



Female Labour in Saudi Arabia under the Nitaqat Programme: A Gendered Power Relations Approach

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Portsmouth.

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Declaration

Whilst registered as a candidate for the degree above, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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Abstract

This study is among the first to explore female labour in the private sector in Saudi Arabia, drawing on Saudi women's experiences of working in SMEs. A gendered power relations approach was adopted to make an important and original contribution to knowledge, with regard to the implications of feminisation in SMEs. In particular, it addresses the gendered nature of Saudi Arabia's latest Saudization incentive, the Nitaqat programme; illuminating the complexities of managing female labour under Nitaqat and allowing the voices of female labour in the Saudi private sector to be heard and interpreted. The study therefore explores the shifting role of women in the Saudi Arabian labour market due to Nitaqat – a programme launched in 2011 to impose quotas for the employment of Saudi nationals in the private sector, but which has also led to an increase in the number of female employees in what were hitherto almost exclusively male environments. Hence, Saudi women are gradually beginning to experience more open workplaces. It is these changes that have inspired the current study on the management response to increased female labour in private Saudi firms. Moreover, Bradley's (1999) gendered power relations approach in the workplace provides a lens through which the experiences of Saudi women and the shifting nature of their roles which challenges the norms within Saudi Arabia's patriarchal society. Consequently, this original research, based on five detailed case studies of private-sector firms, explores the experiences of female Saudi employees in SMEs, with specific reference to their management. The findings are clearly complex: while the women appeared to be subjugated in some ways, they also seemed to be gaining sources of power in the workplace. However, the source of this power varied across the firms. Through semi-structured interviews, rich, in-depth qualitative data were gathered from 26 participants, comprising female employees and human resource managers. To enrich these data, an ethnographic approach was adopted for two of the case studies. The findings highlight varying responses to female employment, revealing that while some firms comply with Nitaqat, an opportunistic approach to employing women is also evident, with Nitaqat as an incentive. Therefore, this research provides insights into the varying degrees of liberation witnessed amongst female employees in the private sector, particularly in terms of their workplace experience, influenced by managerial responses, the nature of the firm, and the employer's level of authority. Thus, this research makes an important contribution to existing work undertaken on the implications of gendered power and labour in SMEs in emerging economies.

Key words: Nitaqat, patriarchy, female employees.

Conference Papers:

1. The Impact of Quota System Regulations on the HR Management of Female Employees in Saudi Arabia. Paper presented at the BUIRA PhD Conference, Cardiff University, 30th November 2017.
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List of Abbreviations

GCC: Gulf Cooperation Council (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates – UAE).

GOSI: General Organization for Social Insurance.

KSA: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

SMEs: Small and medium enterprises.

UAE: United Arab Emirates.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Rationale, Background, Knowledge Gaps and Contribution

The purpose of this research is to present the new profile of Saudi women in the workplace and understand their experience of working in mixed gender environments, within male dominated sectors of Saudi Arabia's highly patriarchal society. A gendered power relations approach in this research enabled female labour in the Saudi private sector (SMEs) to be explored, understood and made sense of; including the way in which women are managed, and their experiences in the specific circumstances of the Nitaqat programme. This research explores women's experiences in the Saudi private sector, based on understanding how their power sources vary among organisations. The contribution of this research involves reflecting how gender and power relations operate, with women having access to sources of power in different ways, and to different degrees, according to the context and their ability to access the source of power and the firm management.

This gendered power relations approach also helped produce a rich picture of what has occurred in Saudi Arabia as part of the Saudi female experience of SMEs; illustrating the variation that was evident across the cases studied in this research. Therefore, this research presents evidence that while women in Saudi culture remain subjugated, they have also begun to empower themselves, with a potential source of power being their employment in SMEs. This enables a deeper understanding of Saudi women in the workplace and the shifting role of Saudi women in Saudi Arabia's distinctive culture.

Saudi Arabia is the second largest Arab country in the world, with a population that is estimated to reach over 34 million in 2019, and 39 million by 2030 (World Population Review, 2019); reflecting the rapid growth in the nation's population over time (see Table 1). Aside from this, an important contextual element of the present study is Saudi Vision 2030¹, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's (KSA) current economic development plan. A key component of this plan is its attention to small and medium-sized firms (SMEs), in recognition of their limitations in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, Saudi Vision 2030 proposes providing governmental support to encourage young Saudi citizens to establish and participate in SMEs as an important agent for economic growth in Saudi Arabia (Saudi

¹ Saudi Vision 2030 is built on three elements: "a vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation" (Saudi vision, n.d., p.13). It focuses on economic improvement, increasing job opportunities, and investing in small and medium businesses (SMEs). This vision is important, as Saudi Arabia lies at the heart of the Arab world and is its leading country.

Vision 2030, n.d.). A primary aim of Saudi Vision 2030 is to reduce gender discrimination and ensure equal opportunities for men and women. One of the objectives in this regard is to invest in women and empower them in the workplace (Saudi Vision 2030, n.d.). Critically, the aim driving this development is to attract foreign investment in Saudi Arabia, as a means of helping to diversify its economy and reduce its dependency on oil by opening the door to investment in non-oil sectors (Saudi Vision, n.d.; Larson & Pence, 2016). Saudi Arabia is currently ranked at 146 out of 156 countries in terms of the global gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2020). Thus, one of the aims of Saudi Vision is to increase the proportion of female employment. Although female employment in Saudi Arabia is still affected by the gender gap, it is slowly rising and making progress, with opportunities being created for women as a result of the Nitaqat programme, aimed at reducing dependency on foreign workers and boosting female participation (Elborgh-Woytek et al., 2013; Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018; International Monetary Fund, 2018). Thus, increasing female participation in the labour market will contribute to broader economic development and diversify the labour market (International Monetary Fund, 2018). For example, Saudi Arabia has taken steps to collaborate with foreign organisations to train Saudi women, opening the door to the world for Saudi women and attracting international investment (Saudi Arabia and Political, Economic & Social Development, 2017). However, the rise of female participation may lead to challenges in the form of the higher cost of employing nationals in the private sector (International Monetary Fund, 2018).

Nevertheless, it has been argued that the Saudi Vision development plan is about maintaining the nation's political, social and economic stability, while reducing dependency on oil through increased investment in non-oil sectors, especially SMEs (Thompson, 2017). Thus, the Vision is intended to contribute to more diverse economic growth in the country (Thompson, 2017). As an outcome of aiming to increase female participation, the World Bank reported that Saudi Arabia made the most progress globally, regarding gender empowerment in 2019, with an estimated score of 70 out of 100. There is now more focus on ensuring greater economic opportunities for women in the nation (International Monetary Fund, 2018). This evidence demonstrates the interest and involvement of major international organisations in promoting reforms in Saudi Arabia in general, and a concern with advancing the role of women, especially in the labour market. As such, this study should constitute a valuable resource for shedding light on the position of women in the Saudi labour market. In turn, this will contribute to fulfilling the objectives for development that are envisaged under Saudi Vision 2030, in particular, the

key aim of empowering Saudi women (Saudi Vision 2030, n.d.; Arab News, 2018). Overall, the current situation in Saudi Arabia, with increasing attention to the inclusion of Saudi women and other components of Saudi Vision 2030, points to a move towards investment in non-oil sectors, including SMEs and the possibility of greater female empowerment. Hence, this research represents a timely and potentially valuable contribution to the literature on gender in the workplace.

Table 1: Population of Saudi Arabia:

Population of Saudi Arabia (2019 and historical)

Year	Population	Yearly % Change	Yearly Change	Migrants (net)	Median Age	Fertility Rate	Density (P/Km ²)	Urban Pop %	Urban Population	Country's Share of World Pop	World Population	Saudi Arabia Global Rank
2019	34,140,662	1.75 %	586,319	118,000	30.2	2.67	16	78.4 %	26,763,925	0.44 %	7,714,576,923	41
2018	33,554,343	1.87 %	616,130	118,000	30.2	2.67	16	78.4 %	26,304,988	0.44 %	7,632,819,325	41
2017	32,938,213	2.05 %	662,526	118,000	30.2	2.67	15	78.4 %	25,829,952	0.44 %	7,550,262,101	41
2016	32,275,687	2.28 %	718,543	118,000	30.2	2.67	15	78.5 %	25,344,685	0.43 %	7,466,964,280	41
2015	31,557,144	2.85 %	826,294	318,000	29.8	2.73	15	78.8 %	24,853,959	0.43 %	7,383,008,820	41

The absence of women in the labour market across the Arab world has been considered in the gender studies literature with regard to employment (Rutledge, Al Shamsi, Bassioni & Al Sheikh, 2011; Forstenlechner, Madi, Selim & Rutledge, 2012; Alhamli, 2013; Qureshi, 2014). The implications of feminisation in the labour market have certainly resulted in the integration of females into male-dominated sectors. However, this integration does not give women the same full access to the labour market that is afforded to males (Rubery, 2015).

Cultural attitudes are recognised as a key factor of influence on the position of women in the labour market globally (Buğra & Cakar, 2010). Therefore, in most Arab countries, where society is largely shaped by sociocultural attitudes and religion, a level of segregation is required between men and women in the mixed-gender workplace (Metcalf, 2011). Following the introduction of the Nitaqat programme in 2011, which requires private-sector employers to hire Saudi personnel as a matter of priority, the last eight years have seen an expansion in women's access to male-dominated sectors in the highly gender-segregated society of Saudi Arabia (Alfarran, Pyke & Stanton, 2018). This emphasises the issue of the growing number of mixed-gender working environments in the country. The feminisation of the workplace has also played a role in changing the gendered nature of its working environments, with some firms being forced to hire women, in order

to meet the quota of Saudi employees prescribed under the Nitaqat programme. Nevertheless, there is limited knowledge on Saudi female employment in general, with more information required in the context of SMEs, which are considered to hire females with low capabilities and skills (Alfarran, Pyke & Stanton, 2018). Consequently, although Nitaqat does not directly impose an obligation to employ women, it has had an indirect influence on increasing female participation in the labour market and feminising certain sectors (De Bel-Air, 2015; Alfarran et al., 2018).

In particular, Saudi Arabia, as the current research context, has a highly patriarchal society; characterised by male authority over women, whereby women are subordinated to men, with no means of exercising power. However, it is argued that women are also attaining both senior and subordinate positions in the workplace, and so this needs to be explored in a micro-level analysis of gender and power at work (Bradley, 1999). Walby (1996, p.3) states, “Men have often been active in building institutions which suit their needs rather than those of women”. Walby’s claims suggest a need to structure the workplace to accommodate female employees working alongside men, given the low priority that is currently given to female employment and the needs of female employees in mixed-gender workplaces.

This research will explore the management of Saudi female employees and their experiences of gaining access to opportunities in private sector SMEs, which were not open to them before the introduction of Nitaqat. As mentioned previously, there has been little attention paid to exploring the employment of women in male-dominated sectors, especially in Saudi SMEs. The outcomes of this study will fill the research gap that results from a lack of gender studies on the nature of female engagement in the workplace in Arab countries (Banihani & Syed, 2017).

In addition, this research examines the influence of managers on female engagement in the workplace. Although Nitaqat is allowing women increased access to private sector’s employment, there is a scarcity of knowledge on women employees in SMEs in Saudi Arabia (Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018). Thus, it is important to understand the managerial response to female engagement in the workplace. This would involve the way in which gender is managed and responded to by managers, thereby influencing firms’ progress in the workplace (Banihani & Syed, 2017).

In relation to changes in the positions awarded to different genders in the workplace, as an outcome of female employment in male-dominated sectors, it is worth exploring the voices

of women and their experience in SMEs the Saudi labour market, in such a distinctive patriarchal society. It is worth exploring the issues of subjection and the experience of female in Saudi workplace. This involves exploring the subjugation of women and at the same time, their opportunities for empowerment and the potential for this empowerment in the workplace, which a gendered power relations' approach offers. However, patriarchy theory alone is insufficient for exploring ways of enhancing opportunities for female empowerment in the workplace.

Bradley (1999, p.97) "details the possible barriers to change in gender inclusion in the workplace as being resistance towards and a backlash against women in the workplace, arising from male authority". In trying to understand this male authority, the present study argues that patriarchy theory is important, but it does not sufficiently account for the efforts and experiences of women themselves. Moreover, this research suggests a need to explore some of the improvements that have been brought about in the position of women in the Saudi workforce, although in some cases, these improvements may be limited in scope.

Walby (1996) argues that there is an absence of women in senior management positions and that women are rendered powerless by male authority. In the context of Saudi Arabia, women have low power, and to varying degrees, are subordinated and subject to the patriarchal control structure, relating to segregation in the workplace, as shown in the cases examined in this research. However, the fact that women have access to paid employment, aspirations, a desire to improve themselves, and an opportunity to be liberated means that this study is an important means of exploring their experiences. The data from this research provide an important opportunity to explore the theoretical framework of gender and power relations in the workplace, from a new perspective within the context of Saudi Arabia.

This research aims to make a theoretical and empirical contribution to gender studies in the private sector and in particular, in the context of SMEs. It therefore uses a sample of Saudi women as a 'laboratory' to theorise women's experiences in the workplace; applying Bradley's theory of female gender and power relations in the workplace, in order to untangle and explain the complexity of women's power in male-dominated sectors within the distinctive culture of Saudi Arabia. Although Bradley's theory was originally formulated in the context of patriarchal Western societies, the outcome of this current research is expected to extend it, so as to provide a richer and more comprehensive understanding of women and power; using a gendered power relations' approach to

explore women's shifting roles in the Saudi context, which is known to be highly patriarchal society. In so doing, this study is careful not to ignore patriarchy influence in its exploration of the perspective of managers in their management of female employees, but Bradley's theory contends that despite male authority, women can, at some level, leverage sources of power in the workplace. This makes her theory important in relation to the current situation faced by women in the Saudi context and more specifically, in light of the Saudi governments' Nitaqat programme to increase female representation by offering women new opportunities in the labour market. In terms of the existing literature, women's experiences and an analysis of gendered power have not yet been addressed in the Saudi context, while the dynamics of the gendered workplace remain insufficiently explored in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, to the best of the author's knowledge, this thesis represents the first attempt to explore female experiences in SMEs, from the perspective of gendered power relations' theory.

Empirically, this research contributes to research on SMEs and female labour. Most of the studies on Nitaqat are mainly interested in Saudization, and the programme's requirements for the private sector (Ramady, 2013; Sadi, 2013; Alshabri, Khalfan & Maqsood, 2014; De Bel-Air, 2015; Zaho, 2016). However, less attention has been paid to the influence of the programme on female employment, and what little research exists in this area lacks detailed description and depth in its understanding of gendered power in SMEs. Therefore, it is expected in this current research that in-depth information will be gathered on the topic of women and gender in the workplace by exploring five case studies. Thus, it will provide SMEs with new empirical knowledge on the involvement of women in male dominated sectors of the distinctive Saudi context.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

Having identified gaps in the existing literature and to ensure that this study makes appropriate theoretical and empirical contributions, the aim of this research is to explore and understand the implications of feminisation for SMEs under Nitaqat, in terms of the response from management and the experiences of women across the cases under investigation in this research. Outlined below are the key objectives of this research.

1.2.1 Exploring the Impact of Nitaqat on Female Employment in the Private Sector

This objective was guided by the lack of existing literature on female employment in the private sector and gender studies, with a call for this to be addressed (Nasseef, 2015; Al-

Abdulkarim, 2018; Alfarran et al., 2018). The current objective is therefore to explore female employment as an outcome of Nitaqat, in terms of its influence on female employment in male-dominated sectors and in the gendered workplace environment. It involves exploring the way in which female employment is being received in firms. The evidence presented in the existing literature emphasises that gendered culture is a growing challenge in mixed-gender environments. In Saudi Arabia, most female employees work in gender-segregated environments in the public sector (Yusuf, 2014; Al-Waqfi & Al-Faki, 2015). However, Nitaqat has resulted in increased opportunities for women to work in mixed-gender environments in the private sector (Alselaimi & Lord, 2012; Labour and Nitaqat, 2012; De Bel-Air, 2015; Sadi, 2015). This increase in opportunities for women, especially in SMEs, has yet to be explored in the literature, to the best of the author's knowledge (Alfarran et al., 2018). Therefore, this objective will ensure a valuable contribution to the existing literature on female employment in SMEs, in the distinctive context of Saudi Arabia.

1.2.2 Exploring the Management of Female Labour in the Context of the Nitaqat Programme

This objective is in response to the increase in female employment, the implications of feminisation in firms, and the call to investigate the experiences of female Saudi employees in the private sector. This objective relates to exploring managerial responses to receiving female employees across SMEs, with special attention being given to the way in which they are treated after their engagement in male-dominated sectors, and to whether changes have been made in these firms, consisting of opportunities or obstacles put in place by management as an outcome of female employment in firms under the influence of Nitaqat.

1.2.3 Exploring the Experiences of Female Employees in the Context of the Nitaqat Programme

This is an empirical objective, involving an in-depth exploration of the experiences of female employees in the workplace, together with their roles, in order to investigate their degree of subjugation and power at work across cases drawn from SMEs in male-dominated sectors.

1.2.4 Theorising the Developing Position of Saudi Women in a Gendered Workplace

This is the theoretical objective, deploying Bradley's gendered power relation's dimensions in the workplace to theorise and offer the best fit to facilitate an understanding of women's experiences. The theory justifies the level of gendered power in the workplace within a male-dominated society. Theoretically, addressing Objective 4 would involve accessing gendered power in the workplace, in order to investigate the extent to which women are able to build their autonomy and power in the workplace, especially in the distinctive context of Saudi Arabia. Gendered power dimensions are applied to interpret the relevant research findings and address these objectives, in order to explore the experiences of women who are employed in SMEs.

To achieve the research objectives, three research questions were identified, with a view to addressing gaps in the literature on work and employment in the Saudi context:

- RQ1 In what way has Nitaqat impacted female employment in the private sector?
- RQ2 How are female employees managed in the context of the Nitaqat programme?
- RQ3 What is the experience of female employees in the context of the Nitaqat programme?

1.3 Research Design

A subjective interpretivist perspective is adopted in this study, aimed at understanding the female experience in depth by conducting micro-level analysis on five case studies across SMEs in four different sectors: retail, architecture, construction and engineering. The size of firm selected was based on gaps in the existing literature on female employment in SMEs, within male-dominated sectors where women have been employed after the introduction of Nitaqat in 2011. The present researcher recognises the value of conducting multiple case studies to solve a research problem from different perspectives and in different situations. In order to obtain in-depth data, a qualitative approach was adopted; allowing data to be analysed empirically and triangulated via semi-structured interviews with managers and female employees. Moreover, two micro-ethnographic case studies were conducted with female employees in the workplace to enrich the data obtained in this study. The data were collected over a period of three months from July to September 2017.

1.4 Research Structure

Subsequent to this first chapter, the Introduction, the thesis is divided into six further chapters, structured as follows.

Chapter 2 defines the research problem, starting with the purpose of the current research. It highlights the characteristics of the labour market and gender issues, and the gap identified in the existing literature, thereby underlining the importance of the current study. Moreover, it describes programmes designed to regulate and improve the Saudi labour market, especially the Nitaqat programme, which has had a remarkable effect in increasing female employment in the private sector. Moreover, the gender cultural situation in the Saudi context is described in detail, providing knowledge of ongoing changes to the position of Saudi women in the labour market.

Chapter 3 then proceeds to explain the concept and implications of feminisation in the workplace, drawing attention to patriarchal societies where male authority influences female participation in the labour market. Also addressed are the obstacles and opportunities experienced by women in the workplace. Moreover, this chapter presents the underpinning theories in this research, with regard to understanding gender in the workplace, within the distinctive culture of Saudi Arabia. It explores the relevance of Bradley's theory and states the limitations of patriarchy theory with regard to theorising the experiences of the women studied in this research. The chapter closes with the theoretical framework: a gendered power relations' approach, which guided the research process. This bridges the gap identified in the literature, with regard to the experiences of Saudi women working in the private sector, especially SMEs.

In **Chapter 4**, where the relevant philosophical approach is explored, it is the subjective interpretivist position that is established. This approach is used to conduct the fieldwork for this inductive exploratory research; corresponding to the researcher's lens through which the research results will be derived and interpreted and determining the appropriate data collection methods and approach adopted in this study. In particular, this chapter describes the case studies conducted in this research, together with the means of accessing them and their limitations. This is followed by a description of the data analysis carried out in this study, with a visual example of the coding scheme and extracted themes. Moreover, the researcher's reflexivity and approach to ensuring data quality in this qualitative research is outlined.

In **Chapter 5**, the research findings are discussed separately for each case, in order to identify the variations between them, based on the four themes that were identified through the data analysis in the previous chapter. The chapter highlights the obstacles and opportunities that emerge in the cases, with variation in the findings, according to the influence of feminisation as an outcome of Nitaqat, the women's experiences, and the managerial response in the firms under study. The reason for presenting the findings in a single chapter was to draw a conclusion from all the cases to show variation in the findings, so that it can be discussed in the following chapter by theme, thereby building on these findings.

Therefore, in **Chapter 6**, the main findings will be examined through the lens of gender power theory and the relevant literature. This discussion builds upon the four previously identified themes, as applied to each case; helping to explain the complexity of the findings and the variation and similarities across the cases. This will help to meet the research objectives and answer the research questions in the following chapter. Chapter 6 concludes with information on the original contribution of this research, based on a critical discussion of the cases.

Finally, **Chapter 7** concludes the thesis as a whole, revising and addressing the research objectives. Furthermore, the original contribution made by this study to the literature is emphasised, followed by a reflection on the research journey. This conclusion is then completed by a statement of the research limitations and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Saudi Arabia's Labour Market and Female Employment

2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

This chapter highlights features of the labour market in Saudi Arabia, with a focus on female employment. It presents a brief discussion of Saudi employment policy and the way in which this contributes to increasing female employment in mixed-gender sectors within the Saudi context. It goes on to present a brief review of the situation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – which all have similar features in their labour markets; thereby demonstrating their common lack of attention to female employment. Moreover, the chapter discusses the main drivers of Saudi society and the associated barriers facing women in the labour market. The existing literature evidences gaps in the area of gender studies on Saudi private-sector workplaces. This chapter therefore highlights the experiences of female employees and the changes that have taken place regarding female employment in Saudi Arabia. However, there remains a gap in the literature in the area of gender-related experiences in the Saudi private sector, which raises the need to conduct this study.

2.2 Characteristics of the Saudi Labour Market

Before discussing the Saudi labour market, it is important to understand that governments are the main overseers over the public sector and support businesses in the private sector in GCC countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates [UAE]) (Hetrog, 2013). Thus, across the GCC, it is important to comply with government policies. For example, there are no trade union bargaining or negotiating rights, such as the possibility of taking strike action to assert workers' rights (Gordon, 2014; Alsharbri, Khalfan, Noor, Dutta, Zhang & Maqsood, 2015).

Saudi Arabia is one of world's fastest developing nations and also one of the wealthiest oil producers. According to Alfalih (2016, p.25) "Saudi Arabia has the second greatest global oil reserve" and the majority of its income depends on oil revenue. However, this can give rise to challenges and risks within a country during oil crises, as happened in the 1980s and during the latest drop in oil prices in 2014 (Allothman, 2017).

The story of Saudi Arabia's economic development began with the discovery of oil in the 1930s and saw the country develop rapidly between the 1930s and 1970s. Since the 1970s, Saudi Arabia has been counted as one of the world's biggest oil exporters (Allothman, 2017). During the oil boom, Saudi Arabia needed a large and strong workforce, but Saudi citizens did not have the necessary skills, due to the country's lack of industrialisation, the absence of modern features, and no knowledge or experience of human resource (HR) management (Al Otibi, 2014; Al Sheikh, 2015). The literature on the GCC countries in general, which resemble the Saudi context in terms of their labour market features, confirms that GCC nationals suffer due to low skill levels and poor HR development, which has led to the employment of foreigners to enhance the labour market (Achoui, 2009). For example, Saudi Arabia employed, and still employs, a foreign workforce to operate its oil industry and provide human resources, who have contributed to the massive development of Saudi Arabia's economy (Alshehry, 2009; Allothman, 2017). By the 1990s, foreign workers made up around two thirds of the total workforce in Saudi Arabia, most of whom were non-Saudis, and 90% of whom were employed in the private sector (Alshehry, 2009). As a result, foreign workers have contributed greatly to the Saudi economy and its development. However, Saudi Arabia now faces the challenge of one of the world's most rapidly growing young populations, who are also seeking a place in the nation's labour market (Aldehailan, 2007; Ramady, 2013). This is elaborated upon in the following section.

2.2.1 Saudi Arabia's Public and Private Sectors

The public sector is the main target for young graduate employment in Saudi Arabia. However, in the 1980s, the Saudi government realised that the public sector was insufficient to absorb the large number of Saudi citizens of working age, including Saudi graduates (Alshehry, 2009; Sadi, 2013). The Saudi labour market has been highly dependent on foreign workers and so a policy was required to increase Saudi nationals' share in this market. Moreover, the nation's growing young population led to unemployment issues in the 1990s, especially during a period when Saudi Arabia was still highly dependent on foreign workers (Ramady, 2013). This was mainly a problem in the private sector, causing the Saudi government to increase diversity in this sector and to focus on expanding the foreign workforce, because of the lack of experience in HR management amongst Saudi nationals and an absence of the requisite skills for economic development (Choui, 2009). This was particularly the case in SMEs, with their poor HR development (Choui, 2009). Official statistics for immigration levels indicate that the

number of foreign workers in Saudi Arabia reached nine million in the private sector in 2013, representing 30% of the total workforce (SAMA, 2015). At the same time, Saudi Arabia's national population was estimated at around 29,000,000 – higher than that of any other GCC country (Matherly, 2015). Furthermore, Euromonitor International (2017) suggests that in 2030, the population of Saudi Arabia will reach 39.1 million, an estimated increase of 24.1% from 2015. In the early 2000s, Saudi Arabia's demographic profile showed nationals under the age of 20 representing more than 60% of the nation's population (Aldehailan, 2007), thereby creating a need for employment in a labour market that was heavily dependent on foreign workers (Alshehry, 2009; Ramady, 2013; Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014).

The Saudi government attracts its citizens to the public sector by providing an open door for the recruitment of Saudi nationals. However, one challenge is that the Saudi public sector cannot provide enough jobs for the high number of nationals seeking employment (Al Sheikh, 2015). The introduction of the Saudization policy (discussed in detail in the next section) was therefore aimed at increasing the employment of nationals in both the public and private sectors (Alotibi, 2014; Al Sheikh, 2015). One factor of this unemployment issue is that Saudi nationals refuse to take jobs in the private sector, because of social attitudes, wherein these jobs are considered to be low in status and lack opportunities for promotion or professional development (Alshehry, 2009; Alotibi, 2017; Budhwar, Pereira, Mellahi & Singh, 2018). Furthermore, Saudi nationals maintain a preference for working in the public sector, due to the higher salaries and greater number of white collar jobs, compared with most of the private sector, where jobs tend to be low-paid and low-status (Alshehry, 2009; Alotibi, 2014; Yusuf, 2014; Al Sheikh, 2015; Alotibi, 2017). There is also a belief that jobs in the private sector are less secure and lower in prestige (Yusuf, 2014), which suggests some of the reasons why Saudis favour working in the public sector over the private sector.

Nevertheless, there is awareness of the need for a highly skilled workforce in Saudi Arabia; hence the launch of the Saudi Vision 2030 development programme in 2016, which is focused on reliance on the private sector and investment in a highly effective workforce to achieve global competitiveness. Saudi Vision 2030 aims to attract international investment in the private sector, including in SMEs (Goals: Saudi Arabia Vision 2030, 2016). The evidence suggests that Saudi Arabia plans to invest in developing its non-oil private sector, with projected revenue of between 35 billion and 40 billion riyals (\$9 billion-\$11 billion) (Kalin, 2018). The future of Saudi Arabia is therefore concentrated

on its need to generate income from its workforce, especially given the high rate of increase in its youth population. Saudi Vision 2030 envisions the private sector, especially SMEs, as being the key to investment in a young national workforce. It also reinforces the influence of external calls – such as from the World Bank – for greater female empowerment in Saudi Arabia (Goals: Saudi Arabia Vision 2030; International Monetary Fund, 2018). The next section will consequently look at SMEs in Saudi Arabia.

2.2.2 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the Saudi Labour Market

Growing attention is being paid to SMEs in the Saudi Vision 2030 development plan. Thus, it is important to discuss the state of the Saudi SME sector. The proportion of SMEs in Saudi Arabia reached 93% of all enterprises in the country, with 700,000 active firms in 2014 (Alenaizan, 2014; Azyabi & Fisher, 2014). There are, however, lack of studies on SMEs in Saudi Arabia (Alsaleh, 2016) and this is challenge in a number of areas, as already observed by Azyabi and Fisher (2014):

The lack of research in the Saudi context makes it difficult for SMEs to learn from previous research. As a result of the differences between the Saudi context and other contexts (Western and Asian contexts) in terms of economic, cultural and political factors, the applicability of previous research to the Saudis context needs to be investigated. (Azyabi & Fisher, 2014, p.1)

It should be noted that HR management capabilities are limited in SMEs, due to the cost of enhancing skills, such as the cost of training programmes (Couj, 2009; Alsaleh, 2016). This can result in the employment of less qualified employees, in order to reduce labour costs (Alsaleh, 2016). It would explain why there is such dependence on foreign workers, where these are less qualified than Saudi nationals. Moreover, SMEs' capabilities differ from those of large firms, making them less secure. They also offer lower wages and poorer working conditions, compared to large private-sector firms. As a result, they are less attractive to Saudi nationals (Azyabi & Fisher, 2014; Alsaleh, 2016). However, SMEs are currently a major engine for the Saudi Vision 2030 incentive to become less dependent on oil. Moreover, the call for female participation in the labour market grows louder. Saudi Vision 2030 therefore aims to increase women's participation in the labour market to 30%, reducing their unemployment rate from 11.6% to 7% (Ghalayini, 2018). However, the Nitaqat programme (which will be discussed later in this chapter) has exerted pressure on SMEs, imposing the requirement to hire a greater number of Saudis, who demand higher salaries than foreign workers (Alsaleh, 2016).

2.2.3 Lack of Female Participation in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries

This section presents an overview of the position of women in the labour market in GCC countries, in order to explore similar labour market conditions. The current research context consists of a labour market that is one of the most restricted worldwide, as regards female participation.

In all Arab countries, especially in the GCC countries, women experience similar economic and labour market conditions. However, there is a lack of attention in the existing literature to female employment in these zones (Rutledge et al., 2011; Forstenlechner, Lettice & Özbilgin, 2012; Alhamli, 2013; Qureshi, 2014), despite the fact that this lack of female participation in the labour market in the GCC countries is a recognised issue. Alwaqafi and Alfaki (2015) argue that women in Arab nations have been supported by their governments through reduced inequality in education, but they still lack support in reducing inequality in the labour market, due to male dominance and cultural barriers to hiring women. Moreover, despite women's often high levels of education, their participation in the labour market remains low (Khalaf, Nakhleh & Abu Sara, 2015). Notably, Saudi Arabia, one of the world's most strictly gender-segregated cultures, also has the biggest gender imbalance in the workplace out of the 20 countries listed in Figure 1. More description of the Saudi context will be provided later in this chapter.

Gender imbalance in labor force participation (15-64 year olds, 2015)

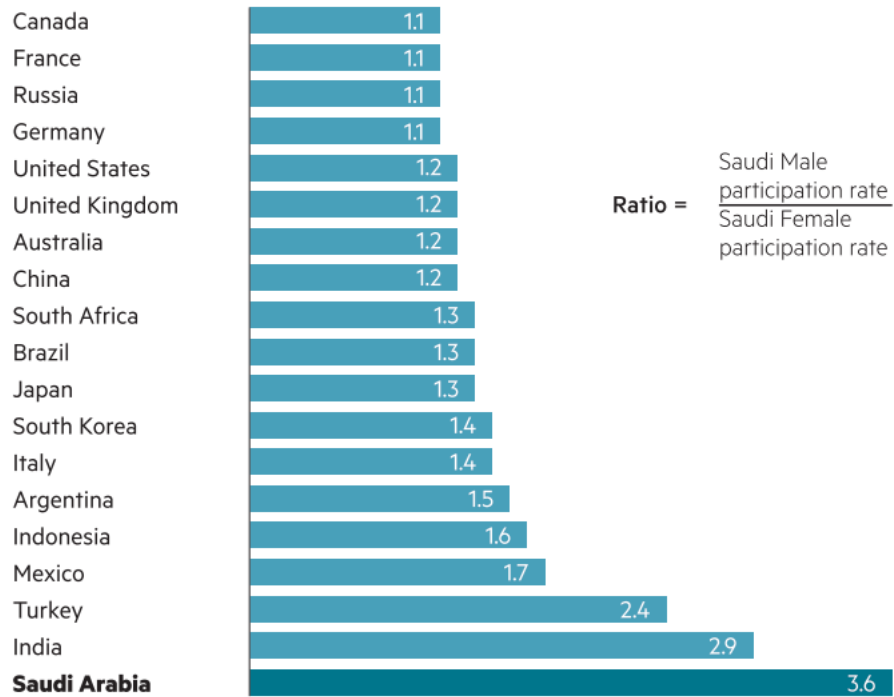


Figure 1: Gender imbalance in labour force participation, 2015 (source: Ministry of Labour and Social Development, 2016)

It has been argued that Saudi Arabia has the world's lowest level of female participation in the labour market (Singh, Jones, & Hall, 2012; Alothman & Mishra, 2014; Alotibi, 2014; Rajkhan, 2014; Alfrahan, 2015; Alwaqafi & Alfaki, 2015). However, the latest data (see Figure 2) indicates an employment rate of 23% in Saudi Arabia, with some countries registering lower rates than this. It means that employment rates in Saudi Arabia remain low, but have evidently been on the rise (International Labour Organization, 2019). As such, it would appear that progress has been made in recent years, with regard to female participation in the labour market.













All Countries and Economies			
Country	Most Recent Year	Most Recent Value	
Yemen, Rep.	2018	6	
Syrian Arab Republic	2018	12	
Iraq	2018	12	
Jordan	2018	14	
Algeria	2018	15	
Iran, Islamic Rep.	2018	17	
Somalia	2018	19	
West Bank and Gaza	2018	19	
Morocco	2018	21	
Egypt, Arab Rep.	2018	23	
Saudi Arabia	2018	23	

Figure 2: International Labour Organization (source: ILOSTAT database)

Nevertheless, despite this lack of female participation, the GCC literature has shown that localisation, in the form of a programme aimed at promoting the employment of nationals in the labour market by replacing foreign workers with citizens, has been successful in increasing female participation in the labour market (Al-Waqfi & Al-Faki, 2015). For example, the UAE’s localisation programme has increased female participation in the workforce (Al-Waqfi & Al-Faki, 2015). However, existing studies on female employment in the private sector under nationalisation policies have raised criticisms, due to the pressure placed on the private sector and lack of HR gender management experience (Metcalf, 2008; Forstenlechner et al., 2012; Randeree, 2012; Al-Hamli, 2013).

This section has identified that female participation is considered to be an issue in the GCC labour market, with Saudi Arabia recording the highest gender imbalance in employment and one of the lowest rates of female participation in the workplace worldwide. In the following sections, the labour market programme in the current research context is outlined, this being the latest programme to make progress in opportunities for female Saudis in the private sector.

2.3 The Saudi Labour Market Programme

This section is important for understanding the challenges and opportunities facing the Saudi employment programme, in its bid to make changes to the position of women in Saudi Arabia's private-sector labour force since 2011.

Nationalisation or localisation programmes in the GCC countries were introduced to “understand the extent to which citizens could play a more central role in the development of their national economies” (Randeree, 2012, p.2). The GCC nationalisation programme was developed as a result of the GCC countries being highly dependent on foreign workers, and their emerging issue of unemployment (Randeree, 2012). The term, Saudization is used to identify Saudi Arabia's nationalisation programme.

2.3.1 The Saudization Programme

The Saudi government introduced the Saudization programme to increase opportunities for Saudi nationals in both the public and private sectors (Koyame-Marsh, 2016) by replacing foreign workers with Saudis. This programme was launched in the 1990s to mitigate high levels of unemployment (Koyame-Marsh, 2016) among Saudi citizens. However, at the time, no specific policy was implemented for Saudi female employment (Al-Asfour, Taliss, Khan & Rajaskar, 2017). The Saudization programme sought:

- To encourage the local workforce to participate in the Saudi labour market in the public and private sectors by replacing foreign workers with Saudi nationals.
- To reduce the high rate of unemployment among Saudi nationals in Saudi Arabia.
- To reduce the high dependency on foreign workers in Saudi Arabia (Alshehry, 2009; Alotibi, 2014).

The programme gained success in the public sector by increasing the employment of Saudis and therefore met its main objectives. In the private sector, however, it was not a success; the reason being that Saudi nationals lacked HR experience and suitable workplace skills. Consequently, the private sector favoured foreign workers (Alshehry, 2009; Baqader, 2011; Alharbi, 2014; Al Sheikh, 2015; Alothman, 2017). Specifically, employers claimed that Saudi nationals were less attractive than foreign workers as employees, the main reasons for this preference being that:

- Foreign workers are more flexible and willing to take jobs with low salaries, compared with Saudi nationals who demand high salaries;

- There is a lack of workplace skills, because there is a mismatch between the education system and the skills required by employers;
- Employers have a negative attitude to Saudi nationals in the workplace;
- There is a lack of training programmes and technical support.

All these factors are potential reasons for the continuing low rate of employment among Saudi citizens in the private sector (Achoui, 2009; Alshammri, 2009; Alotibi, 2014; Yusuf, 2014; Alghamdi, 2016). However, organisations make little effort to train Saudis and improve their skills, based on the common assumption that Saudis are unlikely to stay, but will rather move elsewhere for other opportunities (Alotibi, 2014).

One reason for poor job skills among Saudi citizens is that the government has mainly focused on reducing their high rate of unemployment, without giving much consideration to the qualifications and skills required for the private-sector workplace (Alotibi, 2014). However, the Saudization development plan in the 2000s identified the need to develop Saudis' skills to meet future workplace requirements. Thus, as a result of the challenge presented by the prospect of foreign workers leaving the private sector at any time, the Saudization programme developed its aims to that qualified Saudis were hired instead of foreign workers (Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014).

The Saudi economy depends heavily on the skills of foreign workers and so a prepared Saudi workforce is vital. As a result, Saudi Arabia has made efforts to develop its education system to correspond to the required workplace skills and qualifications, thereby preparing a Saudi workforce accordingly (Alshehry, 2009). It is worth noting that the Saudization programme has encouraged the employment of Saudis in SMEs and created incentives for firms that comply (Alotibi, 2014). The latest Saudization development plan has given rise to the Nitaqat programme (Randree, 2012; Alotibi, 2014), which is the main influence on this research, as explained in the next section.

In 2011, the Saudi government introduced the Hafiz programme, which is similar to other government programmes around the world, offering benefits to unemployed citizens. The Hafiz programme provides a monthly income (\$533) for up to one year to young unemployed graduates aged 25-35. The fact that 85% of those registered are women (Yusuf, 2014; Alothman, 2017) clearly evidences the low level of female participation in the workplace, which presents another key challenge for the Saudi labour market (Achoui, 2009). Thus, although the Saudization programme has aimed to increase the number of Saudis hired, it is claimed that the participation of Saudi women in the workplace remains

low (Singh, Jones & Hall, 2012; Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014; Alothman & Mishra, 2014; Alotibi, 2014; Rajkhan, 2014). This is because the Saudization programme does not specifically consider the presence of female Saudis in the labour market (Metcalf, 2011). Aside from this, it is argued that most national programmes have failed to increase local employment growth in the private sector (Budhwar et al., 2018). What is more, it is claimed that Saudization was poorly enforced in Saudi Arabia's private sector, whereas Nitaqat has been implemented as a strict quota system with strong and effective monitoring (Alharbi, 2014; Basahl, 2016). Moreover, it has been suggested that Saudization was unsuccessful due to low wages, a lack of female employment, and competition from foreign workers (Ramady, 2013; Alharbi, 2014).

2.3.2 The Nitaqat Programme

After the failure of the Saudization programme in the private sector, the Saudi government took the step of introducing a more rigorous programme, namely Nitaqat, which is an Arabic word for 'bands' or 'zones'. This was implemented in private-sector firms to meet Saudization targets (Koyame-Marsh, 2016).

The Nitaqat programme is an enforced quota system, designed to create opportunities in the Saudi private-sector labour market for Saudi nationals (Alharbi, 2014). It was formulated in response to economic and political pressure in Saudi Arabia (Alharbi, 2013). Nitaqat is not only aimed at providing jobs for the unemployed, but also at enhancing the labour market; creating better conditions for employees, including HR development, and increasing the share of Saudi female employment in the labour market (Alsulami, 2017).

Peck (2017) states that a quota system is a mechanism for implementing a form of affirmative action in favour of certain groups, including disadvantaged groups. The Saudi government therefore imposed a quota system on organisations on its territory, in the form of the Nitaqat programme, which placed pressure on private-sector employers to hire Saudi nationals. Peck (2017, p.318) asserts that:

Nitaqat was responsible for the addition of roughly 63,000 Saudi workers to existing private sector firms over a 16-month period, a sizable share of the approximately 169,000 new Saudi workers in total employed at these firms over the same period. New entrants also tended to have higher Saudi employment rates, accounting for an additional 30,000 positions for Saudi workers in these firms.

All private firms have been obligated to implement Nitaqat, which offers incentives, but also imposes punitive measures (Peck, 2017). Four bands have been established under the

initiative: red, yellow, green and excellent/premium (Labour and Nitaqat, 2012; Sadi, 2015). Furthermore, the quotas for local workers differ, depending on the type of industry (according to 45 categories) and size of the firm. In terms of size, firms may fall into any one of five different groups:

1. Micro- – 0-9 employees
2. Small – 10-49 employees
3. Medium – 50-499 employees
4. Large – 500-2999 employees
5. Very large – 3,000+ employees.

Each size of firm may employ a certain percentage of local workers (see Table 2, below). The firms in the green and blue ‘excellent’ zone will enjoy benefits from the government, whereas firms in the red and yellow zones will face problems and punitive measures (see Table 3, below). Arguably, the Nitaqat programme has exerted pressure on SMEs, because it has imposed the hiring of more Saudis, who demand higher salaries than foreign workers (Alsaleh, 2016).

Table 2: Business size and zones (source: Ministry of Labour, 2016)

Business Size	Red	Yellow	Green	Premium
Small (10 - 49)	0 - 4%	5 - 9%	10 - 39%	≥ 40%
Medium (50 - 499)	0 - 5%	6 - 11%	12 - 39%	≥ 40%
Large (500 - 2,999)	0 - 6%	7 - 11%	12 - 39%	≥ 40%
Huge (3,000+)	0 - 6%	7 - 11%	12 - 39%	≥ 40%

Table 3: Incentives and punitive measures (source: Ministry of Labour, 2016)

Excellent/ Premium	Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete freedom in hiring employees • Easier visa processing • Freedom to issue new visas for opened professions • Freedom to change profession of employees even for some restricted categories • Condition-free visa transfer: Freedom to hire employees from Red and Yellow zones and transfer their visas without approval from former sponsor. <p>Grace period: One year to improve Nitaqat record</p>
Green	Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom to apply for new visas • Freedom to change foreign workers' profession • Freedom to renew work permits • Freedom to recruit employees from Red and Yellow zones and transfer their visas <p>Grace period: Nine months to improve Nitaqat record</p>
Yellow	Incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom to issue one visa after the departure of two expatriates • Freedom to renew work permits but only for workers below maximal duration of stay • No freedom to issue new visas • No freedom to transfer visas and change professions (since November 2011) • Barred from renewing work permit (capping of stay) after workers completed four years (since mid-2014) • Fines for redundant expatriates (\$26,700) • No possibility to open files for new businesses and/ or new branches <p>Grace period: Six months to improve Nitaqat record</p>
Red	Punitive measures	
	Punitive measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banned from: changing profession, transferring visas, issuing new visas and opening files for new branches • Fines for redundant expatriates (\$26,700) <p>Grace period: Six months to improve Nitaqat record</p>

Table 3 shows the benefits awarded by the Nitaqat programme to firms who comply, such as facilitating visa applications for foreign workers, making the recruitment process easier, etc. Conversely, it lists the sanctions applied to firms in the red and yellow zones, such as being banned from launching a new business; while firms in the red zone are not permitted to renew visas for foreign workers. The Nitaqat programme has consequently presented diverse challenges for firms in terms of meeting the requisite quotas for Saudi workers, based on business type and size, so that private firms can benefit from the advantages provided (Alshanbri, Khalfan, Noor, Dutta, Zhang & Maqsood, 2015). In the green zone, however, there is arguably very little change in the advantages for firms under Nitaqat, whereas in the red zone, firms will be under threat of being closed down, due to their failure to satisfy Nitaqat's requirements. Finally, in the yellow zone, firms have little

clarity about their current status and their future is usually ambiguous (Alshanbri et al., 2015).

In addition to the above, along with the growing employment of Saudi nationals through the Nitaqat programme, there has been increasing concern in the private sector over the implications of Nitaqat (Labour and Nitaqat, 2012; Almoamar, 2014; Alshanbri et al., 2015). The Nitaqat programme can certainly create opportunities for a large number of young Saudis looking for jobs, but it is challenging for firms to pay the high wages expected by local workers, as it is widely recognised that local workers are paid higher wages than foreign workers (Dudley, 2012; Henelito & Sevilla, 2014). Nevertheless, in the private sector, firms now tend to prioritise employing enough local workers to fill the Nitaqat quotas, rather than looking at the skills and capabilities of those workers (Alshanbri et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the Nitaqat programme's influence varies between sectors. For example, in telecommunications, firms falling within the green zone have generally reported a positive impact of the programme, especially in terms of the visa renewal process, which is consequently easier and quicker. Meanwhile, Saudi haulage firms claim that Nitaqat has had a negative impact on them, since Saudi nationals are unwilling to take low-paid, low-status manual jobs (Peck, 2017). However, in the implementation of the first Nitaqat requirement, firms can lose their position in the labour market as a result of the imposed quotas. One such firm stated that Nitaqat had hurt its business, claiming that the restrictions "caused them to lose SR 250 million a year for failing to hire enough Saudi truck drivers to meet their 10 percent benchmark" (Peck, 2014, p.11). However, the Saudi government's HR fund supports private-sector firms by paying the salary of a Saudi employee throughout the first year of employment under the Nitaqat programme (Al Sheikh, 2015).

More than half the population of Saudi Arabia is under the age of 30 (Dublely, 2012) and the Nitaqat programme has opened up opportunities for more young Saudis to work in the private sector (Al Sheikh, 2015). In particular, it has increased the number of Saudi women in the workplace (Alselaime, 2012; Saudi Hollandi Capital, 2012; Sadi, 2013; De Bel-Air, 2015). This is because Nitaqat has incentivised the employment of women in certain firms and feminised sectors such as lingerie and cosmetics retail, where female Saudis were previously prohibited from working (Alfarran et al., 2018). De Bel-Air (2015, p.20) suggests that:

Introducing Saudi women to the labour market has had a very far-reaching and politically groundbreaking effect on the country's social and religious institutions.

This illustrates Nitaqat's influence on female employment opportunities; enabling women to work in several sectors and reducing the social challenges presented to women working in mixed-gender environments in the private sector.

Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that while the Nitaqat programme has created opportunities for workers and some firms, other firms do not benefit from it, if they cannot meet the quota requirements (Peck, 2014; Zaho, 2014; Alshanbri et al, 2015). For example, it was reported that one local retail firm was forced to close, due to its inability to fulfil its quota of Saudi employees. The firm consequently decided to relocate to the UAE to avoid the challenges of fulfilling Nitaqat quotas (Zaho, 2014). The owner claimed that:

Why should I go through the expense of hiring three times as many Saudis as I need, just because I know that by the time my numbers are checked I would have lost at least two thirds of those Saudis I hired? You and I know the high turnover when you're dealing with Saudis. (Zaho, 2014, p.649)

Enforcement under Nitaqat has therefore led companies to employ Saudis, even when they have not wished to, contributing to the phenomenon of 'fake Saudization' (Bassnawi, 2017). Fake Saudization is defined as "a firm include[ing] just the names of Saudi nationals as employees in the company's system, in order to avoid penalties that relate to Nitaqat" (Alshanbri et al., 2015, p.705). Koyame-Marsh (2016) argues that firms are engaging in illegal practices by making fake Saudization declarations, where Saudis are employed but not registered and in reality, have no real work, since these firms actually employ foreign workers. For example, in 2015, 18,000 female employees were cited in firms' fake Saudization practices, wherein they were registered by firms and paid salaries of between SR500-1000 per month, with no real work roles in the firm (Koyame-Marsh, 2016).

Nevertheless, Nitaqat has helped to expose illegal contracts and irregular employment practices in firms, resulting in around a million workers leaving the country (Arab Gulf Labour, 2014). The Saudi Ministry of Labour conducts monitoring tours of private-sector firms to check for fake Saudization practices. In 2013, the annual review of employment in the General Organization for Social Insurance (GOSI) found 104,000 women registered in the construction sector, which raised concerns over the authenticity of these figures (Alshanbri et al., 2015). It should be noted here that the consequences of making fake Saudization claims are severe; the Saudi Ministry of Labour imposes fines of up to SR10

million (USD2.6 million) and sentences of up to five years' imprisonment, together with other sanctions (Alshanbri et al., 2015). In practice therefore, Nitaqat does not necessarily fill employment gaps, but it does check firms' reliability over the employment of Saudi nationals and ensures that fines are imposed for illegal actions, in order to reduce instances of fake Saudization. The next section looks at Saudi female participation in the labour market and the influence of the Nitaqat programme on this employment.

2.4 The Saudi Labour Market and Female Participation

This section is important in helping to understand the features of the labour market in a highly patriarchal society. The evidence from the existing literature reveal Saudi Arabia to be a country with one of the lowest rates of female participation in the labour market worldwide.

2.4.1 Nitaqat and Female Employment

A number of studies (Ramady, 2013; Sadi, 2013; Alshanbri et al., 2014; De Bel-Air, 2015; Zaho, 2016; Peck, 2017), reviewing the impact of Nitaqat on firms, have concluded that it presents challenges by influencing firms' strategy, due to the mandatory employment of Saudis who demand high salaries. Thus, when this is not achieved, the outcome is high employee turnover. Equally, the influence of social norms, such as the low status of the jobs being offered, results in Saudis leaving positions quickly. Peck (2017) claims that despite Nitaqat's success within a short period of time, critics suggest that it was implemented too quickly and very strictly enforced, which resulted in high costs for firms. Aligning with this argument, it is claimed that Nitaqat effectively closed down around 11,000 firms, which could not meet the quota requirements in its first year of implementation. Peck (2014) suggests that in this way, Nitaqat differs from affirmative action in the international sense, as the latter favours specific groups, whereas Nitaqat is dedicated to enforcing the employment of all Saudi citizens in the private sector.

Although, as mentioned in earlier studies, Nitaqat has given rise to challenges in the private sector, due to its implementation methods, Al Sheikh (2015) and Alfarran (2016) acknowledge its success in reducing the low rate of Saudi employment in the private sector. Moreover, the existing body of research on Nitaqat suggests that the programme has led to an increase in female participation in this sector (Alselaimi & Lord, 2012; Labour and Nitaqat, 2012; De Bel-Air, 2015; Sadi, 2015; Alfarran, 2016). Much of the literature on Nitaqat is dedicated to Nitaqat's influence on firms, but it has neglected to

investigate female participation in the Saudi workplace (Elamin & Omair, 2010; Alselaimi & Lord, 2012). However, evidence from the Saudi Ministry of Labour and Social Development Statistics for female employment in 2016 reveals an increase in female participation in the Saudi labour market: “Private sector employment for women is growing, but from a low base” (Ministry of Labour and Social Development, 2016, p.18), presented in Figure 3, below.

Women’s employment in the private sector (2005- 2014)

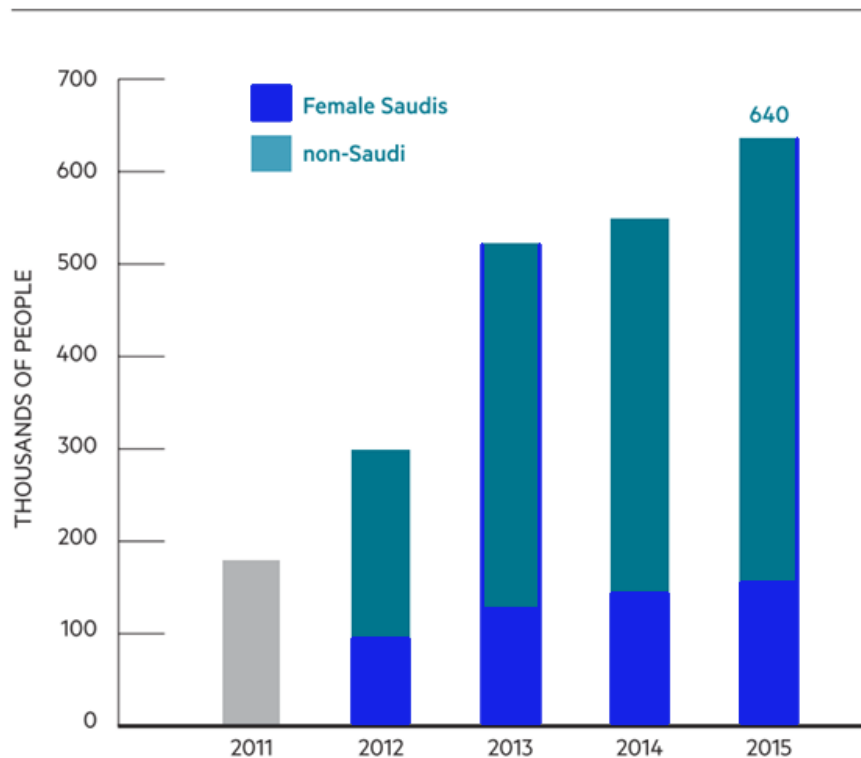


Figure 3: Women's employment in the first implementation of Nitaqat in the private sector (source: Ministry of Labour Social Development, 2016)

As can be seen in Figure 3, around 99,000 Saudi women were employed in the private sector as recently as 2012, “but that number rose to more than 159,000 by 2015, exceeding the rate of employment growth for males” (Ministry of Labour Social Development, 2016, p.18).

Nevertheless, De Bel-Air (2015) argues that the rapid implementation of Nitaqat has had a detrimental influence on firms at micro-level, often leading to their collapse. However, it has achieved valuable results for female employment and reduced the pattern of male dominance. Thus, “It breaks the taboos of gender segregation and males’ control over

females' spatial mobility and allows social and economic empowerment" (De Bel-Air, 2015, p.20). Women have gained more positions in the private-sector workplace and some jobs are even restricted to women, such as sales jobs in retail outlets (De Bel-Air, 2015). Furthermore, a key finding affirms that "the primary barrier to women's employment was cultural factors rather than the regulatory conditions" (Alfarran, 2016, p.112). Put another way, the main stumbling block for women in the Saudi labour market has consisted of cultural norms, which exclude women from working in mixed-gender environments, maintain male dominance, and uphold family authority over women's choices regarding work and family responsibilities. All these factors challenge a woman's position in relation to the workplace.

It should also be added here that discrimination is a further factor in the context of job opportunities for men as opposed to women; the experience of recruiting Saudi females in the private sector varies between sectors, according to the relevant job requirements (Alfarran, 2016). For example, it is more challenging to employ women in manufacturing, compared with the insurance sector, due to the working conditions and skill requirements of these sectors, and women's lack of appropriate skills (Alfarran, 2016). This raises concerns over Saudi women's experience of working in certain domains within the private sector as a whole. The increase in female employment under the Nitaqat programme strongly supports the value of future studies on gender issues that are associated with female employment in Saudi Arabia, especially in relation to local SMEs (Alfarran et al., 2018).

Al-Abdulkarim's (2018) study of the impact of Nitaqat on firms, before and after implementation, concludes that it has created challenges for low-productivity firms, which depend on foreign workers to comply with Nitaqat's requirements in the short term, due to the high cost of employing Saudis. Nitaqat has consequently caused these firms to exit the market (Al-Abdulkarim, 2018). However, more productive firms are surviving, due to their capabilities as "they are able to allocate their resources to improve productivity to raise profitability and continue to exist in the market" (Al-Abdulkarim, 2018, p.194).

Furthermore, due to the high rate of unemployment among Saudi women, they may accept jobs that are considered to be of low status, which previously would have been filled by foreign workers (Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018). Nevertheless, there is a need for further research on women's experiences in the workplace, following the introduction of Nitaqat, given that it has transformed the Saudi labour market and increased female employment. There is also a real need for studies to investigate Saudi women's voices in

this regard (Al-Abulkarim, 2018). This is especially pertinent in Saudi society, where it is argued that few studies to date have considered the influence of social change on the position of female employees in the Saudi workplace (Nasseef, 2015).

A review of the relevant literature on Nitaqat will reveal its impact, as a quota system, on firms' performance at different levels and on the Saudi labour market in general. For example, the Nitaqat programme has led to increased female participation in the private sector, as already stated in this chapter (Alselaimi & Lord, 2012; Labour and Nitaqat, 2012; De Bel-Air, 2015; Sadi, 2015; Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abulkarim, 2018). However, many of these studies have looked at Nitaqat's influence on firms, but neglected to investigate female participation in the Saudi labour market (Elamin & Omair, 2010; Alselaimi & Lord 2012). It may therefore be identified that there is less of a focus on female employees' experiences and voice in Saudi Arabia's highly gender-segregated and male-dominated culture. In light of this, the growth in female employment in Saudi Arabia raises the need to study female employment and gender issues in the Saudi private sector (Nasseef, 2015; Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abulkarim, 2018). This current study responds to this need by investigating female participation and women's experiences in private-sector firms, following the implementation of Nitaqat programme. Growing female employment in the Saudi private sector means increasing their participation in mixed-gender workplaces. Hence, it is important to explore the issue of segregation in the workplace.

2.4.2 Segregation in the Workplace

Gender segregation in the public sphere is not only related to social attitudes but is also a result of Saudi Arabia's Islamic society, combined with government policy and law (Renard, 2014). Metcalfe (2011) found that more than 57% of Arab women have concerns about working in the private sector, due to mixed-gender environments and the limited opportunities available, compared with the public sector – most women are employed in the education and health sectors, which are usually in the public sector. In contrast, it is rare for women to be employed in architecture, engineering and technical fields (Metcalfe, 2011). Notably, in most Arab countries, private-sector firms tend to operate with mixed-gender environments (Metcalfe, 2007). However, it should be noted that the majority of oil companies, such as those in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Qatar, are gender-segregated. These restrictions limit women's opportunities to choose their preferred types of work, as women in employment are required, due to social norms and cultural influences, to work in separate offices in the workplace (Metcalfe, 2011; Nasseef, 2015).

Increased female participation in the private sector emerged after the implementation of quotas; placing pressure on employers to comply with social and traditional norms, thereby maintaining gender-segregated environments at work (Alfarran, 2016). According to The Economist (2016), countries require time to implement quotas in the workplace. For example, Al-Abulkarim (2018, p.24) argues that female employment in Saudi Arabia needs “...to provide an environment that adheres to Saudi labour law, which allocates males and females to separate working places”. Moreover, segregation is associated with occupations that correspond to either men or women, in terms of cultural norms (Metcalf, 2007). For example, in Saudi Arabia, the highest-ranking jobs in an organisation are considered most appropriate for men, because these positions require more interaction with men. Accordingly, from a socio-cultural angle, they are inappropriate for women in a highly gender-segregated culture, where male leaders hold dominant positions (Elamin & Omair, 2010). The following section will explain what social and cultural norms mean in the context of Saudi Arabia.

2.4.3 Social and Cultural Norms in Saudi Arabia

Traditional attitudes in patriarchal societies are important and have an influence on HR management in the workplace, which differ from these of Western societies. Saudi Arabia is a particularly conservative country, with strict requirements regarding gender-segregation, including the provision of exclusively female working environments and women being excluded from employment in certain sectors, which are traditionally dominated by men (Elamin & Omair, 2010).

The role of Islam in Arab countries in general and more specifically in the GCC is combined with social and cultural norms to guide policies and form the basic social and legal infrastructure of these societies (Sidani, 2005; Tlaiss & Dirani, 2015). However, it has been argued that Islam is not the only reason for discrimination against women, or for the historic male domination in these countries, which in turn affects the position of women (Metcalf, 2011). At this point in time, traditions and cultural norms represent obstacles that restrict women’s opportunities in the private-sector labour market across the GCC countries (AlHamli, 2013). Therefore, Randeree (2012) argues that there is a need to change social attitudes towards women in the above-mentioned context and reduce inequality in the workplace. Importantly, many Arab societies are characterised by a religious and gender-segregated culture, which has shaped labour market policies in these contexts. Thus, to varying degrees, women are subject to control by men in the Arab

world. As such, Ray (2002, p.1) suggests that “The nature of control and subjugation of women varies from one society to the other as it differs due to the differences in class, caste, religion, region, ethnicity and the socio-cultural practices”. Alfarran (2012) also stresses the importance of contextual considerations; for example, in terms of religion and culture. In order to fully understand the role of gender in Saudi Arabia, it is important to consider religion, tradition and patriarchy. Regarding the role of Islam and culture, Alwidani (2016, p.36) states that “What makes Saudi Arabia unique from other Muslim countries is the fact that Saudi Arabia is the only Islamic country that completely segregates both sexes in all walks of life”.

It has been suggested that Saudi male attitudes to Saudi women discourages female participation in the labour market and places more emphasis on women’s domestic responsibilities (Elamin & Omair, 2010). Saudi Arabia's economy and society is shaped by its culture and social norms, encased within a highly patriarchal society. Here, men are financially responsible for the female members of their family, and women's primary role involves family responsibilities as mothers, wives and daughters (Walby, 1989; Elamin & Omair, 2010; Alqahtani, 2012; Fallata, 2012; Alfarran, 2016). However, the concept of patriarchy will be explored in more depth in the next chapter.

Women’s lives in Saudi Arabia are shaped by roles that are traditionally embedded in Islamic societies – compounded by tradition and a patriarchal society – which dictate that men (fathers, husbands, brothers, etc.) control women in the public sphere (Metcalf, 2011; Alwedini, 2016). For example, women are obliged to obtain permission from male family members, if they wish to work outside the home (Alqahtani, 2012). As a consequence, Saudi female employment is influenced by the religion of Islam, the nation’s dominant ideology, and Saudi gendered culture, both of which have shaped women’s position in the workplace (Alqahtani, 2012). However, this patriarchal influence differs from one environment to another; depending on the level of male control and family background, rooted in strict family traditions. Alwedini (2016) suggests that “Women who come from traditional families are more likely to accommodate the patriarchal influences, whilst those who come from non-traditional families are more likely to bargain or negotiate with the patriarchal system” (Alwedini, 2016, p.2).

Aside from the above, job status is considered to be significant in Saudi society, with jobs reflecting social status (Alghamdi, 2016; Budhwar et al., 2018). Meanwhile, social and cultural acceptance influences the status of different jobs in the Saudi labour market, and so job status appears to be associated with social attitudes in Saudi Arabia. Thus, jobs in

engineering or teaching are considered high level, carrying more prestige and as a result, more influence in society (Alghamdi, 2016). Consequently, the level of a job is defined by its prestige in Saudi Arabia, and it is a primary factor in favouring public-sector over private-sector jobs (Budhwar et al., 2018). Moreover, a job with a high salary is considered prestigious, while a low-paid job with long working hours is considered to be low level, associated with non-Saudis and foreign workers. This even includes nursing (Alwedini, 2016).

It is therefore important to understand Saudi Arabia's traditions and cultural norms, as these even differ from those of other GCC contexts, in that there is more consideration given to the norms for female participation in the workplace (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Social and cultural norms are undoubtedly significant when discussing Saudi women in the workplace and the associated barriers affecting women. However, the implementation of the Nitaqat programme has begun to break down some of the boundaries relating to gender-segregation, gender roles and social attitudes to women in a mixed-gender labour market. Female employment and the shifting roles of women will consequently be addressed in the following subsections.

2.4.4 The Employment of Female Saudis

Saudi Arabia is a highly masculine society, which has an influence on the low participation of women in its labour market (Alfalih, 2016). Al-Rasheed (2013) argues that although there are women in Saudi workplaces, their participation is low and restricted by narrow rules that affect their lives in the public sphere. As mentioned earlier in this Literature Review, Saudi women live in a highly patriarchal society, where men dominate, and there are very few studies on women's general experiences of work in Saudi Arabia (Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018).

Nevertheless, there have been critical efforts to promote equal opportunities in education for women in Saudi Arabia (Al-Dehailan, 2007). The Saudi government now offers equal opportunities for men and women to develop themselves educationally and as a result, Saudi women tend to be well-educated, but have fewer and more restricted job opportunities than men in the Saudi labour market (Al-Dehailan, 2007; Alfalih, 2016; Alothman, 2017). This inevitably means large numbers of well-educated, unemployed female Saudis (Alshehry, 2009), amounting to around six million, whereupon the Saudi government has intervened to create more jobs for women. Most of these jobs are in the public sector, where there is less discrimination; in an environment that is further enhanced

by more incentives such as privacy and gender-segregated workspaces (Yusuf, 2014; Al-Waqfi & Al-Faki, 2015). Thus, the literature suggests that it is a challenge to hire women in the private sector, compared to the public sector, due to the spatial dimension, in that female public-sector employees usually work in gendered-segregated workplaces, but this sector cannot offer jobs to all female Saudis (Yusuf, 2014). Conversely, although Saudization applies to all Saudi nationals, whether in the public or private sector, it is still challenging to hire women in the private sector, because most women refuse to work in mixed-gender environments (Metcalf, 2011). In contrast, the public sector offers women gender-segregated workspaces and development activities (Van Geel, 2016), so that women are not compromised in their working environment. Another inhibitor of job opportunities for women in the private sector is the fact that women often lack the appropriate qualifications and skills for these workplaces, with a mismatch between their qualifications and the skills required for the available jobs (Alfarran, 2016).

Similarly, Alshehry (2009) suggests that private-sector employers favour male employees, indicating that there are social and cultural influences on the position of women in the Saudi labour market. Nasseef (2015) also points out that there is still resistance to women holding professional positions. Moreover, Saudi nationals prefer not to work in the private sector, because there is the possibility that they will have to come under non-Saudi supervision, causing friction and giving them the sense of being lower in status than foreign workers. These situations can create problems for HR management in the private sector (Budhwar et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, it should be clarified here that the employment of female Saudis in the private sector must comply with the Saudi Ministry of Labour's policies on female employment. For example, under these policies, female employees must not work more than eight hours a day, to a maximum of 48 hours a week. Moreover, women must not be assigned to work night shifts, except in hospitals, in shops selling women's merchandise, in retail as cashiers, or in emergency situations (Saudi Ministry of Labour, 2015). In light of the literature, the preference among Saudi female employees for positions in the public sector is specified, based on cultural and social reasons (Allothman, 2017); principally, the greater likelihood of working in a gender-segregated environment, which is why over 95% of Saudi female workers are in the public sector.

Irrespective of the above, limited research has been conducted on gender and HR management in the context of Saudi Arabia. Al-Asfour et al. (2017) found little consideration in the workplace for women's family responsibilities, including pregnancy.

Furthermore, there have been issues surrounding women's mobility, and limited job opportunities for women, associated with discrimination in the workplace (Metcalf, 2007). Evidence of gender discrimination in the workplace is further associated with cultural norms regarding communication between men and women at work. For instance, some Saudi men avoid communicating with Saudi female peers. There is an expectation, however, that social change may influence male authority and help shape more positive attitudes towards women in the workplace, as a result of increasing female employment: "there are more working in the private and public sectors, and sooner or later, many of obstacles will slowly disappear..." (Al-Asfour et al., 2017, p.193).

It should also be added here that although women are now permitted to work in shopping centres, they have little access to higher positions (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). This is compounded by the fact that women face the challenge of balancing family responsibilities with their jobs – despite many women performing paid work to help their families nowadays. Their duties in the home usually involve the management of domestic tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and childcare, alongside work responsibilities (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Family responsibilities are therefore a significant issue faced by women in the Saudi context. As such, women need employers to be flexible over their working hours, offering employment with reduced hours. There is evidence to show that firms frequently lose female employees in high positions, due to the long working hours that are usually associated with these roles (Alselimi & Lord, 2012). This implies that women tend to be more concerned about working hours than about attaining high professional positions, where their family responsibilities are concerned. This point is illustrated by an example where a woman refused a well-paid job opportunity in a bank, taking a lower paid university job instead, due to its lower number of working hours:

Although the pay is nothing compared to the banking position I had, at least now I can go home, attend to all my family needs and still have time for myself (Alselimi & Lord, 2012, p.8). This situation explains and confirms female employees' need for flexibility, so that they can accommodate all the domestic responsibilities that are expected of them in Saudi Arabia's patriarchal society.

As mentioned earlier, Islamic culture and the roles it determines for men and women are the main determinants of Saudi regulations and the Saudi labour market, with an inevitable influence on the position of women as potential employees and their opportunities in the workplace (Metcalf, 2007; Alshery, 2009; Al-Zahrani, 2010). For example, in the private sector, even the recruitment process is difficult for women, because of restrictions such as dress code – for example, wearing the hijab – which can have an impact on work and

promotional opportunities for female employees (Metcalf, 2007). To clarify this further, women's need or requirement for privacy, including specific dress codes, has implications in the work environment and vice versa.

Another point to consider is that Saudi women often experience a lack of training in the workplace, placing them in a similar position to women across the rest of the GCC and certain other countries in the developing world (Metcalf, 2007). Moreover, under Nitaqat, Saudi women still face obstacles to working in the private sector, because of conditions that include long working hours, poor motivation to recruit or include women, and the low priority given to female management roles (Alfarran, 2016). Alahmadi (2011) claims that women in leadership positions are frequently less empowered and face a lack of resources, and this poses more of a problem than cultural barriers. In contrast, Alselimi and Lord (2012) cite cultural barriers as more influential, even compared to the Islamic religion – Islam essentially supports female employment, whereas Saudi culture shapes female participation in the workplace:

Cultural processes assume that a woman will marry early; that her contribution to the family will be as homemaker; that the household will be headed by a man and that the man will provide financially and 'protect' the family. Male protection is seen as justification for the exercise of authority over women in all areas of decision making that relates to the public sphere (Metcalf, 2011, p.133)

In this regard, Nasseef (2015) adds that the form of Islam adopted in Saudi Arabia is highly conservative with regard to women's roles. For example, although the Quran defines the role of women, there is the potential for liberation in Islam. Moreover, justice for women aligns with the Quran. Nasseef (2015) argues that the obstacle here is that women are being marginalised, due to male influence in the public sphere, where men are given authority in a patriarchal society.

What results is a kind of vicious circle, where employers are unwilling to hire women, due to the need for gender segregation in the workplace, where they are not happy about introducing segregation into their workplace environments (Alfalih, 2016). Most notably, Saudi culture not only has the most stringent gender-segregation requirements in the world, it also has a high demographic distribution of youth, making it even more difficult to recruit women in the private sector, given the general competition for jobs. Consequently, most of the positions that are available for women through the Nitaqat programme carry low status, such as low-paid receptionist roles with monthly salaries of around SR2000 (Alfarran, 2016).

Female employment in Saudi Arabia usually requires a mixed-gender workplace, with separate sections for women in mixed-gender environments; representing an obstacle in the private sector, as they are costly for firms to accommodate (Alfarran, 2016; Van Geel, 2016). Moreover, after the introduction of the Nitaqat programme, the Saudi Ministry of Labour issued regulations in 2013, obliging firms in the private sector to build walls at least six feet high to segregate male and female employees in mixed workplace environments (Alfarran, 2016). Additionally, it is required to provide a private space for women, if they are employed in clothing stores or as cashiers: “They must have their own work area and rest rooms and they may not interact with unrelated men” (Alfarran, 2016, p.34).

In turn, an argument has been put forward concerning the key role of HR managers in reducing discrimination in the labour market, such as exercising fairness in the recruitment, selection and development of employees (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). There is evidence of the role of HR management in contributing to economic growth (Afiouni, Ruël & Schuler, 2014). It has also been argued that the failure of HR departments to prioritise gender equality in the workplace contributes to women lacking motivation, being uninformed, and having no access to development opportunities in the workplace (Metcalf, 2007; Alfarran, 2016). Although female employment has increased under Nitaqat, cultural and social norms continue to control the employment of women (Alfarran, 2016). For example, Saudi women require permission from their male relatives to be allowed to go out to work, and this represents a barrier. In Saudi society, as discussed previously, women are dependent on their male relatives, and so this permission to work is important in light of Islamic and cultural stipulations (Alqahtani, 2012). Even more influential is the fact that Saudi women are expected to concentrate more on their family responsibilities as their primary role, rather than participating in the workplace (Nasseef, 2015). Thus, another argument put forward regarding employers’ reluctance to hire women is women’s need for flexibility in a number of areas, including working hours, consideration during pregnancy, and childcare (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Saudi women in senior positions enjoy fewer legal rights than women elsewhere in the world (Nasseef, 2015). However, the growing literature on women's increasing share in the workplace in Saudi Arabia highlights their changing roles in this distinctively patriarchal society, which raises the need to examine HR management, which will be reviewed in the next section.

2.5 Human Resource (HR) Management and Women in the Saudi Labour Market

Since Nitaqat has increased female participation in the workplace, it is important to discuss HR management in Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, regarding mixed-gender workplace environments. Following on from this, the role of women in the workplace and changes in their participation in the private sector will be discussed.

2.5.1 HR Management Issues and Challenges

Together with the issue of a lack of gender studies in Saudi Arabia, the evidence suggests that HR management needs to pay attention to the female labour force, especially in the private sector in this Arab country, where there is resistance to employing women and a lack of HR management experience of women in the workplace (Sidani, 2005; Metcalfe, 2008). Effective HR management, adopting appropriate HR practices, can improve the position of women in the workplace (Shen, Chanda, D'Netto & Monga, 2009). For example, to eradicate discrimination at work, it has been found that pay and salary should be equal between the genders, based on an individual's skills and abilities, rather than gender (Shen et al., 2009).

Moreover, there is a lack of HR research in the Middle East, pointing to a need for further attention to be paid to this area (Melahi & Wood, 2013; Afiouni et al., 2014). Tlaiss and Dirani (2015) note the importance of in-depth qualitative studies, which could contribute to the literature on HR management in developing countries.

Both Randeree (2012) and Forstenlechner et al. (2012) argue that labour market policies need to place greater emphasis on the important role played by women in work. They claim that policies should also address the issues of equality, culture and society, while at the same time increasing gender awareness, rather than simply focusing on implementation. This will result in a deeper understanding of women's needs. It has been argued that no aspects of HR management are dedicated to diversity in GCC countries and most HR practices in this context are shaped by Islamic norms (Metcalfe, 2008). This means that any change in organisational culture is shaped by Islamic norms in the GCC:

The Islamic religion provides guidelines encompassing all aspects of public and private existence, in the political and economic spheres" (Hutchings, Metcalfe & Cooper, 2010, p.10).

Moreover, management is assigned the task of considering the socio-cultural context of the corresponding country, associated with local, cultural and economic conditions, and labour

policy (Metcalf, 2007). It is social and traditional norms that shape the way in which men communicate with women in the workplace, especially in patriarchal societies, where men attain leadership roles and independence, while women remain dependent (Elamin & Omair, 2010). Cultural norms, for example, are factors that have supported the tendency for employers to hire men for managerial jobs. Furthermore, a typical lack of training and professional development in patriarchal societies restricts women from gaining high-ranking positions in the labour market (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). In other words, social influences dictate that the primary role of a woman is to take care of her family. In turn, this impacts negatively on women's roles in the workplace, as does men's lack of trust in women's professional abilities; resulting in an absence of organisational support for women at work (Al-Asfour et al., 2017).

Most importantly, it is argued that increasing the level of female employment in the GCC labour market is not just about offering appropriate training to employees, but is also about the need for HR managers to consider the social and cultural challenges associated with women in the workplace (Marmenout & Lirio, 2014). For example, Walby (2009) states that there is discrimination against women in terms of the training opportunities offered to them, with men being prioritised instead. The justification for this is that the management expects women to get married and leave their jobs, due to their domestic responsibilities. Thus, there is less managerial support for female employees (Metcalf, 2007). In contrast, there is a training institute in Bahrain that supports the private sector, but most technical schools are for men, since jobs of a technical nature are considered to be 'male jobs' in the private sector (Metcalf, 2007). Metcalf (2007, p.65) therefore highlights the dilemma over female recruitment: "The reasons given for women's limited requirement is that the private sector is not known as being 'women friendly.'"

Moreover, it is claimed that nationalisation programmes have resulted in women having to compete with men in recruitment and selection, with an expectation of bias in favour of women (Elamin & Omair, 2010). Nevertheless, managers tend to hire and promote men over equally well-qualified women, leaving low-status jobs to be filled by women who will accept these jobs (Elamin & Omair, 2010). As a result of female recruitment being of low priority to managers, combined with their belief that women's primary role is to bear family responsibilities, the only jobs offered to women are those that are unattractive to men. This also explains the low rate of female participation in the labour market, due to the male-dominated culture of Arab countries (Alwaqafi & Alfakih, 2015). However, Nitaqat has opened up opportunities for women to work in previously male-dominated sectors; for

example in interior design within architectural firms. This is because women are expected to perform better than men in this field, due to the creativity that is required – a quality that is more closely associated with women in Saudi culture (Franchini & Garda, 2018).

Nevertheless, an argument has been presented concerning the need to address equal opportunities in organisations, as the lack of consideration for this issue tends to limit women's participation in development skills such as training programmes (Alwaqafi & Alfakih, 2015). This lack of consideration may be associated with the influence of a patriarchal society on HR management practices (Alwaqafi & Alfakih, 2015). The consequence of bias in recruitment and selection is women's lack of career progression in organisations (Elamin & Omair, 2010). Alhmali (2013) affirms that there is a clear lack of focus on gender in the labour market, giving rise to the need for a more supportive environment in the workplace. In turn, this will impact on economic growth in the GCC countries.

In fact, women have been one of the main targets of recent policies in the GCC region. For instance, labour market policies encourage female employment and increase women's opportunities. However, this can also place pressure on the private sector in some countries, especially in highly gender-segregated societies, with regard to managing women in the workplace. The existing literature highlights the need to focus on gender in the private sector, given the increase in female participation in the labour market, which remains poorly understood, especially in Saudi Arabia (Nasseef, 2015; Alfarran, 2016, Al-Abulkarim, 2018).

The purpose of presenting and discussing the literature on women in the workplace in the GCC is to demonstrate women's low participation and lack of HR management in contexts that resemble Saudi Arabia. In patriarchal societies, such as those of the Arab world, men play a dominant role; ultimately influencing and challenge female positions in the workplace (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). Consequently, HR management's consideration of female employees demands attention in the literature, now that women have a growing presence in the private sector. Ongoing changes in the position of women in the labour market have been instrumental in this growth, with implications for HR management. The following section looks in more depth at the ongoing transformation in the position of Saudi women in the labour market.

2.6 The Changing Position of Women in the Saudi Labour Market and Freedom of Movement

Despite arguments from critics about the low position of women in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi government has opened up opportunities for women to sit on the consultative Shura Council. This occurred for the first time in 2011, in order to enhance women's public participation in politics (Gardener, 2013; Van Geel, 2016). King Abdullah (the previous King of Saudi Arabia) asserted that women should play an important role in the nation and share in its development (Van Geel, 2016). To be more specific, the government's role is crucial in empowering women in the workplace (Walby, 1990; Alqahtani, 2012). It should also be noted that women own 30% of businesses in Saudi Arabia (Yusuf, 2014); indicating the ascending position of women in the Saudi private sector, supported by the Saudi government. This illustrates that women are making progress at work in the private sector and contributing to its localisation (Renard, 2014). Moreover, the government has implemented measures that could potentially transform the role of Saudi women in their society, such as allowing them greater freedom from the restrictive rules governing permission from a male guardian; for example, there is no longer any need for a women aged 21 or over to obtain permission from a male guardian to travel (Alarabiya, 2019). This indicates the beginning of change for Saudi women in the nation's distinctive culture.

However, there are still many barriers to the promotion of women in Saudi society, despite the developments being undertaken to expand their role. In this domain, cultural and social barriers cannot be ignored, especially in the private sector (Achoui, 2009; Nasseef, 2015). Van Geel's (2016) finding from interviews with businesswomen in the city of Jeddah identified that women are working with men in mixed workplaces. However, with respect to the country's cultural and social norms, they have separate offices and only come into direct contact with men in meeting rooms to discuss projects. This is determined by the legal requirements for hiring women to work in mixed environments in Saudi Arabia, whereby female employees must have separate rooms to work in (Van Geel, 2016).

Through their efforts, Saudi women are seeking to reduce the impact of Saudi Arabia's patriarchal society. For instance, they are entering the labour market (Alqahtani, 2012), and in some situations, challenging the status quo. They are also being empowered by the Saudi government to engage in business, with their rights secured in the workplace (Fallata, 2012). For example, women at work may draw upon informal connections to improve their skills and development (Metcalf, 2011). These changes in Saudi society have enabled women to participate widely in the workplace, as has occurred in other Arab

countries (Lari, 2016) such as Qatar, another patriarchal society, similar to Saudi Arabia. These changes indicate a movement towards reducing patriarchal influences on women. Nevertheless, Metcalfe (2011) affirms that in the Arab world, women encounter barriers to entering certain professions or sectors such as architecture and engineering, with most women finding employment in low-level jobs. Saudi government policies, especially the Nitaqat programme in 2011, have therefore opened up opportunities for women to work in the private sector and consequently, patriarchal Saudi cultural attitudes to female employment are changing.

Al-Abdulkarim's (2018) call to study female employment, especially after the lifting of some of the restrictions to female employment in the country, is even louder now. Women are being recognised as important in Saudi society. One government target in Saudi Vision 2030 is to promote and facilitate female participation in the private sector (World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, 2017). Moreover, one of the transformational steps taken by Saudi Arabia in 2018 was to allow all women over the age of 18 to drive, which has opened up a further 50,000 jobs for Saudi females (Obaid, 2018). Moreover, there is evidence of more autonomy being expected by women in the workplace, with new generations and attitudes gradually changing these environments. Eliman and Omair (2010, p.762) suggest that “traditional attitudes may gradually become more egalitarian as the new generations based on liberal gender socialization replace the old one”. In this period of new regulations for the Saudi labour market, women are resisting and bargaining within the patriarchy (Al-Rasheed, 2013). The opportunities associated with the Nitaqat programme may therefore find women's voices getting louder and negotiating for autonomy in the workplace. It represents rapid change in the position of women in Saudi Arabia, pointing to the need for more studies on their role in the workforce (Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abulkarim, 2018).

2.7 Conclusion

The existing literature has identified growing female participation in the Saudi labour market. In such a male-dominated society, women face challenges when engaging in private-sector employment, due to the influence of social attitudes perpetuated by a patriarchal society. In turn, this situation influences managers' attitudes to women in a scenario where lower priority is given by the HR function to female employment. This has the effect of placing women in low-status jobs.

In the corresponding literature, Saudi Arabia is revealed as a society where patriarchy is particularly evident and prevalent. To be more precise, it is a country with one of the lowest levels of female employment in the world, with a wide, gender-related employment gap. However, an analysis of the literature also revealed that the Nitaqat programme has created opportunities for women to take their place in the private sector, which has been obligated to comply with regulations established by Nitaqat. However, some firms have found it difficult to align themselves with these regulations, consequently resorting to fake Saudization claims. This is especially the case in SMEs, where the employment of Saudi nationals has given rise to pressures due to high costs. These costs subsequently encourage the employment of women in low-paid jobs to offset high dependency on foreign workers.

In the relevant literature, a number of gaps may be identified in the area of understanding women's actual experiences, which this study seeks to address. For example, the experiences of female employees in Saudi SMEs have yet to be satisfactorily documented. However, the literature does show that the expectation of social change has created avenues for female participation in the workplace, together with increased female autonomy. This situation is likely to present further challenges within Saudi Arabia's strictly patriarchal environment.

Aside from the above, the existing literature highlights the need to consider traditional attitudes and cultural aspects when studying women's experiences in Saudi Arabia's distinctive society. To understand the relevance of patriarchy theory in this research context, with regard to shaping gender in the workplace, the next chapter references the patriarchal core of Saudi society, which inevitably influences women in the workplace. With growing female participation, especially in the private sector, there is a need to understand female experiences. These new experiences can then be theorised under Bradley's (1990) theories of gender and power relations, which will be explained in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: The Feminisation of the Workplace and the Gendered Power Relations Approach

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the concept of feminisation in the workplace within a patriarchal environment. It begins by acknowledging patriarchy varies across societies. For example, the level of patriarchy in the current research context differs from that of Western countries. This chapter then moves on to examine women in work in developing countries, so as to gain a deeper understanding of women who work in male-dominated societies. It will highlight the transformation in women's autonomy at work, with evidence that women are challenging the influence of patriarchy in the workplace. Next, this chapter identifies the theories that will be drawn upon to inform this current study and develop a conceptual framework for the management of female employees at work within a patriarchal society. In this study, a gendered power relations framework will subsequently be utilised to gain a rich understanding of women's experiences in the workplace.

3.2 Feminisation in Work

This section aims to illustrate how economic change has resulted in an increasingly feminised workplace. However, the concept of feminisation in the workplace differs across societies and varies from country to country. Moreover, this section will explain how feminisation is received in the workplace, while the association of this issue with female employment will be discussed.

The feminisation of the workplace is meant to increase the percentage of women who work (Bradley, 1999), thus bringing change to paid employment in a nation's economy. Feminisation involves moving away from exclusively male workplaces to a situation where women also participate in these environments. Thus, feminisation means that women have the opportunity to work in male-dominated professions and environments (Rubery, 2015). While economic advancement is the main driver of growing feminisation, the level of female participation in the workplace varies across the world, as mentioned earlier (Thévenon, 2013). Increasing feminisation in the workplace is associated with economic and structural changes in both the developing and developed world (Standing, 1989; Buğra & Cakar, 2010; Mezzadri, 2016). Figart (1997) argues that feminist scholars emphasise the role of economic change and development in increasing female participation in the labour market. However, with regard to promoting feminisation in the workplace, it

is often the government's role to legislate for the provision of facilities for women in these environments (Horton, 1999).

The first point to consider in relation to this specific topic is that feminisation could enhance the 'flexibilisation' of the labour market. Rubery (2015, p.634) defines flexibilisation as follows: "...flexibilisation is concerned with how we work, under what forms of employment contract, for how many hours, at what times of day and with what degrees of employment security..." For example, to address the challenges of domestic responsibilities and long working hours, female workers in the UK have the option of part-time jobs and flexible working hours to help them balance their family and work commitments (Rubery, 2015). However, if there is no flexibility in working conditions, and if working hours are long, this presents women with the challenge of trying to combine multiple roles (Buğra & Cakar, 2010). Thus, certain types of flexibility at work can ensure that women have the time to fulfil their responsibilities, both at home and at work, leading to their greater retention in the workplace (Coyle, 2005). Most European women; for example, in Germany, Austria, the UK, Belgium and Switzerland, favour part-time work, if they have family responsibilities (Jumotte, 2003).

Nevertheless, although flexibility in the form of part-time work has opened up the workplace to more women in the UK, it is argued that part-time work and shorter working hours are generally associated with low-paid jobs (Coyle, 2005). Moreover, it is suggested that women who work fewer working hours are likely to be amongst the high percentage of women who leave their jobs, therefore implying high staff turnover amongst female part-time employees (Jumotte, 2003). In particular, Walby (1997) is critical of the impact of flexibilisation on employers and economic development.

Since the increase in feminisation in the workplace, "...irregular conditions once thought to be the hallmark of women's 'secondary' employment have become widespread for both sexes" (Kanji & Menon-Sen, 2001, p.1), which has in turn increased the demand for female labour. However, such rapidly developing feminisation of the workplace means that firms need to recognise the complexity of this process. Although it has resulted in more women occupying traditionally male-dominated job roles (Standing, 1989), Mezzadri (2016) claims that feminisation not only leads to higher female employment, but also presents an opportunity for employers to fill low-level jobs. This reduces the cost of industrial activities; for example, hiring women to work on production lines in sweatshops

in India has contributed to reducing factory production costs for the employer (Mazzadri, 2016).

Aside from the above, Rubery (2015) argues that female employment has an influence on the level of discrimination experienced in the workplace. It would seem that female participation in the labour market is not the same as male participation. For example, when increasing their female participation, firms need to consider policies that will accommodate the dual role of women as paid workers and domestic caregivers. Such policies include maternity leave and childcare (Barrientos & Kabeer, 2004). Moreover, Buğra and Cakar (2010) state that the acceptance of women in the workplace is associated with their level of education. Thus, women find less acceptance in business and service sectors. Besides the strict discrimination against women entering occupations dominated by men, their educational level therefore also limits their opportunities in the workplace (Jaumotre, 2003; Buğra & Cakar, 2010).

Nevertheless, the integration of women into various employment sectors does not mean that there is no discrimination or segregation stemming from tradition or workplace culture (Rubery, 2015). In particular, aside from their problems in balancing work and family life, women still suffer due to pay gaps (Mazzadri, 2016). Figart (1997) considers that discrimination and job segregation may be found across all sectors and job roles, and that 'women's jobs' are typically less well paid and often regarded as 'unskilled'. Thus, women tend to occupy low-status jobs, because of organisational characteristics that prioritise male workers, when it comes to filling higher-level positions in an organisation (Figart, 1997; Al-Lamky, 2007). This is especially true in Arab societies, where there is a marked absence of women in middle and higher-level management in both the public and private sectors, since it is generally considered that the primary role of a woman is in the home (Walby, 1997; Al-Lamky, 2007). The gender gap in emerging economies and Arab countries is associated with privileging social norms, which influence and create barriers to job opportunities (International Labour Organization, 2018).

However, Jaumotre (2003) proposes that discrimination against women in the workplace is not the only reason for the low level of female representation in senior job roles. Instead, this phenomenon may be associated with women voluntarily choosing to work in positions that offer fewer opportunities. As discussed previously, the working conditions that accompany senior positions can pose problems for women and so they may choose roles with less responsibility. This is another limitation on women attaining higher-level employment. Furthermore, female employees may require various types of support,

according to the policies on integrating women into the workplace. For example, a firm's provision of childcare facilities is likely to encourage a greater level of female participation in the workplace, due to the more family-friendly work environment (Thévenon, 2013).

There is no doubt that the feminisation of jobs has opened up opportunities for women to attain high positions in the Saudi workplace, but employers still restrict access for women in certain male-dominated occupations, such as in the engineering sector (Rubery, 2015). In turn, women tend not to take up these traditionally male-dominated professions and so their self-exclusion results in the prevalence of men in these jobs (Rubery, 2015). However, there are moves to feminise workplaces in developing countries, especially in Asia, with women moving from jobs in agriculture to service, commerce and manufacturing industries (Horton, 1999; Williams, Bradley, Devadason & Erickson, 2013). Historically, most women in these countries have performed low-status and semi-skilled work; for example, on factory production lines (Standing, 1989). They have been allocated this work and widely favoured over men for many manufacturing and production roles, purely due to the low status of these jobs, where it has been difficult for firms to recruit male personnel who are willing to do this low-paid work (Standing, 1989, p.1086). Moreover, culturally male-dominated and strongly patriarchal societies (as described in more depth later in this chapter) have an influence on the level of female participation in the labour market. In such societies, low-paid, low-prestige jobs are typically associated with women (Brinton, Lee & Parish, 1995). It illustrates the effect of male authority on women at work, which reduces their work privileges and opportunities.

In developed countries, the shift towards the feminisation of jobs began with clerical work, which was previously male dominated. However, men still perform most clerical jobs in certain Asian countries, including India and Indonesia (Caraway, 2007). India has a highly masculine labour force, although 90% of Indian sweatshop factories are feminised. In these factories, female workers suffer due to lower wages, compared with men (Mazzadri, 2016). In reality, many women in the Middle East and Asia have low participation in the labour market and tend to be concentrated in poor paid work (Horton, 1999; Mazzadri, 2016). Moreover, the movement towards female participation in the public sphere has been more in the fields of education and health (Al-Lamky, 2007; Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014).

Despite increasing feminisation in relation to economic advancement, women even face challenges in the jobs that they can access. It has been argued that in male-dominated societies, the family and working environments have an impact on female participation and

the position of women in the workplace (Walby, 1990; Figart, 1997). Although structural organisational change and economic development have led to an increased rate of female employment, the cultural attitudes of employers in strongly patriarchal societies still cannot be ignored and continue to influence men's attitudes to women in the workplace (Buğra & Cakar, 2010). Mezzdares (2016) argues that the level of male authority in the workplace will depend on the extent of the patriarchy and its relevance to the entry of women into that workplace. Thus, variation across changes in the context of female employment relate to male responses in a patriarchal society, and men's influence on women in the workplace. This would include the challenge faced by women over equal pay. As such, it is important to understand patriarchal influences on women in the workplace, as explored in the next section.

3.3 The Patriarchal Perspective

As discussed in the Literature Review, the current research setting is located within a distinctly patriarchal society. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the concept of patriarchy and to understand patriarchy theory in relation to this study on women's experiences in mixed-gender workplaces within a highly patriarchal society.

In *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men, dominate, oppress and exploit women” (p.135). In such a society, the main role of the father is to exert authority in both the private and public spheres, maintaining control over the power relationship (Moghadam, 2004; Alqahtani, 2012). Consequently, men have authority and women have no say in this, and even their mobility is controlled by men (Moghadam, 2004). It has been stated by several authors that patriarchy creates gender inequalities in both the private and public spheres (Habiba, Ali & Ashfaq, 2016).

To elaborate on the above, patriarchy is a social construct that has existed throughout history, with men having authority over women. However, the level of patriarchy will vary between and within developed and developing countries (Ray, 2002; Moghadam, 2004). Aside from this, patriarchy occurs in two forms: private and public. Private patriarchy consists of men having authority over women in the home and family, whereas public patriarchy relates to male authority in the workplace. Walby (1996, p.13) defines public and private patriarchy as follows:

The private one built around men's exclusion of women from the public and confinement to the private world of the family household; the public one which did not prevent women from gaining access to the public, but which used segregationary strategies to subordinate women within all spheres of social action.

Given that this current research investigates women's experiences in the workplace, it focuses on public patriarchal influence. Public patriarchy imposes authority over women at work and at an economic level. In this form of patriarchy, the government and employer are the main sources of authority over the woman (Habiba et al., 2016).

In most developing countries, especially Middle Eastern countries such as Oman, the government plays a primary role in shaping opportunities for women in the labour market (Al-Lamky, 2007). The governments in many of these countries are currently encouraging female employment and increasing their participation in the workplace (Al-Lamky, 2007; Tatli, Vassilopoulou & Özbilgin, 2013):

In societies where patriarchal social orders remain influential and the representational function of women workers remains weak, strong and continuous state intervention is vital to achieve a level of gender equality. (Cooke, 2010, p.2267)

Alqahtani (2012) clarifies that women in strict, patriarchal societies are prevented from entering the labour market, and men hold all the power in the workplace. Moreover, traditionally, men have had greater opportunities in the public sphere (Walby, 1996). Likewise, male authority in the workplace across the GCC countries has been a major factor in the low level of female participation in the labour market (Alqahtani, 2012). Moghadam (2004) mentions the "belt of classic patriarchy" that is typical of Muslim societies. It refers to male domination restricting women's behaviour and resulting in gender segregation, legitimised under Sharia law (the Quran and Hadith) as part of the gender construct.

However, this strict patriarchal social structure has undergone rapid change since the 1960s, leading to the modernisation and industrialisation of states in the Middle East (Moghadam, 2004). In Muslim societies, patriarchy is more prevalent than in non-Muslim societies (Khatwani, 2016), and an increase in feminisation is associated with a society's compliance with patriarchal influences (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Male domination over women in paid employment is influenced by culture and in the Middle East, the notion that a woman's primary role is a domestic one (Abbott, Wallace & Tyler, 2005).

Nevertheless, Walby (2002) argues that economic development has led to increased feminisation and the movement of women from more domestic responsibilities to participation in the public sphere. This is evident in a number of areas, including politics. Moreover, it could be argued that the step from private to public patriarchy is not merely due to structural change, but rather to a greater orientation towards a capitalist economy, with a consequent increase in the demand for waged labour and potentially female empowerment'

female empowerment.

In this research, the focus is on women in the workplace. Thus, the next section will discuss the movement of women into the labour market in patriarchal societies, which will help establish the context of this research.

3.4 The Movement of Women into the Workplace and Challenges to Patriarchal Societies

It is claimed that within patriarchal societies, women face challenges in the workplace based purely on their gender (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). However, the influence of patriarchy varies from one society to another. In a patriarchal society, as discussed previously, a man's primary role is to take financial responsibility for female family members. Therefore, men have a higher rate of participation in the labour market (Kandiyoti, 1988; Kabeer, 2016). Moreover, it is known that within a patriarchal society, fathers have authority and control over women's choices in the public sphere (Ray, 2002).

Regarding the increase in feminisation, Al-Lamky (2007) argues that it is the family's role to support women in their desire to work and to encourage their autonomy. This crucial influence of tradition over legislation is made explicit by Alkhaled (2013, p.280):

...even if the laws were to change overnight permitting men and women to work equally, this does not mean that families will accept this for their daughters nor will society accept their visibility in every industry.

The feminisation of employment challenges established, private forms of patriarchy (the family), because women gain more opportunities to earn a living and attain independence through work (Walby, 1996). However, women's participation in the workplace does not necessarily mean that they are in high positions, especially in masculine societies, which define women's roles in the labour market (Walby, 1996). In some cases, for example in China, there are challenges regarding the acceptance of women in managerial positions in

the sales sector (Tatli et al., 2013). However, elsewhere, governments support feminisation in lower-level jobs, such as manufacturing; providing childcare for women working in factories (Caraway, 2007). In another example, Malaysia has feminised its manufacturing sector in similar ways (Kaur, 2000), whereby women are recruited merely to fill low-paid jobs, and not based on their skills (Kaur, 2000).

Many jobs in developing countries are low status, such as in manufacturing. However, there has been a movement towards employing a small number of women as managers (Appold, Siengthai & Kasarda, 1998). Notwithstanding this, male authority and various cultural forces present a barrier to women holding high-level positions in the labour market. Thus, there is the assumption that women will not strive to attain senior positions in the workplace, due to the influence of male authority (Appold et al., 1998). The question is therefore:

Are women underrepresented in higher positions because there is a dearth of qualified female labor or because there is a dearth of firms willing to employ the women who are qualified? (Appold et al., 1998, p.539)

In highly patriarchal societies where cultural and social norms influence the position of women in the workplace, men have a marked control over women, both in the home and in the workplace (Cain, Khanam & Nahar, 1979).

Although women in economically poor countries like Bangladesh are encouraged to do paid work to reduce poverty, men continue to create barriers to female independence (Cain et al., 1979). Pakistan is another context where women have faced challenges in the labour market and their job opportunities, due to patriarchal restrictions (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). This is especially true in countries where Islam is the predominant religion. In these conservative societies, employers encounter obstacles when seeking to hire women, because of gender restrictions (Caraway, 2007; Al-Asfour & Khan, 2014). There are two main components of Islam's religious stipulations for women in employment: firstly, there is the requirement to wear the hijab, and secondly, there is the rule of gender segregation in the workplace (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). However, prevailing traditions and customs have a greater influence than Islam (Moghadam, 2004; Al-Lamky, 2007). Therefore, regardless of gender-segregation, inequality in the workplace cannot be attributed to Islam itself, since the religion encourages equality between men and women. Moreover, it is argued that it is also the role of the state to encourage female employment (Al-Rasheed, 2013). However,

although Nitaqat has allowed for more employment in mixed environments, Saudi culture still has a powerful influence on women in the labour market.

Looking at the further implications of greater gender inclusivity at work, concerns have been raised over segmentation in the workplace, due to increased female employment. In patriarchal societies, providing jobs for women is of secondary importance, and low priority is given to women's improvement in the workplace. Therefore, women are likely to be in low-paid and insecure factory jobs, with few benefits (Tjandraningsih, 2000). Additionally, from the employer's point of view, women are likely to leave their jobs for family reasons or as a result of their domestic responsibilities, which tends to restrict them to low-paid employment (Kandiyoti, 1988; Joekes, 1995; Williams et al., 2013). This results in the segmentation of roles and positions in the workplace, where men hold more senior and superior positions (Bradley, 1999). Moreover, segmentation at work can also occur, because of motherhood being regarded as women's primary role, with subsequent childcare and domestic responsibilities (Bradley, 1999). As a result, in different countries with different levels of patriarchy, it is more acceptable for women to work in low-paid sectors. Examples of segmentation in the workplace may be found in Bangladesh, where the influence of an extremely strict patriarchy limits women's options to low-wage jobs, in order to avoid poverty (Kandiyoti, 1988). It could also be stated that domestic responsibilities are not exclusive to married women, as single women are also likely to have duties in the home, such as cooking and housework, presenting a challenge to their freedom to perform paid work (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Regardless of their marital status, women's roles are consequently defined by patriarchal traditions and customs. Therefore, segmentation in the workplace occurs, because women's responsibilities are primarily considered as being located in the home, while their paid employment is secondary. For this reason, men are appointed to the best positions in the workplace (Bradley, 1999). It illustrates how male authority influences the position of women in the workplace. Furthermore, compared with men, women tend to be less valued by employers, despite the fact that they also participate in the labour market (Bradley, 1999). This can be seen from employers' recognition of the dual role of women as both employees and mothers with domestic responsibilities. Consequently, employers exploit this through low-paid, low-status jobs.

It therefore follows that understanding the influence of patriarchal societies on women sheds light on the position of these women in the labour market. This influence determines whether women can attain leadership positions, because of the belief that a woman's

primary role is in the home (Al-Lamky, 2007). Consequently, low-paid jobs tend to be filled by women for social and discriminatory reasons, with women being paid less than men and regarded as a source of inexpensive labour (Joekes, 1995; Williams et al., 2013).

Some scholars are of the view that the reason for so many women doing low-paid jobs is that they enter the workplace with lower levels of education, then leave work as a result of their domestic responsibilities, leading to a lack of commitment and short tenure in job roles (Joekes, 1995). Women who are less educated and lack skills are therefore considered more suitable for low-paid jobs. However, the balance between work and family is associated with the way in which culture and society reinforce feminisation in the workplace and how conservative that society is (Al-Lamky, 2007).

The demand for female workers to perform low-paid manufacturing work is due to women being seen as a source of cheap labour, with a willingness to work long hours and an acceptance of a strict policy of 'being observed' in the workplace (Williams et al., 2013). Conversely, women also tend to be regarded as more productive than their male colleagues in semi-skilled jobs, such as working on assembly lines. Additionally, in high-level jobs, such as in the technology sector, there is less feminisation and men are favoured (Kucera & Tejani, 2014). In short, women are seen as merely fit for semi-skilled work and so questions have been raised as to why high-level or 'upgrade jobs' are not feminised. The answer to this is not just a matter of a skills gap, but rather relates to gender norms, designated by male authority (Kucera & Tejani, 2014).

In traditional Indian culture, for example, it is considered improper for women to work nights, but certain jobs, such as in the service sector, require female employees to work night shifts. This presents certain challenges to organisations, based on these social norms (Williams et al., 2013). Male-dominated and high-priority jobs are typically given to men, indicating a lower level of trust in women's abilities. Moreover, employers anticipate that women will leave their jobs once they get married (Al-Lamky, 2007). It indicates that employers may also prefer to employ single women (Caraway, 2007). Thus, a woman's marital status may be important for employers. Despite the fact that most women are employed in low-status jobs, there is evidence to suggest that factory managers, for example, prefer women to work on assembly lines, due to their perceptions of women's lack of long-term commitment to their work (Williams et al., 2013).

While it could be argued that women are willing to improve their skills, a lack of training and limited opportunities restricts their scope to develop and advance in the job market

(Roomi & Parrott, 2008). In a study of women's experiences of working in Pakistan, Roomi and Parrott (2008) found that these women were dissatisfied with the labour market, due to high unemployment and no professional development opportunities. They consequently started their own businesses. In choosing this path, women can be seen to challenge patriarchal expectations and their lack of opportunities in the workplace may motivate them to resist subordination to men. For example, in gaining paid employment, women can also achieve some (limited) freedom or autonomy.

Martin and Barnard (2013) argue that despite male resistance to women working and the lack of advancement that is available to women, female employees can adjust to their status and situation, while at the same time empowering themselves in the workplace. Moreover, there is also the issue of women struggling to establish their position at work, due to low self-confidence. There have been claims made by women that they need to feel sufficiently confident to change male expectations of them in such patriarchal societies. Meanwhile, Al-Lamky (2007, p.62) is rather of the view that the challenge to female advancement in Oman is primarily cultural, and that there is "...the need to change the strongly held negative beliefs about women which are culturally ingrained; for women to believe in themselves and be supportive of each other's growth and development". Secondly, there is a need for women to feel confident as "the primary challenge is to build up their confidence, and it will take years for them to be accepted and to function at a closer footing with men" (Al-Lamky, 2007, p.62).

This lack of confidence seems to be due to the male cultural influence on women. Thus, women need to be trusted and feel secure in the workplace, if they are to share advancement opportunities with men. Moreover, the influence of patriarchy on women reaching high-level positions is significant among less well-educated males in the labour market. There is evidence to show that men with lower levels of education tend not to accept women in positions of seniority, especially if they are subject to female authority, based on the belief that men are superior to women (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). Thus, for women to attain high-level and management positions in the workplace, male subordinates must first accept their authority. Secondly, the challenge for women is to prove themselves, balancing their personal expectations at work with their role in the home (Budhwar, Saini & Bhatnagar, 2005; Roomi & Parrott, 2008). Hence, women may gain senior positions, but this is associated with the level of male acceptance of their ability to balance their domestic and job duties. Overall, women in Saudi society are likely to

believe that their cultural image and traditional home responsibilities differ from those of men (Al-Lamky, 2007).

Other obstacles that are faced by women and which hinder their career progress include gender bias, which is common in the GCC countries, as evidenced by the negative attitudes to women in leadership positions. In the Middle East, most women are in lower-level professional roles, compared with men (Horton, 1999; Al-Ali, 2008; Alfarran, 2016). It could be argued that two of the factors affecting whether women's prospects of attaining leadership positions at work are the requirements for senior employees to travel and work long hours, which are problematic for women in the above-mentioned context (Alfarran, 2016). A further example is India, which is a highly patriarchal society, where women face obstacles to their progress in the workplace, because they are excluded from informal networking, thereby restricting their participation in organisational politics (Budhwar et al., 2005). Thus, few women in patriarchal societies are granted any level of authority in organisations and rarely hold managerial positions. In turn, this means that women are not involved in tackling important issues in organisations, which is especially seen in certain sectors where males dominate, such as engineering (Budhwar et al., 2005). It is argued that male-dominated occupations remain influenced by underlying patriarchal perceptions of female roles (Martin & Barnard, 2013).

As touched upon earlier, gender stereotyping and discrimination are common in male-dominated sectors such as engineering (Martin & Barnard, 2013). These experiences can drive women out of male-dominated workplaces towards more female-oriented ones, as they feel the impact of gender bias – which is what happened in parts of Asia when the door opened for women in the service sector to work in call centres. Work in call centres was considered to be more suitable for women for a number of reasons (Williams et al., 2013). For instance, it was regarded as 'middle class', causing women to become integrated into the customer service sector and to acquire new skills.

Nevertheless, the psychological assignment of stereotypical gender roles to male-dominated occupations holds great influence over organisations, so that they do not take women seriously, which presents barriers for women. Consequently, women feel less confident and are paid less, which inhibits their career progression, due to male prejudice (Martin & Barnard, 2013). However, despite women's preferences for working in sectors that are not male dominated, women are productive in mixed-gender environments (Kabeer, 2016).

One further point that should be noted is that in male-dominated occupations, there is a biased infrastructure and men acquire the resources to enhance their power and careers, whereas there is a lack of resources to empower women. For example, Martin and Barnard (2013) found that women in the construction sector claimed that there was a lack of funding to promote their skills and job status in the organisation. Furthermore, in male-dominated occupations, there is a lack of communication and development in the work environment, because of the low priority given by the management to female advancement:

...for women, the difficulty of penetrating historically male dominated occupations, coupled with the unwillingness to accommodate them in those occupations, make the environment unattractive for enticing substantial numbers of women into these fields and retaining them... (Martin & Barnard, 2013, p.3)

However, the structure of a patriarchal society is difficult to change and may be met with resistance, such as resistance to increased female autonomy, which is at odds with patriarchal interests (Cain et al., 1979). Nevertheless, there is a movement towards neo-liberal globalisation to empower feminisation, creating opportunities for women in new types of work (Williams et al., 2013), albeit still low-paid and controlled by men. An increase in female participation would give women an opportunity to challenge the established patriarchal structure, while gaining autonomy and a better position in the labour market.

It is claimed that there is ‘everyday resistance’ towards women in the form of managerial control – for example, women are viewed as speaking loudly. Williams et al. (2013) make an important point about women who challenge the patriarchal structure by gaining their autonomy, and the degree of freedom offered by increasing numbers of women in work. However, this would not have been possible without women having employment opportunities in the first place, because in patriarchal societies, women’s roles are traditionally considered to be played out in the home. There is consequently a direct causal link between employment opportunities for women and female autonomy.

To conclude, it would seem that feminisation has paradoxical consequences – it can promote women’s subordination under the influence of male authority in the workplace within a wider patriarchal society, represented in the form of male managers and employers. However, at the same time, it creates the conditions for women to liberate themselves, even if only partially, from this subordination by providing them with jobs that can in some way empower them, so that they are able to mitigate the force of patriarchy. In

the next section, the position of women in the workplace within patriarchal societies will be explored in more depth.

3.5 Patriarchy – Women at Work

The movement of women into the workforce has meant a change in social perceptions and gender constructs: “An increase in female employment is part of the modernization of the gender regime in its transition from a domestic to a public form” (Walby, 2009, p.412). Women may well be willing to progress in their careers and develop in the workplace, but the acceptance of women moving into the workplace and attainment of power in this domain is associated with social norms and levels of sexism, which impact on the power allocated to women (Jones & Clifton, 2018). The influence of patriarchy in both the private and public spheres therefore creates a major obstacle for women, and despite women being able to make the transition from the private to the public sphere, men continue to dominate (Khatwani, 2016).

The increase in female participation in the labour market has taken place for two main reasons. Firstly, employers required cheaper labour, with workers who would accept to work for low wages. Secondly, women’s struggles against the patriarchal enforcement of exclusion strategies helped to encourage female participation (Walby, 1990). Despite the fact that working under male authority is challenging, the increase in the number of women going to work continues (Kanji & Menon-Sen, 2001). Remarkably, although women are cheaper to employ, due to most jobs being low paid, there is still a preference for employing men (Walby, 1986). Walby confronts the prevalence of women in low-paid jobs, posing the question of why there is no satisfactory response to the problem of women’s exclusion or low representation at higher levels in the workplace. However, Walby suggests that this phenomenon relates to women’s perceived low skill levels and lack of time around their domestic responsibilities. Nevertheless, women tend to find employment more quickly than men, because they accept low-paid jobs more readily and are easy for employers to manage (Walby, 1986). This is largely due to patriarchal structures and attitudes that have caused women to be cheaper to employ, and supposedly rendered them more compliant with authority (Walby, 1986). Walby (1986) also points to the limited scope of female employment in patriarchal societies: “The options for most women in paid work are not much better, because men have usually been successful in excluding women from the better form of work” (Walby, 1986, p.248). To clarify this further, the management of women is controlled by patriarchal authority, and so women

under this male authority will have lower skills and fewer opportunities for advancement than their male peers, because their paid jobs will be considered secondary to their primary role in the home.

Walby (1986) suggests that any study on female employment in patriarchal societies will be presented with two main problem areas: firstly, women being excluded from paid work altogether, and secondly, women being segregated from men in the workplace, due to the low-level jobs that are generally allocated to women. Since patriarchal pressures are not always sufficient to exclude women from the workplace, employers will confine women to distinct job roles (Walby, 1986). Therefore, the employment of women in low-paid jobs is still enforced by the patriarchy (Walby, 1986), which aligns with the current research context. Women in Saudi Arabia have been segregated in the workplace through their low-level positions. In contrast, Walby's theories help develop a new understanding of how to manage female employees; women are now working in sectors from which they were previously excluded; on the grounds that these were male-dominated sectors in a patriarchal, gender-segregated society. Thus, women's employment in Saudi Arabia cannot be understood without considering its relationship with the patriarchy (Walby, 1986).

The increase in female participation in the workplace may increase opportunities for female autonomy, but gender segregation persists and is dependent on both the context and the country (Walby, 1996). Walby (1996) argues that scholars vary in their explanation of women in work and female autonomy. The employment of women can mean an increase in female emancipation. For example, it could be argued that being paid for work (usually within the home) can give women a degree of autonomy and independence from the men with whom they live. Furthermore, there may be long-term positive implications for women being able to participate in wider forms of decision-making; for example, in elected parliaments or as members of significant professional groups. The emancipation here is the movement of women into the public sphere, where they can participate in politics. However, emancipation in other contexts involves movement from the private to the public sphere and actually having a presence in the workplace (as discussed earlier in this chapter). In Asian countries, the movement from the public to the private sphere and being able to work in factories, albeit in low-paid jobs, is believed to increase female autonomy and independence, while at the same time helping women to build social identity (Williams et al., 2013). From all angles, therefore, women's involvement with paid work is associated with their autonomy and empowerment (Khatwani, 2016).

Moreover, it has been suggested that increasing women's participation in paid work still results in the subjugation of women, due to the segregation that ensues in the workplace. This varies from one country to another (Walby, 1996), but generally speaking, women participate differently from men in the labour market: women may work, but still be subordinated and work in less powerful positions (Walby, 1996). Women have entered the public sphere in waves, with each new transformation in the position of women in Western countries affecting the economy and social relations. However, the majority of women have experienced inequality in their work opportunities (Walby, 1997). For example, despite there being a movement to promote female employment, there is inequality in practice, which "...is complicated by the development of new forms of inequality and by the diversity between women" (Walby, 1997, pp.4-5).

The transformation in the work environment means that women have jobs just as men do (Walby, 1997). However, the issue is that they are treated differently, as "Women's skills and labour are wasted more than those of men, under-utilised in terms of levels of skill and range of occupations" (Walby, 1997, p.12). This indicates that improving the position of women in the workplace is of low priority. In the public domain, the challenge does not relate to excluding women from actually having a job, but rather to the fact that women are subordinated and segregated in waged employment (Walby, 1997). Walby believes that patriarchal societies differ in the way that authority is exerted over women. In studying the transformation of gender relations, Walby (1997) addresses the male exercise of power over women in the home and of women's voices being given less consideration by governments. For there to be a productive feminist response to the current global situation, women need, according to Kocabicak (2013, p.5), "...to be able to define a feminist response, feminist praxis needs to be improved with respect to its capacity to address changes in patriarchy".

Nevertheless, patriarchal societies have had to accept the shift in the role of women from the private to public sphere. A critique of patriarchy is that it privileges male dominance, assuming that women will always be subordinate and remain confined to secondary roles (Bradley, 2013). This current research is influenced by Walby's theory, because it considers that even if increasing women's participation in the labour market creates or enhances their sense of autonomy, they are still subordinated, occupy low-status jobs, and have less power in some countries.

Although Walby's work has been criticised for failing to consider diverse groups of women (Bradley, 2013), it cannot be ignored, because Saudi Arabia's society continues to uphold the patriarchy in the context of female employment. As a result of changes following the introduction of Nitaqat in Saudi Arabia, however, it is not sufficient to draw upon solely patriarchy to understand the female experience in the workplace, especially regarding rapid changes in the Saudi female labour market. Gottfried (1998) argues that patriarchy theory cannot provide the knowledge to help deal with everyday struggles or enable experience to be shared from both sides. Acker (1998) affirms that it is purely concerned with the male perspective and gives little attention to women. Thus, the implication is that the power is always held by men and women are unimportant, and that women are always oppressed in all situations. However, feminist scholars argue that it is important to consider gender in the life of a society. Consequently, the problem with patriarchy theory in relation to feminist research is that it focuses on just one perspective: the dominance of women by men, rendering it inadequate for feminist research (Acker, 1998).

An alternative perspective is 'hegemonic masculinity', described by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) as male domination of women through masculinity. However, hegemony does not mean the exercise of violence, but rather relates to the force of domination through culture and institutions (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this current research context, it represents a masculine society, where men dominate women in the culture. Leavy (2007, p.2) states that this hegemonic masculinity is made to appear normal and necessary by certain men, whereby they dominate most women and other men. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has been applied to different cultures and contexts. However, it is critical to recognise that its focus is the difference between women and men, while overlooking differences between gender categories (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In other words, it tends to limit its scope to masculinity by concentrating solely on men and their issues, while ignoring gender relations. Levy (2007) references the theory, explaining that men exert power over women, and this appears to be normal, if men dominate in a society. Connell and Wood (2005) also claim that men dominate, because 'masculinity' in gender relations is associated with social power. Thus, men hold the power in society, where their dominance is part of the culture.

This could explain Saudi Arabia's highly patriarchal society, where men dominate both socially and culturally (Connell & Wood, 2005). Moller (2007) claims that this link between masculinity and power excludes the power of women. Hegemonic masculinity is

therefore mainly cited in sexuality studies, whereby Saudi Arabia could be defined as patriarchal (Demetriou, 2001); showing how gender influences the distribution of power, always placing it in the hands of men to the detriment of women in such a society. Gender always creates differences between men and women in the workplace. Thus, it has been disadvantageous to women at work. Higher positions are generally given to men, while women occupy low-level jobs (Acker, 2006). In the Saudi context, Alshehry (2009) affirms that private sector employers favour male employees, indicating that there are social and cultural influences on the position of women in the Saudi labour market. Nasseef (2015) also points out that there is still resistance to women holding professional positions. The power in patriarchal society consists of male domination and the imposition of masculinity as the leading force. Acker (2006) explains that gender roles in such societies work against women; finding that in firms where women are segregated from men into different sections, they are powerless and less involved in decision-making. However, in firms where most of the employees are women, they make a successful contribution to their firms and share in the decision-making.

However, there is evidence to confirm that in situations where female managers are given responsibility and independence in managing female staff, with authority over their subordinates, they make decisions for women that reduce inequality in the workplace (Cohen & Huffman, 2007). Thus, the presence of women in high positions and management results in benefits for all women working in such firms, reducing the gender salary gap. Cotter, DeFiore, Hermsen, Kowalewski and Vanneman (1997, p.715) affirm that “As more women in [positions of authority] make crucial decisions about salaries, promotions, hiring, and firing, gender differences in earnings should decline”. Elborgh-Woytek et al. (2013) argue that firms with women in senior positions, and which hire female managers, have a positive impact on the labour market and demonstrate higher productivity, especially in firms with a predominantly female consumer base. Therefore, gender plays a role in providing advantages to female employees, but can also be disadvantageous to women, where male authority controls them. Acker (2006) argues that gender roles influence gender status and so workplace inequality is associated with biological factors. Conversely, the way in which biological differences are perceived will to some extent influence employers in certain firms, who do not consider women suitable for senior positions and who regard a woman’s primary responsibility as a domestic one, namely to her family and the home. Hence, such employers will only appoint women for low-level jobs, thereby compromising women’s progress in the workplace.

This study consequently explores the female experience of working in male-dominated sectors and women's level of gender power as a source of power that is exercised in the workplace. In the Saudi context, there is a need for theory to help understand women's shifting roles in several sectors, following the introduction of Nitaqat. In this current research, Bradley's (1999) theory of gender and power relations will be applied in an attempt to understand the phenomenon under study, and this is presented in the next sections.

3.6 Women's Power and Challenges to Patriarchy in the Research Context

Changing gender relations and an increasing number of women in the workforce may contribute to enhancing female identity in the labour market. Gender is one of the primary factors informing an individual's identity and it likewise has an impact on equality and participation in the labour market (Valenziano, 2008). In more succinct terms, identity is a person's sense of self-development through interaction with others, shaped by social norms and conditions. In the workplace, identity affects economic outcomes (Chang, 2011). In particular, a woman's identity may be affected by her increased participation in the labour market and a reduction in her domestic responsibilities (Chang, 2011).

The transformation of women in the public sphere and their paid employment is associated with a potential increase in their autonomy, as well the promotion of their collective voice. Thus, female employment empowers women in the public sphere, offering them access to paid work and development opportunities (Khatwani, 2016). Regarding the patriarchal context, Bradley (1999) argues that although employers exert control over women in the workplace, women have power and can compete with men, even if the development of this competitiveness is slow in terms of equal opportunities at work. Moreover, Bradley (2013) maintains that gender practices vary between developed and developing countries and are shaped by politics and law.

Increased female participation in the workplace does not mean abolishing the existing social norms, even if it does present short-term challenges to patriarchal attitudes in society, while change is taking place (Moghadam, 2001). Bradley (1999) claims that economic development influences the 'traditional' division of labour, which in turn has an influence on families by reducing men's authority, meaning that they are no longer associated with the role of breadwinner. However, as mentioned previously, gendering in the workplace places women in lower-status jobs (Bradley, 1999).

In a contrasting society, such as the UK, workplaces are still characterised by a patriarchal structure, whereby women in senior positions and professional occupations have more flexibility. Conversely, women in low-level and/or manual jobs tend to be highly segregated at work and experience less flexibility and equality in their opportunities (Bradley, 1999). This is similar to other contexts in the developing world, since women in patriarchal societies tend to be in low-paid jobs and lack development opportunities, as already established in this chapter (Kandiyoti, 1988; Joekes, 1995; Williams et al., 2013). Furthermore, the types of jobs performed by women are associated with the ideology of being ‘suitable for women’, namely involving caring, serving and communicating. Again, as these jobs are frequently performed by women, they tend to be low-paid, low-status, and in most cases, part-time jobs (Bradley, 1999).

However, regarding domination in work, Bradley (1999) argues that at certain social levels, the power in the workplace may be in the hands of women, with women actually dominating men. This dominance varies and requires empirical study with closer observation and micro-level analysis (Bradley, 1999). Thus, Bradley’s theories of gender and power challenge Walby’s belief that men are always dominant in the private and public spheres. To analyse the experience of women in the current context, Bradley’s theory of gender and power is important for gaining a deeper understanding and grasping the implications of women’s shifting roles in the labour market within a highly patriarchal society.

To illustrate the above, Bradley (1999, p.31) affirms that “At home and at work, gender roles are contested, and the balance of power is subtly shifting. To study how exactly this is occurring requires a theory of gendered power”. Bradley suggests that the shift in women’s roles from manufacturing to the service sector will create new positions for women. However, the feminisation of the workplace does not mean the end of women’s work versus men’s work, as gender segregation continues to exist in employment (Bradley, 1999). This segregation is sustained by employers viewing low-level jobs as ‘women’s work’, while preserving the better job opportunities for men. Adham (2018) states that employers prefer to hire favoured employees for the ‘men’s jobs’, presenting an obstacle to the recruitment of women. Bradley also argues that women’s domestic responsibilities still limit the type of work that women can take (Walby, 1999). Bradley found instances of women pushing to compete with men in work and in education, but in male-dominated sectors, “men get favoured more... men get the prime jobs” (Bradley, 1999, p.65). Bradley (1999) therefore suggests that managers should concentrate on generating a climate of

equality and opportunity in the workplace, with female employees in mind, because women will no longer accept being subordinated to male authority at work.

Bradley (1999) defines three barriers to opportunities for change with regard to women in work: the backlash of men's resistance to change; the ideology of the sexes and merit status, and women's domestic responsibilities. These are barriers to change regarding the acceptance of women in the labour market and their opportunities to gain power at work in the types of jobs available to them. Bradley's (1999) claim that men traditionally believe women's jobs to be less important for them (as discussed earlier in the literature), cannot be sustained. For example, she reports one man's view of women:

No disrespect, but a lot of women can't get out of the idea that their job is a second job. They're not looking to develop themselves. They are concerned to marry, have a family and keep money coming in but no more. (Bradley, 1999, p.103)

Many female workers value their jobs and being independent, having autonomy, and being able to develop themselves (Bradley, 1999). However, increasing feminisation in the workplace may shift the power dynamic between male and female roles, and women's exercise of power may be resisted by men (Bradley, 1999).

Kanadiyoti (2018, p.1) suggests that although feminist-based research considers patriarchy to be an important phenomenon, in some respects it is under-theorised. This is due to the number of studies on gender in developing countries undertaken using Walby's patriarchy theories (Al-Mugani, 1990; Agha, 2015; Aseri, 2016; Lari, 2016). Meanwhile, Bradley's views are important for understanding the new wave of women into the labour market in the current study context. The following section will discuss in more detail the relevance of Bradley's theories for understanding the management of female labour and helping to understanding women's experiences.

3.7 The Relevance of Theory in the Research Context

Before justifying the relevance of theory to the present research, it is useful to restate the theoretical research objective:

- To theorise the developing position of Saudi women in a gendered workplace.

In order to understand the position of women in a patriarchal society, it is necessary to first apply Walby's theory to define and justify male authority in the labour market. As discussed in the contextual literature, it is not possible to ignore patriarchal influence when

studying gender. Walby's theories on women at work (1986) and gender transformation (1996) are relevant to the present research, because Saudi Arabia is structured as a religiously conservative state, where Islamic law influences patriarchal society. Moreover, it is recognised that gender transformation, which opens the door for women to participate in the labour market, remains at a lower and less empowered level.

Although it is true that women are restricted by cultural and social norms in Saudi Arabia, the structure of the Nitaqat employment programme has opened up opportunities for Saudi women to participate in new sectors, which have hitherto been patriarchal. Thus, since these are male-dominated sectors, Walby's theory is important for justifying the present research context, regarding the management of the movement of women into the public sphere and into paid work.

As discussed earlier in the literature on the Saudi context, it is important to consider traditions and patriarchy in gender studies (Alfarran, 2016). Therefore, because of the substantial number of Saudi women entering the workplace in the private sector, it is important to explore this theoretical framework from a new perspective (Walby, 1988), namely looking at the effects of introducing the Nitaqat programme. Furthermore, the framework can be used to justify the male management of female employees in sectors that were once male dominated. However, the new experiences of women in these sectors cannot be aligned with Walby's perspective, which consider that males always dominate, and women are always subordinated (Walby, 1986). In contrast, Bradley's (1999) gendered power relations approach considers, as discussed earlier, that the growing participation of women will gradually increase their autonomy and expand their development opportunities in the workplace. Bradley argues that patriarchal power consists of male authority over women in the workplace. However, gendered power "is a broader concept which allows for variable relations between men and women, but does not rule out the possibility that power relations may be patriarchal" (Bradley, 1999, p.33). For Bradley (1999, p.54), considerations of gender and power need to be explored in specific research contexts - in this instance, Saudi Arabia. Bradley emphasises the importance of studying local labour markets, in order to understand social change. Her theory is relevant to the current research context, as her study was conducted on several specific labour markets. It is empirically applicable here, as the current study will be conducted in several specific sectors of the Saudi labour market.

Nevertheless, in the small body of literature on female experiences in the private sector under the Nitaqat programme (Nasseef, 2015; Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018), no

attention is given to understanding the nature of patriarchal gender relations. Instead, the focus is on the views that prevail within institutions. An analysis of the literature will reveal that in Saudi Arabia, male domination is exercised in the workplace, resulting in the subordination of women and conservation of their primary role as that of caregiver in the home, fulfilling family responsibilities (Metcalf, 2011; Nasseef, 2015). Moreover, an analysis of the literature will also reveal that Saudi Arabia remains strict in terms of gender segregation in a distinctly patriarchal society, extending to HR management in the workplace (Elmain & Omair, 2010). It affirms the importance of patriarchy theory in explaining the male management of female employees in a mixed-gender environment, as waves of women enter male-dominated sectors. This separation of the sexes in the workplace is fundamental in the Saudi laws on employing female Saudis (Al-Abdulkarim, 2018), which is where Walby's theories are useful for gaining a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Despite its importance, however, patriarchy is insufficient in itself for explaining all aspects of female labour in a country such as Saudi Arabia, as emphasised by Adham (2018, p.198), who claims that patriarchy theory cannot in itself be applied to all aspects of gender studies. This was previously stated by Pollert (1996) and Gottfried (1998), the latter claiming, "that patriarchy as a sole analytical concept cannot explain gendering issues and power relations at work". Therefore, one of the aims in applying Bradley's theory was to fill knowledge 'gaps', while recognising that a gendered power relations approach is superior. This current study is the first to apply Bradley's (1999) theory in an attempt to understand the recent shift in female roles in SMEs in Saudi Arabia. It is anticipated to draw out the experiences of women within patriarchal boundaries and how they negotiate these when working in a male-dominated sector.

The theoretical framework of this thesis is built upon the two main theories described above. Firstly, Walby's theories (1986) of women in work are used to illustrate the movement of women into the public sphere, under patriarchal management in the Saudi context. Walby (1996) does not ignore the increasing number of women in the Saudi labour market but recognises that there are still boundaries that limit equal opportunities and women's opportunities for development. Secondly, Bradley's (1999) work on gender and power in the workplace is used to theorise women's experiences under the Nitaqat regime in the Saudi context.

This Literature Review in this study examined existing research on the role played by social norms and Saudi Arabia's patriarchal environment, but little attention has been

given in the literature to female labour in Arab countries, especially in patriarchal Saudi Arabia. This gap relating to gender management in the workplace was identified in this Literature Review. In response, the theoretical framework provides the tools for making sense of and building a profile of male management and the experiences of Saudi women in SME workplaces across several sectors, which have not been researched previously. This current study therefore aims to address this gap, building upon the existing literature and adding new knowledge. Based on earlier discussions about women and the lack of a gendered approach to examining the shift in gender equality under the Nitaqat programme, this research is framed within the influence of Walby's patriarchy theory in work, in order to depict the influence of Saudi culture on the management of female employees. Moreover, Bradley's theory serves as a core theory in this research to help understand the relevant phenomena.

3.7.1 Power and Empowerment

In the current research context, the need to explore the topic of women in the workplace presents itself, since one of the intended outcomes of Nitaqat is to increase female participation in the Saudi labour market. Thus, women's experience of the workplace has been investigated in this study to help fill the gender studies gap. Before discussing the theoretical approach adopted here, however, it is important to understand the difference between 'power' and 'empowerment', in terms of women in the workplace and within the research context.

Power consists of a person's ability to do or achieve something. Nevertheless, the concept of power varies in its meaning and it is difficult to interpret from a feminist perspective (Allen, 2005). One form of power is domination, which is about force, control and the subordination of others (Allen, 2005). Lukes (2005) describes this as "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (p.16). This concept is therefore the preference of one entity or individual over another, which is associated with social culture. However, it may be criticised as a bias, where the favourable position permits the exercise of power over others to serve and benefit those in a position of superiority. Moreover, that power is reinforced by culture, force, manipulation and authority (Bachrach & Baraty, 1992), mainly in the domains of politics and policy-making, which fall outside the scope of this current study, as it solely explores the experiences of Saudi women in the workplace.

There is no doubt that women's power in the Saudi workplace consists of simply fulfilling their duties and attaining positions in firms (Morris, 2006). However, the exercise of power in the workplace is influenced by social constraints (Hayward & Lukes, 2008). In Saudi Arabia, these practices are shaped by social and patriarchal views, which oppose equal gender power. Nevertheless, the Saudi government, in introducing Nitaqat, has sought to increase female participation in mixed-gender workplace environments across various business sectors, thereby potentially opening up the opportunity for women to access a source of power in their work. This is discussed, because the study context is patriarchal in nature and therefore male-dominated, as explained by patriarchy theory. However, patriarchy theory purely addresses the managerial perspective of the research topic, in terms of managing female employees, but it is inadequate for exploring the female experience and potential sources of power within female employment. Hence, the focus here is not to study gender inequalities, but rather to apply Bradley's (1999) theory to an analysis of women's experiences in the current context. These are important for gaining a deeper understanding of women's shifting roles and their implications in the labour market within a highly patriarchal society.

As clarified by Bradley's dimensions of power, the level of power attained can be a source of power; for example, gender power in the workplace (Allen, 2005). These power dimensions are therefore appropriate for exploring women's experiences of the workplace in this study and their sources of power in a highly patriarchal society. Bradley (1999, p.33) defines gendered power as "the capacity of one sex to control the behaviour of the other". Patriarchal power is consequently men's capacity to control women. It is a broad concept, which allows for variable relations between men and women, but does not rule out the possibility that power relations may be patriarchal. The power defined by Bradley, as referred to in this research on the female experience, is conceived as a 'source'. It is consequently the power that someone possesses due to their position, or their 'positional power'. It can also consist of their voice, as in 'symbolic power'. According to Bradley, these sources of power exist in seven dimensions, which will be explained in the next section. However, in this research, the term, 'power' does not imply the dominance of women over men or over other women by force, as defined by scholars like Lukes (2008). It rather refers to Bradley's sources of power, in an exploration of female experience.

Similarly, the term, 'empowerment' does not relate to power through domination or the imposition of masculinity but refers to the ability to enhance people's capabilities, rather than them being controlled by others.

. It is also the power to bring about transformation, change and development. It is distinct from power through domination, because its aim is to enhance and empower others and execute development. It is therefore the capacity to stimulate and execute change (Allen, 2005). This power promotes prominent themes in feminism, which can be seen where women are enabled to make changes and realise development in the workplace – which runs contrary to the concept of domination and force as power in the workplace (Allen, 2005). In some cases, where men dominate at work, “Women’s empowerment requires promoting women’s capacities” (Khader, 2016, p.127). In other words, where men dominate; for example, if the employer supports and enables women to effect change and development, this will empower women in the workplace.

In the present study, the concept of power as a source is adopted, applying Bradley’s theory to an exploration of female workplace experiences. Moreover, the term, ‘empowerment’ is used in situations where women have been able to generate development, share decisions, and make improvements. The empowerment of women also means women being allowed to improve themselves, whereby they gain capabilities and confidence in the workplace (Khader, 2016).

3.8 Underpinning Theory

The theoretical framework constructed for this study comprises the features, developments and pressures that are evident in Saudi society, the Saudi labour market and female employment.

3.8.1 The Theoretical Framework

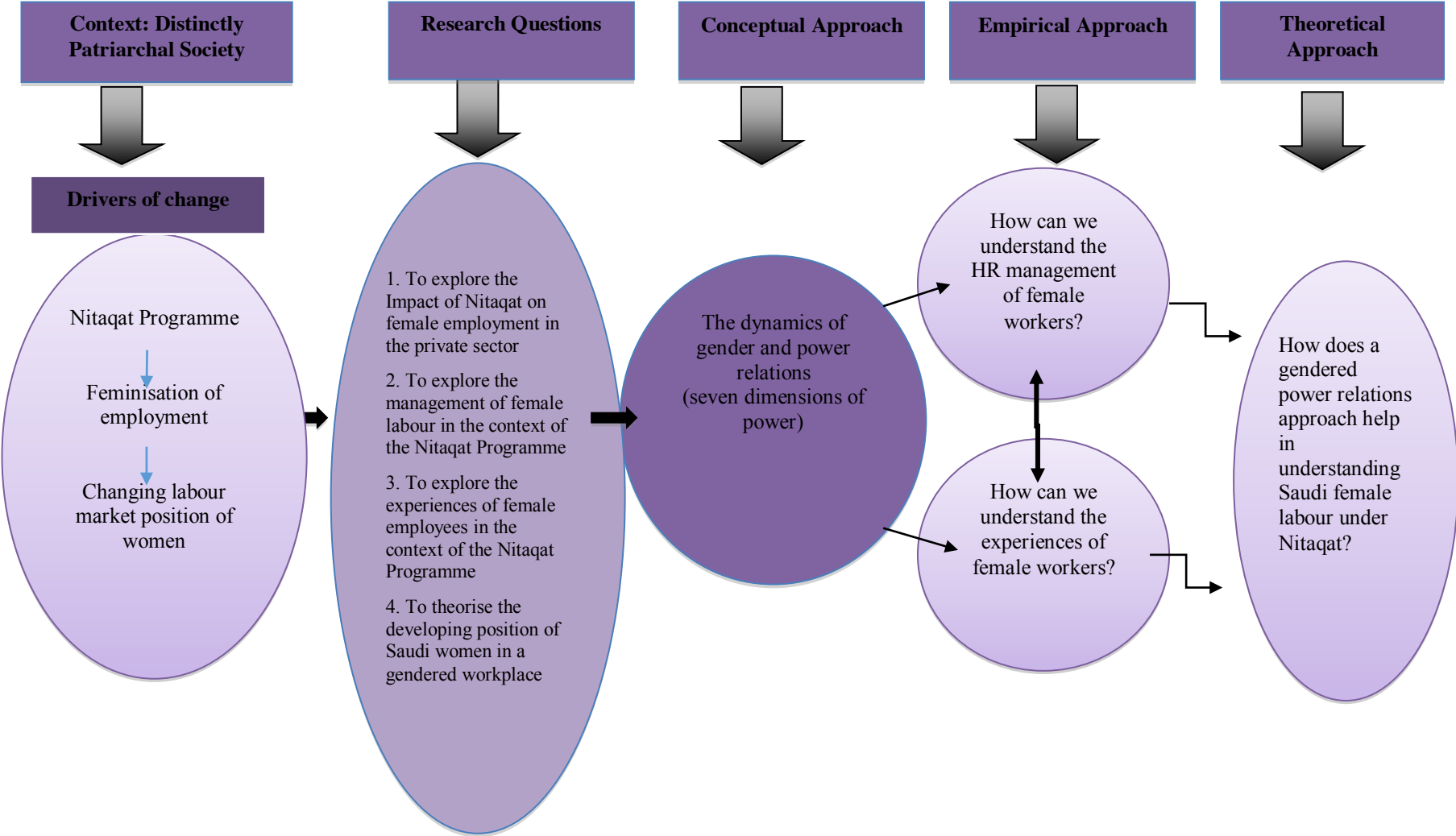


Figure 4: The theoretical framework

3.8.2 Explanation of the Theoretical Framework

The framework presented in Figure 4 shows the Saudi context to be a distinctly patriarchal society, with the available literature showing how it has shaped and influenced its society in the public and private spheres. In this current research on women in the workplace, the main driver of women entering the labour market is the Nitaqat programme, as illustrated in Figure 4, above. Nitaqat has opened up opportunities for women to work in sectors that were male dominated before Nitaqat was introduced. In turn, this has led to an increase in feminisation in the labour market, followed by ongoing change in the position of women in the Saudi labour market.

To explore the influence of these drivers on women in the workplace and to meet the research objectives, the dynamics of gender and power relations will be explored. As seen in Figure 4, this represents *the conceptual approach*, which can be adopted to gain an understanding of these related issues and women's experiences in the labour market. There are nine dimensions of power to be explored for this purpose. However, two are not applicable to this study, namely sexual power, relating to sexual harassment in the workplace, which is not the focus here, and domestic power, which concerns women's power in the private sphere, i.e. the home. It is difficult to study these two dimensions, due to the sensitive nature of Saudi culture and religion with regard to gender, rendering it impractical to apply these dimensions in this study. As a result, seven dimensions were identified – some of which are related – as useful for interpreting the data and filling the empirical and theoretical gaps in this research context. This would enable the research objectives to be met, so that an empirical contribution could be made to the existing knowledge.

To clarify further, these seven dimensions will help interpret Saudi female experiences under the Nitaqat programme. **Economic power** refers to the control of economic resources (the firm's capital and income). In the context of this current research, economic power is concerned with a firm's control and interpretation of women's roles in all cases to show the distribution of power. **Positional power** refers to "power and authority gained by virtue of holding positions" (Bradley, 1999, p.34). Historically, men have tended to hold the power in the workplace. However, in the current research context, women hold positional power through being in paid work under Nitaqat programme. This dimension is the most significant in this research context, with the outcomes of Nitaqat leading to changes in the position of women in the workplace. Meanwhile, **technical power** has been described as "the development of technical expertise and mechanical competence"

(Bradley, 1999, p.34), referring to men's ability to acquire technical skills, whereas these are inaccessible to women as a result of male authority. In terms of women's involvement in training programmes, for example, this current research may identify restrictions and barriers in this power dimension. **Physical power** is the least significant dimension in this research, but it is nevertheless important to discuss it as a potential issue within women's challenges in the workplace, according to the nature of the job. This dimension relates to physical strength, whereby the muscularity of men's bodies gives them advantages in some sectors and workplaces. Therefore, the challenges and opportunities presented to women in these sectors will also be interpreted in the research context, looking through the lens of what is physically required in a job. Meanwhile, **symbolic power** refers to the ability to impose and express one's values, define one's own meanings and establish one's own rules. Thus, it relates to women's voice and their agency to create meaning and make a contribution. In order to better explore women's voice in different sectors, this dimension considers women's symbolic power within the topic of HR management. With regard to **collective power**, Bradley argues that women can mobilise collective resources, accessing other sources of power by networking. The dimension of collective power will help to explore and understand workplace networks. The final dimension to be explored is **personal power**, which Bradley argues is important in gender relations' studies, as it involves women being empowered to use their knowledge and experience to get on with others. This is where women present themselves in a positive light and exercise interpersonal power as an expression of their autonomy. Thus, women's personal power will be explored across the cases in this current study.

These seven dimensions will help interpret women's experiences in a patriarchal environment. Therefore, they will enable the empirical gap in understanding the management of women in SMEs in Saudi Arabia to be addressed, alongside the general gap concerning female experiences in the labour market. This makes for complexity and implies a need to present a complete picture of women at work. Consequently, theories of change and women's power, as suggested and justified earlier, will elicit a deep understanding of women's experiences and male management in SMEs in Saudi Arabia, in order to fill the empirical research by answering the questions outlined in Figure 4, above.

Bradley's (1999) theory is important for conceptualising the research context; arguing from a theoretical base that gendered power means a woman gaining greater access to power in the labour market. However, this theory was formulated for a UK context and is suited to Western societies (Bradley, 1999). Thus, as this current study is believed to be the

first Middle Eastern study to use this theory, one of its limitations may be that it has never been applied to a context that resembles Saudi Arabia, which posed challenges to its application in this research. For example, given the sensitivity of the Saudi context and the purpose of this research, two dimensions were excluded, which means that Bradley's perspective has not been fully explored in the Saudi context. However, despite this exclusion of specific dimensions, no impact on the findings was revealed, and Bradley's seven dimensions were still considered to be the best fit for meeting the research objectives, making this study the first to explore and try and explain gender studies in the context of the Saudi workplace. Moreover, the limitation of Bradley's seven dimensions is their weak consideration of the employer's perspective, as they primarily concentrate on the employee's experience, despite the fact that the employer may have an influence on the practices of these sources of power in the workplace.

To conclude, Patriarchy may be considered to have a highly significant influence on the management of female employees and their experiences in the labour market, but it is insufficient for understanding the movement of women into mixed-gender workplaces, or their subsequent experiences of these. To address the theoretical gap, a gendered power relations approach is adopted here to explore and illuminate the position of female employees in the Saudi private sector under Nitaqat. The data from this research will be important for exploring the theoretical framework from new perspectives.

3.9 Conclusion

The review of the relevant literature (in Chapters 2 and 3) identified a number of gaps, which this study seeks to address, raising the importance of conducting the current research.

Firstly, as discussed, there is an incomplete picture and lack of gender studies on women's experiences in the Saudi private-sector workplace. The literature shows that Saudi Arabia has a strongly patriarchal society, which influences both private and public spheres of life, extending to the HR management of women. Conversely, the literature also reveals the new movement of Saudi women into work under the Nitaqat programme, which has resulted in women working in male-dominated workplaces in Saudi Arabia's private sector. This new movement challenges the patriarchal society, which is grounded in cultural and social norms that have shaped patriarchal authority over women. The increasing number of mixed-gender workplaces therefore suggests a new wave of women into these workplaces (Alfarran, 2016).

Secondly, women's experiences have hitherto received little attention in the few existing studies on Nitaqat, which have mainly been from an institutional perspective. Furthermore, no studies have been conducted on women's experiences of working in SMEs in Saudi Arabia, or on the management of women and women's experiences in SMEs under the Nitaqat programme (Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abulkarim, 2018). Also identified in the literature is a lack of studies on SMEs in the Saudi context (Azyabi & Fisher, 2014; Alsaleh, 2016).

Moreover, from the Literature Review, it is evident that the feminisation of work has increased in different societies and countries. Although feminisation leads to increased female participation in the labour market, it has been shown that in highly patriarchal societies, women face challenges in the workplace, resulting from male authority. This leads them to take low-status jobs with little or no prestige and no opportunities for self-development. Although there is some evidence in the literature to suggest that most Saudi women working in the private sector are in low-status jobs, with no opportunity to progress at work, there is no evidence of women's experiences of working in SMEs under the Saudi Nitaqat programme. This is important in Saudi Arabia today, where Saudi Vision 2030 is engaged in energising female empowerment in the labour market, in a response to external calls for greater female empowerment in Saudi Arabia. Likewise, as mentioned previously, SMEs are an important investment area in the Saudi economic development plan.

Thirdly, the waves of women being hired in SMEs are combined with the patriarchal emphasis on male authority in the labour market and here, there is a theoretical gap in the Saudi context, stemming from the lack of attention given by scholars to women in the workplace. Although the consideration of Saudi women has increased in the public sphere, their employment remains subordinate to their primary role of fulfilling family responsibilities. This current research therefore aims to gain an understanding of Saudi women's movement into male-dominated sectors by applying gender power relations approach. This is aimed at closing the knowledge gap with regard to changes in gender balance in a shifting labour market and at exploring the management of men and women's experiences of working in SMEs.

Patriarchy is a very important issue in Saudi Arabia, but it is not the only problem. Male dominance and social norms all need to be taken into account, as they create resistance to change. Therefore, the limitations of the patriarchal perspective encouraged the adoption of Bradley's (1999) theories on change in the labour market and women's power in Western countries. This permits an exploration of the movement of female employees into a changing labour market economy. In order to identify whether this creates autonomy and

reduces the level of control within patriarchal boundaries. Bradley's theories are important for gaining a full understanding of the position of women in Saudi SMEs. Critical feminist theories also contribute to this understanding of the challenges facing women in a patriarchal society, and in identifying new ways of interpreting the changes that have accompanied women entering the workplace in SMEs.

Fourthly, feminist scholars have explored the process of feminisation in certain Western contexts, such as in the UK, where it is associated with 'flexibilisation', which is helpful for women. However, the argument has been made that women are placed in low-status jobs as a consequence of 'flexibilisation' at work (shorter working hours, part-time work). Thus, on the one hand, it creates low-level positions, which limit women's opportunities in the workplace, but on the other, it results in low costs to organisations, due to women being a cheap source of labour. The difference in non-Western countries is that not only do women constitute a source of cheap labour, they are also more restricted and influenced by gender, culture, religion and social norms, thereby resulting in boundaries for women at work. Moreover, there is a gap in understanding feminisation in non-Western countries from the perspective of male management, with regard to gendered movement into SMEs under the Nitaqat regime. This is similar to the situation found in other GCC countries in terms of economic labour market features. However, Saudi Arabia is complex, as it is known to be a highly patriarchal society, both in its private and public spheres. The rapid changes that have taken place in the Saudi labour market have increased the presence of women in previously male-dominated sectors. Thus, the managerial perspective, regarding the response to this change, is unknown in the current research context.

Lastly, a gendered power relations approach can extract rich information on women's experiences of SMEs. As is evident in the literature, women are becoming more autonomous in Saudi Arabia, and the gender balance is shifting in the public sphere. Therefore, research and micro-level analysis is important for gender studies and to understand women's experiences (Walby, 1996; Bradley, 1999). As a result, adopting an in-depth, qualitative gendered power relations approach to examine women's subjective experiences could potentially reveal the underlying change in perspectives and women's new place in the Saudi labour market.

In the next chapter, the Methodology, the research approach and empirical methods adopted to help bridge the identified gaps in the literature will be outlined in detail, with a new theoretical framework being constructed; aimed at understanding women's movement

into the workplace, based on women's experiences of working in SMEs, following the implementation of Nitaqat. Moreover, it will help clarify the managerial response to the HR management of women within a patriarchal society under the Nitaqat programme.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the empirical research design and the methods adopted in the current study. The purpose of the Methodology chapter is not only to clarify the way in which a study has been conducted, but also to establish the relevance of the selected approach (i.e. qualitative in this instance) by addressing the research gap from the perspectives of the various participants. In particular, this chapter clarifies the ontological and epistemological perspectives, research paradigm, research strategy and methods used to collect data, in order to achieve the research objectives. In addition, ethical approaches to data collection are considered; the data analysis process is explained, and an evaluation of the research quality is presented.

In the previous chapter, an analytical review of the literature was carried out, identifying the need to undertake this current research, which aims to understand HR management and female employment under the Nitaqat programme in Saudi Arabia. In this case, the research interest lies in women's voices in the Saudi workplace and how female employees are managed in SMEs. Hence, as I'm Saudi female, my aim was to listen to and try and understand the experiences of the participants in this study, which was achieved by capturing reality, as experienced by HR managers and female employees. Therefore, I was concerned with making sense of the phenomenon being studied in the selected business sectors by interpreting the participants' experiences and voices. This could not be attained without immersing myself in, listening to, and connecting with the participants in relation to this phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

4.2 Research Philosophy

The choice of research philosophy is important, bearing upon the study design and the way in which the participants' experiences are interpreted. Moreover, a researcher's philosophical approach can help him or her determine which research strategy and methods to use in a study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). The choice of research methodology and approach to the data collection and analysis will depend upon and be guided by the researcher's philosophical position. Here, there are two key philosophical branches: epistemology and ontology. The former represents the researcher's understanding of the nature of knowledge, and the latter examines the nature of reality in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

To clarify this further, the epistemology concerns knowledge within the relevant field of study and what can be captured about the subject to address the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Within an epistemological assumption, however, there is the interpretivist position, concerned with feelings and attitudes towards the phenomenon being studied, and the positivist philosophy, which differs from interpretivism in that it is concerned with identified resources and facts that can be tested (Lin, 1998). Furthermore, positivism is concerned with the existence of truth that can be tested numerically (Mantzoukas, 2004, p.997): “These are not negotiable issues for any research, because they exist independent of human reality and are free from temporal and contextual factors, as they are mathematically drafted”. Positivist philosophy is not considered to be applicable to the current research, because it mainly pertains to quantitative research, where a prior theory is necessary for developing a hypothesis that can be either confirmed or refused (Saunders et al., 2009).

The interpretivist position was considered to be most appropriate for interpreting the meanings assigned by the participants to their experiences of working in SMEs under the Nitaqat regime, including the perspectives of HR management and female employees. Bryman and Bell (2015, p.29) define interpretivism as “understanding for social action rather than external forces that have no meaning for those involved in social action”. This research focuses on an in-depth understanding of the management of female employees and female employees’ experiences in SMEs, using an interpretivist philosophy to underscore the importance of interacting with social communities, in order to understand human beings as social actors (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). In addition to the interpretivist position, an epistemological approach was adopted to understand the reality being studied in this research, as it would assist with making sense of the participants’ social experiences. This approach is associated with the meanings that a researcher constructs, based on individual contributions. Epistemology deals with understanding and building the nature of knowledge of social phenomena – in this case, by understanding the inner knowledge gained from female employees’ everyday experiences and their HR management in the workplace.

Moreover, it has been argued that phenomenology is crucial to understanding women’s experiences within the human sciences (Smith, 2016). Therefore, it is essential to adopt a phenomenological position when seeking to interpret epistemological knowledge, as it can produce an accurate description of the phenomenon being studied, which is an aim of this research. Thus, the experience gained, as it appears, is reflected when building a holistic

picture of a phenomenon being studied. The phenomenological approach leads to an understanding of female experience, allowing for an exploration of phenomena to gain subjective meaning, rather than to explain the data (Shkedi, 2005). According to Allen and Collinson (2011, p.3), “The interaction between phenomenology and feminism has furnished powerful analytic insights”. Fisher (2010) affirms that a phenomenological approach enables voices to be interpreted in more depth in light of feminist experience. Therefore, a phenomenological approach is important for understanding women’s everyday lived experience in feminist research, thereby reflecting an insider understanding of women’s voices, emerging from an exploration of individual female experience (Garko, 1999). In this case, the researcher interpreted the data based on the participants’ narratives and interpreted these in light of the phenomenon being studied.

In order to interpret the ontology of the data acquired – in other words, to answer the question “What is reality?” – a subjectivist position was adopted in this research. This is a position that helps researchers understand reality and interpret the social roles and actions of those involved in the phenomenon being studied, so as to identify the individual motives behind the participants’ actions (Saunders et al., 2009). In contrast, objectivism “presents the position that social entities exist in reality external to social actors concerned with their existence” (Saunders et al., 2009, p.4), requiring a researcher to have external objectives in a study. However, this requirement does not correspond to the ontological position of this research, which aims to introduce subjective meaning and make sense of the data collected from participants. As mentioned in the Literature Review, in relation to studying women in the labour market, there is a need for in-depth studies to understand female employees’ experiences of working in firms at micro-level (Walby, 1996; Bradley, 1999).

Thus, the current research did not adopt a deductive approach, which is instead associated with an objective position and the development of theory to make generalisations, which requires a sufficient numerical sample size. This did not fit the research aims in this instance (Saunders et al., 2009), since a deductive approach is structured around a hypothesis (Kuper, Reeves & Levinson, 2008). Conversely, a largely inductive approach allows meaning to be generated from participants’ experiences, which this research aimed to achieve (Kuper et al., 2008).

Therefore, a largely inductive approach was considered more suitable, as it could fill the methodological gap when studying female employees in SMEs in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the justification for adopting an inductive approach was that it would enable a study of female employees' experiences and voice in the Saudi context. In particular,

there is a need to investigate female employment and gender issues in SMEs, associated with the growth in female employment in the Saudi labour market under the Nitaqat programme (Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018).

4.3 Research Paradigm

The previous section described the influence of the philosophical approach adopted to interpret data, which in turn establishes the foundations that largely guided the research methods. Researchers use different paradigms based on various assumptions. A paradigm is “a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.35). When conducting social research, a paradigm needs to be applied, in order to interpret the social phenomenon being studied. In this research, the empirical context consists of SMEs in Saudi Arabia, and it has been stated that with small firms, the selection of an appropriate paradigm should be associated with gaining an in-depth understanding of people's experiences (Eleanor, 1999).

Consequently, an interpretative paradigm was adopted in this study, as it is concerned with making sense of the phenomenon and understanding the meaning behind it by interacting with people's experiences of working in SMEs. Thus, the aim here was to arrive at a subjective interpretation of what was happening in the organisations in this study.

Researchers classify paradigms as either qualitative or quantitative (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and then other researchers, such as Guba (1990) classify paradigms as constructivist or positivist. However, all these types of paradigm concur that constructivist, interpretivist and qualitative methods share certain characteristics that correspond to understanding subjective meaning, while positivist and quantitative paradigms share characteristics that are more objective in their investigation of phenomena. In choosing an appropriate paradigm, Burrell and Morgan (1979) introduced a framework that identified four main paradigms (see Figure 5 below): functionalist, interpretivist, radical humanist and radical structuralist. Also contained within this framework were two dimensions that refer to the researcher's assumptions. The classification of the Burrell and Morgan paradigm is linked to the relevant epistemology and ontology, with an emphasis on understanding real life issues in society, especially in the context of management and business research (Saunders et al., 2009).

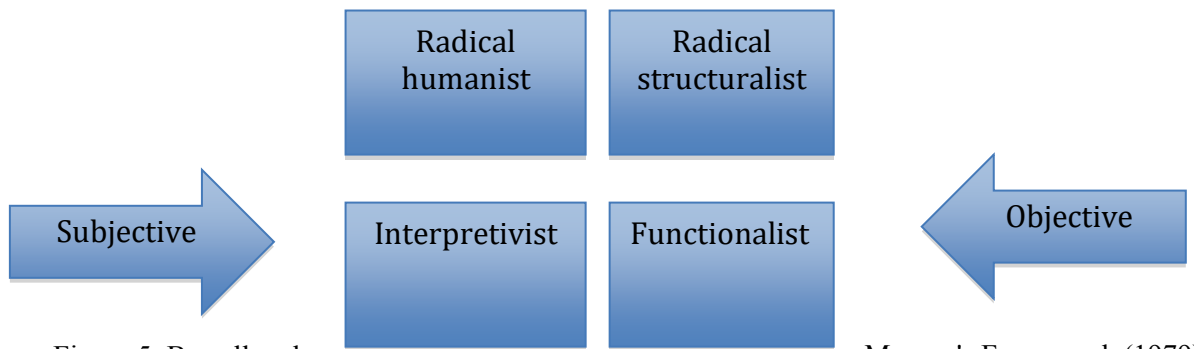


Figure 5: Burrell and

Morgan's Framework (1979)

Each paradigm offers a different view of society and so a researcher can apply a single paradigm to interpret the research and the researcher's assumptions; a synthesis between paradigms cannot be achieved within a single framework (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Burrell and Morgan (1979, p.25) consider that "...one cannot operate in more than one paradigm at any given point in time since in accepting the assumptions of one, we defy the assumptions of all the others". Thus, a researcher using one paradigm will view the world differently from a researcher using another (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

The research methodology selected will then depend on the adopted paradigm, which will in turn depend on the type of knowledge required and the ontological and epistemological assumptions made in an inductive approach. Based on Burrell and Morgan's (1997) classification, the *interpretivist paradigm* was chosen in this current study, based on a belief in the importance of understanding subjective experience, personal frames of reference, personal values, and individual perspectives in an organisation, specifically in the context of SMEs. It was evident that the researcher would need to get close to firms and interpret people's subjective meanings – which cannot be achieved in a positivist approach (Eleanor, 1999). This makes interpretivism a subjectivist philosophy, as it aims to understand and interpret what is meant by 'reality', rather than measuring actual social phenomena (Collis & Hussey, 2003).

Conversely, a functionalist paradigm was not considered to be applicable for this research, because it is based on a determinist standpoint and therefore concerned with explanations of the status quo and problem-solving in response to opinions of social rules (Saunders et al., 2009). The aim of this current research is to explore both the experience and management of female labour. Thus, the functionalist paradigm is inappropriate, because it prioritises measurement over interpretivism, while interpretivism involves an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences. Neither is the *radical humanist/structuralist paradigm* suitable, as it is mainly concerned with making radical changes in an

organisation's structure, which is not an aim of this study. Furthermore, *the radical humanist paradigm* is based on a subjectivist approach to understanding people in an organisation (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Bryman & Bell, 2015). The view in this paradigm is that employees in an organisation need to be emancipated and so the research is guided by the importance of change. Neither is the *radical structuralist paradigm* applicable, because it refers to radical organisational change from an objectivist standpoint.

Therefore, the interpretivist/subjective position was considered as the most appropriate to meet the aims of this research investigation at micro-level. Moreover, in response to the theoretical aims of this research, which involved theorising the developing position of women in the gendered workplace, it was considered important to interpret the subjective meanings in depth; making sense of the data and consequently generating the appropriate theories to justify the phenomenon being studied. In the next section, the methodological approach adopted to answer the research questions will be explained in detail.

4.4 Research Methodology

The research methodology relates to the research design for collecting data in a study. It is shaped by the researcher's assumptions and interest in interpreting the data (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015).

4.4.1 Qualitative Research Enquiry

The selection of an appropriate research strategy will depend on the selected philosophical approach and the paradigm adopted by the researcher to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions. It is argued that exploratory studies are important for “obtaining a good grasp of the phenomenon of interest” (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009, p.104) and can help gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon. Consequently, this research is exploratory in nature, aligning with the selected interpretivist inductive approach.

In considering the research paradigm and methodological approach, Saha and Corley (2006) argue that the main difference between functionalism and interpretivism is that in functionalism, the aim is to test theory, so that theories can be generalised using a deductive approach, under an ontological assumption of objectivity and a positivist epistemological position. Both of these goals can be achieved through quantitative methods. Conversely, in an interpretivist paradigm, the aim is to interpret the phenomenon being studied. A need to study female employees in SMEs has been identified and deeper

investigation can only be made possible by gathering people's experiences and interacting with them in the workplace (Saha & Corley, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, qualitative research is often conducted when studying feminisation at micro-level, in order to make sense of social reality and ensure greater opportunities for feminist sensitivity (Bryman & Bell, 2009). As there is an identified lack of attention and methodological gap in the existing literature, regarding the situation of female employees in the labour market (Alhamli, 2013; Qureshi, 2014; Rutledge et al., 2011; Forstenlechner et al., 2012; Alfarran, 2016), this current study represents an attempt to address this gap in depth, so that the social world of these female employees can be understood. Thus, a qualitative strategy was identified as appropriate to the nature of this study.

Qualitative research provides thick data and in-depth descriptions. Therefore, it is appropriate to use this method when an inductive and subjective approach is needed, which is concerned with what the researcher sees and understands (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The most appropriate approach for achieving this is through the methodological tradition of qualitative research, as there are strong links between interpretivism and qualitative research methodology. Halmi (1996) suggests that in qualitative studies, researchers need to study phenomena in natural settings, in order to make sense of the meaning derived from the individuals under study. Creswell and Poth (2018) affirm that in qualitative research, the researcher, being close to the research participants, draws on knowledge and carries out exploration through the subjective experience of the participants being studied, unlike quantitative research which depends on hypothesis and theory-building in advance (Shah & Corley, 2006). Thus, qualitative research is very effective at exploring how and why things happen and evaluating them by interpreting meaning.

A further reason for choosing a qualitative approach was because this research is in the field of business, specifically HR management, where the unsuitability of quantitative research is highlighted and where a qualitative approach is preferred over a quantitative approach, because it is concerned with interpreting meaning from the perspective of the individuals in an organisation, and from the organisation alone (Halmi, 1996).

Furthermore, a qualitative approach was favoured for this current study, due to its flexibility in interpreting meaning. Creswell (2009, p.186) explains that qualitative research allows for flexibility in that:

the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data.

For example, the questions may change the forms of data collection shift, and the individuals and sites visited modified.

A notable strength of the case study in qualitative research is that it is the most flexible qualitative approach, as it allows the researcher a level of flexibility, enabling deep access to core values in the data (Hyett, Kenny & Dickson-Swift, 2014). The next section therefore describes the case study approach and its suitability for the current study.

4.4.2 Case Study

In Henry, Foss and Ahl (2016), the dearth of in-depth qualitative methodological research using case studies or life history is identified. More importantly, there is a methodological gap in feminist studies using a case study approach. As such, this study will go some way towards filling this gap, making it necessary and important (Henry et al., 2016).

Since a qualitative approach is adopted here, a case study method was considered to be most relevant for addressing the research questions in adequate depth, which would require extensive interpretation of social phenomena (Yin, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018, p.96) define the case study as:

an approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bound system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and report a case description and case themes.

There are three main types of case study: intrinsic, collective and instrumental. In an intrinsic case study, the focus is on studying the case itself, which needs to be described in detail (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Meanwhile, in a collective case study, it is appropriate to study a single issue or problem and focus more on relationship patterns and comparative studies. Finally, instrumental case studies are concerned with specific issues, and are aimed at understanding a phenomenon or problem. In instrumental case studies, specific issues are addressed, rather than whole cases (Creswell, 1998). The nature of this current research pointed to the instrumental case study as the most suitable approach, because the objective was to understand particular issues within cases, namely the HR management and experience of female employees in SMEs. Therefore, it is not about the cases themselves, as in an intrinsic case study, nor is it a matter of exploring different perspectives and structured case studies to make comparisons between cases, as in a collective case study design. Moreover, although some similarities and differences are examined in the Discussion Chapter, this study is not a comparative case study. Thus, multiple instrumental

case studies were undertaken to understand the research phenomenon, which concerned studying specific issues from different perspectives in multiple case studies (Stake, 2000).

Yin (2018, p.54) considers that “The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall multiple-case study is therefore regarded as being more robust”. Thus, having more than two cases will make the research stronger. This type of case study is effective for gathering data on different perspectives (Simons, 1998). It is an important approach for understanding phenomena. However, a limitation of the case study is the fact that the data sources are confined to a single case. Therefore, I conducted multiple case studies with multiple sources of data, in order to triangulate the results (see section 4.5) and enhance the quality of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The multiple case study approach, however, brings with it more challenges and is more complex than a single case study, but it also affords a richer understanding and encourages increased confidence in the data (Yin, 2012). Thus, two snapshot cases studies were conducted, so that each data set enriched the other. The reason for conducting minor ethnographic case studies will be explained in the next section.

4.4.2.1 Case Study Design

In designing the current case studies, I considered first the choice of cases and their relevance to the research questions, relating to SMEs that have employed women following the introduction of the Nitaqat programme in 2011. Yin (2018) affirms that case studies are appropriate for answering ‘what’ and ‘how’ research questions, as outlined in this study:

- In what way has Nitaqat impacted on women's employment in the private sector?
- How are female employees managed in the context of the Nitaqat programme?
- What is the experience of female employees in the context of the Nitaqat programme?

As multiple cases studies are undertaken in this qualitative research. It is important to reap the benefits of this research through in-depth interviews, micro-ethnographic cases, including non-participant observation, and visual methods (photographs) to enhance the richness of multiple case studies. The value of using these methods will be outlined briefly in the following sections, before addressing the practical aspects of conducting this study.

4.5 The Value of Interviews

As a data collection tool, interviews are primarily used to gather the knowledge, experiences and impressions of the research participants (Alvesson, 2011). As such, they are commonly used in business and management research (Bokovikova, 2013), and are considered valuable when collecting data in exploratory studies (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). Therefore, interviews were considered to be an appropriate method for this current exploratory research.

However, there are different types of interview and also different interview methods. For example, they can be conducted via email or telephone, or face-to-face. Braun and Clarke (2013) state that face-to-face interviews allow rich information to be gathered about individuals' experiences and perspectives. Face-to-face interviews are particularly appropriate for sensitive topics, as they can facilitate the interviewees' understanding of the questions, meaning that the relevant answers can be elicited (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009). In this current study, semi-structured interviews were selected as the primary data collection tool, based on the following reasons:

- They would enable the researcher to prepare the interview questions in advance.
- They would be appropriate for studying sensitive subjects (gender).

Thus, interviews can help to answer the research questions in a case study, and the current researcher determined that the in-depth semi-structured interview would be most appropriate as the main data collection method, due to the nature of the research. This type of interview would be most effective for understanding the participants' experiences and answering the research questions.

4.6 The Ethnographic Aspect

Due to the necessity and importance of this research context, which involves women in Saudi Arabia – a distinctive patriarchal society, influenced by cultural norms – an ethnographic approach was considered useful for enriching the data collected from the female participants in relation to their experiences. An ethnographic approach is appropriate in feminist research, in order to document women's lives and perspectives (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Thus, the ethnographic cases enhanced the interview data here.

Silverman (2011) states that ethnographic research means using multiple data collection methods to enhance the research data. Thus, the role of ethnography is to increase the

depth of the data (Hammersley, 2006), and use of ethnography will depend on the research strategy and purpose (Wolcott, 1990; Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). The nature of this research renders an ethnographic approach within a short timeframe, appropriate for supporting the primary interview data collected in the case studies. However, this is not a conventional approach, as it is micro-ethnography, rather than an extended longitudinal application. Bryman and Bell (2015) describe micro-ethnography as research conducted within a short period of time, which could range from a few weeks to several months, bringing the researcher closer to a population, so that the phenomena being studied can be better understood.

Since this research is qualitative in nature, it is concerned with interpreting meaning. As such, rich data must be collected to be able to draw out answers to the research questions, with interviews and observation with photographs being used in ethnographic cases (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston, 2013). Conger (1998, p.117) emphasises the use of observation to support interviews in qualitative research as “observation when combined with interviews proved to be a powerful methodology for not only uncovering data either distorted in interviews or else not accessible through interviews”. Observation is important to provide evidence of processes in the work setting (Mulhall, 2003). Thus, the purpose is not merely to record data, but also to interpret and make sense of that data (Gobo & Molle, 2017). Consequently, although ethnographic observation was not the main method of data collection or interpretation in this research, it enriched the data.

4.7 The Value of Visual Methods

Visual methods are important for contributing to evidence in a phenomenon and to data collected through interviews and observation. Photographic images are the most commonly used visual method adopted in combination with interviews (King, Horrock & Brooks, 2019). It is argued that visual methods enhance and triangulate data and thereby help strengthen and enrich description of “the phenomenon under question” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.187). The visual methods used in this study were intended to facilitate understanding of the interview data and to add depth, whereby the images taken in the workplace would help interpret the interview data more effectively (King et al., 2019).

Thus, in the current research, the images helped describe the women's mixed gender workplace environment in SMEs in the cases.

4.8 Data Triangulation

The use of these multiple sources to enrich the case study data helped triangulate the data, which is worthwhile in that it reinforces the validity of the research (Breitmayer, Ayres & Knafl, 1993). Using multiple data collection methods can enhance a study's validity and reliability in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since this research was qualitative, the researcher therefore used more than one source to triangulate the data (interviews, observation, photographs), thereby promoting its reliability (Fusch & Nees, 2015).

4.9 Accessing the Cases

In this current research, the researcher conducted five cases studies, following the guidance of Yin (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018) who recommend up to five cases studies to be studied in total.

The researcher successfully gained access to SMEs in the retail, architecture, construction and engineering sectors. However, the challenge to gaining access was that I would need to be present, travelling to the case study settings in Saudi Arabia for a temporary period, according to the availability of the participants in the same firm. Thus, I started the process of gaining access six months in advance, sending reminders to firms to reduce the possibility of problems arising at short notice, given the short period allocated to the data collection. Furthermore, I respected the confidentiality of the data on the firms involved, as a researcher should maintain confidentiality and avoid exerting any pressure on participants (Saunders et al., 2009). This is ensured by obtaining ethical approval to study human participants, which will be addressed later in this chapter. Nevertheless, there were some difficulties due to the nature of this research; first, the sensitivity of the subject being studied (women in Saudi culture), second, the problem of managers being prohibited from sharing information about their firms, and third, the managers' lack of time to participate in the study (Laurila, 1997). There were further difficulties involved in gaining access to the firms to conduct the research, especially as this research was qualitative, and the interviews and observations required that the participants take time out from their work (Laurila, 1997).

However, my own background as a female Saudi HR researcher helped me gain access to most of the firms, based on personal contacts in some cases and formal contact in others. The formal letter that was sent to the firms from the University of Portsmouth helped

validate the research and gain access. In this regard, I contacted firms in the cities of Riyadh and Alkhobar in June 2016 and received responses from firms in both cities. Then, during the six months between June and December 2016, I obtained official consent from firms in both cities.

However, with regard to obtaining permission to conduct micro-ethnographic research, only two firms were willing for me to carry out observations. According to Jeffrey and Troman (2004), ethnographic research is affected by access limitations. In this study, only two micro ethnographic case studies were conducted, as the researcher was not able to gain access to all five cases. I obtained official approval letters from the two firms that gave permission to carry out ethnographic case studies in November and December 2016. Therefore, I performed 'snapshot' ethnographic case studies, because of the limited access and short time allowed to collect data from firms for the purpose of this research.

4.9.1 The Case Studies in This Research

As reviewed in the literature, there is a lack of studies on female and gender issues in the private sector (Nasseef, 2015; Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018). In particular, there is a lack of studies on women in SMEs under Saudi Arabia's Nitaqat programme (Al-Abdulkarim, 2018). This research is sensitive, as it concerns feminist enquiry, and the location of researcher was important to interpret women's experiences. Thus, my position as a Saudi woman helped me understand the culture and interpret the case study data. In feminist research, there is little attention to women's experience in practice (Letherby, 2003) Therefore, this research will contribute to the existing knowledge on the empowerment of women in the corresponding settings.

All cases studied in this research were selected because they were SMEs in the private sector. The sectors involved were retail, architecture, construction and engineering, because these sectors have been obliged to employ females after the introduction of Nitaqat in 2011. As discussed in the Literature Review there is limited knowledge of women's experience in the Saudi workplace, and no study has been conducted on Saudi SMEs to understand the situation of women in work under the Nitaqat programme.

4.9.2 Conducting the Case Studies

4.9.2.1 Case 1: The Alkabda Firm - Retail Sector (Micro-ethnographic Case)

The Alkabda firm is a medium sized company with 33 shops throughout Saudi Arabia and a total of 114 employees (70 female employees; 35 male supervisors; 8 male managers; 1 female HR manager). One supervisor is employed at a lower level off the shop premises to observe the female employees at work (see more details in the Findings Chapter). The retail sector was feminized following the implementation of Nitaqat.

The researcher had permission to conduct the research in Riyadh, where there are two shops, and Alkhobar, where there is one shop. Six female employees were consequently invited from across these three shops, each shop employing two Saudi women and one foreign male supervisor. The reason for selecting shops in Riyadh and Alkhobar was because there is only one HR manager and she is located in Riyadh, where the firm's head office and management are based. The researcher conducted interviews with the HR manager and female employees and conducted non-participant observation during a two-week period in July 2017, using a predefined form for the observation, which guided the note-taking and was available to review during the period of data collection. These included comments on the poor state of the workplace, including photographs of the shop. However, there were challenges encountered on the first day of data collection with this firm, whereby the management (100% male) did not allow me to meet them or enter their section. Instead, they contacted me by telephone to arrange a meeting through the female HR manager, whom I met face-to-face (she was located in a separate section, next to the premises occupied by the male management). All this occurred because the male management were not flexible about communicating with women. Moreover, I faced challenges in the first meeting with the female shop workers, because I was the first researcher to study them. Their initial impression was that I had been sent by their management to check on them. This was because they felt that they were always being scrutinised by the management and did not feel trusted. As mentioned above, I was the first researcher to conduct a study at the firm and to meet its female employees, due to the lack of research on women's experience of SMEs in Saudi Arabia. I therefore mitigated this challenge by presenting official letters to show that I was a female Saudi researcher from the University of Portsmouth (the Consent Letter).

4.9.2.2 Case 2: The Najam Firm - Retail Sector

The Najam firm is a small retail company (a gift shop), with a total of 12 employees (3

females; 9 male). Of the three women, one is non-Saudi. The firm has employed women since its launch in 2012. The researcher received permission to conduct research at the company in August 2017. Convincing interviews were held with the HR manager and female employees, as they were all very comfortable with me, the manager was female, and the environment was friendly.

4.9.2.3 Case 3: The Marouj Firm - Construction

The Marouj firm is a medium-sized company with 303 employees in total. There are now four women (three Saudi and one foreign) employed by Marouj. The researcher received permission to conduct research at the company in Riyadh in August 2017. The firm has been in operating on the market since 2006 with male employees, but after Nitaqat was introduced, it began employing women in a small separate section within it. The interviews took place with female employees and HR managers. I found the male manager welcoming when arranging the interviews with the female employees and there was no challenge to accessing this firm.

4.9.2.4 Case 4: The Aram Firm - Architecture

The Aram firm is a small company with 11 employees in total (7 male; 4 female). It has operated on the market since 2009 with male employees. After the introduction of Nitaqat, the interior design section was opened up to female employees. The researcher received permission to conduct the research in August 2017. A minor ethnographic observation was conducted over a two-week period in the interior design section, where the women work. This observation helped gain an understanding of the workplace environment and the relationship between the female employees and the HR manager. This firm had a friendly environment and there was no obstacle to meeting the male manager or female employees to arrange the interviews and observation.

4.9.2.5 Case 5: The Sarai Firm - Engineering

The Sarai firm is a medium-sized company with 402 employees in total (9 female; 393 male). However, the researcher was able to interview only four of the female employees, because the others were on leave. The firm originally employed a 100% male staff, but after Nitaqat was introduced, the firm began employing women in a separate section in its workplace. The interviews with the female employees and male HR manager took place at the end of August 2017. The male management were flexible in their contact with me,

which is why I encountered no difficulties in meeting the male HR manager and female employees.

4.9.2.6 General Comments on the Selected Case Studies

The findings from all five cases will be discussed in-depth separately, in the next chapter, and this will be followed by the Discussion chapter. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), there is no specific structure that must be applied to writing up case studies. Therefore, to meet the research aims and address the research questions, I wrote up each case separately, but with a common thematic structure, which was most appropriate for interpreting the data. This corresponded to the thematic analysis approach to analysing the data, adopted in this study and discussed later in this chapter.

4.10 Data Collection

In this section, the data collection will be justified in relation to this research and the challenges faced in the fieldwork will be described.

4.10.1 Interview Design

This research is informed by a gendered power relations' perspective, with patriarchy as a significant element of male authority in the labour market. However, the main focus is to study the experiences of female employees in the workplace, or the experiences of those who manage them. For this reason, I chose a range of participants to increase confidence in the data and ensure a better fit between the perspectives of the HR managers and the female employees. It would not have been possible to present a complete picture of these perspectives and experiences without including HR managers in the sample, because of the influence of their authority over female employees in the context of Saudi Arabia. Consequently, I designed the research questions for the HR managers and female employees as two separate schedules, which could both contribute to addressing the research questions and filling the knowledge gap. The research questions were developed based on the gap identified in the literature, regarding female experiences arising from Nitaqat and the management of women in SMEs. The research interview protocol was drafted in both English and Arabic (see Appendix I: English Version and Appendix II: Arabic Version).

4.10.2 Pilot Study

To test interview questions, a pilot study is important. This will assist with the further development of the research questions, if necessary, and ensure that the interview questions are appropriate for covering the main aspects of the study. For this study, before the actual interviews took place, a pilot interview was conducted (by telephone) with three female employees and a manager from another firm in Saudi Arabia, in order to gather feedback that could be used to amend the interview questions, if required. The research questions were subsequently refined so that they were more focused, based on comments made in the pilot study, and reading through the questions several times. The questions were devised in three sections, each focusing on specific issues: HR management, female experience, and Nitaqat. When framing research questions in qualitative research, there is some flexibility to amend, remove and add questions, either before or during data collection (Braun & Clarke, 2013; King et al., 2019). Therefore, during the main study interviews, this flexibility led the researcher to add a question (to the Female Employees' Interview Form), based on comments made by the participants from the Alkabda firm, worded as follows: 'Is there a training programme provided by the firm?' The reason for adding this question was because there was no training provided by the Alkabda firm.

4.10.3 Sampling

Qualitative research involves small or moderate samples, compared with quantitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Consequently, the sample in this research was moderately sized. In qualitative research, it is the type of research question that determines the suitable sample size. According to Braun and Clarke (2013) the questions in a study should be aimed at "understanding experience" and so a suitable sample in this current study would be moderate (10 to 20 interviewees). Here, the relatively small size of the sample is less important than the depth of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Curtis, Gesler, Smith and Washburn (2000) emphasise that the choice of sampling strategy is also crucial when considering an appropriate strategy for answering the research questions and ensuring that it is relevant to the conceptual framework of the study. The research questions for this current study relate to understanding the HR management of female labour and the experience of female employees in the Saudi private sector, and so both purposive and convenience sampling were conducted.

4.10.3.1 Purposive Sampling:

A purposive sampling approach was used in this research, which is often employed in qualitative research to enhance understanding of a phenomenon (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Purposive sampling enables access to the information from the specific people who can provide data to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives (Sekaran & Bougie, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2013).

4.10.3.2 Criteria for Choosing the HR Managers

The purposive research sample consisted of HR managers and these were chosen for a number of reasons:

- they had full access to all information required to manage the female employees;
- the researcher chose to interview all the HR managers, because the study was conducted on small (9 to 49 employees in total) and medium-sized firms (50 to 499 employees);
- Therefore, the number of HR managers in each firm was expected to be small (1 to 2 in each firm).

The total sample comprised 7 managers across the five cases (see Table 4, subsection 4.10.7).

4.10.3.3 Convenience Sampling

Sekaran and Bougie (2009) define convenience sampling as a strategy for gathering data from participants who are conveniently available to provide it. They add that this sampling strategy is the most popular in qualitative exploratory studies and is therefore very common. In this current study, the sample was selected because it was accessible to a researcher, with the firms' management referring the researcher to suitable female employees for the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.55). Therefore, I met all the nominated females who were available in each firm and the total sample comprised 7 managers and 19 female employees across the five cases (see Table 5).

In research of this kind, there is single rule for ending data collection. It is argued that data saturation is not necessarily related to the volume of data collected, because the data collection may be brought to an end, due to the time limit on the research (Mason, 2010).

Thus, it is not about the size of the sample or number of interviews conducted, but rather about the depth of the data (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Therefore, saturation is reached in interviews, not because of the number of interviews conducted, but because the researcher obtains all the data required to ensure comprehensive coverage of the phenomenon, and all information for answering the research questions has been gathered (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002; Fusch & Nees, 2015).

The researcher sought to obtain all the necessary information to present a whole and clear picture. Braun and Clarke (2013) argue that data saturation is where any new data collected fails to add information. In interviews, saturation occurs "...when the researcher begins to hear the same comments again and again. [This is when] data saturation is being reached..." (Saunders et al., 2018, p.1896). This means that saturation is achieved in interviews when repetition is found in the data being collected. In contrast, Anderson (2017) is rather of the view that data saturation is observed where more details will not make any difference to conceptualisation. Thus, in qualitative research, saturation is not necessarily achieved when data is repeated, but refers more to the thickness of the data in relation to the themes. In this instance, the use of multiple data collection methods enabled the data to be triangulated, in order to enhance the richness of the data, resulting in data saturation in a qualitative study (Funsch & Nees, 2015; Anderson, 2017). Anderson (2017) affirms that saturation may be achieved by using more than two data sources, as is the case in the present research.

4.10.4 Conducting the Interviews

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with HR managers and female employees from private-sector SMEs in all the present cases studied. The interviews with HR managers helped validate the information, because these personnel were in a senior position, which gave them more access to organisational information. The female employees' responses gave the researcher information to supplement what was obtained from the HR managers, and also revealed other important perspectives for this study.

Although, there are advantages to conducting interviews in English, so as to maintain reliability in terminology, which in turn reflects positively on the data analysis and coding, reducing the risk of meaning being lost or altered in translation, I conducted all the interviews (with female employees and HR managers) in Arabic, as most of the participants, especially the female employees, did not speak English. Therefore, there was

a risk that the participants would not be able to express their feelings or emotions effectively. Moreover, despite the fact that the HR managers' second language was English, the interviews with them were conducted in Arabic. As this research study is qualitative in nature and concerns the experiences of female employees and their managers, it was deemed important to be able to gather their feelings and attitudes, which meant that communicating in English may have been a challenge for them.

The interviews took place by agreement, after the participants had read and signed a participant consent form (see Appendix III for the Participants' and Managers' Consent Forms). After signing this form, the female employees chose to be interviewed in Arabic.

4.10.5 Challenges Encountered during the Interviews

There are a number of challenges associated with conducting interviews. For example, they can be time-consuming, and it can be difficult to engage with some participants. Moreover, the degree of anonymity can be affected (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, the challenge of employees' working hours does not always allow for participation in interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this current study, the 'Najim' case was challenging in this way, with one female employee not being on time for the interview. It meant that the interview had to be postponed, necessitating another visit to the firm to complete the interview. This demonstrates the practical difficulties encountered in the interviews; its impact on my time management as the researcher, and the way in which I resolved it to continue the interview process. All the interviews were conducted one-to-one on the firms' premises, in order to protect the participants' privacy. In consideration of the participants' time constraints, I offered them the opportunity to arrange suitable times for the interviews, anticipating 30-45 minutes for each participant.

The fact that I was a Saudi woman meant that there were fewer barriers to me understanding the participants' various circumstances and history. For example, in the Alkabda shop, one employee only had a low level of secondary school education and she found it difficult to understand my interview questions. I was able to reword these in simpler terms, so she could understand them clearly. Being a native Arabic speaker and aware of the culture, I could interpret what she verbalised or expressed through body language.

4.10.6 Observation

The role of a researcher can take the form of a 'complete observer', whereby behaviour is studied and meaning understood, or a researcher can be a 'participant observer' (Saunders

et al., 2009). In this study, I conducted non-participant observation guided by an observation form (see Appendix IV), to better understand the communication between female employees and their attitude in the workplace. There are two main types of observation in research: structured, which is associated with the positivist paradigm, and unstructured, which is associated with the interpretivist paradigm, where context and knowledge being important for interpreting the data (Mulhall, 2003). However, there are challenges to using observation in terms of researcher bias, regarding the selection and recording of observation data, as considered by Mulhall (2003, p.308): “observers have a great degree of freedom and autonomy regarding what they choose to observe, how they filter that information, and how it is analysed”.

In the ethnographic cases for this present study, semi-structured interviews were conducted. These were instructed by the main points on the observation form, thereby including interaction, feelings and attitudes. However, the interview guide was flexible enough to allow for additional notetaking, where required. Nevertheless, it had been challenging to gain access to firms to conduct pilot observations, prior to carrying out the main observations, in order to test my notetaking and observation skills. Therefore, I conducted observations of staff in training sessions at the University of Portsmouth instead, which enabled me to determine how to collect data in my main study observations.

In this current research, I was permitted to carry out observations in a small architectural firm over a two-week period, wherein I spent 4-6 hours observing female employees in their workplace. I also carried out observations in a medium-sized retail firm over the period of one week, spending 4-6 hours daily on the firm's premises. The reason why the HR management were not observed was because of the sensitivity of this work area, and also because there was no specific need to observe HR managers to satisfy the research aims.

All the observation data were read carefully and reviewed in the data collection period. The observations were recorded in English to facilitate concentration for the researcher, and this also helped in interpreting the translated interview data. Additionally, it saved translation time and cost. The observations were conducted during the weeks when the interviews took place. Through the interviews and observations, I was able to develop a better understanding of the female employees' experiences at micro-level. In particular, during the observations, I took notes in each section of the form and these notes were transferred immediately into a full description on the day of the observation.

4.10.7 Visual Methods

I was allowed to take pictures in three cases: the two ethnographic cases, and the one small retail case. The researcher was able to take pictures in the small Najim firm, but only of the workplace, with no female employees appearing in the photographs. The reason for taking photographs was that they would help support the evidence related to how the workplace 'looked'. For example, in the Alkabda firm, the workplace was poor, with no facilities like a private room or toilet, and no private staff room for breaks. Thus, the women wore their hijabs during all their working hours, as can be seen in the pictures taken at the firm. Meanwhile, in the architectural sector, the photographs of the women's private room and meeting room showed a more welcoming workplace, with more privacy such as a private room, where women can take off their hijabs, access a private toilet, or use desks to work, indicating a convenient workplace environment.

It should be noted that it is not simply a matter of taking a picture, but there may be issues regarding how pictures are taken (Pink, 2001). Thus, the researcher considered that having pictures taken should not impact negatively on individuals or organisations in any way. The pictures taken in this study were merely to reinforce the evidence of the workplace environment (see Findings Chapter, Figures 16-25). All the pictures were taken using the researcher's phone and transferred to a file via email, before being stored on the researcher's laptop. These photographs were saved in preparation for helping to interpret the data during the data analysis. All pictures were deleted from the researcher's phone.

The following Table (Table 4) shows the total number of interviews and observations conducted in this current research. The names of firms and participants are pseudonyms.

Table 4: Sample of data collection details

Firm	Sector	Observation	Number of Interviews (HR Managers)	Number of Interviews (Female Employees)	Location
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The Alkabda firm	Retail (medium-sized firm)	7 days	1 HR manager (male)	6 female employees	Riyadh
The Najim firm	Retail (small firm)	----	1 HR manager (female)	2 female employees	Alkhobar
Marouj firm	Construction (medium-sized firm)	----	1 HR manager (male)	3 female employees	Riyadh
The Aram Design firm	Architecture (small firm)	2 weeks	1 HR manager 1 general manager	4 female employees	Alkhobar
The Sarai firm	Engineering (medium-sized firm)	----	2 HR managers (male)	4 female employees	Alkhobar

4.11 Data Preparation prior to Analysis

Before the data could be analysed, the interviews had to be transcribed, which I began undertaking in September 2017. The interviews were read more than once to ensure that the questions elicited the right type of data for analysis. To ensure the validity of the research in translating from Arabic to English, I selected random anonymous samples of research questions with participants' answers. To evaluate the translation and ensure accurate meaning, I tested the clarity of meaning with a native Arabic-speaking academic professor at the University of Portsmouth. He confirmed the clarity of the translation (see Appendix V: Sample Translation and Professor's Agreement).

The data obtained were organised and prepared for analysis, using computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). This will be described in detail in the data analysis section.

4.11.1 Ethical Procedures

This research received ethical approval from the Business School Ethics Committee at the University of Portsmouth in April 2017 (see Appendix VI). Official letters of agreement from the firms approached in this research were included in the application form for ethical approval.

I sent invitation letters to managers and female employees in the firms under study in this research (see Appendix VII). Before starting to collect data, a consent form was prepared for the participants: the female employees and managers, for the interview and for observation (see Appendix III and Appendix VIII) for all the participants' signed Consent Forms and Information Sheets, prior to taking part).

To protect the privacy of the female employees in the observation, the women were asked to sign a consent form, indicating their willingness to participate in the observation. Moreover, no actual names were included in the observation forms.

As mentioned previously, gaining access to the firms for observation, taking photographs, the (subordinate) position of the women and my position as the researcher all raised quite profound ethical issues over conducting the data collection. However in the interviews and observation conducted in my research, there was no potential harm or ethical concern that could have affected a participant or the privacy of their data. This is due to me ensuring that I had no information could cause harm to any person or organisation. The participants were informed that the data gathered would only be used for the purpose of the research and kept securely uploaded to a password-protected computer.

The ethnographic cases required multiple data collection. Therefore, I took pictures of the workplace environment, such as the offices and meeting rooms, without identifying any individuals (Silverman, 2011). I included a box on the consent form for the female employees being observed, which they could tick if they were willing to have their picture taken. There was also an explanation on the form that nothing that could identify any individual would appear, and that their faces would be blocked out to protect their privacy under their agreement for the pictures to be taken.

4.12 Data Organisation and Analysis

The nature of this research required the use of an inductive approach, which derives findings in a bottom-up manner. To help address the research questions, a thematic analysis approach is commonly used when analysing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In research aimed at obtaining an in-depth understanding of people's experiences, feelings and thinking, in specific contexts that target particular research questions, thematic analysis is the most appropriate method (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011). Thus, the selection of a data analysis approach will depend on the nature of the research and research questions.

Thematic analysis is a “method for identifying themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset in relation to the research questions” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.175). However, Bryman and Bell (2015) argue that an inductive approach and data-driven research is associated with a grounded theory approach in qualitative research, but there are several reasons why the objectives of the present research do not align with the grounded theory approach. Firstly, the grounded theory approach is suitable for use in a systemic comparative data analysis technique. This is most appropriate for addressing research questions that involve studying social phenomena within a structured process (Guest et al., 2011; Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, the present research is not concerned with a process of studying social phenomena, but rather with understanding the participants’ experience within the phenomena. Secondly, it is challenging to apply grounded theory to small projects, as it is time-consuming (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Thirdly, grounded theory is more suited to comparative analysis, where line-by-line coding is practised. Thematic analysis, by contrast, captures the important data to be coded when answering research questions, and builds themes according to the researcher’s judgement (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore, thematic analysis was carried out here, due to the flexibility it allows in research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The choice of thematic analysis is also linked to the research philosophy, which was interpretivist in this study and therefore concerned with making sense of meaning and interpreting data. Guest et al. (2011, p.16) emphasise that “what one researcher sees as a limitation another might see as strength contingent upon their epistemological bent”. For example, “extrapolating beyond the data” is likely to be viewed negatively by a positivist. In contrast, a researcher with an interpretivist perspective would probably regard “this additional latitude as a strength”.

Before analysing the data, all the interviews were transcribed from the Arabic-language audio-recordings. The decision not to translate the transcripts into English was made, in order to ensure clear and accurate analysis by the researcher, and also because of the time constraints and complex procedures that would be necessary to test the translation of each participant’s transcript (all transcription was performed by the researcher with no outside help). Moreover, the translation of large volumes of text can result in mistranslation, which could in turn affect the meaning of the data. However, the codes generated from the Arabic source were in English, following the themes, because the data management via the Atlas.ti tool was in English (definition of codes, theme network features and quotas used in the thesis). This will be explained in the data analysis, presented in the next subsection.

In contrast, the observation notes were recorded in English on pre-prepared forms and the researcher wrote notes during the actual data collection process. These were reviewed on the same day as the observation to ensure that the notes and the meanings conveyed within them were clear.

I undertook six phases of thematic analysis when analysing the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (from the interviews, observation and photographs). The photographs were analysed and linked to the theme that best fitted them in relation to the work environment code that was linked to Nitaqat and the theme of female employment, as outlined later in this section. In the first phase, the researcher read the transcribed interviews more than once and reviewed the observation notes. All participant data, notes, transcripts and the field diary documentation were recorded in Word documents and entered into Atlas.ti software for data analysis. The codes and themes were consequently created and recoded. Finally, the themes were prepared in depth, so that the data could be presented in the findings chapter (as the final step of the analysis), using Atlas.ti software (described in detail below).

In a thematic analysis approach, the researcher should decide prior to the data analysis, whether that analysis will be manual, or conducted using a software program (Byrne, 2001). The limitation of manual coding is the challenge of extracting and connecting codes (Bazeley, 2013). The researcher should ensure that the data is organised and clearly revised to ensure effective analysis of the data through data management, enabled using a software program. Programs such as NVivo and Atlas.ti have similar data analysis features (Smit, 2002). However, Atlas.ti was selected for this study, due to several reasons. Firstly, it is the only program that currently supports Arabic-language data analysis, which is consistent with the language of the data collection in this instance. Moreover, Atlas.ti supports data analysis and the organisation of data through coding, classifying, and defining codes, which helps to build a whole picture of the research and to write up the findings (Smit, 2002). The advantage of data organisation is that the researcher can easily read, sort and re-read the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, the visualisation features of the software program assist with linking codes and themes and the creation of relationships to help interpret the data (Smit, 2002; Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the challenge of using a software program is that it requires time to learn the program's features, in order to conduct the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher could learn the basic features but to be able to use the program effectively, there is a need for guidance from specialised trainers, which costs time and money (Bazely, 2013).

I faced challenges in first having to learn the Atlas.ti 8.1 program, as she had no previous experience of using qualitative software. Furthermore, the University of Portsmouth does not provide training in Atlas.ti for PhD students. This led the researcher to find an external trainer on the official website of the Atlas.ti programme 8.1 and engaged in one-to-one training sessions from November 2017 to February 2018 with a professional trainer. It was necessary to become very familiar with the program's features and to be able to apply them to the research data (see Appendix IX: Training Certificate). This self-funded training was time-consuming and costly, but I believe that the effective structuring of the data and its high-quality management resulted from learning about the program's features, thereby producing accurate analysis and adding richness to the findings.

It is important in thematic analysis or cross-case analysis to ensure that interviews are analysed individually (Bryne, 2001). Therefore, I analysed the data for each case on an individual basis. The research strategy involved conducting multiple case studies in various business sectors and so the coding of the cases varies on some points for defining codes; to avoid any overlapping, each case was analysed individually. However, similar coding and the same themes were used across all the cases based on the fact that they share the same research questions. Nevertheless, there may have been variation in defining codes or additional codes when describing particular issues or cases. In order to undertake the thematic analysis, this research applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases to analyse the qualitative data, as presented in the Figure below.

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with your data



Phase 2: Generating initial codes



Phase 3: Searching for themes



Phase 4: Revising themes



Phase 5: Defining and naming themes



Phase 6: Producing the report

Figure 6: Braun and Clarke's (2006) phases of qualitative data analysis

4.12.1 Using the Atlas.ti 8.1 Program to Analyse the Data

When data are initially coded, there is no link to existing data or theories, because analysing data under an inductive approach involves bottom-up data analysis in the form of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In Phase 1, 'Familiarising yourself with your data', I read the transcripts more than once to ensure that I understood their meaning. The data collection was completed with all participants before the coding process began. All of the interviews were transcribed, and the observation notes and photos were organised into files in the Atlas.ti program. In Phase 2, 'Generating initial codes', the researcher generated new codes for the data in the Atlas.ti program. Coding involves recognising and naming important data that best represent the phenomenon under study. Thus, the researcher recodes rather than merely coding the data in one pass, and also defines each code. Thus, to ensure effective analysis, the researcher must identify what each code really conveys, and make notes on each code to build a comprehensive understanding of the data (Bazely, 2013). Figures 7a and 7b show an example of one transcript in the program from Case 1. On the left-hand side is the text being coded and on the right-hand side is a sample code: 'Recruitment and selection.'

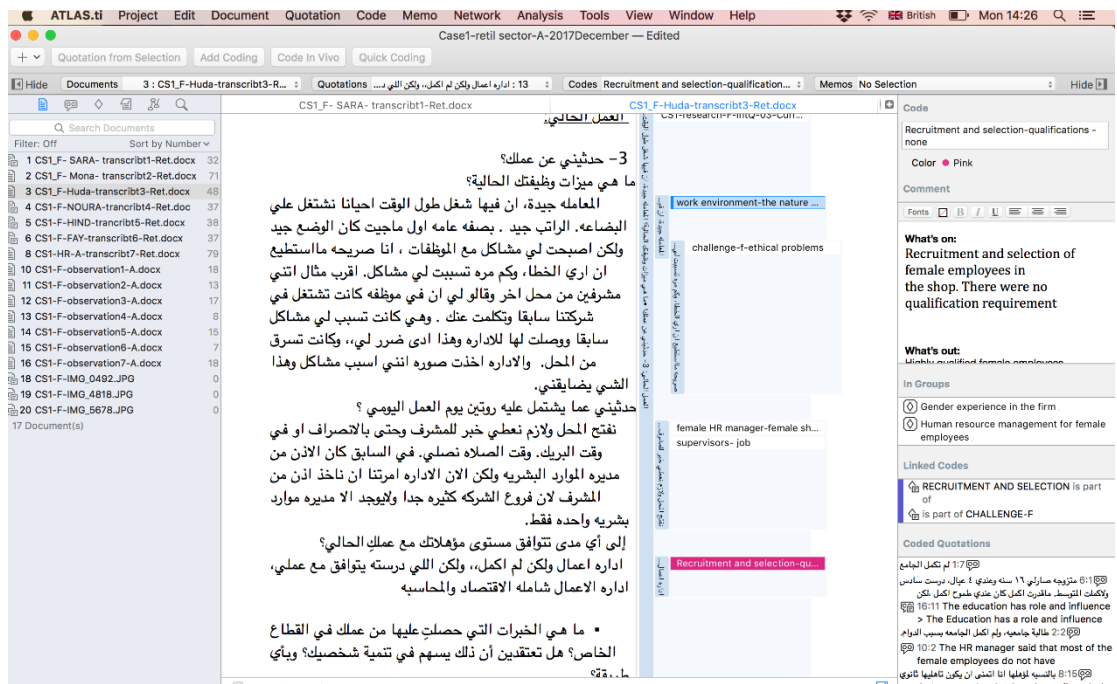


Figure 7a: An example of a transcript in the program, from Case 1

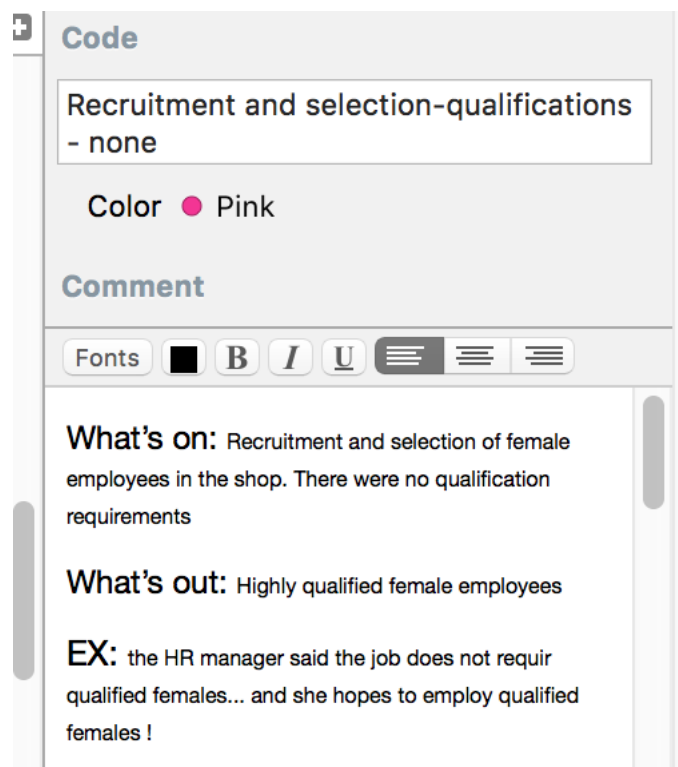


Figure 7b: Right-hand column of the transcript in the program in Case 1 (enlarged)

In each instance, the researcher defined the code and what the code revealed to be interesting, in order to render the final analysis clear and evidence based (Bazeley, 2013). The codes in each case were reviewed and revised and were read more than once to update

them and ensure that they were defined effectively. The challenge was to take the time to refine and remove codes, merge similar codes, and build categories with sub-codes. The codes were revised more than once for the sake of relevance and connection, with weak codes being deleted in interpreting the data. When the researcher had finishing coding each case, the cases were revisited after a period of time and after finishing the other codes, in line with Bazeley’s (2013, p.185) recommendation that “This process is never concluded in one step: not only do some codes resist early cataloguing, but you will see some differently as further data and later reflection will lead to fresh understanding”.

I then built sub-codes that were linked to the main codes, conducting each phase for all cases and then starting the next phase to re-read and revise the codes. In this way, all the codes were derived for Case 1, with definitions, and then Cases 2, 3, 4 and 5 were coded. The third phase, ‘Searching for themes’ was subsequently initiated to construct themes that were the same in each Case. This enabled interpretation of the phenomenon under study and helped to make sense of each Case, with consideration of variation between the Cases.

One example from the engineering case study was ‘code manager’, which contains core codes and sub-codes with definitions and links to quotations, if needed – the frequency with which each code was quoted is indicated in blue and its code group on the left-hand side is used to build themes (see Figure 8).



Figure 8: Code manager

Due to the flexibility of thematic analysis, in Phase 4, ‘Reviewing themes’, I was able to review these final themes, and then amend and rename them, so that they would be more

focused when the findings were written up (reporting the data). Moving on to Phase 5, the final themes were defined and identified, with three main themes being derived to help interpret the data:

1. Nitaqat and female employment.
2. The HR management of female labour.
3. The experience of female employees in the firm.

The networking helped to present all the data in the codes and themes, including notes, definitions and the type of linkage, illustrated in a network diagram. The network view in Atlas.ti displayed a hierarchy diagram for the code relationships, beginning with the theme category and proceeding to the core code and then the sub-codes. Thus, Atlas.ti helped to explore the research data visually, which facilitated the writing up the findings in each case. According to Friese (2014, p.219), “The Atlas.ti network views illustrate findings in the format of a concept map”. An example of a network map for the ‘Nitaqat and female employment’ theme in Case 3 is presented in Figure 9, below. In the analysis, this is divided into two sub-themes, one of which is shown in Figure 10, in order to interpret Nitaqat’s influence and the workplace environment.

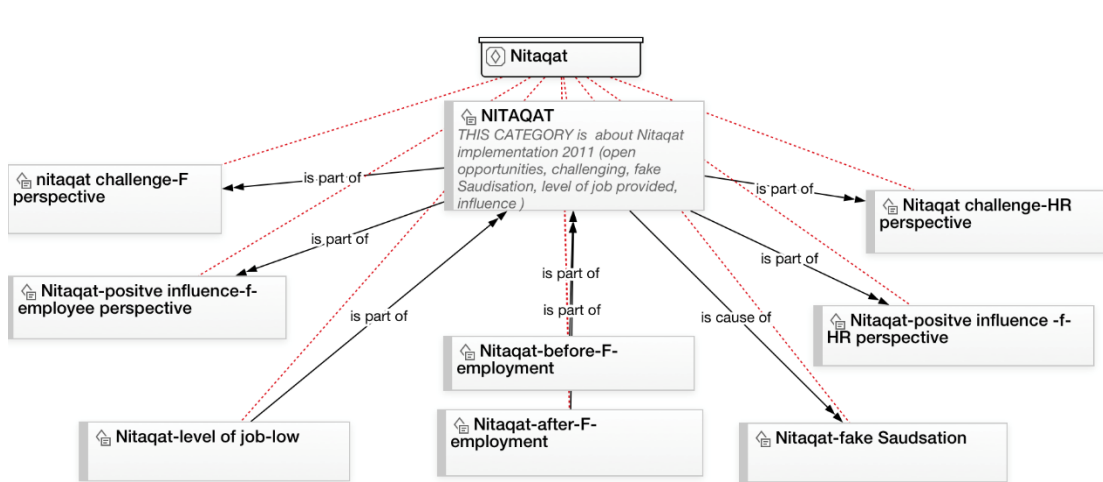


Figure 9: Theme 1, ‘Nitaqat and female employment’

Firstly, the main theme illustrates the influence of the Nitaqat programme on female employment, the type of job, and the challenges of the job. Secondly, the sub-theme, ‘nature of work environment’ (see Figure 10, below) indicates the level of segregation in the work environment, which in turn influences communication between the female employees and the HR managers. This helps to illustrate the themes relating to HR management and female employees, as presented in the findings.

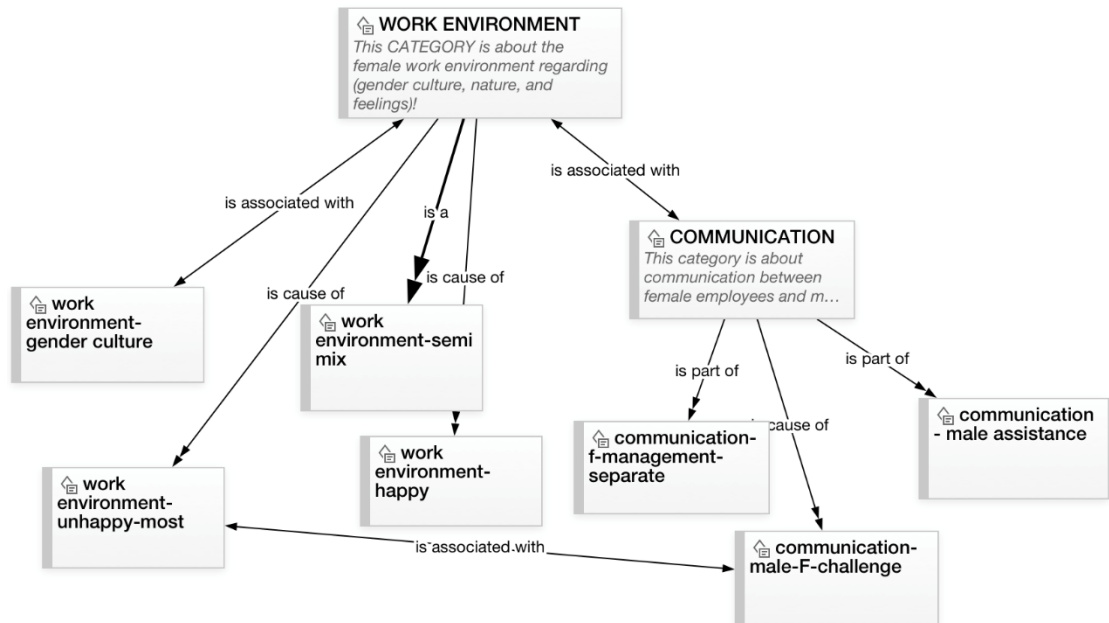


Figure 10: Nature of the workplace environment

The reason for merging these sub-themes into a single theme was because they follow each other. For example, the sub-theme of ‘communication’ emerged with the ‘work environment’ sub-theme, because communication is part of the workplace environment, as shown in Figure 10. The codes may be under a sub-theme or main theme and can either combined into a single theme or left as they are after being reviewed. In this stage and after reviewing the sub-themes, combining themes into one helped illustrate the Nitaqat and female employment theme. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, p.21), “At the end of reviewing the theme phase, you should have a fairly good idea of what your different themes are, how they fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data”. Moreover, the main theme of these sub-themes is important to help illustrate and address

Research Question 1: In what way has Nitaqat impacted female employment in the private sector?

The ‘HR and female management’ theme is more complex; it was deemed preferable to include one theme in a network to represent the richness of the data that can be separated into sub-themes (see Figure 11). This theme helped to answer Research Question 2: **How are female employees managed in the context of the Nitaqat programme?**

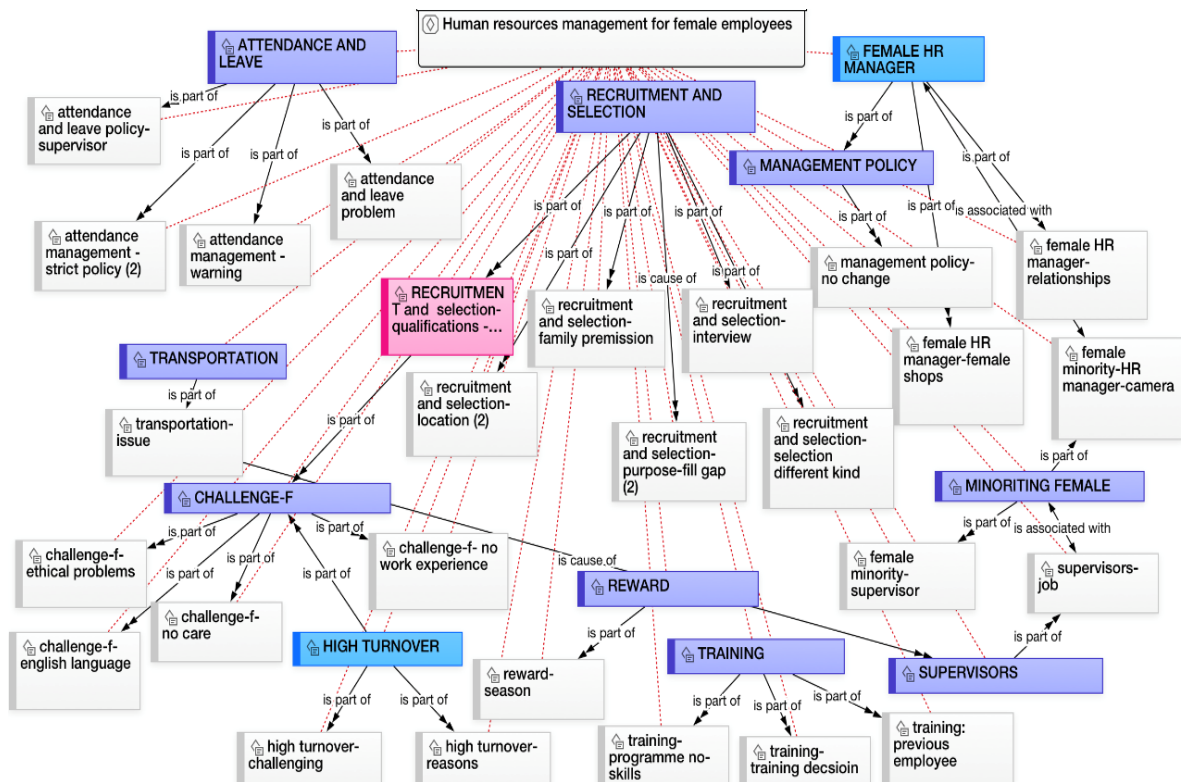


Figure 11: Network Case 1, the Alkabda firm – HR and female management

Here, the main theme is the human resources management of female employees. This links with core codes, such as ‘attendance and leave’, which in turn contains sub-codes (‘attendance and leave policy-supervisor’, referring to the role of supervisor in monitoring the attendance and leave of female employees, according to the firm’s strict policy. Moreover, the other sub-code, ‘attendance and leave warning’ refers to the firm’s policy regarding absence. ‘Attendance and leave - a strict policy’ generally outlines the challenges and policy implemented for managing absenteeism and poor timekeeping amongst female employees. The attendance and leave problem highlight the challenges faced by managers with female employees, in terms of their attendance and leave. These codes and sub-codes are linked through the arrows shown in Figure 12, below. In addition, each code includes details and definitions, presented in Figure 13, below.

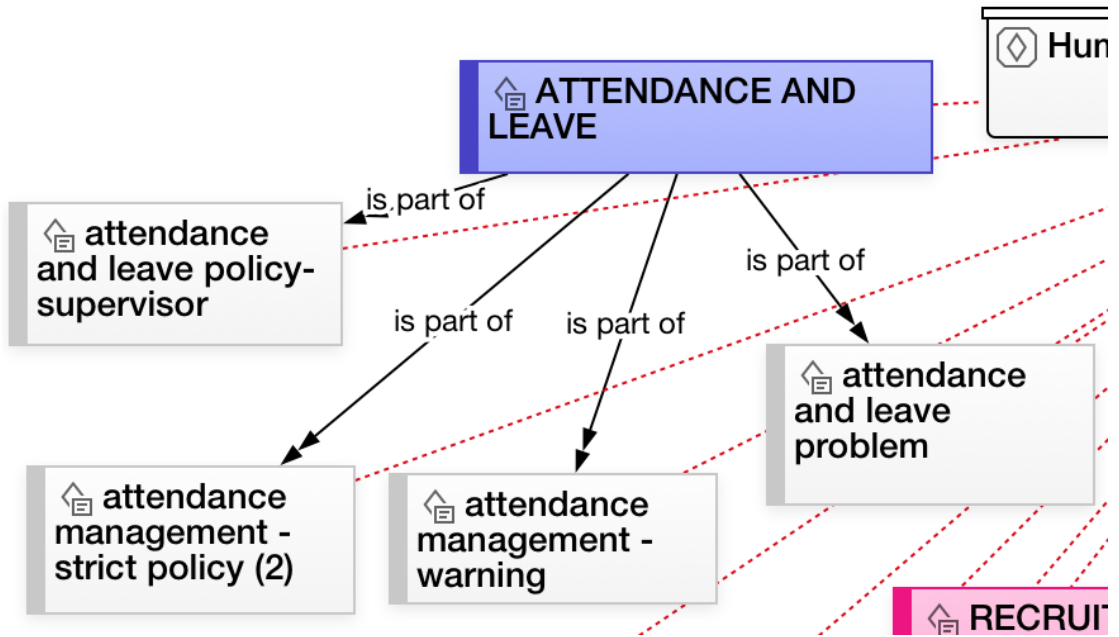


Figure 12: Code and sub-code linkages

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what's in:
Firm has a strict warning policy for female employees for lateness (7 days) and absence (3 times)

what's out:
other policy

thoughts: The warning policy may help to ensure that females turn up for work on time; however, it creates challenges in terms of raising the chances of dismissal from the firm and may result in a cost in terms of finding new female employees to fill jobs.

Figure 13: Code definitions

Another example is the network from the Najim firm, Case 2, and the theme, ‘the experience of female employees in the firm’.

The network view in Figure 14, below, presents all the data collected from the female employees. Each code details and links to quotations from the participants. This theme helps to answer

Research Question 3: **What is the experience of female employees in the context of the Nitaqat programme?**

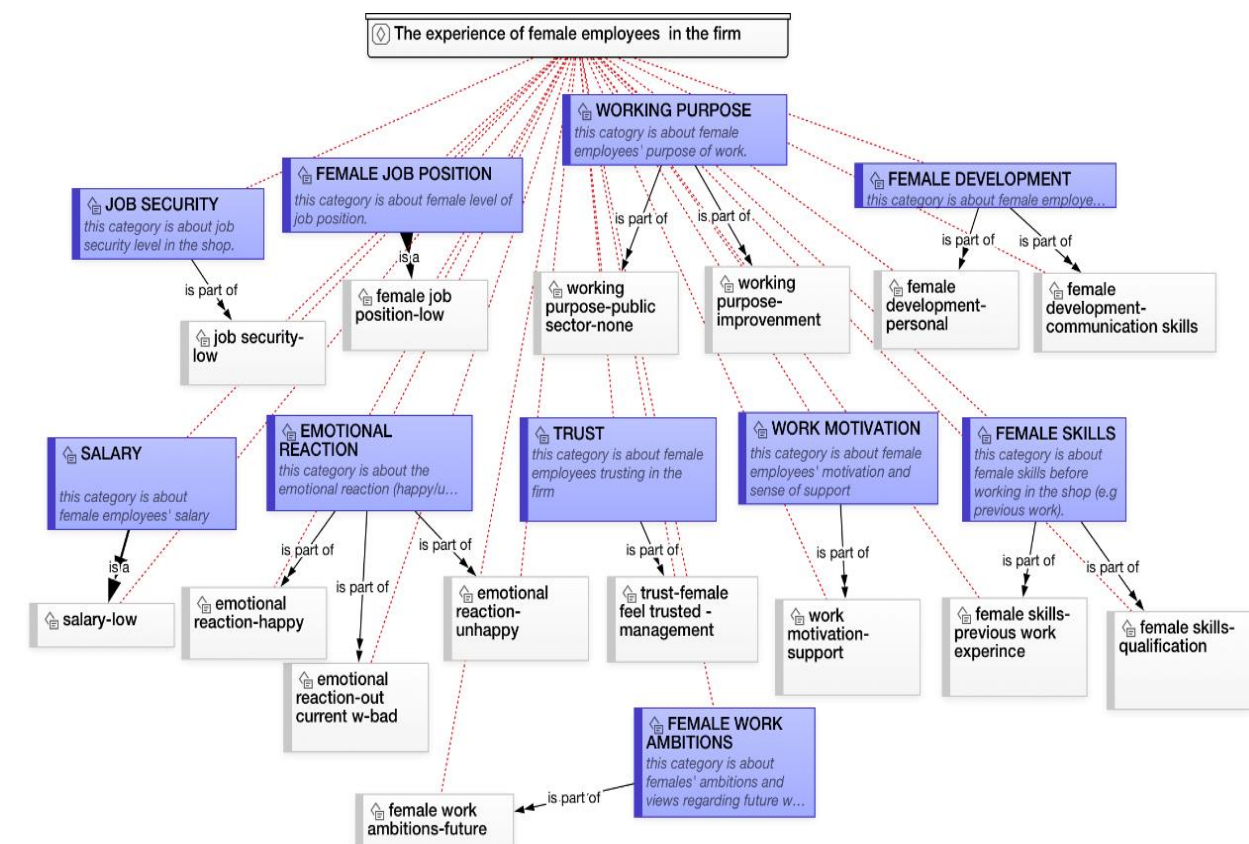


Figure 14: The experiences of female employees in the Najim firm

In the ethnographic case study conducted on the Aram Design firm, the code links all the interview and observation codes with supported quotations under the theme, 'The experiences of female employees in the firm' (see Figure 15, below). There is a core code entitled 'female development', and a sub-code called 'female development manager support', which illustrates that women are being developed in the workplace, due to the manager's support in providing opportunities for women in work. This is supported by the quotations shown in white squares (one example on the left-hand side is a quotation and its translation). The main blue square defines the sub-codes with examples. This network shows how the details can be linked in the codes, which helps in interpreting the data from the theme-code and sub-code in each case.

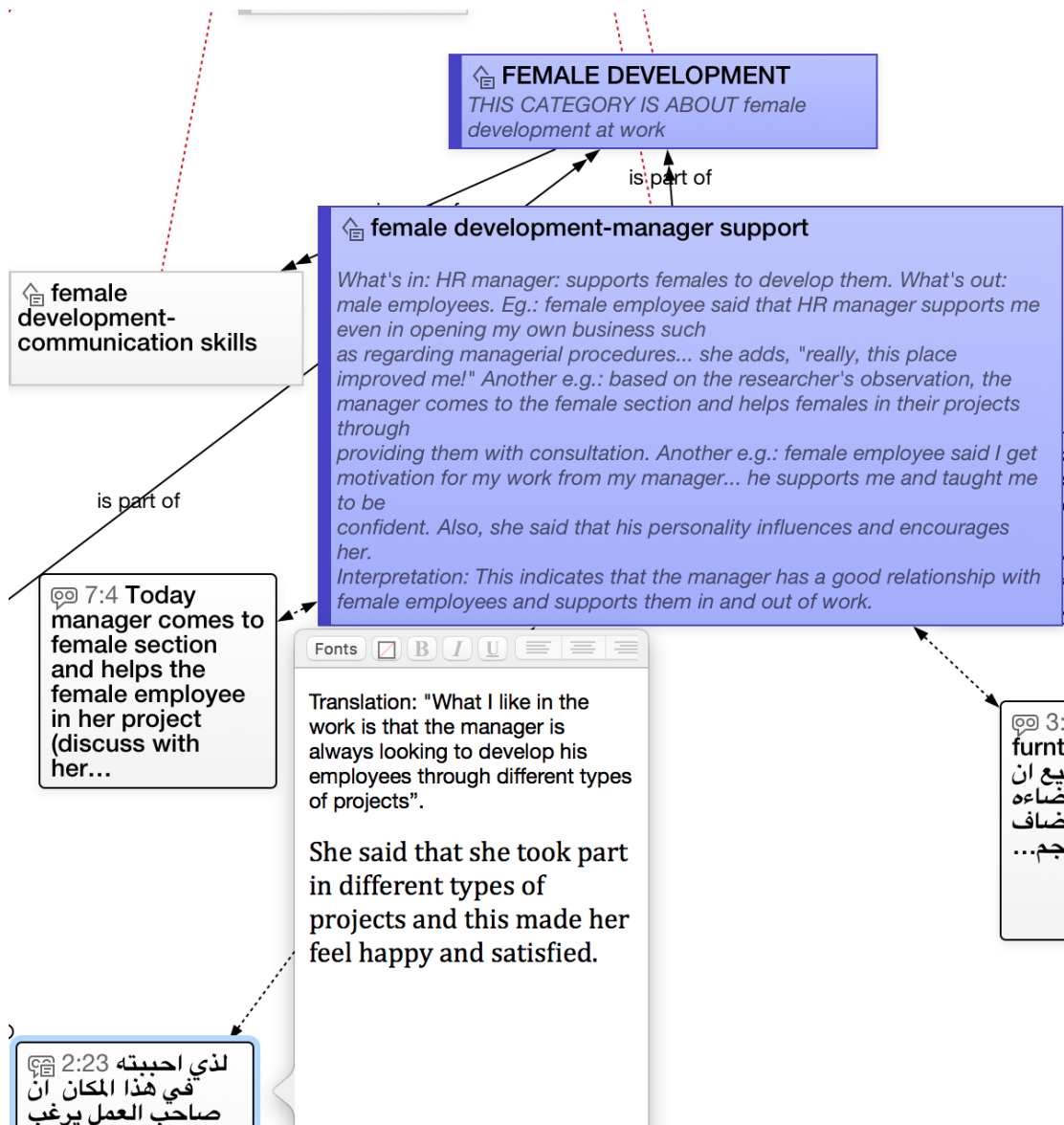


Figure 15: Interviews, observations and supporting quotations

In summary, each case contains three main themes ('Nitaqat and female employment', 'HR management of female labour' and 'the experiences of female employees in the firm'. These themes will enable the data to be interpreted in depth in the findings chapter. Therefore, 'Producing the report', which is the final phase of the thematic analysis, is achieved by writing up in detail the completed themes, with the codes and sub-codes, as a written story. This in turn leads to a critical reflection and a concise interpretation of the data in the Findings Chapter. All of the details required to write up the findings from the data can be found in the network view for each theme in the Cases.

4.13 Research Quality

I was aware that it is difficult to test reliability and validity through measurement of the data in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Since the current research is exploratory and qualitative in nature, it is essential to ensure the reliability of the data (Golafshani, 2003). Validity, which is concerned with the measurement of what the research is intended to observe, may be addressed by applying quantitative measures (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The application of an external validity measurement was not appropriate for this research, however, because such measurements are concerned with the degree to which a study can be replicated and generalised, which relates more closely to a quantitative approach. Internal reliability concerns the way in which a study is conducted with more than one observer, but the present research was conducted solely by me, the researcher. Internal validity is concerned with the connection between what the researcher witnessed and the theoretical research approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This was measured using the two micro ethnographic cases, which support the interviews, but still cannot be applied to this current research as a whole, because an ethnographic approach was not applied to all five cases. Therefore, it was not possible to assess internal and external reliability or validity in this instance. To ensure the quality of research in qualitative studies, Lincoln and Guba (1985) produced alternative criteria (naturalistic equivalents) to test the reliability and validity of a qualitative study by assessing its trustworthiness (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018):

Credibility – an alternative to internal validity

Transferability – an alternative to external validity

Dependability – an **alternative** to reliability

Conformability – an alternative to objectivity.

This research produced in-depth details of a phenomenon and then met the transferability requirements of qualitative research, which are concerned with ensuring a thick, detailed description of the object of the data study (Bryman, & Bell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, all research recordings (audio-, fieldwork notes, transcripts, photographs) were retained. Due to the large amount of qualitative research data, the Atlas.ti program was used to keep the data safe and organised. For the research quality to be dependable, all data were saved.

The credibility criterion involves the use of multiple data sources to ensure the data's trustworthiness (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To meet this criterion, data triangulation is one

possible technique and it was used in this study (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods, such as interviews and observation, or different points of view to study a phenomenon; leading to the generation of more valid and reliable data (Jick, 1997; Golafshani, 2003). Thus, in the present research, triangulation was achieved through multiple forms of data collection (interviews and observation with photographs), used to study the phenomenon from various participant perspectives (the perspectives of managers and female employees) to enhance the richness of the data. Although there are advantages to using qualitative methods, the limitations of the researcher's stance (bias) need to be taken into account. One of these limitations can arise from the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Here, the fact that I, the researcher, am a Saudi woman may have influenced the data. Thus, to reduce the risk of researcher bias, data triangulation was applied (Golafshani, 2003), and the interviews were carried out individually to obtain richer and more authentic data.

Furthermore, conformability was achieved in this research, which involves ensuring that the research is data-driven by the findings, rather than being objectively defined (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is achieved through data analysis and the themes emerging from it, so that the research findings can be written up.

Moreover, the rigour of the data in qualitative research is achieved through reflexivity. The position of the researcher in a study influences qualitative research by shaping the research experience (Leavay & Harris, 2018). Therefore, my position as a Saudi woman researcher had a considerable influence on the data and cannot be separated from the data itself. In turn, this had an influence on the interpretation of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While I am aware that my role may have influenced the data (Gabriel, 2015), I was careful to exercise reflexivity, which is crucial in good-quality qualitative research. This means that the researcher's role is critical in knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this current study, I occupied two positions: I am a Saudi woman, and therefore able to understand the female Saudi participants and their culture, but I was also a researcher, and my familiarity with the context could have posed a challenge for the reader's interpretation of the meaning, in terms of the language and the cultural context. Thus, the trustworthiness criterion that was fulfilled in this research and the nature of the research itself, which was inductively driven by the data gathered from the participants, minimises the influence of my dual position as a Saudi woman researcher on the data elicited in this study.

4.14 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the rationale and a detailed description of the methodological approach used to conduct the current study. A qualitative approach was adopted for this research, using multiple case studies, interviews and observations to collect data from HR managers and female employees. The gap in the existing literature on inductive studies in this area means that this study is important for filling the methodological gap in feminisation research in general, and in particular, the gap concerning the experiences of female employees in Saudi SMEs. The Atlas.ti 8.1 program was applied to analyse the data, and this study is one of the first to use Atlas.ti in the field of human resource management research, especially with regard to studies on Saudi women's experiences of working in SMEs. Finally, this chapter considered the validity and reliability of the qualitative research conducted, and the procedures for reducing limitations on qualitative research quality were set out. In this regard, the criteria for qualitative research quality and ethical considerations were adopted. Therefore, the next chapter will discuss the research findings from the five Cases.

Chapter 5: Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

The findings are presented with respect to five case studies undertaken in four business sectors: retail, construction, architecture and engineering. In this chapter, the findings from each case will be taken together and interpreted to address the overall research objectives, as follows:

1. To explore the impact of Nitaqat on female employment in the private sector.
2. To explore the management of female labour in the context of the Nitaqat programme.
3. To explore experiences of female labour in the context of the Nitaqat programme.
4. To theorise the developing position of Saudi women in a gendered workplace.

To understand the story of each Case, the researcher will discuss the broad common themes identified, starting with *Nitaqat and female employment*, followed by the theme of *HR management of female labour*, in order to gain a deep understanding of the HR management of female employees and the interaction between female employees and management, and finally, the *experience of female employees in the firm*, which explores the lived experience of female Saudi employees in each firm. These themes are the outcome of a rigorous process of coding and thematic analysis, using the Atlas.ti analysis programme, as covered previously in the Methodology Chapter.

The findings for each case will be presented individually to enable the different situations in HR management and experiences of female employees to be identified across all the cases. The chapter will then conclude by presenting the common findings for the five cases.

5.2 The Alkabda Firm - Retail Sector (Medium-sized Firm)

5.2.1 Background to the Alkabda Firm

Alkabda is in the retail sector, selling female accessories and bags in a shopping mall environment. This firm was founded 10 years ago and is based in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. The firm had 100% male employees prior to the introduction of Nitaqat in 2011, as women were not permitted to work in the retail sector up until that point. Nitaqat, however, incentivised the hiring of female employees in all shops. As a consequence, Alkabda began hiring female staff in 2012. The firm's female HR manager is responsible

for all the shops and engages in communication with each outlet where female employees are employed as sales personnel. These employees work a six-day week, with each working day consisting of 11 hours. Part of this sales work involves recording on a computer any purchases made by customers in the shop. While serving customers, the female employees must also communicate with them face-to-face. The female staffs work in a mixed environment, because the malls have customers of both genders. The shop door is made of glass and so the women wear their hijabs throughout the entire working day, which can be uncomfortable for such long periods, as claimed by the employees. Alkabda's head office is located at a distance from the mall, with the firm's management based in a separate building in Riyadh. This building has a separate private section (next to the management building) for the female HR manager, where there are facilities such as a desk, private toilet, coffee bar and private driver for site visits to the firm's shops, if required.

In Saudi Arabia's highly gender-segregated culture, Alkabda firm's male management found it challenging to communicate with their female employees, which led them to hire a female HR manager, who is currently assigned responsibility for the female staff, in communication with the management, but also under their authority. The important role of the HR manager, as defined by the management, is to monitor the female employees using a digital control screen. The HR manager's role can be described as that of a 'go-between', relaying communication between the management and female staff. However, the main decisions over working hours, salaries and training for the female employees are made by the management and passed on to the HR manager to implement.

Aside from the above, supervisors are hired in each of the shops (one male supervisor per shop), allocated the role of observing the female employees. There is no prepared section or desk for the supervisor within the shop, just a chair placed opposite to each of these outlets. The supervisor's job is purely to oversee the female employees and communicate with the firm's male management (and HR manager), if required, via a mobile phone provided by the firm. The supervisors are male foreign contractors, who are not part of the firm's management. These supervisors have no line of authority and their salary is lower than that of the female employees. Moreover, their position as assistants is not permanent. Consequently, they are frequently replaced, which can result in a lack of continuity in relationships and processes. The structure of management and supervision strongly suggests two lines of management on a gendered basis, which continues to reflect male authority over women. This type of supervision can lead to employee confusion about

operational decisions, causing female employees to feel ‘spied on’ and uncomfortable. As such, the female staffs are aware that the supervisors have a lower status than them, but still hold a form of authority over them.

5.2.2 Profiles of the Alkabda Case Study Participants

Table 5 presents a profile of each participant who agreed to be interviewed (all names are fictitious, in order to maintain anonymity).

Table 5: Profiles of the Alkabda participants

Name of Participant		Marital Status	Social Status of Job²	Duration of Employment in the Current Firm
SARA	Salesperson	Single	Low	1 month
MONA	Salesperson	Single	Low	6 years
HUDA	Salesperson	Single	Low	2 years
NOURA	Salesperson	Single	Low	2 months
HIND	Salesperson	Married	Low	3 months
FAY	Salesperson	Married	Low	8 months
DALAL	HR Manager	Single ³	Medium	3 years

The data were collected through interviews with the female HR manager and female employees. Observations were also conducted to enrich the interview data, in order to understand the feminisation of this medium-sized firm in the retail sector.

² Low social status in the Saudi context means that one’s job status is considered low, with long working hours and a low salary (Alwedinani, 2016). In this case, the female employees were unqualified and considered to be of low status in Saudi society. Therefore, they had accepted to work in low-paid jobs. Furthermore, before Nitaqat, these jobs were filled by foreign workers, who were also considered low status by and within Saudi society.

³The HR manager was not married. She was informed in her interview for the job that the firm was looking for an unmarried HR manager, who could therefore focus on the job. They wanted somebody with few family responsibilities. This indicates that more responsibility and confidence is placed in unmarried women.

5.2.3 Nitaqat and the Challenge of Employing Female Labour in the Alkabda Firm's Workplace

Like other retail sectors worldwide, sales jobs have similar features. However, the key difference in the Saudi retail sector is that female employees only began working in it after 2011, with the implementation of the Nitaqat programme. Nitaqat has influenced the opening up of opportunities for female employees in the retail sector. To understand the strength of its influence, it is necessary to first explain it, together with its relationship to female employment.

Nitaqat, with its incentive to employ females in the workplace, has helped open up the workplace in Saudi Arabia, and to some extent, it has had an influence on cultural gender barriers. However, the participant, Hind argued that this influence is contrary to Saudi culture and is negative, as it creates:

A huge mixed environment of females and males. Nitaqat offers jobs, but the management and supervisors are males, which is against our Saudi culture and creates barriers! I don't communicate with management unless in urgent situations.

This view raises the issue that Nitaqat goes against the practice of gender segregation, which is widely accepted by and within Saudi culture. The female participants in this case study considered it to have increased job opportunities, since there had been no chance of them working in the retail sector previously. The current experience of women working in the retail sector shows that it is relatively easy to find a job; a typical experience being described by Noura who found the current job in less than a month.

Nitaqat has brought about noticeable changes in Saudi society regarding the position of female Saudis in the labour market and workplace. However, Noura considered that

Despite Nitaqat creating a mixed workplace environment, everyone should keep boundaries between each other.

Nevertheless, despite holding a traditionally conservative view of gender culture, Noura could also see that:

Nitaqat has had a positive influence, because women now have the right to work, the same as men, and that has given them confidence and feelings of responsibility.

This view indicates that Saudi females have gained a sense of freedom through their participation in the workplace; it is the perception of emancipation, even with subordination to male authority. Nevertheless, this step towards a mixed-gender environment may be too big for some female employees. The common view among the

participants was that the Nitaqat quota requirement for firms to employ women has brought about some changes in Saudi culture, but women were still considered subordinate to men.

The requirement to employ 100% female employees in firms falling within the 'feminised' retail sector, dealing with women's products, has created challenges for these firms, leading to 'fake Saudization', as indicated in the literature (Koyame-Marsh, 2016). Dalal, the HR manager of the Alkabda firm, explicitly referred to firms making fake Saudization claims. She cited a possible reason for this as the monthly salary of a foreign worker being SR3,000,⁴ because they are not registered in the social security process, whereas for a Saudi woman, it is SR3500. Furthermore, firms see foreign workers as easier to control and less costly to employ. A second reason for fake Saudization is the challenge of high turnover amongst Saudi female employees (as explained under the HR management theme later in this chapter). Dalal specified that if such practices are discovered by the Saudi Ministry of Labour, a firm can be fined up to SR100,000,⁵ which indicates pressure to comply with female employment legislation. Interestingly, when I first asked about the firm making fake Saudization claims, it was emphasised that fake Saudization is unethical and encourages women to laze around at home with a salary. Dalal asserted that:

...a lot of small firms make fake Saudization claims, and the retail sector is the worst, because it cannot find qualified Saudi females!

However, Dalal admitted that she herself had employed two Saudi women who did not have 'real work' and then employed foreign women to do the actual work instead, but for lower salaries.

In the area of Saudi female employment, the data suggest that the retail sector is challenging for employees who have the skills required for the workplace. Dalal's experience indicates that the firm faced difficulties in finding Saudi women to work in its shops, because Saudi women are usually dependent on their families and need their permission to work. However, it is becoming less of a challenge, in terms of family authority, for women to work outside the home. Over the years of Nitaqat implementation, Dalal has noticed this difference, as she explained:

Previously, there were no women working in this job, in the retail sector, whether here or elsewhere in retail... it was difficult to employ women in our Saudi society. However, Nitaqat has imposed this... they are all female employees in this shop and

⁴ SR3,000=£470

⁵ SR100,000=£20,049

the male management is in a separate building. At first, we faced challenges in finding women who could work here, but now we can find them easily. Recently, the percentage of women working has increased to 80%, compared with the first years of female employment.

In line with Dalal's thoughts, the evidence demonstrates that female employees' families are becoming more flexible and are letting their female members work in the retail sector, especially where all the employees are female. However, concern was expressed over the gendered culture, which creates issues for female employees working in shops. Overwhelmingly, the female employees expressed that they faced problems with male customers, because of this gendered culture. Evidence from the interviews revealed that some male customers refuse to accept women working in shops and in some cases, they even ask to communicate with the manager, because they think that women should not be working in shopping malls, as Huda explained:

In Saudi society, the women depend on the men. My female colleagues, when they are working in the shop, feel sad, because of society's view of them working in an open area, which is against our Saudi culture...

This comment raises the issue of the influence of Saudi culture on female roles in the workplace. Although attitudes are changing, they still appear to prevail in the workplace. The presence of women in retail is increasingly challenging to Saudi Arabia's gender culture.

The evidence provided by Dalal demonstrates that the firm's policy requires all female employees to wear the hijab at work, because they are obliged to communicate with a mixed-gender clientele. Commenting on the hijab, prior to their acceptance as employees in the firm, the women have to agree to cover their faces while working in the shop. From my observation, it was evident that the women felt uncomfortable, because they had to keep their faces covered in the workplace for up to 11 hours over the course of the working day. Moreover, in the workplace, I observed that the female employees did not wear special clothes for work. The firm's policy rejects any flexibility over the hijab, although some of the women did not want to cover their faces. Nevertheless, they had to comply with the firm's policy, which requires them to do so. This demonstrates strict gender policy, based on Saudi culture.

Aside from the above, the female employees' workplace environment seemed very confined and tight. Based on the observation data, it appeared to be an inconvenient and challenging environment for them to work in over a long period of time. Figures 16, 17 and 18 show aspects of this environment, indicating that the management attaches little

importance to the comfort or wellbeing of female employees. An example from the interviews of the management's treatment of female employees is exemplified by the two following comments:

I feel unhappy in the work environment; often, we face challenges from male customers... the work pressure, especially in the holiday seasons, there is no break. I was tired in Ramadan because of pressure, no break and I must accept this to [be able to] treat my family. (Hind)

I'm working for the salary, because I have family responsibilities. I'm dissatisfied working here in a mall and I don't feel good, but I have to accept this job. (Fay)



Figure 16: The tightness of the confined workplace environment



Figure 17: Another view of the same work environment

The shops are small kiosks with a store, but all share the same features, being located in mixed open areas with the supervisor surveying the outside of the shop to monitor the female employees. The workplace is a noticeably uncomfortable, with no facilities provided for the female employees. As recorded in the observation field notes:

This is a bit embarrassing; two female employees working here, but there is only one chair... not a clean place... female employees clean the place themselves.



Figure 18: External view of the mixed-gender kiosk

It is clear that the experience of these female employees suggests a sense of pressure in the workplace and feelings of being imposed upon to perform work, with no flexibility. There is little interest in hiring women on the part of the male management, which is reflected in the poor workplace environment. This was confirmed by Hadeel, who stated:

...they don't want us here; they employ us just to fill job gaps. Therefore, there's no concern for the work environment.

What this Nitaqat theme raises is the argument that its requirements have, on the one hand, created positions for women, but on the other, presented challenges for firms to comply with the feminisation of jobs. In its early implementation, Nitaqat encountered issues regarding family authority over women being permitted to work in the retail sector, although there are now signs that this is becoming more flexible.

Under the next theme, the management of female employees in the workplace will be explained in detail.

5.2.4 HR Management of Female Labour

In light of Nitaqat's influence on increasing the number of women employed in the firm, and the accompanying issues in the workplace, the purpose of this theme is to understand the management of female employees in the firm. As mentioned previously, the reason for employing Dalal was principally to communicate with all the female employees. In this regard, I personally found it difficult to communicate with the male management to arrange the interviews, purely due to my gender as a Saudi woman, as they were inflexible. For example, the male managers severely restricted my ability to contact or meet them. In our phone conversation, the manager said:

We don't meet women face-to-face. If you have any enquiries, you can make contact through Dalal.

I was therefore only allowed to communicate with Dalal, and this was restricted to a specific period during the day. The situation suggested an enforced gender bias within a strongly patriarchal work environment, whereby the male management did not wish to communicate with any women, employees or otherwise. The female employees also found it challenging to communicate with the firm's management and their relationship with them was poor. For example, there were no regular meetings and there was no direct communication with the male management, as indicated by the following comment:

...there are no meetings with the firm's management. If the management held monthly meetings, so we could discuss the work between us; the manager, supervisor and all staff, this would be really motivating to work better, understand each other, and clearly identify what we should or shouldn't do in the workplace. (Mona)

Dalal, as required by the management, limits the way in which female employees communicate with the male management. This communication takes place exclusively by telephone and only after obtaining permission from Dalal. If a female employee communicates with the management without this permission, she is liable to be dismissed. Fay noted this situation and the sense of isolation:

I can't meet the employer. It is not permitted to communicate with him, or have his contact number, even if I feel lost with the supervisors and HR manager.

It indicates a sense of control and real organisational barriers, as the female employees are prevented from meeting their employer. Moreover, the importance of communication arrangements has been identified as an effective means by which employees can discuss general and specific issues. It appears that the decision to hire Dalal was essential to the firm, as her role facilitates employee to management communication. Dalal's means of

communication with the female employees is via the telephone, on site visits, or in meetings, if required. Moreover, communication with the female employees is supplemented by communication with the male supervisors, should any issues arise in the shop. Likewise, Saudi Arabia's gendered culture influences this communication with the male supervisors. As mentioned previously, these supervisors observe the female workers from outside the shop to monitor their timekeeping. If there is any need to speak to a female employee, they must do so outside the shop. This policy of segregation is emphasised from within the firm, as it does not allow men and women to work in the same place.

The hiring process for female employees in the firm is relatively rapid. It is based on a face-to-face interview with the HR manager and sometimes a phone interview. The face-to-face interviews indicate some level of formality in the firm's employment process. However, one female employee's statement revealed that this engagement process is surprisingly superficial, as clarified by Noura, a new employee in the firm:

I got this job quickly and immediately... my friend works in another shop and she spoke with the supervisor about me and they contacted me and accepted me in this job after a phone interview. (Noura)

The above comment reveals a situation within the firm that indicates a level of informality in the recruitment process. The requirement for female employment in the retail sector, in order to fill these low-paid jobs, makes it a quick process.

At the time of conducting this research, women were still not permitted to drive in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, when selecting female employees, the management preferred to hire women who did not live far from the shop, due to transportation issues, which would include women have difficulty finding drivers and then encountering traffic problems that could make them late for work. Aside from this, the management employs women with varying levels of education, because the job simply requires female employees. It should therefore be noted that the fact of being female is more important to the firm than any consideration of a candidate's skills, qualifications or marital status. Dalal is concerned about the low qualifications of the female staff and the effect that this has on the quality of the work, where marketing skills are needed and communication skills with customers are crucial:

The low level of education has a role and influence on female employees, in terms of how they communicate with customers, which is a key factor in the retail sector, and also on the skills they need for working in the retail sector...

Hence, Dalal is concerned about the low employee qualifications that are associated with this type of job. In Saudi society, shop work is poorly paid and therefore, only of interest to women with a low social status. Dalal acknowledged that if the employees were well-qualified women (well-educated and skilled), they would be unlikely to accept to work in the firm, because this type of work is low paid. Fay's comment supported this:

I didn't study at university and in terms of work, there is no comparison, I've learned, from my experience here.

Dalal suggests that in the recruitment of women, family permission is crucial, which is not the case when recruiting male employees. Prior to Nitaqat, this requirement slowed down the recruitment process in comparison to male recruitment. Family authority and permission is especially relevant amongst the lower classes of Saudi society, who tend to be less educated, and where there is more authority exerted by the family over a female family member's decision to work in a mixed environment.

The research data suggest that the male management applied a strict monitoring system over the female employees, with Dalal commenting that:

Monitoring with a camera... the nature of this work requires women to be observed with a camera. I monitor their work and attendance, and if I have any comments or there are problems such as the employees taking a long break... there are many things I can see via the camera...

However, it is very difficult for Dalal to monitor all the shops, especially on a screen. It is worth noting here that for reasons of privacy and security, I was not permitted to photograph the screen, indicating that the management are sensitive about their strict observation policy. Hence, it would appear that the firm has little trust in its female employees, given that cameras are used to monitor them, and male supervisors are employed. One reason for employing these supervisors, however, is due to the issue of transportation, because at the time, women were not permitted to drive. Part of a supervisor's job in the firm requires a car to move between the shops and the management, and to convey merchandise to the shops. Dalal also stated that the supervisors helped record the female employees' time-keeping in attendance sheets, which are sent to the management every month.

The recording of time-keeping is considered essential by the firm, which has a strict warning policy for female employees, as explained by Dalal:

The attendance policy has been taken from the Saudi Ministry of Labour's system. After I read it carefully, I felt that it was appropriate for our firm.

The employment contract for female employees explains that the firm has the right to dismiss any employee who is late for work on seven working days in a year. One copy of the written contract is retained by the firm and the employee is given another copy. Dalal considered the attendance policy to be crucial, because female employees are frequently late or absent without leave. When the employment of women in retail first began, Dalal found this challenging, especially when there was no one to fill jobs in situations of absence or staff turnover. On this issue, Dalal stated:

The challenge of female [staff] arriving late for work caused us to develop a strict policy to follow; this is important for the women's commitment to working, because they don't have work experience or qualifications. So, from the beginning, we imposed time commitments on female employees. First, we issue oral warnings for lateness and then, a written warning. Once we implemented this strict policy, the women became more committed in their time-keeping... because the women who came to work didn't have any experience, so they didn't know the meaning of being on time for work; they thought if they were late, this would not influence the progress of the work...

In my field notes, I recorded on one day that I noticed Mona looking stressed and worried'. She declared:

I don't want to lose the job; they are really strict!

She knew that only one warning remained for her and then she could be dismissed from the job.

The robust policy on attendance and leave, along with the camera surveillance, supervisors, and female HR management, may have been introduced because of the perceived low level of the job and the fact that the female employees tended to be less well educated. Dalal expressed concern over the high staff turnover, which was an issue, as she explained:

The turnover in female employees is 9-13 monthly, and I also have to employ women to replace the ones who leave. In one shop, the problem I faced was that the shop closed, because two female employees left... and I couldn't find replacements to work in the shop.

Evidence from the field notes indicated that one reason for the high staff turnover was that the women were employed with no preparation to meet the job requirements. Clearly, the main purpose of working, identified by the female employees, was to earn a salary. Thus, if the employees found a better job, or one with a higher salary, they would leave their current job, especially as there was no strict policy on leaving a job without giving a reason. Moreover, the female employees had experienced problems with the supervisors,

and this had further contributed to the high staff turnover in the firm. Evidence of this high turnover was not only provided by Dalal, but also in statements from the female employees; for example, Huda explained that:

Most of the female employees don't last in the job, but leave; if you asked them, they would tell you, 'I'm here for a week, month...'. Maybe the longest period anyone stays is nine months, because they didn't come to work to make progress, they come for the salary, and they don't care about the firm's progress.

Another long-term employee emphasised that:

The firm suffers high staff turnover and most of the women don't stay for long; they just work for a few months and most don't have a good experience or don't want to work effectively. It is really rare for a female employee to complete a year in this job. (Mona)

It is clear that few of the female employees invested extra effort in their work, because of the firm giving them such low priority, whereby the salary was the only motivation. In a discussion between two female employees, Fay revealed her views of the firm:

I will not make an effort for the firm to increase its profits and I don't care about the firm.

However, some of the female employees were willing to make an effort to help the firm to succeed. Huda claimed that she made an effort, and advised and encouraged her colleagues to work effectively, but they made no effort to increase the firm's productivity. Interestingly, one long-term employee, Mona, had spent six years working in the firm, and had ambitions to work hard for the benefit of the firm's success.

Other challenges identified from the observation data consisted of a lack of English language skills, with the firm losing international customers who spoke English instead of Arabic, because the female employees did not understand them and so were unable to serve them. Dalal claimed that:

Unfortunately, 95% of female employees are non-English speakers, and we have foreign customers, and this makes it difficult to communicate with them. We hope to start a training programme for basic English.

Dalal considered that training programmes were very much needed, but the male management was unwilling to invest in training programmes for the female employees, because of the cost and because it was so easy to replace them. Dalal clarified that she had the power to make any decision relating to a female employee, but she claimed that the firm's management, her employer, did not allow her to make any decisions about training. Overwhelmingly the female employees felt dissatisfied with the lack of training

programmes, as indicated by Hind and Mona:

I'm dissatisfied that there are no training programmes in this firm; also, there should at least be expert trainers to train new employees.

I feel I need training courses, because it would help me with many things... which can only be from people who have experience in this field of work. (Mona)

and Huda expressed a desire to improve her personal skills in the workplace:

There is no chance of improvement in the workplace; we are on one level and this level enables customers to buy and make purchases. I need a training programme, I want to learn English to improve myself.

However, Dalal was concerned about the firm's commitment to its female employees. To encourage the women's efforts in the workplace during various holiday seasons, the management had instituted a financial reward of SR1500⁶ for all female employees working in, for example, Ramadan, where additional effort and long working hours were required. The influence of this financial reward resulted in the women showing a positive commitment after Ramadan. This strategy may help reduce the issue of lateness or absenteeism, if maintained by the firm. Dalal hopes:

...for a fixed annual financial programme for female employees. I've spoken with the male management, but we still don't have an effective reward system and I cannot make decisions without the male management.

From further study of this case, it became clear that the predominantly male management were reluctant to discuss female professional development, or to allow the female HR manager to make any improvements. However, in periods such as Ramadan, when the firm faced high demand and high sales volume, the management were more flexible, in order to motivate the female staff by providing financial rewards. This theme tells us that the management of female labour was not being given high priority by this firm, but some authority was delegated to Dalal to manage the female employees.

5.2.5 The Experiences of Female Employees in the Alkabda Firm

In the context of the management of female labour, it is important to understand the experiences of female employees in the workplace. Nitaqat has provided jobs for Saudi citizens with a low social status and enabled women to work and earn a salary. The fact of women being permitted to work in the retail sector has brought about some positive changes for them, and despite the low level of the job, it has helped them build their

⁶ SR1500=£300

experience of the market and develop skills for future work. Therefore, the female staff seemed to see this job as temporary, representing a stepping-stone towards future employment. The women working in the shop expressed self-reliance and a sense of responsibility, as they now had an opportunity to take responsibility for themselves, as indicated by Mona:

After working here, I can finish all my work by myself without waiting for my brother to do it for me.

Other evidence came from Huda:

Now, I feel that the value of men in my life isn't important for me. Before work, I depended on men for everything, but after having work, I am less dependent on men and I'm responsible for myself; I help my family. I now see myself as stronger than a man.

Furthermore, these comments indicate that since working in this firm, the female employees had developed strong personalities, and their self-confidence had grown. However, they did not see this job as secure, but rather a means of building their confidence and experience for future jobs. Additionally, the women were working to help their families financially, as most of them were from low-income backgrounds, where additional income was needed. Another reason acknowledged by the participants was that they were less qualified. Huda explicitly declared her reason for being in the job:

...this is a chance to work and nobody will accept us, because we don't have high educational qualifications or skills and most firms require that.

5.2.5.1 The Role of the Male Manager Disadvantages Female Employees through a Strict Management Approach

It was claimed by these female sales assistants that there were no opportunities for development in their job positions, which means that they were not empowered by their managers, due to the highly authoritative nature of that male management. Based on the observation data and the participants' claims, the position of salesperson is considered to be 'low status' in Saudi society and therefore suitable for the 'less well educated' and those prepared to take low-paid and low-status jobs.

From my observations, it was apparent that the firm's policy did not allow its female employees to share in its decision-making and these staff felt under pressure, because they could not make any decisions about improving the shop, or even discuss these ideas with the management. For example, Dalal, with no prior notice, increased their working hours by half an hour, based on a decision of the male management. The female employees were

dissatisfied, because they felt there was no reason for the decision. However, they were unable to share their concerns with the HR manager, because the decision was made by the male management. Mona was sad, claiming:

...we are treated as a commodity to do work and accept any decision!

This indicates the female employees' awareness of their position in the firm and their lack of freedom to share their ideas and concerns. It was clear that the firm had a 'just follow, no discussion' policy. Moreover, it was evident that the supervisors complied with the firm's stipulated product arrangement and avoided deviating from this with different ideas for sales or presentation. Thus, they merely appeared to follow management policy, which can – and does – lead to a high degree of inflexibility when dealing with female employees and products.

Interestingly, the female employees expressed concerns about the presence of the supervisors in the workplace and there were some bad experiences reported, including inflexibility in communication and lack of respect. From the female employees' responses, it was evident that the supervisors were a contributory factor in the high employee turnover in the firm. For example, Fay felt under pressure in the workplace, because of a supervisor, explaining:

The supervisor puts me under pressure; he has complained that I don't work well, even though they can see me via the camera. The supervisor makes me feel stressed with his obligations, I feel I can't do anything.

Another issue emerged from the female employees' statements, regarding being under constant observation in the workplace and feeling distrusted by the management.

The supervisor over-observed me; he doesn't want me to talk to my colleagues, especially if there is a customer in the shop. (Noura)

Sara also claimed:

When I communicate with the supervisor, he is inflexible and very picky, overly inflexible... there are two cameras in the shop. I'm dissatisfied with having cameras observe us and also supervisors observing us; this is very annoying and disappoints us.

Unsurprisingly, claims made about the strict monitoring system indicate little trust placed in the female employees; however, they considered being observed by the female HR manager via cameras as less stressful than being surveyed by the supervisors at the shop, due to the HR manager's position and female gender. Some of the female staff explained that the camera provided helpful evidence for the HR manager to resolve any problems

that might occur, but most remained dissatisfied with the constant monitoring that they were subjected to in the shops. Mona perceived the management's lack of trust in them and was discontent, because the male supervisors and management created a feeling of distrust in the workplace. They did not have any confidence in the women's behaviour or their work for the firm. All these situations involving a lack of trust reduced the women's motivation to work effectively in the shop, which emerged as a significant issue. Fay expressed a desire for trust:

I've been here for eight months; the firm's management doesn't like anything and that is disappointing to me. In August, we made a high profit, but the firm didn't see this contribution... the management didn't trust that we made the contribution... they do not communicate with us, they communicate with the supervisors first about our work.

The above comment indicates that the female staff was aware of the supervisors having a more effective communication channel open to the managed than they did. This provides further evidence of the management distrusting the female employees in the workplace. Another notable concern arising from the data was low motivation. From the experiences recounted by the female staff, it was clear that the management were unconcerned with motivating them to work harder or do better. The female employees highlighted their poor motivation at work, as there were no sales targets to be met, which is what they would have preferred, since these would give them a sense of achievement and competition with each other.

I've made profits for this firm, but they really don't care about motivating me or encouraging me. Also, the HR manager doesn't care about our needs in the workplace. (Mona)

Consequently, this situation reduces the women's motivation to work effectively. During my observation, I noticed that they were disappointed., which is also captured in the following comments:

Why should we do better at work if they don't see that?

...they are focusing on the working hours...

...not being late.

...observing, but they don't look after us, motivate us, or encourage us.

These statements strongly suggest that the female employees were not important to the firm because of the effort and value they brought to it, but perhaps only because they served the purpose of Nitaqat compliance. Mona claimed that the HR manager was aware of their problems in the workplace but did not make any changes or improvements to meet

their needs.

Overwhelmingly, the female employees talked about how the long working hours inflicted pressure and stress on them and claimed that breaktime was just 15 minutes a day. The firm's strict policy, evidenced during the observations, was apparent in one shop, where one female employee arrived on time and the other was just a few minutes late and received a warning. She was informed that the next time she was late, it would result in dismissal. The combination of long working hours and strict policy implementation made the female staff feel that they had low job security, with many seeing the job as temporary for various reasons, including the long working hours and low salary. Noura mentioned the low status of the job:

It would be impossible for me to be in this job for life, because it is [a] very low position; when I decided to work here, I never thought that this would be the job I was looking for.

And Sara identified a lack of care and encouragement:

I see this job as temporary; if there was rewarding encouragement for us from the firm, then I would remain here... but if the management continues not caring, I will leave the job and look for another...

The female employees were working to assist their families and saw this as sufficient, but it did not indicate happy acceptance of their salary level. They claimed that the salary was low and also unfair, especially for those working two shifts (11 hours in a working day) for a salary of SR4000⁷ a month.

Similarly, the participants expressed a desire for training programmes, which they believed to be more important than implementing strict policies. They claimed that the firm knew they lacked skills and qualifications but made no effort to introduce training programmes in as marketing and self-improvement. Based on six years' experience with the firm, Mona suggested possible reasons for this lack of training:

If there is a shortage of products in the workplace, nobody cares; most big firms have training programmes and meetings with employees. However, in small and medium-sized firms, training is challenging, especially as the men still want to control women in the workplace. There is no improvement...

Mona's comment about the shortage of merchandise also shows that the management were not fully committed to ensuring that the shops were fully stocked and may have been negligent or closed their eyes to the effectiveness of the male supervisors.

⁷ SR4000=£805.96

These results show that although the female employees were important to the firm, they were merely seen as a commodity to be used. For example, during the busy seasons, such as Ramadan, the firm puts pressure on its female employees, expecting them to work long hours. The participants considered that they had made a good contribution to the firm's success in the busy seasons, with Mona asserting that she had made a high profit for the firm in one day: approximately SR9000⁸.

Furthermore, temporary staff is employed, if needed; compounding the view that female staff are a freely available commodity, available whenever required. Conversely, there is no reward for working overtime; for example, when the firm decided that its employees would work half an hour extra each day. Huda's reaction was as follows:

I feel disappointed about working in the firm without a reward or bonus; we just had a financial reward in the Ramadan season: SR1500 for working extra hours.

The financial reward in the busy season made most of the female employees happy, but they claimed that there was no fixed reward system in place, such as a bonus for experienced female employees, who did extra work and trained new employees in the workplace.

The female staff had gained experience in sales, as cashiers, and in accounting. They could communicate with colleagues and peers, deal with people of either gender, and had participated in the Saudi labour market for the first time. What this theme tells us, however, is that being under strict management control limits the move towards female progress in the workplace.

5.2.6 Conclusion

The process of hiring females in a mixed-gender environment shows transformation in the position of women from the home to the workplace, especially where they are less educated and of lower social status. It was found in this study that many had rarely worked or held jobs at the same level, prior to their employment with this firm. This firm demonstrates that female employment can be influenced by the obligation to comply with Nitaqat, where a feminised sector is required. Thus, it provides evidence of male management still exerting a high level of authority over female employees, who feel that they are strictly monitored as a result. Moreover, the low priority given to female employees by the management reduced their motivation to progress in the firm.

⁸ SR9000=£1,813.23.

Nevertheless, they were in paid work, which inspired them to develop their personalities, promoted their self-worth, and enabled them to contribute financially alongside their domestic responsibilities.

Female employment opportunities have given Saudi women a sense of independence to be able to work and increase their levels of involvement in the workplace. Thus, female employment is part of a wider movement, which is starting to influence the gendered culture of the work environment in the Saudi retail sector, where it is becoming more acceptable for women to work in a mixed environment under a male-dominated and authoritarian society.

5.3 The Najim Firm - Retail Sector (Small Firm)

5.3.1 Background to the Najim Firm

Najim consists of a boutique gift shop in the retail sector. It was founded in 2014 and is located in Alkhobar, a large city in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The employment of women began when the shop first opened in 2014. Its male employees are foreign workers, deployed in reception, or as drivers and in the preparation of orders. Hind is the owner and HR manager, responsible for the management of her female employees, with autonomy over all decisions relating to them.

There is one supervisor (Mona), a female employee working at the same level as the other women in the workplace. Mona's job is to check and prepare orders, collecting what is required for them by going to other shops, and spending one day a week in customer service. Moreover, her role is to communicate with the owner/HR manager. Mona works in the shop, because Hind, the HR manager is away, travelling for most of the time. The other employee, Maha combines working at home on online customer orders with working in the shop, checking for orders. The working hours of these female employees consist of seven hours a day, with some flexibility – more so than for the male employees, who work eight hours a day. This is outlined in more detail later in this Case. At this point, it should be noted that there is no difference in policy for the management of all employees, except that for female employees, there is a maternity leave policy for married employees.

5.3.2 Profiles of the Najim Case Study Participants

Table 6 presents a profile of each participant who agreed to be interviewed. All names are fictitious, in order to maintain anonymity.

Table 6: Profiles of the Najim Participants

Name of Participant	Role of Participant	Marital Status	Duration of Employment at Current Firm	Social Status of Job	Qualifications
Maha	Working on online orders	Married	3 years	Low	Bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies
Mona	Supervisor and accountant	Single	2 years	Low	Bachelor's degree in Business Administration
Hind	Employer and HR manager	Single	---	High	Bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management

The data were collected in interviews with the HR manager and her female employees. There was no possibility of undertaking observations, because permission was not given. However, I was allowed to take photographs of the workplace.

5.3.2 Nitaqat and the Challenge of Employing Female Labour in the Firm's Workplace

Nitaqat has opened up opportunities for Saudi women to work in the retail sector in small businesses where, prior to Nitaqat, there were no female Saudis working. Therefore, this theme is important for understanding the position of a small firm in the retail sector, with regard to the new employment of women. The employment of female staff in this firm came about as the result of the Nitaqat opportunity, which supports Saudi women working, helping them to participate, and share their ideas and creativity in the retail sector. Hind talked about this as a positive experience and described the opportunities that female employment had opened up for her company:

I have really benefitted from the Nitaqat quotas; there are lots of Saudi women and also, their creativity is high! I see the concept of Nitaqat contributing to the Saudi labour market.

However, despite Nitaqat creating job opportunities in the retail sector, it is claimed by some that these jobs are still low paid in relation to the qualifications possessed by

potential female employees. Mona, expressed her concerns over the levels of jobs that were available to qualified women like herself:

I graduated from university with the same skills as the men have, but men have higher level jobs and more opportunities, compared to women who have the same level of skill in the Saudi labour market.

This further indicates that despite the work opportunities, there are limitations on women holding high level positions, but in this particular company, few of the jobs are at a high level. Irrespective of this, it should be emphasised that Hind employs women because of their skills and not just to fill a gap. She consequently expressed her objections to the practice of making fake Saudization claims:

Our firm doesn't need to resort to fake Saudization, because we are fully satisfied with female Saudi employees. I see that fake Saudization is illegal; however, there are challenges in finding women who can accept to work in the shop, because of Saudi culture. Family permission is important in Saudi culture. Families create barriers to women working in the shop, because of the mixed working environment.

Therefore, Hind pointed out that most of the issues faced regarding female employment concerned allowing women to work in a mixed-gender environment. She related her personal experience of the traditional, patriarchal values of family authority over women, which she has encountered while employing female Saudi staff:

There was one female candidate, she was well qualified and had high skills in marketing. She came to the shop and she saw the workplace environment, but after that she refused to work here because of her family. When her father learnt that she would be communicating with male employees on the ground floor, this created a problem. I have faced a lot of these issues with female employment, because the open workplace environment is still unacceptable in Saudi society and this is the most challenging situation I face with female employment.

Patriarchal and traditional values limit Saudi women. However, policies can change quickly, but fundamental cultural and traditional values generate the sense of an invisible institution, which controls the female to male relationship. Nevertheless, for female staff who prefer not to communicate with male employees or customers, a female supervisor is employed by this firm to serve as a mediator with men, if a female employee is unwilling to communicate with male colleagues or customers.

The nature of the female employees' jobs includes preparing orders, checking the shop's requirements, accounting, and customer service – if customers need to talk to a staff member, there is one day a week dedicated to customer service activities. The women's work is more deskbound, which they prefer, as explained by Mona:

I feel good in the workplace environment; we have offices and a good workplace environment. Honestly, if my work was only to communicate with customers and in reception, I would not accept to work here.

The day-to-day customer service and selling to customers visiting the shop, however, is undertaken by foreign workers; limiting the need for the female staff to communicate directly with the general public.

The female workplace is in the shop itself. Therefore, it is considered as a mixed-gender customer environment. On the shop premises, the women have a private section on Floor 1, where the HR manager's office is located. However, most of the HR manager's time is spent away from the shop. The foreign workers often come to this floor to collect merchandise and customer orders, but they do not pass the female section. Therefore, it is optional for the women to wear the hijab, because they have their own private section with facilities such as a private toilet and coffee-making facilities. Figures 19 and 20 show the product storage area, which is on the same floor as the female employees' workplace.



Figure 19: Floor 1/storage and female employees' workspace



Figure 20: Condition of the female employees' room

The concept of a private room provides a space for female employees to discuss their work with each other, and in particular, with the supervisor. This shows flexibility in the relationship between the owner (Hind), the supervisor and the employees. Mona, the supervisor, commented:

...in our room we cooperate and discuss our work, and I'm happy to be with my colleagues in the same room.

Maha also declared that she was satisfied with the experience of working in the same room as her supervisor:

I feel good in the workplace environment because I don't like working under pressure, and here there is flexibility with the supervisor.

These comments reveal flexibility and staff satisfaction in this workplace, which underlines the positive influence on the progression of the work. This theme tells us that the employment of women under Nitaqat represented an opportunity for this firm, but there were still challenges, regarding family acceptance of women working in a mixed-gender environment.

5.3.3 HR Management of Female Labour

This theme illustrates the HR management of female employees in the firm. Hind stressed the importance of Mona's role as an employee working in the shop, while at the same time supervising the other female employees in the same section. As the supervisor, Mona assists Hind with management functions and Mona confirmed her role in communicating with Hind:

Yes, yes, honestly Hind, who is the employer, communicates with me about everything; she offered a phone to me, for work, to communicate with her directly.

As Hind travels most of the time, in her absence, Mona's role is important for keeping Hind up to date with any issues regarding the company's female employees. Furthermore, communication also takes place through regular meetings. Here, it should be noted that flexibility in communication and responsibilities form part of the supervisor's role.

With regard to gender culture, since the owner of this firm is female, it would appear from the data that this had impacted on the experiences of the female staff and the flexibility of the workplace. Hind understood that there are some female Saudis who avoid communicating with men in the workplace. As a consequence, for any work issues, the supervisor acts as mediator between these women and male employees or any other men in the workplace. Maha explained the importance of having a female supervisor at work to accommodate the requirements of Saudi gender culture:

I communicate through my supervisor, Mona, or my HR manager; I don't communicate with any men, because my husband won't allow me to communicate with any.

Furthermore, the supervisor's role is important to the firm in terms of helping to solve any work-related problems, with no need to contact the management. Mona explained her contribution to the firm:

I contribute here as I'm the one who links the employees with the management and that helps the manager. If she is busy, she doesn't need to come here and check, because there is a supervisor. Also, if a mistake is made in work, I can communicate with the management. However, most of the mistakes I resolve myself and I don't need to communicate with the management about them!

For example, when there are customer complaints, the supervisor resolves these directly. In this firm, the management's flexibility in giving Mona the authority to make decisions in the workplace has not only built her confidence for solving problems relating to employees, but may have also impacted on her personal and professional development. This means that there is enhanced empowerment in her workplace, in that she is allowed to

make changes in the firm by developing the range of products on offer, and sharing her creative ideas with other female employees to present new things in the gift shop.

In short, the ultimate aim of this firm's management is flexibility, rather than implementing strict policies, as Hind explained:

I was working before and I know that stress in the workplace will make female employees uncomfortable in their work... I'm looking for contributions and progress rather than a stricter system and at the same time, creating a balance in the management of the work they do.

A concrete example of flexibility at work may be seen in the working hours. Hind considers that a focus on female achievement, rather than being strict about working hours, helps women make a more effective contribution at work. For example, a female employee dealing with online orders was meant to work for eight hours, but Hind allowed her to work for two hours at the shop and spend the remaining six hours working at home, as her job related to online orders, where there is no need for her to work long hours in the office. Another example of flexibility refers to the working days; if a female employee cannot work her normal days for any reason that is acceptable to the management, she can work on the weekend instead. Hind considers that:

Flexibility with female employees, so that they have space in work, will not affect their work progress.

As already mentioned previously, the management's focus is more on achievement than on timekeeping for female employees, which is managed with a fingerprint system. Hind explained that there was no problem if a female employee was absent or delayed, since this had no effect on the progress of the work, because another employee could continue with it. Maha stressed the firm's flexibility over working hours, her experience having attested that:

The management is very, very flexible with us regarding working hours. If an urgent situation occurs, or if I can't come into work, they are very flexible

The data suggest that the most important focus in this firm is productivity. This is seen in the recruitment and selection of female employees. Hind is looking for skills, rather than just employing women to fill jobs. She considers that

Skills (creativity) are 80% important for female employment in the shop.

This view is supported by Maha:

I have my qualifications and I have knowledge of marketing, which only helps me in my work here... the management employed me not just for my qualification... but

also for my skills regarding the nature of the job.

What emerges from the data is that female employees are selected to support the firm's productivity and reduce staff turnover. The nature of these jobs does not demand high qualifications, but rather specific capabilities in terms of commitment and personal skills, bringing new ideas to the shop; for example, in the product display. Furthermore, in the face-to-face job interviews, conducted by Hind, the firm's management policy and job requirements are explained clearly to the candidates. Maha described her own experience:

The interview was clear and explained what I should do in the job, the firm's policy and the training period of two weeks before officially starting. I signed the official employment contract.

The firm's pre-employment training policy provides an opportunity for the female employees to understand the nature of the job and workplace, thus reducing the risk of high staff turnover. This process influences female employees' decisions as to whether they are happy to continue working officially in the shop.

I had an official interview with Hind and she explained the work required for my job in the firm, and asked me if I could do it or not... after I agreed to work, she gave me a two-week training period. I left a previous job and came here, after I felt it was a more appropriate workplace environment. I feel happy communicating with female employees here. In the training period, I felt that I could work here, and 'Alhumduallah', I left my previous job. (Mona)

The evidence suggests that Hind has benefitted from the Saudi quotas opening up female employment in small retail firms. This signifies a positive view of female employees by the company's management. However:

The only challenge I face in the employment of women is finding qualified females who are prepared to work in the mixed environment; their family may prevent them from working here, because they don't allow them to communicate with male employees or male customers. (Hind)

Moreover, there are other challenges to female employment that are associated with Saudi society, its gender culture, and Saudi law, such as working night shifts in the firm. Here, there may be difficulties for female staff with domestic responsibilities. In managing the issue of female Saudi employees working nights, the firm's official working hours are eight hours per day. However, there is some flexibility exercised for female employees, who can work just five hours to avoid working late (because the official working hours are from 2.00 p.m. to 10 p.m.). Thus, the women start work in the morning (from 9.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.), before the official working hours. Overall, there is considerable flexibility with the female employees, which helps reduce the challenges posed for women the workplace

at night.

In addition, it should be emphasized that the Najim firm appears to promote a sense of trust for its female employees in the workplace, and respects their privacy, as they are not monitored.

The camera is on the ground floor, where the foreign workers are; there is no camera on the first floor in the female section. (Hind)

This further demonstrates that Hind is looking for the female employees' contribution, without subjecting them to pressure from excessively controlling management. Regarding the monitoring of female staff, she claimed that:

The firm is small and there is no need to observe the female staff via a camera... if there is any shortfall, it will be easily found.

The firm's management also seems to motivate the women at work; for example, with a reward system. If a female employee produces high sales figures, the manager rewards her financially, in order to motivate the employees to work more effectively. Hind provides an example of the high sales produced by the employee responsible for online sales:

The female employee who works online, when the online sales increased, we give her a percentage of the sales made by the firm. This made a big difference, and it increased her percentages... she was happy, even though it took more time than her officially required hours, but in turn, she received a financial reward based on the sales made.

The financial reward offered by the management was because the female employee made a remarkable contribution to the firm. Maha gave an idea of her contribution to the firm:

...from 20,000 to 50,000 from online sales and this is based on my efforts...

It demonstrates the positive influence of female employees on the firm's sales progress, resulting in the women feeling a sense of achievement, with increased motivation and a sense of success and self-worth. The female employees were happy to work extra hours to increase sales, as a result of this motivation, which in turn also provides them with financial rewards. Interestingly, Hind explicitly referred to the overall contribution made by her female staff:

Female employees can't be assessed, if they make remarkable contributions in just four years, which is length of time this firm has been operating, because it is market-based and different economic situations have passed, based on customers and demand, but generally, they make a positive contribution to the firm.

However, Hind realises the need for training programmes and more facilities for female

employees, in order to invest in their skills. However, it is difficult to conduct training programmes within the firm's limited capabilities:

...there is no training programme, because the firm has only been operating for four years and programmes are expensive, but there is a plan to do this in future!

The women's jobs are low paid, but Hind considers that

''it is not a bad salary, SR3500 to SR4000''

The employment of Saudi citizens costs a firm more than hiring foreign labour, due to the fact that Saudis require higher salaries. This is counted as a challenge to small firms employ more Saudis.

In summary, this firm reflects a positive managerial response towards women in the workplace with a focus on investing in female employees and offering flexibility within its capabilities, as the women are regarded as a source of value.

5.3.4 The Experiences of Female Employees in the Najim Firm

This theme is important for illustrating the female employees' experiences of working in the firm. It is worth noting here that although the female employees working in the firm have educational qualifications (they are university graduates) and have previous work experience, they are employed in low-paid jobs. Working in the retail sector is new for female employees, but this provides jobs, albeit low paid, and it provides them with experience. Maha considered this job as temporary, because she is looking for a more secure position. However, it is evident from the previous theme that the female employees considered flexibility and good management to be important for determining their continuing commitment.

5.3.4.1 The Positive Impact of Female Managers on Female Employees

The flexibility of the female manager in the current Case has ensured that the female employees are satisfied with their workplace, generating and maintaining a high level of commitment to their work and the firm. Maha stressed that:

Despite this being a low-paid job and even if I find a job with a higher salary but inflexible management, I will choose to work here, because of the company's flexibility.

Moreover, there is a notably high level of confidence in the workplace, because the female employees take part in decision-making. There is also a high level of flexibility regarding

their working hours and they can decide what suits them best; setting their own schedule, in order to finish their specified tasks. As such, the female employees felt that there was a high level of trust place in them by the management, as demonstrated by Mona:

In the short period since I first came here, the HR manager has given me responsibility and trust... she has given me freedom over how I work, and this means she trusts me and appreciates my work.

Moreover, the management style can elicit job satisfaction amongst female employees in a firm and become a possible source of job commitment. In this Case, the female employees had such a sense of satisfaction, as the management enabled them to make decisions. Therefore, these Saudi female employees were applying their creativity at work under flexible management. In Saudi society, women have limited opportunities to communicate with others, but in this firm, their work experiences encouraged and supported them to build communication skills with customers. Mona related her own experience:

...from work, I got experience of how to deal with customers; I didn't have these skills before working here... now I can even solve problems for customers...

Maha's experience had also been positive:

I've been working here for two years; I have learned how to communicate socially with people. Previously, I didn't have these communication skills, and I was unable to deal with different types of people.

Communication skills with customers are important for retail management, because this sector depends on customer satisfaction. It was clear in this firm that the female employees could deal with different types of customer and keep them satisfied. Furthermore, the data clearly indicate that the female employees were ambitious in their work and wanted to build their skills for the future, possibly in their own businesses.

Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that the female employees were dissatisfied with their low salaries, in relation to the progress that they had made in their work.

Mona stated that:

the Nitaqat programme has opened the door for jobs but the salaries are low...

This inhibited the women's ambition to work in the private sector. Interestingly, despite the female employees feeling confident and trusted by their management, the data show that the women's future ambitions involved attaining a higher position than their current, low-paid jobs. Mona asserted that:

I don't want to be here in the future in this position, not because I'm not satisfied at

all; I'm satisfied in this job; however, it will not be my job for life!

The participants had wider ambitions, with a desire for more responsibility in future, as Maha commented:

Honestly, I have ambitions to work in a better job...umm... a private business, or being a partner or employer, but not to be responsible for the whole firm; it is very difficult, I want to be a part of the management.

Nevertheless, the experiences of the female employees in this firm indicate a high level of trust and flexibility awarded to them as staff. Therefore, although, these were low-paid jobs, the women enjoyed a positive workplace environment. However, lack of promotional opportunities in the firm made them want to seek higher positions than their current job, regardless of the friendly and considerate management.

5.3.5 Conclusion

In this case study, it was found that the female employees were treated as an important and valuable resource for Najim to make commercial progress. The evidence generated by this case study shows that Nitaqat had opened doors for female employees to gain skills in the retail sector, where Saudi society had previously refused to allow female employment in small retail companies. Facilitated by Nitaqat, it is becoming more socially acceptable for Saudi women to work in mixed-gender environments. In the present case, the issue of the mixed-gender environment had been addressed by the management's efforts to maintain a private section for the female employees and female supervisor. However, this case also revealed notable challenges, presented by the gender culture, which discourages female talent in the workplace.

The evidence from the data indicates that the management's flexibility over working hours is insightful, as it promoted commitment among the female employees. However, the firm had low capacity to develop its HR practices, given its small size and relatively short time of operation – just four years. The HR manager/owner's methods of exerting authority over the female employees highlights the importance and positive impact of the female HR manager's role in the management of women, as a means of empowering them in the workplace. Moreover, the women in this firm enjoyed friendly relations with the management based on a high level of trust and confidence, which sustained their commitment in the workplace. Moreover, the participants' experiences revealed a high level of satisfaction with their management's communication practices. Regarding their job status, however, this was still low-paid work, with few opportunities for progress or self-

improvement.

This case study shares some common findings with the Alkabda Case; both reveal opportunities for female employees to work in sectors that they were excluded from, prior to Nitaqat. Furthermore, the participants had witnessed some personal development by working in a mixed-gender environment and gaining inspiration for future professional improvement. However, in the Najim firm, the influence of female managers was found to offer advantages to female employees, with more respect from the management for their privacy, and some informal flexibility over working hours. This may have been due to the owner/employer being female. Moreover, the size of this company made communication easier, with the general perception that female employment is an incentive and an opportunity, not merely a means of approaching Nitaqat compliance by feminising the Alkabda firm.

Aside from the above, the high level of trust afforded to the female employees in the Najim firm, with faith in their workplace commitment, was in stark contrast to the Alkabda firm, where there was high staff turnover, because of the management's inflexibility towards female staff. Nevertheless, in both Cases, these jobs were considered low paid, and were previously filled by foreign workers. Overall, however, the evidence strongly indicates a shift in attitudes within Saudi society towards women working in a mixed-gender environment. This has given women opportunities to work in places that were previously inaccessible to them and has enhanced their role in the Saudi labour market, although there are still challenges regarding family acceptance of the employment of female relatives.

5.4. The Marouj Firm - Construction Sector (Medium-sized Firm)

5.4.1 Background to the Marouj Firm

The Marouj firm is in the construction sector, specifically in the building business. It was founded since 2006 in Riyadh, and originally employed 100% male staff. Prior to Nitaqat, it was not permitted to employ females in the construction sector, but since Nitaqat was introduced, Marouj has opened a new section for female employees.

The management of female employees takes place via a male HR manager, who claims that the women's jobs are administrative in nature. One female employee, referred to her as 'Fatima', works with the firm's account payment system for projects. The other two female staff members also work in roles with management titles, which do not correspond to their actual job status in information systems. Deem's work involves entering data into a

system for the firm's project management program, while Hala's job is to prepare employees' files for the HR manager, including information on employees' status and personal information. However, most of the time, Deem and Hala have nothing to do. In terms of their official working hours, designed to accommodate women's domestic responsibilities, Deem and Hala are in the workplace for six hours a day, compared to eight hours for their male counterparts.

The building in which the firm is based has a separate female section with its own entrance, which is in line with the requirements of Saudi' Arabia's gender-segregated culture. This section contains facilities such as a desk for each employee, computers and a toilet. There is no face-to-face communication with male employees, although there is communication with men when staff was 'mixed' at official meetings.

5.4.2 Profiles of the Marouj Case Study Participants

Table 7 provides a profile of each participant who agreed to be interviewed. All names are fictitious, in order to maintain anonymity.

Table 7: Profile of the Marouj Participants

Name of Participant	Role of Participant	Marital Status	Social Status of Job	Duration of Employment in Current Firm	Qualifications
Fatima	Accountant	Married	Medium	2 years	Bachelor's degree in Accounting
Deem	Information systems analyst	Single	Low	2 years	Bachelor's degree in Computing
Hala	Administration	Married	Low	3 years	Bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies
Mohamad (Male)	HR manager	Married	High	8 years	Bachelor's degree in Business Administration

The data were collected through interviews with HR managers and female employees.

Observations were not conducted, because no permission to do so was granted by this firm.

5.4.3 Nitaqat and the Challenge of Employing Female Labour in the Marouj Firm's Workplace

As explained earlier in this chapter, the Nitaqat programme has opened up opportunities for Saudi women in sectors of the labour market that were previously dominated by males. Thus, this theme is important for understanding female employment under Nitaqat and its influence on a company in the construction sector. Evidence shows that previously, qualified women found it difficult to work in the private sector. However, following the incentives provided by Nitaqat to encourage the employment of female Saudis, more job opportunities have opened up. Fatima, currently employed as an accountant at Marouj, explained her situation:

I graduated in Accounting in 2010, but I didn't find an appropriate job. The employment of women is difficult in the private sector.

However, the type of jobs provided as a result of Nitaqat remain low paid, with long working hours for women. Deem highlighted the issue of low-level jobs for women, created under the Nitaqat programme, giving her view of the situation:

Even though Nitaqat provides jobs. My working here provides a low salary and a very low-level job - entering data into a computer, arranging files, etc.

However, in her accounting job, despite its low pay, there was a financial bonus for Fatima, and she was treated differently from her colleagues, because she worked with the firm's most important projects. This will be discussed further under the theme relating to women's experiences in this case study workplace.

At Marouj, women are merely employed to ensure the firm's survival and fill the gap in the quotas with low-paid jobs to meet the Nitaqat requirements. The data suggest that jobs in the construction sector are considered more suitable for men (a 'masculine sector') and from a managerial perspective, this could explain why female employees are placed in low-paid jobs, given the lack of opportunities for women to work in the construction sector. In turn, highly skilled female personnel usually refuse to take low-paid jobs and seek higher positions. Mohamad, the HR manager, described the impact of Nitaqat on female employment in his terms, and in relation to the Marouj firm:

Female employees who want to work don't have the experience needed for the work and women who have the experience want higher salaries than the men. Nitaqat doesn't provide the qualified women required in work, such as in HR management,

and if they are available, they want a high salary! This firm is medium-sized and can't pay them high salaries!

It is notable from the data that the employment of women with no previous work experience is a matter of concern, as expressed by Deem:

Nitaqat has enforced the employment of women who don't have any experience in the labour market, with no preparation... the employment has been random!

the study data suggest that female employment at Marouj was merely to fill a job gap so that the Nitaqat requirements could be met, thereby further demonstrating the challenge facing the construction sector, which previously depended on male foreign workers. Following Nitaqat, there was a lack of male Saudis who would accept to work in low-paid jobs, resulting in the employment of women to fill this lacuna. However, Mohamad claimed that these female employees lacked skills, which implies that the firm was not prepared for female employment. Moreover, this lack of preparedness could be the cause of high staff turnover amongst the female staff in the firm. It should be noted here that the Saudi Ministry of Labour did not allow sufficient time for firms to understand and prepare for the Nitaqat programme. Thus, Nitaqat created financial problems when first implemented in the private sector, which Mohamed explained:

Nitaqat created financial issues for the firm, because we had to dismiss foreign workers and employ Saudis. It presents challenges to the firm, in terms of implementing certain points in the policy, based on expectations, like working hours, salary.

In practice, Nitaqat places pressure on employers and customers who are most affected by it. There is the issue of preparing separate sections for female staff, in order to meet the requirements of Saudi Arabia's highly gender-segregated culture. Consequently, women must have gender privacy in the workplace, with their own work areas, separate from men. This demand has elevated costs for firms, related to building sectioned facilities. However, Mohamad declared that when preparing the female section, high cost was avoided:

After Nitaqat, all firms had to offer privacy for female employees. However, we are lucky, because we already had a separate section for foreign workers before Nitaqat and we just employed females in this section.

Despite the low position occupied by the female staff, due to the limited number of jobs for women, Hala referred to the positive changes that had taken place for women in the Saudi labour market:

I'm happy with this opportunity for us; now we can work in different firms and sectors that we were not allowed to work in before. Also, I'm happy that they allow female employees, who don't have a high level of education and need jobs, to work

and have a salary, regardless of the low level of the job.

In light of the above, there are inspection tours conducted by the Saudi Ministry of Labour to check firms' Saudization status and verify that Saudi nationals are officially employed within them. Thus, it is necessary to employ women to fill the quotas. Mohamad explicitly stated his antipathy towards employing women in this sector:

In fact, before Nitaqat, we were not willing to employ women, because construction is a male sector and not for women! Furthermore, I want to say that the employment of women, which started after 2011, is to fill gaps. These quotas have created problems and influenced women and society. Firms were not prepared for female employment or to provide the training needed, because Nitaqat was implemented at very short notice...

Employing women instead of men, solely as a means of filling a job gap, further reinforces the HR manager's view that jobs that are unsuitable for women result in low priority being given to female improvement. The following comment by Deem clarifies this situation:

I think the firm has avoided opening a female section, because it wants to make improvements to female employees. I feel they employed us just to fill job quota gaps... there is no clear plan or work! (Deem)

The above comment seems to indicate that female employees are hired purely to fulfil the Nitaqat quota, which implies that the firm is in some way patriarchal.

The construction sector faced challenges in offering positions to Saudi nationals, especially in the area of low-paid work, leading some firms to engage in fake Saudization. Mohamad asserted that fake Saudization is a result of the aggressive Nitaqat requirement to employ Saudis at all costs, and his comment reveals that fake Saudization occurs in his firm.

We are engaging in fake Saudization with one female employee... there is a Nitaqat inspection tour, but it is conducted by men; we don't face inspections in the female section. I don't think the Saudi Ministry of Labour knows that firms are faking Saudization and they let them do it, because it is really a pressure for the construction sector. A lot of firms have been closed because of Nitaqat.

The data reveal an interesting point made about fake Saudization in the construction sector, which Mohamad acknowledges is illegal. However, the Saudi Ministry of Labour were aware that it was taking place at Marouj, but took no action, due to the difficulties in finding Saudis who were prepared to work in the construction sector. Moreover, the Nitaqat requirement to employ women meant that some low-paid jobs were given to women, particularly in the construction sector.

5.4.4 HR Management of Female Labour

This theme emerged from the data and it is aimed at understanding the management of enforced female employment under the Nitaqat requirements.

In the recruitment and selection of female employees, the firm's management clarified the nature of the job, during the interviews with female candidates, in order to try and reduce the risk of staff turnover amongst female employees. Moreover, during the interview process, the manager was careful to inform the female candidate that there was a private section for women, but official staff meetings would be mixed. Thus, prospective female employees needed to be aware that they would sometimes have to communicate with male employees face-to-face in meetings. The reason for this clarification in the interview was to test the female applicants' acceptance to work in this type of workplace environment, where there are also male employees and managers, in some cases. Fatima, an accountant, stated that she knew about the firm's workplace before becoming an employee:

I had an interview face-to-face; the manager explained to me the nature of the job, and with training, I like the work. Also, he asked me if it is acceptable for me to attend mixed meetings conducted monthly in the firm, and I said it was fine with me and I have no problem with mixed meetings.

During her interview, and before being employed, Fatima knew that the firm's work environment was mixed gender in meeting rooms. However, one woman was employed, based purely on family connections, without interview. Concern was expressed by Mohamad about the challenge of finding qualified female employees. There had previously been poor experiences with female employees, as they had lacked skills and left after a short period.

We employed women in managerial jobs. We have previous experience with Saudi women, but they are no longer in the firm. Some of them were very young and freshly graduated. They didn't even know how to write reports or have computer skills. We tried to teach them many times. Thus, the step we took was to concentrate on male employees, who have experience and have trained for years. We are like other firms. There are Saudi females employed for Nitaqat, but there is no job created for them. We now employ some Saudi women based on their qualifications in Accounting, and foreigners in Architecture. The others have work writing reports, but overall, we won't succeed with large numbers of female Saudis.

It is worth emphasising here that Mohamad refers to female positions as 'administrative jobs'. It is shown that their roles are low level, serving as assistants in administrative jobs, which include writing reports for managers. It may be noted from the data that there is no preparatory training programme for the development of female employees' skills. This

suggests low priority given by the management to training programmes for female employees.

The evidence gathered in this study gave key insights into the firm's management of female employees. Marouj exercises a flexible policy with regard to domestic responsibilities, which was detailed by Mohamad:

We are flexible with women's working hours. They work from 8.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m. However, the official working hours are from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. We are flexible with them, because they have family responsibilities.

The data indicate that the flexibility in working hours comes from the firm's policy, as there is no policy imposed by the Saudi Ministry of Labour regarding working hours for women. For instance, it was identified in this study that the firm focuses on work achievement rather than working hours. Therefore, if the female employees have completed their work, there is no strict requirement for them to stay in the workplace. However, this flexibility did not apply to the male employees, who were obliged to stay at work for the full official working hours.

Female attendance is managed purely through fingerprint recognition. However, there is some flexibility permitted in their working hours, as their male colleagues can undertake tasks in their absence. Furthermore, the data imply that the role of women in the firm is less important, given that the manager depends on male employees to complete their work, thereby allowing for the flexibility afforded to the female employees. The drawback of this is that while the female employees felt satisfied with the flexibility, they feel less trusted and less valued by the management, because they were not given any responsibilities in the workplace and were kept in very low-level jobs. Mohamad confessed to this reliance on male employees in the workplace as:

the presence of women in the firm doesn't increase anything for the firm. As I said, this place is for male employees.

The above constitutes a further demonstration of the HR manager's negative attitude to female employment in the construction sector, with the claim that jobs in this sector are for men, not women. Furthermore, regarding flexibility, there is no need to monitor female staff, because the female section is separate from the male sections. Thus, the work of female employees is assessed through their performance, not timekeeping.

Mohamad emphasised that there are just three female employees in the female section, and they are under his management and supervision:

In monitoring the women, there is a phone and their performance, but observing the women in their section? No. I give them work and they have to complete it. If not, this means there is a problem, but I can't see them face-to-face, because their section is separate from ours.

Communication with the female employees takes place via telephone and their time-keeping is monitored using a fingerprint system. However, regarding their communication with male employees, Mohamad continued:

In the beginning, I was monitoring female employees very strictly; I was clarifying over the phone. For example, they were not allowed to communicate with male employees, just the contact number given to them by the manager on the firm's 'internal line' and I also informed male employees that if they had any inquiries, they should contact me first! (Mohamad)

This situation reveals a gender-segregated culture, where the authority lies with men; thereby limiting the female employees' freedom to communicate with their male colleagues who are experienced in the construction sector. Such a situation inhibits the crossover of knowledge and sharing of experience, ultimately impacting on job performance and progression. Moreover, in an industry that values masculinity, men have an advantage just because they are male. Additionally, although the female employees were in low-paid jobs, their salary was based on their qualifications and skills, as clarified by Mohamad:

The salary is dependent on the job and differs based on the job role, qualification and successful completion of the three-month training period. The salary is up to SR5000⁹, whereas the minimum wage is SR3000.

However, the evidence shows that the job roles for women were limited in this firm, and there were challenges for female employees in the construction sector in general. Mohamad emphasised:

We are unable to improve women's positions, because our work in the construction sector is rather limited to men... for example, [women] can't go away for field work, because of the nature of the job and that is not appropriate for Saudi women in Saudi society (night shifts, contractors, etc.), so they can only be employed in easy jobs, which anyone can do... administrative jobs.

Nevertheless, despite women being allocated administrative jobs, the data suggest a lack of trust in their work in this firm. Mohamad considered that:

The administrative job demands hard work, and the women are less specialised in management and human resources, but we have to employ women in the female section, as part of our human resources. However, the electronic management programs from the Ministry of Labour help a lot, which means that female employees should be able to help me in work. For example, I told one to give me the

⁹ SR5000=£1,013.57

file for an employee whose visa ends in October... but the women can't concentrate very well and are slow in understanding work processes.

Mohamad's negative comment suggests that female employment in the firm is purely for the sake of Nitaqat compliance and has brought few benefits to the company. This theme reveals the attitudes of the management at Marouj and provides the insight that female employment has not affected the firm's performance. However, the management awards low priority to the development of female employees, due to the belief that in the construction sector, men are more experienced and skilled, and therefore of greater benefit to the firm.

5.4.5 The Experiences of Female Employees in the Marouj Firm

The purpose of this theme is to understand the experiences of female employees with the management at Marouj; outlining their experience of work and its challenges in the firm. Despite Mohamad's claim that from a managerial perspective, no progress has been made as a result of female employment, the fact if women working for the firm has helped expand women's employment opportunities. The data suggest that having women working at Marouj, even in low-paid jobs, can develop their general skills in a private-sector workplace. Deem suggested:

Work experience here will open up opportunities for women in the future.

Furthermore, through their achievements at work, for example in accounting, it was found in this study that some women participated in sensitive international projects, thereby developing a sense of responsibility. It should therefore be highlighted that Nitaqat has positively influenced the position of women in Saudi society, not just regarding family responsibilities, but also in terms of establishing a place of significance for women in a wider sphere. Fatima's experience in her current work attests to this:

I feel confident and developed communication skills. Now, female employees with a job have a good position between family and society.

Furthermore, the evidence collected in this study indicates that positive changes are taking place in women's personal development through their everyday working lives:

After working here, my personality changed a lot. I can see more growth in my personality, in terms of communicating with different people. I've learned a lot of information in work. I am also practicing with computer and information systems in the workplace, which has developed my skills and contributed to me positively! (Deem)

Notable insights have been gained into society, which limits women in the workplace. In

terms of participating in a sector that was previously limited to men, these opportunities demonstrate a degree of gender equality. Fatima's self-confidence was evidenced by her view that:

I feel the same as my husband, at the same level; my thinking has even changed after being in work.

The change that has taken place in Saudi society, with women being permitted to work in the same firms as males, is further reinforced by evidence that Saudi women can now communicate with men; a change illustrated by Hala's experience:

My views on life have changed. My communication with men in our society has become clearer and I understand them. My personality has completely changed; I was shy about communicating with men before, but now I'm very strong, I have a strong personality, and I'm confident. I have changed a lot. I was not ambitious before, but after working, I've changed; I see myself as deserving more and more.

Furthermore, in such a society that has been strongly dependent on men, females are gaining a sense of freedom and independence. Deem commented that:

I feel I'm a person who is responsible and depends on myself

Some of the female employees were also ambitious and wished to advance in their current job roles. In the construction sector, however, there are clearly concerns that career progression for female employees is inhibited, further demonstrating managerial views of female employment.

5.4.5.1 The Limiting Impact of Male Managers on the Development of Female Employees

As this firm has a high degree of male authority, the male management limits female development and female sources of power in the workplace. Although women are accruing work experience and developing themselves, there are boundaries to limit their progress in the workplace. This situation is illustrated by Fatima's experience:

There was a man who was employed in Accounting over a year after me and he has become better than me and had more skills than me, because he was with employees with previous experience in the firm, not just asking [questions] over the phone! Phone communication isn't enough, and I can't call every time and get a response... if I need to meet in the meeting room, it is difficult to access it every time, because there is only one meeting room in the firm!

The firm's communication system has therefore contributed to slowing the progress of female employees in obtaining skills and accessing professional development opportunities. It is evident that the male employees do not have the same restrictions

imposed upon them as the female employees who seek to improve in their work. However, the strict rules governing communication between male and female employees makes female improvement difficult.

I really want to improve my skills, but there are boundaries. For example, if the manager asks me to give a financial statement over the phone, I can't learn and understand! I can't understand anything! Especially in Accounting, it is difficult, unless there is paperwork with a male employee, and we can share together. Even though I graduated from university in Accounting, I need to gain experience at work!
(Fatima)

This situation raises a notable issue regarding male dominance and its impact on female communication in the firm, which limits female employees' progress in the workplace, since they have fewer opportunities to learn and communicate with male employees. Furthermore, the women's experiences suggest that even a woman who is qualified in accounting will find it challenging to improve herself, because of the firm's boundaries and limitations. Mohamad's concerns over the difficulty in finding qualified female staff are consequently not solely based on the low salaries paid for these jobs, but also on the lack of opportunities for women to progress in these jobs.

This, gender separation in the workplace presents a serious challenge for female employees and Deem's thoughts on this issue paint a clear picture:

The female section is completely separate from the men's sections. They don't care about our improvement; they don't feel like we are all in one firm! The environment doesn't let me communicate with men in the firm, which reduces my opportunity to learn and gain work experience from the men!

Her views support the notion that female employment merely serves to fill job gaps, with low priority given to female improvement. Furthermore, Hala pointed out:

We don't have training programmes in the firm; there is no improvement for female employees.

The lack of training programmes to support women's upward progression in their careers results in them staying at the same level. It is evident from the data that the jobs given to women are administrative jobs. However, claims were made that the job title does not match the actual work. Hala provided an example of the nature of her job:

We work in low-paid administrative jobs. In reality, there is no serious work! It has happened sometimes that no paperwork was received at work for a whole day!

She added that:

There is no work that I'm responsible for; there is no work under my name. In the

current job, the manager gives me the task of arranging papers and doing something that anyone can do. They should respect my experience... I see this job as temporary, temporary from my heart!

This situation illustrates how the women feel that they are not really contributing in the workplace, and that their work is beneath what they are actually capable of. Therefore, there is a lack of respect for their skills. If this situation of low-quality jobs and poor management is allowed to continue, the turnover of female employees will continue at Marouj. Moreover, the salary presented a challenge for the female employees. Hala, who has completed two years in the firm, claimed that:

since I've worked here until now, the salary has been the same, no increase.

Fatima, however, expressed her satisfaction with the salary:

I have an increase in my salary each year; an 'annual reward' for accountancy employees and I'm the only female accountant among three male accountants... Also, I asked my manager to increase my salary and he increased it for me only... and he told me, 'Don't tell your colleagues'. This is because I work hard, and the rest of the female employees spend most of their time with no work!

Fatima's satisfaction with her salary, despite the lack of improvement in her job position, may be related to the fact that she is a qualified accountant and her work is more beneficial to the firm.

In terms of working hours, female employees at Marouj work six instead of the eight hours that officially make up the firm's working day. This indicates flexibility on the part of the management, regarding female as opposed to male employees. These flexible working hours are of value to female employees, as they help them meet their personal family commitments. Fatima emphasised that her priority was her family, rather her job:

I will not accept a better job with a higher salary and lose my family

Moreover, some women, due to their domestic responsibilities, have refused jobs, as Deem explained:

I've refused jobs in the private sector, because of the long working hours - working until 5.00 p.m., which is impossible for me!

However, despite this flexibility, the challenges over gaining work experience and poor management appeared to have a significant influence on the participants' job satisfaction, as Deem explained:

I'm fine with the flexible working hours, but I spend most of my time here with no work!

This theme suggests that this firm's female employees have autonomy at work but are only hired for low-paid jobs. Their general feeling is that the workplace is a more male-friendly environment, despite the fact that their job titles place them at substantial management level. The flexible working hours motivate them, but their commitment takes second place to their domestic responsibilities.

5.4.6 Conclusion

This case study has shown a compliance-based approach to female employment. It was revealed by the data collected from the participants that Marouj is less dependent on female than on male employees, and male managers have authority over these female employees, who are placed at a disadvantage, regarding their empowerment in the workplace. The data also indicate that the construction sector is male-dominated, which influences the style of HR management. The expectation is that employees in this industry should be male. However, the enforcement of Nitaqat has imposed an obligation to employ women merely to fill jobs, rather than them being of value in the workplace.

Aside from the above, the issue of segregation and strict rules about communicating with male colleagues creates a vacuum for female employees, with regard to making progress in the workplace. It appears that little or no effort is made by the management at Marouj to encourage female advancement in the firm. Notwithstanding the above, Nitaqat has had some positive influence on female employment in the construction sector. For example, in this firm, Nitaqat has contributed to a greater sense of responsibility among its female staff, and they have been able to develop skills and gain a new sense of freedom as a woman within Saudi society. Moreover, this Case provides strong evidence of the flexibility awarded to female employees with regard to their working hours, in acknowledgement of their family responsibilities.

Nevertheless, this Case also revealed that in a purely compliance-based approach, there are certain common themes that it shares with the previous Cases from the retail sector (Alkabda and Najim). Thus, the employment of women at various levels has replaced the deployment of foreign workers. There are quotas for filling these low-paid jobs, which Saudi males prefer not to take. Consequently, female employment is important for these sectors, but this is given low priority. Despite these jobs being low paid and low status, however, Nitaqat has opened up places in the labour market in previously male-dominated sectors, giving women a sense of independence and identity in Saudi society.

Female employees are regarded as 'commodities' at the Alkabda and Marouj firms. However, at Alkabda, where female employment is imposed by the feminisation requirement, the firm still invests nothing in its female employees. In contrast, at Najim, the female owner/HR manager encourages and invests in her female employees, seeing them as a valuable resource in the market. However, due to its small size, the firm lacks the HR capacity to make a big investment. This may be compared with Marouj, where women are not treated as an important resource, but the nature of this sector, which has hitherto depended heavily on foreign workers, has led to female employment in low-level administrative jobs.

5.5. The Aram Firm – Architectural Sector (Small-sized Firm)

5.5.1 Background to the Aram Firm

The Aram design firm is in the architectural sector and was founded in Alkhobar in 2010. The firm used to have a 100% male staff, working as architects, with a few foreign workers in interior design. However, changes took place in March 2015, and a female section was opened. The Nitaqat initiative created a climate that encouraged firms like Aram to employ female interior designers. Compliance with Nitaqat was not an incentive for the Aram firm to employ women, as it had already met its Nitaqat quota of Saudi employees. Nevertheless, the decision was made to hire women and the reasons for this will be discussed in the following sub-section.

In the Aram firm, the employer is generally responsible for all the employees and communicates with female employees on a regular basis. The reason for including an employer (male) in the data-gathering process was due to his direct communication with female employees. Furthermore, there is one (male) HR manager, who is responsible for all the employees, including the female staff. All the female employees have qualifications in architecture, which correspond to their job roles in the current firm. They therefore work as interior designers on projects involving, for example, residential interiors, malls and restaurants. These projects involve site visits out of the workplace in the same city. The firm provides drivers for these female employees in the case of site visits, which gives them a degree of mobility and flexibility in their work. There is also a female supervisor, whose role is to coordinate the female employees and grant permission for various reasons, such as in the area of time-keeping and attendance. This supervisor has a friendly relationship with the female employees and besides her own work as an interior designer, she exchanges ideas related to work projects. The official working hours are nine hours a

day, five days a week. However, there is some flexibility for female employees, as they can work an eight-hour day, five days a week, which will be discussed later.

The female section is on the firm's main premises. There are two rooms, one for the HR manager and one for the female employees, including the female supervisor. The nature of the work environment is a flexible, mixed-gender workplace. This mixed environment allows for flexible communication with male employees within the firm, which includes the firm's mixed daily meetings – which will be explored in more detail in the next subsection.

5.5.2 The Participants' Profiles

Table 8 presents the profile of each participant who agreed to be interviewed. All names are fictitious, in order to protect the participants' identities.

Table 8: Aram Design Participants' Profiles

Name of Participant		Role of Participant	Marital Status	Social Status of Job	Duration of Employment at Current Firm	Qualification
Hadeel		Interior designer + supervisor of female employees	Single	Medium	3 years	BA Architecture
Alaa		Interior designer	Single	Medium	9 months	BA Architecture
Modhi		Interior designer	Single	Medium	2 years	BA Architecture
Noor		Interior designer	Single	Medium	1 year and 9 months	BA Architecture
Abdullah (male)		HR manager	Single	High	5 years	BA Human Resource Management
Fahad (male)		Employer	Single	High	7 years	MSc Architecture

The data were collected through interviews with managers and female employees, together with observations of female employees in the workplace, in order to enrich the data on the

experiences of female employees in this architectural firm.

5.5.3 Nitaqat and the Employment of Female Labour in the Aram Design Firm's Workplace

The purpose of this theme is to understand the influence of Nitaqat on female employment. Nitaqat has created opportunities for Saudi women to access jobs in the Saudi labour market. This has been especially significant in the architectural sector, where female graduates in this area found it difficult to attain job positions in these types of firm, prior to 2011.

It may be noted from the data that the Nitaqat programme was not directly responsible for female employment in the Aram Design firm, as explained by Fahad, the employer:

Nitaqat didn't impose on us the need to increase female participation in our firm, because we already met the quotas required for Nitaqat. However, Nitaqat opened up opportunities and helped the firm to find women who accepted to work [here].

One of Nitaqat's requirements is to further Saudization in the workplace in the form of female employment. In this firm, the evidence suggests that female employees do not merely serve to fill job gaps, but the firm benefits from them in specific areas, such as interior design, where women's work is considered more appropriate. Fahad explained the reason for employing women:

I have employed women based in the interior design section, which is open for women. We already met the Nitaqat quotas before female employment, so we don't employ them to fulfill the quota!

Nitaqat has made remarkable strides forward in opening up jobs for women in various sectors of the Saudi labour market, which were once limited to men. The employment of women has promoted self-confidence amongst female employees, giving them an equal chance in the Saudi labour market, as illustrated by the following comments:

It is really positive to see that sectors and places in the market don't just include male employees only! (Hadeel)

Alaa added:

After Nitaqat, there were many, many sectors we were dreaming of having a place in and we do work in them now, especially in some fields of business, where women are more fit than men!

The data suggest that the firm's management have a positive attitude to female employment, and Nitaqat has given cause for satisfaction among qualified females, who

are employed in jobs that match their skills in the Aram Design firm.

The data from the participants' statements illustrate that it is appropriate to discuss the first wave of female employment in this firm, which occurred in 2015. It is evident from these data that the main reason for employing women was

...Because they bring creativity to our firm, the female employees in interior design are better than the male employees... (Fahad)

Thus, the firm benefits from the female employees' skills in interior design. However, the employment of women in a previously male environment costs a firm, as it needs to prepare a separate female section to meet certain privacy requirements. During the initial planning for female employment at Aram Design, challenges arose, as explained by Abdullah, the HR manager:

At first, opening up the female section was difficult; I didn't have clear instructions or policy on the Saudi labour market, so I visited the Saudi Ministry of Labour and they told me that there must be a separate section in the firm for female employees, with a private toilet.

Saudi society is segregated in its social life and the workplace, which initially created difficulties over communication with female employees in the firm. Abdullah described some of these early difficulties, encountered when women were first employed in a previously all-male workplace:

...We weren't used to communicating with women outside of our family in Saudi society, so we learned how to set boundaries in the workplace, which were consistent with our culture.

Therefore, despite the desire to employ women in the current firm, the data indicated that this was not without its challenges. For example, female employees cannot work night shifts, due to their domestic responsibilities and need to adhere to Saudi gender culture, which dictates that:

females can't work overtime, as men can (Fahad).

In addition, the issue of transportation and the location of female employees is another challenge associated with female employment, which may lead to late arrival at work, due to female employees (at the time of this research) not being allowed to drive.

It is also useful to note the experience of the first female employee hired by the firm, which highlights the challenges faced by the management during this period. Hadeel, who is the supervisor now, faced difficulties in working with men in the male-dominated workplace and lacked confidence in communicating with them. For example, she

explained that:

...At first, the firm's work was unclear; I made mistakes and didn't ask... I felt stressed, because I was the only female in the firm.

Furthermore, family and society have a strong influence on the acceptance of women working in mixed workplaces. Hadeel described this challenge in her first employment experience at the firm:

At first, it was difficult to work in a mixed environment... a few years ago, it was unacceptable to work here... people in our society asked how I could work in the same place as men!

In addition, there were other challenges for her in the workplace, including a lack of facilities for female employees, such as a special section:

The firm was small, no life in it! There were no other female employees! (Hadeel)

Moreover, when the female section was first opened, the obligation to wear a hijab and obstacles to communicating with men presented a challenge, according to Noor:

It was difficult in the beginning for me... annoying wearing a hijab every time the manager came to our section... so I keep my abayah on and now I am used to it... it is not a problem! The most important thing is, I don't work with male employees in the same room!

The challenge of working in a hijab has since been addressed by establishing a private female section, where female employees now experience no concerns with the current firm's workplace. However, despite having a private section, the females still wear the hijab, because they communicate with men every day. Fahad emphasised the social changes that have taken place in Saudi society, concerning women working in a mixed-gender environment:

In the beginning, it was difficult with female employment, because a lot of families didn't accept women working in places where men were working, but now they are more open and the most important thing for them is to offer a section for female employees in the firm.

The female participants appeared to feel satisfied with the way in which gender culture had been accommodated in the workplace, was perceived as a semi-mixed environment, as there is a private section for female employees. Furthermore, there is evidence from the data to suggest that the environment allowed women to communicate with their male colleagues in a flexible way. In turn, the fact that there were no boundaries to communicating with men in the same workplace increased the female employees' opportunities to acquire new skills. Noor expressed her feelings about the workplace:

I feel happy in the workplace; I don't feel any problems or the need for more privacy, but I don't want to be more open, working with men in the same section or more closely... I don't have any problems communicating with male employees.

The female section permits some flexibility for the female employees over wearing a hijab, although they put them on when they need to communicate with male colleagues. For example, the male employer has visited the female section, with prior notification, and the women wore their hijabs, and the atmosphere is friendly. Alaa felt comfortable and later declared:

We are separate from the males... we are very comfortable... we only wear our hijabs if we want to speak to male employees or the manager.

Figure 21 depicts the entrance to the female employees' section, indicating their privacy within the firm.



Figure 21: Entrance to the female section

Meanwhile, Figure 22 shows the female supervisor's working environment. Besides working as an interior designer for the firm, she also supervises the other female staff. She therefore has a private room to give her more space and privacy.

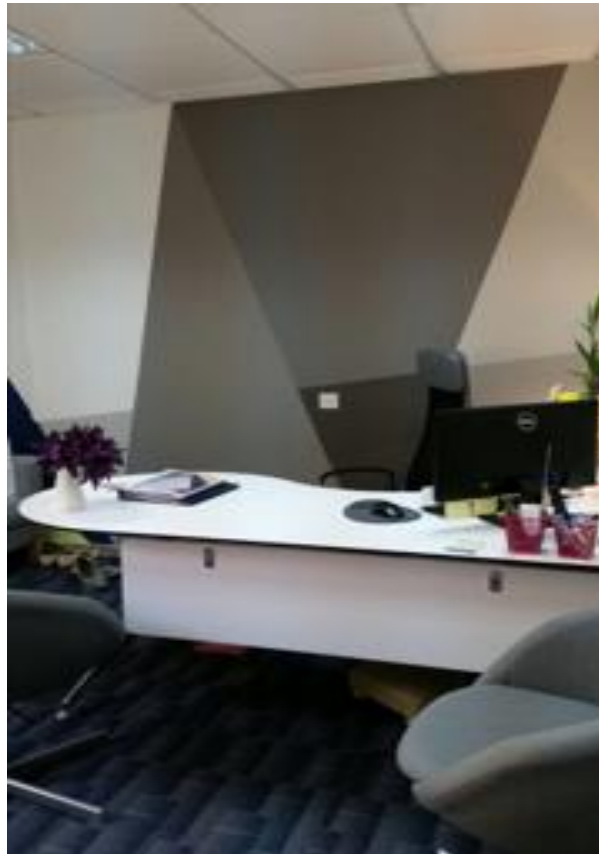


Figure 22: Supervisor's room

Next, Figure 23 illustrates the spatial dimensions of the female employees' office space within the firm; this being a private room for the three female employees. The door remains closed to indicate that men must ask permission to enter the section, out of respect for the women's privacy. This room has private facilities such as a toilet and desks for each employee. Moreover, the desks are adjacent to each other, which allows the staff to share work ideas. This suggests that the management policy is to maintain friendly communication, while also addressing privacy issues.



Figure 23: Female employees' room with private toilet

Figures 24 and 25, below, show the mixed environment, with the meeting room at the centre and glass dividers to create the sense of an open workplace. This meeting room is used every working day, demonstrating the importance of communication between all staff, and the sharing of experience with female employees in meetings.



Figure 24: Meeting room for all employees (male and female)



Figure 25: Meeting room

The firm's open workplace reduces the feeling of separation between male and female employees and encourages the exchange of skills and experience. The data suggest no

differences between men and women in the workplace, regarding opportunities to gain experience. The management's priority is to ensure the job satisfaction of the female employees. In particular, one comment from the employer (Fahad) bears this out:

We ensure the women feel comfortable by providing a female section and privacy, with facilities such as a coffee table and anything else they need in their section, and employ a female instead of a male supervisor.

The female participants' reported experiences further demonstrate their high level of satisfaction with the management's consideration of their needs in the workplace:

[The] male employees and the management are very respectful of our privacy, especially when they are in the same building. (Hadeel)

Furthermore, Alaa expressed her satisfaction with the workplace:

...the one thing that I am satisfied with here is the workplace environment... if this feeling did not exist, I would not feel happy in the workplace.

During the observation, I did not witness any problems in the mixed environment. However, challenges were mentioned, regarding security. Hadeel gave an example of this lack of security in the workplace:

The challenge I face in the workplace, if I stay sometimes out of working hours, there is no security at the entrance, either an employee or a locked door, which concerns me.

It suggests that although priority is given to female employees and they are provided with privacy in the workplace, there is a lack of security for them, especially when working late. However, due to periods of high pressure at work, female employees may need to remain in the workplace until night-time.

This firm operates within a mixed-gender environment, which required no pressure from Nitaqat to employ women. This theme reflects a friendly workplace for women, with a positive attitude towards them and where their job satisfaction and advancement are promoted. Moreover, the employment of women through the Nitaqat programme has occurred through choice and not imposition, whereby Nitaqat may be considered to have incentivised rather than enforced female employment.

5.5.4 HR Management of Female Employment at Aram Design

The purpose of this theme is to understand the management of female labour in the workplace. First, it should be highlighted that there was a friendly relationship observed between the female employees and their manage; it is a very comfortable relationship, as

Noor explained:

We are like a family; we communicate in and out of work. There is no challenge in communication between us and the male manager... we feel more like family than employees!

It was revealed over the course of the case study that the door of the HR office is always open, indicating an open approach, since the female employees can come to the office at any time, and there is respect between them and their management. Furthermore, there is flexible communication between female staff and their managers, with no strict barriers such as having to communicate exclusively by telephone. This flexibility awarded to female employees was clarified by Fahad:

I communicate with female employees in public rooms... meeting rooms and my office...

This approach suggests a level of trust and openness between the management and the female employees. The evidence recorded in my observation notes showed that there were regular, hour-long meetings for female employees to discuss the progress of their work and share decisions.

The firm's policy on managing female staff does not follow rigid management practices, such as focusing on timekeeping. This suggests that the firm is more interested in actual achievement, and Fahad emphasised his belief in this policy:

There is no point in working from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. with no achievement; there are employees who make progress in their work after working for just two hours.

It was also revealed that flexibility over working hours was granted to female employees, as Noor would complete all allocated tasks and then leave early. Furthermore, in the morning, there was some flexibility over start times, with Fahad explaining that:

The official working hours in a day for male employees are from 8 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., whereas for female employees it is to 4.00 p.m.,

The women are meant to work eight hours a day, but this flexibility allowed for female employees to leave work early was out of consideration for their responsibilities outside of work, such as their domestic responsibilities, unless this would have a negative influence on their work.

Although there is the above-mentioned flexibility in managing the female employees and reducing the risk of negligence at work, the women's time-keeping is managed through fingerprint recognition. However, the supervisor's permission is required in the case of out-

of-office work, such as site visits. For example, Noor attended a meeting outside the workplace two hours before the end of the working day, but Hadeel was flexible about her returning to the office for fingerprint registration before leaving, because she was attending a work-related meeting. Noor's experience reinforces that:

The supervisor is flexible; if there is an urgent case or absence, she appreciates that and gives us permission. If there is an absence, she sends [the form] to the HR manager to sign.

Additionally, Alaa's experience confirms this flexibility:

...Regarding being late to work, I'm often on time, however, if there is a case of lateness regarding work such as print projects, the supervisor is flexible with me and doesn't argue with me about it!

This suggests that the firm's management supports the female employees' roles in the workplace by extending some latitude to them and through the authority delegated to the female employees' supervisor. The firm's management is based on trust in the women's work and abilities, giving them the freedom to learn and improve at work:

Our policy with female employees is to trust them and give them space to try and support them. Our policy with women is to give them responsibility and work, just like male employees. If I don't give them a feeling of responsibility and trust, they will not contribute to the firm. (Fahad)

It should be noted here that there is no difference in approach between the way in which the male and female employees at the firm gain experience and acquire skills. The management clearly encourages the female employees to learn, building their confidence and trusting in their work. For example, Fahad stated that:

Our policy in this firm is to provide them with trust and confidence, such as giving them space to talk in meetings.

As such, the management are against implementing a strict monitoring system for the female employees and instead, encourage them to feel comfortable in the workplace and maintain their privacy.

With regard to gender culture, it is not permitted to install cameras in the female section, as this would compromise the women's privacy.

We have cameras in the firm. However, in the female section, it is not permitted to install a camera. Besides, we are interested in offering them privacy in the female section. If there is a camera, I can go back to it to see what happened anytime... but we don't need to be at this level. I believe if you want to see productivity in the workplace, you will look at the achievement... we want the women to feel [they have] privacy... we focus more on productivity than on monitoring female employees

arriving late for work! (Abdullah)

In light of the above, the firm gives high priority to the female employees and provides them with transportation, especially as part of their work is out of the office, such as the site visits that fall within the official working hours. This, the women undertake the same type of work as their male counterparts, for example performing site visits, which gives them a sense of freedom and responsibility. It should be emphasised here that all the female employees at this firm had qualifications in architecture, indicating the careful selection of female staff to fill current positions.

In its female recruitment, the firm specifically looks for women with an educational background in Architecture, particularly interior design, although these candidates may lack skills and experience of the workplace, if they did not work in this sector before Nitaqat. Fahad demonstrated a sense of purpose with regard to female employment, showing a willingness to motivate female employees in his managerial role:

In interviews with women, I'm looking for women who have a desire to work... not just come for a salary, because there are some women who only want to work to get a salary. So, I am looking for women who want to learn, even if they don't have a high level of experience or skills.

Before their official acceptance, the firm conducts a three-month training programme for female employees. This includes initial work on projects to demonstrate their abilities, and to ensure that they are comfortable in the workplace, before officially starting work. Alaa explained that prior training benefits both them and the firm, as it helps with selecting appropriate candidates, who will have a positive influence on the firm. She stated:

I was employed here officially after my training period. I received a project from one female employee working in the firm and also undertook a project for a client, and he was happy with [it]... after that, the firm employed me officially.

Interestingly, Abdullah emphasised that the firm's experience of female employees in its interior design division has been better than with the male employees in the same domain, due to the women's ambitious attitudes, desire to progress, and commitment to their work. It was found that female interior designers displayed more creativity than their male colleagues, as they had the qualifications and skills for this type of work. The evidence suggests that the employment of women in this firm has enhanced its creativity and contributed to its progress. Before the implementation of Nitaqat, the firm lacked opportunities for female employment, but now it is recognised that female employment has had a positive influence, and the firm no longer depends solely on male employees. In this Case, within the domain of interior design, there was previously a lack of male Saudi

candidates anyway. Therefore, foreign workers were employed in these jobs, which are now generally considered to be particularly suited to women.

It should also be emphasised here that the firm's policy on salary levels shows respect for the work of the female employees:

We are not like other firms who employ women, because [female labour costs less]. The salary here is no different from what male colleagues receive... and to make them happy we don't give them a low salary. (Abdullah)

However, there is naturally a difference in salary for female employees who have experience or undertake more tasks, but this is not related to gender difference. For example, Hadeel, who is an interior designer and supervisor, performing more work than the other female employees, receives a higher salary. The management recognises that although the female employees have qualifications, they lack workplace skills. Therefore, there are training courses for female employees, organised by the firm, as Fahad explained:

We opened a new section, whereby it's difficult to run training programme in the firm, but we plan to have training programmes in future.

He went on to say that:

Our firm doesn't have a fixed training programme. However, the firm is a member of the Institute of Architects and they send training programmes, periodically, and then the management choose female employees (not all of them because of work). After taking the training programmes, they share their experiences with the other employees, who didn't attend, so they can benefit as well.

Moreover, training programmes can be selected by the female employees themselves, and the management are flexible about any training courses that could contribute to the firm, as Hadeel explained:

There is no training programme. However, if we want specific training, we can request that from the manager, and he will pay the fees for it.

The evidence suggests that despite the firm being medium-sized, with limited capacity to conduct training programmes within it, these are arranged in other ways. The management apply the same policy to male and female employees, in terms of the benefits provided, such as training programmes and reward systems. The management considers training courses for both male and female and male employees as an important investment.

With regard to the female employees, there is a balance between work and training courses, and they are encouraged to exchange experiences with each other. The management has raised the issue of motivation among female employees in the workplace,

and the financial rewards for women are therefore the same as those allocated to their male counterparts. Abdullah commented that

...we give all employees in the firm a bonus each year, with no difference between female and male employees.

Furthermore, the firm motivates its female employees by establishing a sense of trust and responsibility, which is the firm's policy, as mentioned previously. The women's project work is also acknowledged:

We write the women's names on the projects that they do for the firm, to give them a feeling of being valued and contributing to the firm. (Abdullah)

Alaa further emphasised the point of women being valued in the workplace, despite the fact that she is new in the firm, having joined the staff just nine months previously:

The manager gave me a project, despite me still being new in the firm, and I worked on it, and this encouraged me to put all my effort into it... even though I am younger than them, they gave me a workspace; they shared their project with me and asked me my opinion... really, there is nothing I'm dissatisfied with here.

Moreover, the firm's policy on motivation has had a positive influence on its female employees, as expressed by Modhi:

I feel valued in the firm, because they thank me and include my name in the project, which is very important.

Noor added that:

The words of thanks from the managers and putting my name on the project is really important for me. Also, my supervisor presents our work on social media.

It is therefore evident that the firm's significant motivation strategy encourages high levels of female job satisfaction and gives female staff a sense of their value in the workplace.

Unsurprisingly, the management's experience of the female employees reveals their positive contribution to the firm's progress, as:

The employment of women doesn't just influence us because they are female employees, but there is the influence of their experience in interior design, which increases our revenue in the firm. They also have a positive influence and they are better than male employees, because of their good output, their contribution and their desire to improve themselves... this has created positive competition. (Fahad)

It was also noted in the study data that female employment had attracted female customers, who had previously found it challenging to communicate with male staff. Therefore, the recruitment of female staff had led to more projects being awarded to female employees

and increased revenue for the firm.

Many things changed when we employed women to work with customers; the female customers can comfortably discuss with female employees, communicating better about their projects. (Fahad)

Interestingly, there is now considerable encouragement to increase female participation in the workplace, as emphasised by Abdullah who:

...really wants the future open for females... the majority of women are better than men. I hope that women can hold better positions in the future!

This attitude is a strong indicator of the high level of commitment towards female employment in some sectors of the Saudi labour market, with a view to enhancing the position of women in the labour market in the future. Overall, this theme reveals positivity towards women in the workplace, in that they are simply treated as employees, regardless of the gender barriers, and in the present Case, they are seen as a source of investment for the firm.

5.5.5 The Experiences of Female Employees in the Aram Design Firm

The purpose of this theme is to illuminate the female employees' experiences and feelings about working in the firm. As mentioned previously, Aram Design voluntarily opted to employ female staff and were not obliged to because of Nitaqat. In this Case, Nitaqat merely created a more favourable environment within which the firm could hire qualified females to participate in its workplace.

Although the female employees were qualified, they expressed a desire to acquire job skills, which the firm enabled them to do. It was noted that possessing qualifications without any skills for the job market had created a gap in the workplace:

Before Nitaqat, I worked at home, because there were no jobs for women in firm... I felt less confident and didn't have any communication skills or knowledge of the market... I lacked practical skills... (Hadeel)

Therefore, for some female employees, despite being highly qualified, their work in the current firm has partly come about due to the lack of previous opportunities available for female employment. According to Hadeel, she has

...learned about different projects in the current work... this job gives me experience in different projects on the market.

The data revealed that the women's work experience extended to general workplace skills, such as communication skills with customers. Alaa endorsed her acquisition of these new

skills in the current firm:

I've done work I hadn't done before... I have a lot of work experience now... experience of meeting clients.

5.5.5.1 The Positive Influence of Male Managers on the Development of Female Employees

As the employment of women is the firm's free choice, the male manager is flexible in his management of female employees, giving female supervisors the space to develop female employees.

In the current firm, the women emphasised that they had gained experience and been able to practice their skills and improve themselves, while also sharing decision-making in the workplace, based on the trust afforded them by the management.

In addition, it was clear that the female employees were valued and trusted, since they were given some freedom in the workplace environment. An example of this freedom was the extension of their work beyond their desks to practical work such as site visits, which helped build their experience and encouraged them to make work-related decisions. Furthermore, in all the women's work for the firm, such as projects, deadlines, site visits and meetings, there was no strictly controlled system imposed for organising their work, unless there was an issue affecting the progress of this work. It indicated delegated responsibility and flexibility on the part of the firm towards these female employees.

The trust awarded to female staff in the firm achieved positive results in terms of their sense of responsibility at work. For example, Modhi explained that:

In high pressure periods, I divide my time; for example, three hours for the project work, then time for meetings or desk work... I mean, I try to divide my time... sometimes if I have a lot of work, I work until 5.00 p.m. or 8.00 p.m.

The observation data confirmed the female employees' commitment to their work, as they concentrated on their individual projects and shared ideas about improving their projects. Furthermore, there was a high level of care shown by the female employees to the firm. For example, they fostered client satisfaction by listening to customers and producing work to meet their expectations. The observation data recalled that Modhi spent two hours in a meeting with a client about his project; discussing ideas and listening to the client's needs, so that he would be satisfied with the work performed in the firm's name. This further demonstrates that a more positive attitude to female employment and its contribution has been effective in some sectors of the Saudi labour market, especially in this firm, as confirmed by the following comment:

I feel we have made contributions to the firm by bringing clients to the firm and also building relationships with builders and architects outside the workplace. Many clients were unaware of the firm and so we help advance the firm as well. (Hadeel)

Furthermore, this firm has benefitted from employing educated women with qualifications.

I'm freshly graduated, so I'm different from the other employees, I have contributed to the firm by providing new ideas and learned skills. I also get work done faster than the other employees. I have done three projects for the firm, whereas my colleagues have done just one in the same period of time. (Noor)

The evidence suggests that the freedom given to female employees encourages them to contribute to the firm. They make their own decisions and create and carry out projects themselves, seeing their achievements in the workplace. Moreover, new employees can bring benefits to the firm, even if they do not have many years of experience in the workplace, because they may have skills and be ambitious to progress in their careers.

The firm's management appeared to respect the female employees and endeavoured to meet their needs in the workplace. Therefore, female voices were considered and valued by the management. This was likewise reflected in the women's salaries, which were seen as fair and appropriate for working women. Noor's view of her salary was that it corresponded to her work:

I haven't completed two years in the firm, so I can't request a higher salary! My salary is SR6000 (£1200), and I feel good about it.

Noor also shared her experiences of a course on lighting, which underscores the firm's positive HR policy on training:

I've taken training in lighting and it was very useful... I developed my knowledge and practiced my skills on the trainers in the summer period and also in my work, and passed my new knowledge on to my colleagues in work. (Noor)

The professional development witnessed by the firm's female employees was due to the fact that they were prioritised by the management, which in turn, contributed to the firm's progress. Noor was happy to take about the firm's approach regarding professional development, explaining that:

The employer is always looking to develop the work... this makes me improve!

It may be noted from the data that this improvement is more than mere skills development – for example, communication skills – but also built confidence amongst the female employees and helped them in their personal development. Modhi's comment illustrates this and suggests a supportive working relationship:

I'm motivated in work by my manager... he has supported me and taught me to be confident; also, his personality influences me and encourages me.

Regarding communication skills, there are many daily meetings with managers and customers, and Alaa's experience shows the advantages of this communication:

...the communication with clients gives me responsibility, I've learned how to deal with different clients, how to solve problems with clients, and I've had consultation with my colleagues...

Similar experiences and benefits were described by Modhi:

I've got experience in communicating with clients, which I never had before. I feel confident and able to deal with different types of clients.

It is clear that the female employees' experiences had made them stronger and given them the confidence to display their work in front of male employees and managers. For women entering the Saudi labour market, Alaa's experience in this firm illustrates how a change in culture can occur:

I was very shy, I was afraid to attend mixed meetings, but now I don't have a problem with being in mixed meetings and talking...!

Moreover, these experiences in work have initiated a positive shift for these women towards becoming more responsible and less dependent on their families. Hadeel's comment reflects this change:

I build my confidence from work... depend on myself instead of depending on my family.

Modhi also commented:

I've got the confidence... I was strongly dependent on others, but now I depend on myself.

These comments show that the female employees had gained self-confidence as a result of the greater independence entrusted to them in a society where women are expected to be dependent on their families.

The experience of women in the workplace has fueled their ambitions to gain a place in the labour market. For example, the experience of working and also managing other people has recently encouraged Hadeel to open her own business:

I did not think that I would be the first to open a female section and be a supervisor. I've changed and based on my experience in the current work and with management support, I've opened my own business this year (2017). Before working here, I was

not interested in being up-to-date in my work, but now I want to be up-to-date with everything related to architecture.

Moreover, the female staff have been inspired to develop their own job skills; for example, they declared that they were looking for training courses outside their official working hours:

I'm always looking for training programmes that will develop me; not waiting for the firm to provide training programmes. (Modhi)

The women's experiences in the firm and their skills development have helped them in their current positions and are likely to benefit their future careers, enabling them to contribute to the firm and develop themselves. This theme shows the level of job satisfaction experienced by the female employee when working in a friendly and supportive workplace environment. The experiences of these women demonstrate that where there is encouragement of women to develop themselves, it can lead to women being less dependent on their families and inspire them to improve their skills and make personal progress.

5.5.6 Conclusion

This case study has shown that investment in female employees as a valuable resource can support a firm's development and foster its progress. Female employees are an important resource and can provide opportunities for a firm. In this Case, the management enhanced the skills of female employees through experience of an open workplace, where there was flexible communication with experienced staff. However, these female employees were working in interior design, where their creativity helped the employer to achieve business objectives.

Although Nitaqat had not had a direct impact on female employment in Aram Design, it did have an indirect impact by helping to create a positive environment for female employment in Aram's business sector. There has been a high level of satisfaction on the part of the management with regard to female employment in the firm, due to the contributions of female staff and their ambitious attitudes to improving their work, both for themselves and for the firm. This Case represents very strong evidence of HR management taking female employment seriously.

Women having space to work within less controlling systems. Meanwhile, showing enthusiasm over their work and personal development has helped enhance their position in

both the workplace and the wider society. The findings in this Case indicate that the insightful approach adopted by the firm's HR management can help promote female participation in future and give women confidence to progress to higher positions.

In the Alkabda and Marouj firms, however, female employees were treated as commodities by the management and they were hired purely to ensure compliance with Nitaqat quotas. Firms are required to employ women to fill shortfalls in quotas. Thus, female employment is important for businesses to survive in the labour market. Evidence gathered from Alkabda and Marouj highlights the challenge imposed to hire Saudi women instead of foreign workers. The retail and construction sectors, being highly dependent on foreign workers, are most significantly affected by Nitaqat requirements. However, in the case of the architectural firm, Aram Design, women have been willingly employed, as there was no need to fill jobs solely to meet Nitaqat quotas. Similar to Aram Design, the female manager of the Najim firm viewed female employment as a valuable resource to her company, but Najim did not have the capacity to provide its own training, which presented a challenge to female improvement.

The similarities between Alkabda, Najim, Marouj and Aram indicate that female employment enhances the position of women in Saudi society and promotes their personal development. Female employment has encouraged changes in Saudi society, with less dependence on family approval and a growing sense of freedom and opportunities to attain positive, work-related responsibilities. Nitaqat has opened up jobs to people with a low social status, who are also less well educated. It has also provided for qualified females to participate in the Saudi private sector labour market. In these case studies, poor HR capabilities and the lack of senior positions for women are the main challenges. However, in the long term, women will be inspired to improve their skills and status at work, as they gain work experience and start to attain higher positions.

5.6. The Sarai Firm – Engineering Sector (Medium-sized Firm)

5.6.1 Background to the Sarai Firm

The Sarai firm was established in 2006 and is located in the Saudi city of Alkhobar. When the firm was first launched, most of its jobs were filled by male foreign employees, due to the nature of the business, namely engineering and soil testing. Saudi nationals rarely have experience in this sector. There was one HR manager, who was also a foreign employee, and non-Saudi nationals employed in accounts. This firm then began to employ male

Saudis, but it remained highly dependent on foreign employees, and prior to Nitaqat, it still had 100% male employees. After the introduction of the Nitaqat programme, however, Sarai opened a female section in 2011.

The employer, Bader (male) oversees the work of all the employees, including the female employees. Bader has been included in this study, because of his communication with female employees. I considered that his inclusion would enrich the data on the management of female employees. Furthermore, there is the HR manager, Nasar (male), who is directly responsible for managing the firm's female employees. Nasar has the authority to manage communications between the female employees and their employer.

In this firm, the female employees hold qualifications and their skills match their jobs. These jobs consist of assisting the HR manager, work in administration and accounting. For example, Maram's role is that of a project coordinator working on project CVs and looking at the qualifications and skills of appropriate candidates. She then sends this information to the project manager, so that a decision can be made about the best job candidate. Next, Maram completes the interview procedures and organises visas for foreign workers, if necessary. Hanan, Samiah and Sara all work in Accounts in the Financial Department, with various responsibilities such as generating account statements and checking payments and payroll for all employees' salaries in the firm. In the administrative jobs, the female employees work alongside male colleagues. All the women's jobs are linked to those of the male employees and managers in the firm. Thus, the work done by the women is passed on to managers and male employees to be completed.

The workplace is a mixed-gender environment, with all employees in the same building and there is just a single entrance. However, there is a private section for the female employees, with facilities such as offices and toilets. Nevertheless, male and female employees convene in meetings, as these are mixed. If female employees want to communicate with their male colleagues, then there is flexibility awarded to them by the firm to move around the mixed workplace environment.

5.6.2 Profiles of the Sarai Case Study Participants

Table 9 provides a profile of each participant who agreed to be interviewed. All names are fictitious, in order to protect each participant's identity.

Table 9: Profiles of the Sarai participants

Name of Participant	Role of Participant	Marital Status	Social Status	Duration of Employment in Current Firm	Qualification
Maram	Project Coordinator	Married	Medium	5 Years	BA Accounting
Hanan	Accountant	Single	Medium	6 years	BA Accounting
Sara	Accountant	Single	Medium	6 years	BA Information Systems Management
Samiah	Payroll	Single	Medium	5 years	BA General Management
Bader	Employer	Single	High	Since 2006	MSc Investment Financial Accounting
Nasar (Male)	HR Manager	Single	High	7 years	MSc Human Resources Management

The data were collected through interviews with male managers and female employees. Observations were not conducted, because no permission was granted by the firm.

5.6.2 Nitaqat and the Challenge of Employing Female Labour in the Sarai Firm's Workplace

Nitaqat has led to increased female participation in the private sector labour market in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this theme is to understand the influence of Nitaqat on female employment in the Sarai firm, which has positive attitudes to the Nitaqat programme and female employment, as confirmed by Nasar:

The acceptance of Nitaqat in the Saudi market is excellent. It has created a lot of jobs for women in several sectors. It is a positive step for our firm.

However, the increase in female employment opportunities in SMEs is due to Nitaqat's requirements to employ Saudis in firms, but these jobs being generally rejected by Saudi males. The employment of women instead of foreign workers satisfies the quota

requirements and meets Nitaqat's aims. It is worth noting that in several sectors where women were unable to work prior to Nitaqat, female employment has taken remarkable strides forward in the Saudi labour market. It has raised the position of women in a society that now allows them to participate in the labour market.

Without permission from male family members, no job role is possible for women. However, it no seems as though this situation is changing. The data from this firm suggest that Saudi women can gain a sense of freedom in a society where women are usually dependent on men. Sara was of the view that the position of women had changed in society and that they were becoming less dependent on men since the introduction of Nitaqat. She explained how:

Nitaqat is 100% useful for women. It has built a position for them in Saudi society. I was dependent on men; now I see myself as equal to them, having the same responsibilities in some cases. (Sara)

That Saudi society has started to value the position of women in the labour market and to encourage them to enter it was evidenced by Samiah's statement:

I feel Nitaqat has made a transformational step in the Saudi market; there are some shops that should feminise employment. After Nitaqat, the view of women in Saudi society changed... even us as females, we didn't accept this at first, and we said we can't work in these sectors, but after that, society became more aware of female roles and started to respect women more.

However, the challenge for firms to meet Nitaqat's requirements,

...has led to recruiting those who are available, even those with no skills or qualifications. (Nasar)

Nitaqat's requirements have led some firms to engage in illegal practices such as fake Saudization. However, Sarai does not encourage this, as Nasar claimed:

Fake Saudization can create serious problems, and if the Saudi Ministry of Labour finds out about it, it stops renewing visas and closes the business. The firm can be fined SR50,000 (approximately £10,000),* according to the latest polices on the Nitaqat programme and the firm can be blocked from employing foreign workers for five years.

During the initial employment of women in this firm in 2012, the first female employee was hired for the role of coordinator. The facilities for this first female staff member were very limited:

The firm had not finished the female section and the male employees did not feel good about the first female employees. (Bader)

There were two main challenges presented by female employment. Firstly, the female employees had to accept that although they had their own private section, they also generally had to work in a mixed-gender environment. Secondly, the male employees had to accept female employees working with them in the same workplace. This is where Saudi Arabia's gendered culture influenced the women's decision to work in a mixed environment, as explained by Nasar:

There is a private section for female employees. I found qualified women, who have the skills, and appropriate female employees to fill the jobs. However, the challenge of them not accepting to work in a mixed environment or to communicate with men made me concerned. I can tell you that I interviewed 50 women in two days, and I chose just three of them. However, 10 or 20 of these 50 women had high-level skills and qualifications, but did not want to work in this firm, because of the mixed environment.

In this current firm, it was clearly challenging for the first female employee to accept to work in a mixed workplace, due to the social obstacles in Saudi society, with regard to women working in mixed environments:

We faced challenges in the mixed environment, when first employed at this firm, where they have not worked with women since 2000. The male employees didn't accept me in the firm; they saw female employment as a strange thing, especially Saudi female employment! The male employees didn't accept us; for example, when I was working in Accounts and the men made mistakes, they didn't accept me correcting them, because I'm female. (Maram)

However, this firm's management can be flexible about the nature of the communication that takes place within it. For example, if some female employees are unwilling to communicate directly with men, they can communicate with male employees through female colleagues. The other challenge to female employment is the issue (at the time of this research) of women not being allowed to drive. To reduce the chances of her being late for work, the location of a female employee's home is important when recruiting female employees. Furthermore, the nature of the work in this firm means that employees often have to work night shifts, but this is challenging for female employees, since it contravenes the rules governing the Saudi labour market. Other challenges relate to family, such as maternity leave. Consequently, Nasar depends less on female employees and suggests that there should be other employees who can do the job, in the event of a woman's long-term absence.

Although female employment has presented certain challenges, it has also created management opportunities. Nasar confirmed this firm's desire to employ women:

We were interested in employing women before Nitaqat 2011; there were plans before Nitaqat was introduced and Nitaqat opened the door for us for female employment.

It is therefore clear that Nitaqat did not impose the need to employ women on this particular firm, because it was already meeting the Nitaqat requirement for Saudi employees. Thus, Nitaqat could be described as having incentivised female employment, creating opportunities for female employment in a sector where there were previously only male employees. The firm

...met the required Nitaqat quota, and we are in the green zone; we should employ 9%, but we reached 11% or 12% before female employment. (Bader)

This suggests that the manager is willing to hire female staff in this firm and affirms that qualifications are necessary for the nature of the jobs within it. However, as Bader claimed, the problem is that the nature of the work in this sector is more suited to men than women, since it requires experience of working as contractors or engineers and involves night shifts and travelling, which is less or not at all acceptable for women in Saudi culture. Therefore, female employees are rather required to assist the HR manager in administration and accounting and here, the study the data revealed the management's preference for female employees, due to their commitment:

The reason for employing women is because they are more committed and stay in the firm for a long period, without leaving for other jobs. However, we don't give them big responsibilities and the section is small in the firm... (Bader)

Moreover, Bader claimed that female employees had fewer opportunities in the job market and so they were more committed in their work. It therefore seems from this comment that the manager was content with women working in managerial jobs, because they did not leave the firm to work elsewhere, whereas,

...men have more opportunities to move on to other jobs and don't have problems with transportation, travel.

The firm had prepared the workplace so that there was a private section for female employees, with facilities such as offices and toilets. Furthermore, there were no restrictions on the female employees benefiting from the experience of their male colleagues in the workplace, as they had the flexibility to visit the male section for work purposes. However, there were also female employees, who preferred not to meet men and the private female section offered them privacy in the workplace, as Samiah commented:

As I [usually] cover my face, I feel very comfortable in the private section. If I worked with men, I would have to cover my face for nine hours! ...the private female

section in the firm is a big advantage for me working here; the private section gives us a sense of privacy, we feel comfortable, we can eat and do things with nothing annoying us.

Face-to-face communication with men is flexible in the firm and so if a female employee prefers to communicate via emails or another female employee, she may do so. This flexibility in communication, afforded by the management, makes female employees feel comfortable and committed in their work.

In the Sarai firm, therefore, compliance with Nitaqat over the employment of female Saudis has occurred through choice and not obligation. Female employees have the opportunity to fill administrative jobs, as these are more appropriate for them, due to the nature of the jobs in the firm, which correspond more closely to male employees in this traditionally masculine sector.

5.6.3 The Sarai Firm's HR Management of Female Labour

The purpose of this theme is to understand the management of female labour in the workplace. From the data, it may be noted that the relationship with the managers in this firm is friendly, with no boundaries to limit the opportunity for female employees to gain experience by communicating with the manager. Sara explained that she:

My manager communicated with us and he is very collaborative; I've learned a lot from him.

As the female employees had domestic responsibilities, there was some flexibility exercised over time-keeping, unless there was the risk of this impacting negatively on the progress of the work. The women were required to work seven hours a day, but if there was an emergency at home, they were granted more flexibility than their male colleagues. For example, in the Ramadan season:

...if a female employee has responsibilities in the home, even if she is married or has other family responsibilities, we give her freedom in some situations. However, the important thing is that the female employee shows commitment in her work and we see progress. (Bader).

Under this flexible policy, the management is more concerned with achievement than with the working hours of female employees. However, although there is some flexibility, there is also direct management control of the women's time-keeping. Female employees therefore need to obtain permission from the manager in instances of absence from work or lateness, which indicates the firm's desire to maintain communication with its female staff, so as to avoid any negative effects on the progress of the work due to staff absences or

lateness.

From the above, it is evident that the management are more flexible over working hours and working days with the female staff. The official working days total six days a week for all employees, but the women work only five days, which demonstrates the firm's flexibility with female employees, given their additional out-of-work responsibilities:

The working hours for women are less than for men. There is no problem, because some women have domestic responsibilities, like being married, or they may have kids, so they need two days off... regarding our firm, Saturday is a day off for our female employees, whereas for men, there is just one day off, Friday... we can let them work one hour less than the official working hours, if they finish their work. We focus on achievement: if this hour doesn't influence the work, it is OK and there is flexibility each side. (Nasar)

In this way the female employees' work/life balance is considered, based on the claim that the firm respects the needs of its female employees, so that their work achievements are not affected.

It is worth mentioning here that the management are careful in their recruitment and selection process, in order to avoid any issues or challenges to female employment in the firm. The firm's recruitment is based on finding an appropriately qualified employee who meets the job requirements. Official employment begins for the female employees, after they have received two weeks of pre-training in the workplace, delivered by an existing male employee, in order to understand the job requirements.

With regard to the fact that the female candidates may not have had previous experience of working in the architecture sector, the manager explained the nature of the workplace and the work required of the female employees:

Recruitment and selection are the main means of avoiding issues with female employees; when we interview women for a specific job, we give all the details and even the work expected of the candidate; explaining clearly that the majority of employees in our firm are male, so they will communicate with them by phone or email and face-to-face, if required. Furthermore, in the selection of a female employee, we look at the location of her home, so if she lives far away from the firm, we don't accept the candidate. I explain the nature of the workplace, which is a mixed environment and the policy on working hours. This step helps me to choose the appropriate female candidate for the job. (Bader)

Regarding gender culture challenges, Bader is very careful and clear when conducting interviews with female candidates, so to be sure to select appropriate staff who can work in the firm's environment. In explaining the nature of the work and the workplace environment, he therefore outlines what female candidates should expect when considering

employment in the firm. The specific job role is explained in detail, which can be challenging for female staff, especially when it involves working off the premises:

In the job itself; for example, for the coordinator's position, I told her in the first instance that she would receive work calls at 12 noon and that I would meet her myself, because this is something sensitive, and I told her that if she couldn't work, I would not employ her! Also, if she had family responsibilities, we appreciate that, so we tell them what the maximum expectations are. (Bader)

It is important to be clear with female candidates about the spatial dynamics of gender segregation in light of Saudi Arabia's gender-segregated culture. The firm's spatial arrangements are discussed during each interview with a female candidate. For example, there was one situation that occurred in the current firm, where a female employee refused to work for gender cultural reasons, as the firm only had one entrance for all employees, with no separate entrance for women. Furthermore, Nasar has in place a system for ensuring that female employees are aware in advance of any work requirements outside the workplace. These can include unusual things for women, such as receiving work-related calls at 12 midnight, in the case of international projects, where time differences can result in receiving late night calls. There is a strong sense that for cultural and legal reasons, it is not permitted or acceptable for women to work at night, as mentioned earlier, with regard to the nature of jobs. However, in this firm, there was evidence of some night work being undertaken by women.

The employer asserted that

All female employees stay for a long time in the job because of our selection process.

The data suggest that the process of selecting and engaging female staff is a key factor of the commitment shown by the firm's female employees. The firm's organised approach to female employment has reduced the occurrence of high staff turnover, and the practical induction of female employees into their work has proved useful for the female employees, encouraging their commitment, due to their knowledge of the job requirements.

The firm's policy on professional development for female employees specifies that training be undertaken by more experienced male employees. One exception was where a new computer program was introduced into the firm, and the firm had to hire external trainers to prepare all the employees to use it, but there is no specific training department in the firm, because

It is difficult to recruit specialist trainers for female employees and it costs us. (Nasar)

Therefore, it is clear that the firm is concerned about the development of its female employees and is flexible in providing training programmes delivered by external providers, if required.

Likewise, the firm's policy on salary respects equality as Nasar assert:

There is no difference in salary between men and women, if they hold the same qualifications, position and experience.

If there is some variation in position, salary will be higher. However, these higher positions are usually filled by men. It is challenging for women to work in senior positions, because men tend to be more experienced in these jobs, and so they are appointed for these positions. Bader explicitly referred to the fact that salaries are still not high for female employees and that the minimum wage is SR3000 (£600), despite their long working hours. In the current firm, the salaries of the female employees were not high and so the management was concerned about financial motivation for these female staff in the workplace, in the form of an annual financial reward:

Every year there is a bonus. The manager assesses the female employee's work and sometimes, we give female employees three times their annual salary as a reward. There is not a single employee who has taken less than one salary since their engagement in the form. This is a kind of motivation. (Bader)

The reward has a positive influence on the female employees, as Sara mentioned:

I'm very satisfied with the bonus the firm gives us.

A comment by Nasar suggested that the female employees worked faster than the men:

...male employees, in specific jobs, finish work in three or four days, whereas a female employee in the same job finishes her work in hours with no leave; they work to the end. (Nasar)

Nasar also mentioned that he preferred to hire female employees:

...because they offer more commitment, concentrate on the work, and work hard; they are more patient than men and stay in the same jobs for a long time.

An important point made about female job progression was that women have little chance to attain senior positions; they usually stay in the same jobs and do not leave, unlike male employees. Moreover, the evidence gathered in the study revealed that men beginning to feel challenged by the progression of the female employees in the same place.

This theme identifies what is considered by the HR management when recruiting women, bearing in mind the workplace environment and gender culture. The approach adopted is to

sustain the commitment of female employees to their work and ensure that the firm's management listens to the voice of female employees.

5.6.4 The Experiences of Female Employees in the Sarai Firm

This theme is important for understanding the experiences of the female employees, with regard to working in the current firm. It would appear that one of the main reasons for them working there was to increase their skills and accumulate experience, which could benefit their future careers and enable them to obtain higher positions elsewhere in the private sector.

It is notable that in the engineering sector, where women were previously prohibited from working, there has been a lack of opportunities for them to gain experience. However, there are now opportunities available for women to work and gain experience for the future. Furthermore, it is worth emphasising that the female employees in this current study felt a sense of freedom and responsibility, as a result of their work, and that:

The first benefit of work is becoming financially independent. I feel that I make contributions to society and the workplace environment where I work. (Samiah)

The data indicated that the female employees held job positions that were consistent with their qualifications. For example, Samiah, who was working in a payroll job and is responsible for all the employees' salaries in the firm, explained that

My work matches my major, which was Accounting...

It implies that female employees can practice their skills and work in an appropriate job according to their qualifications. The female employees working in this firm reacted positively to being able to work in their specialist fields and acquire skills. Sara expressed confidence in the experience she had gained in her current job, as she has

...improved a lot in many things in work; before I worked here, I was completely different!

Samiah explained that her job in the current firm had given her the opportunity to acquire more extensive knowledge:

I've gained a great deal of experience in my job; it has taught me to look for and identify many things in the market... for example, I have become more aware of Saudi labour market policy, such as labour systems... I understand the country's labour market regulations, which I knew nothing about before working.

Furthermore, communicating with the managers had helped the female employees to build

experience and skills. For example, in a situation where a female employee makes a mistake, the manager will support them. Sara identified that a manager's experience is of more benefit than training courses:

I've gained a lot of experience in the firm; I have made mistakes and then learned a lot; our managers help us more than training courses.

The data show that the women's job roles were linked to those of their male colleagues in the same position, which suggests the firm's attention to female staff benefiting from the experience of their male colleagues. The managers introduced this system to encourage the exchange of work experience:

We give women duties and we work as a system, so female employees shadow them [the men] at work and they do the same work as the men... and I can see where they have stopped in their work. (Nasar)

5.6.4.1 The Positive Influence of Male Managers on Female Job Satisfaction :

Male managers influence the experiences of female employees in the firms that employ them, as well as their self-improvement. In this case, women have been freely selected for employment and so they are treated positively. Importantly, the data indicate that the women work according to their job titles. In other words, they are in roles that match their qualifications, such as the financial management accountant performing the work of an accountant. Both male and female employees therefore undertake the same kinds of task within the same administration and accounting systems. However, female employees work alongside their male colleagues under male supervision in this firm. Thus, all the women's jobs are linked to those of male employees and managers, whereby the work performed by the women is passed on to managers and male employees to be completed. This indicates that there is still no full independence or freedom for women in this workplace. Nevertheless, a high level of confidence and responsibility is awarded to female employees by the management, which motivates them in their work and in one participant's words, leads to high job satisfaction:

...with friendly relationships with the management and our development at work... this is important for me. (Samiah)

The experiences of the female staff demonstrated that they felt valued in the workplace and able to make contributions in work. For example, the trust afforded female employees in their jobs made Sara, who worked in the Financial Department, feel confident and she considered that:

This job in particular should be accurate. I revise my work more than once to make sure it is done correctly. I've contributed to the firm by working in its accounts... dealing with very sensitive tasks involving the firm's money.

It further supports Nasar's positive view and appreciation of the female employees' commitment to their work and the efforts that they made to complete their tasks effectively, with little chance of error. Furthermore, the data revealed that the female employees were inspired to learn, which influenced their chances of to learn new skills for the workplace. This improvement was the consequence of their management showing an interest in them.

In practice, female employment has opened up opportunities for women to develop personal skills, such as confidence in making decisions and taking responsibility. Furthermore, women's independence through being in paid work has resulted in less dependence on the family, in a society where women are usually highly dependent on their family. One comment made by Sara exemplified this new-found attitude and confidence:

Working in the firm has given me confidence in everything; it has built up my personality a lot... before working, we depended on our families, but now I feel I can do anything.

She added that:

We were a closed society; our communication with people in society was limited. However, after working in a mixed environment, we as women feel more open to communicate with others, whether they are female or male.

From the data, it was clear that paid work opportunities can significantly increase a woman's self-confidence by presenting opportunities for them to communicate with different people and gain experience. This suggests a coming change in Saudi society towards being more open for women to participate and establish their position in the labour market. Such an opportunity offered to female employees in the workplace has inspired women to widen their professional ambitions, as

In future, I don't see myself as an employee, but rather a business owner, and being a businesswoman. (Sara)

Although the female participants had positive experiences and enjoyed positive communication with their management, the data demonstrate that they faced key challenges in the firm. For example, there was a lack of opportunities for progression in the job, so that female employee in accounting could not attain a higher position in management, because this would be filled by a male manager. However, Nasar claimed that higher positions carried more responsibility, such as working nights or travelling, due

to the nature of the work in the engineering sector. He emphasised that:

The female position is limited, not like men, they have different positions, such as in engineering, where there are limited jobs for women; it is difficult to enter different fields in the Saudi labour market.

He added that this was a logical reason for excluding females from higher positions and explained that:

Women can't work overtime as men do (night shifts). This is impossible in Saudi. Moreover, field work is required during certain months of the year, especially in August, and it is rare that women will accept to do field work, especially Saudi women. This then reduces their working responsibilities and position.

From these statements, the conclusion may be drawn that there are identified boundaries, which prevent female employees from progressing in their jobs. The challenge for female employees lies in the responsibilities and requirements of these jobs, which are difficult for female employees to meet, due to these jobs being culturally considered as more suitable for men. Moreover, despite the flexibility given to timekeeping the official working hours remain long, which is a second challenge facing the female participants in their current jobs:

We are not like men; our power is reduced, and this lowers productivity, with long working hours... we are working 48 hours a week, and this should be reduced by the Saudi Ministry of Labour for all female employees. (Samiah)

However, the management allows some flexibility over the women's working hours, as demonstrated by Sara's experience:

The private-sector challenge is long working hours, but the firm is very flexible with women's working hours, because it appreciates the nature of women...

This complaint about long working hours provides strong evidence to support the HR manager's claim that there are few opportunities for women in senior positions, which are accompanied by responsibilities. The long hours and heavier responsibility may conflict with female employees' domestic tasks and duties. Meanwhile, the third challenge in the firm is the provision of professional development programmes.

There is no training programme. We receive training from other institutions, but the firm isn't prepared. As I said, I have now completed the sixth year, with no training added to my CV. (Maram).

Notwithstanding the above, Sara did not consider training programmes to be crucial to personal development in administrative jobs, because the nature of the work is more to do with information technology (IT):

We have training programmes in the firm related to producing a new program; for example, Microsoft dynamic, which is a very effective program and helps me in the job, but there is no training for personal development. We don't need it in our work, because we don't deal with customers face-to-face!

It is evident from the data that some female employees are keen to see training programmes in the firm, but the firm has limited capability to offer specific training, and this reduces the chances of self-development in the firm. However, the firm's concern for developing the skills of female employees through external institutions indicates the learning gains from such training for female employees.

Overwhelmingly, the evidence from the female employees' experiences in this firm demonstrate satisfaction with the workplace and in work. The women have the opportunity to gain work experience, enjoy flexible communication, and conduct friendly relations with the management, as a result of higher levels of trust, confidence, and work commitment.

5.6.5 Conclusion

This case highlights the firm's concern for female employment. Nitaqat has created an environment that promotes female employment, so that women can benefit from being able to access administrative jobs. The data gathered in this study revealed that the female staff had a high level of commitment in their work. The case therefore proves that the female employees are an important resource for this firm.

The experience of the female employees in this firm strongly evidences women being valued in the workplace, with climate characterised by trust and in jobs that match their qualifications. The collected data indicated that the women were inspired by the improvement in their job skills and the work experience accumulated, regardless of the firm's lack of internal training programmes. Furthermore, the nature of the business and their current job roles limited their opportunities to progress to higher levels, due to their family responsibilities and other social restrictions. However, the management showed consideration for the women's family responsibilities by allowing a degree of flexibility to female employees, unless this would negatively influence the progress of their work. Overall, the firm claimed to provide an open space to female staff to exchange knowledge with experienced male employees, as there was no strict policy to limit the women from exercising their communication skills and gaining experience in a mixed workplace

environment. All this shows a growing change in social attitudes to female employment in the new positions opening up for women in the private sector.

This case study produced findings that were similar to those of the Aram Design firm, where a preference was shown for female employees as a valuable resource with high commitment to their work. Female candidates were carefully selected, in consideration of their qualifications and personal qualities. However, it should be noted here that the lack of opportunity for professional advancement to more senior job positions does not relate to a lack of management investment or low priority being given to women, but rather the nature of these senior positions in the engineering sector, where there are long working hours, a high level of responsibility, and night shifts. These job requirements, if imposed on women, run contrary to Saudi culture and conflict with women's domestic responsibilities.

5.7 Chapter Conclusions

In these five cases, certain common considerations emerged, including women being inspired to learn and improve themselves for their future working life, and to raise their profile in Saudi society, establishing themselves in the private sector labour market. Due to being SMEs, Najim in the retail sector and both Aram Design and Sarai in the architecture and engineering sectors, address their concerns for female improvement by providing training to female candidates, before they start their actual work, and draw upon external institutions if needed. This strongly suggests that female employees are considered important in these firms. However, in the Alkabda retail firm and Marouj in the construction sector, women are only important, because they represent a 'commodity' to fill job quotas, and no investment is made in their professional development.

Overall, it may be concluded from the above that the Nitaqat programme has started to change the position of women in the private-sector labour market, bringing about various responses to female employment, in consideration of the nature of the business conducted and the priority given by the management to female employees. The employment of women, whether imposed or through choice as an opportunity, influences how the management will respond to those female employees in the workplace, whether in architecture, engineering, construction or retail SMEs. Nitaqat has created an environment for firms to employ women in appropriate sectors. However, the feminisation of jobs in the Alkabda firm and the pressure to employ women in the construction sector, where women are subsequently hired for the sake of compliance, means that they are given low priority. In Saudi Arabia's highly gender-segregated culture, the employment of women in a mixed

gender environment requires a firm to prepare a separate private section for its female staff. However, in some cases, the level of gender segregation has been addressed, with women being permitted to communicate with male colleagues in the workplace. Meanwhile, in other work environments, there are still boundaries to communication between male and female employees, which limits women's opportunities to progress in firms. The findings also build a picture of Saudi women in the workplace, while showing them becoming less dependent on their families, as they assume financial responsibility through paid jobs. Table 10, below, summarises the key findings and variations across all five case studies conducted in this research.

Table 10: Key findings for the five Cases

Common Issues among the Cases:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Female power position of being in paid work, but at a different level. Consideration of cultural influence and private segregated sections. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low opportunities for women to progress in their jobs. Variable low paid jobs with low status. 					
Variation across Cases					
	The Alkabda Firm: Retail Sector	The Najim Firm: Retail Sector	The Marouj Firm: Construction Sector	The Aram Design Firm: Architectural Sector	The Sarai Firm: Engineering Sector
Nature of Firm's Business	Women's products	Gift shops	Building - construction sector – administrative jobs	Architecture- women in interior design	Engineering sector - administrative jobs
Women's Qualifications	Less educated Secondary school diploma	Qualified Bachelor's degree	Qualified Bachelor's degree	Qualified Bachelor's degree	Qualified Bachelor's degree
Nitaqat Requirement	Firm required to hire 100% female staff (Required)	Nitaqat incentives to hire female staff (Opportunity)	Female employment requirement to fill job gaps (Required)	Nitaqat incentives to hire female staff (Opportunity)	Nitaqat incentives to hire female staff (Required)
Management Prioritises Women's Opportunities for improvement	Low priority given to female improvement	Encouragement of female improvement	Low priority given to female improvement	Encouragement of female improvement	Encouragement of female improvement
Employment Authority	Male authority- strict policy	Female manager has authority	Male manager has authority - high control	Male manager has authority - with flexibility	Male manager has authority - with flexibility
Working Environment	Mixed environment - poor workplace	Mixed environment private section	Segregated workplace - mixed meetings	Mixed environment - private section	Mixed environment - private section
Autonomy and Flexibility	Limited number of women in the workplace and low flexibility	Flexibility awarded to female employees	Women have limited space to work in	Flexibility awarded to female employees	Women have limited space to work in
Improvement in Job Position and Career progression	Firm not interested in women's self-improvement	Although the women are interested in improving themselves at work, there is low HR capability	Firm not interested in women's self-improvement	Women's job roles match their qualifications, but low progression into higher management because of male authority	Women's jobs in line with those of male employees in management, but personal progress is challenging, due to the responsibilities in senior positions

The above Table shows the key issues among the five Cases with consideration for the different firms, their size and the Nitaqat requirements. Compliance with the Nitaqat programme is associated with sectors where female employment is imposed, resulting in male authority, or in sectors that are under less pressure to meet Nitaqat requirements. For example, in the Alkabda firm, the management need to employ women in all its shops, due to the nature of the sector, which deals with ‘women products’. As a result of male authority and control in this firm, however, low priority is given to female improvement in the workplace, indicated by the strict policy implemented over female shop workers, which limits their flexibility in the workplace and leads to a lack of opportunities for personal advancement. This bears some similarities to the construction sector, where women are employed in response to Nitaqat requirements. Nevertheless, the construction sector is not required to be feminised, unlike the Alkabda firm. Therefore, in the construction sector, female improvement in the workplace is given low priority by the management, because the jobs in this sector are seen as ‘male’, and women are controlled by male authority, even if there is some flexibility provided in women’s working hours. In both the above-mentioned mixed working environments, however, the management are unwilling to communicate with female employees face to face, and the HR manager prevents this from happening, which indicates a high level of control over female employees in the workplace.

However, in the Najim firm, Aram Design and Sarai, Nitaqat has been an incentive to hire female employees. These firms already met Nitaqat’s requirements by hiring sufficient numbers of male Saudi staff, before employing women. Thus, female employment represented an opportunity not an obligation for them. Consequently, women are given more priority by their management, in terms of their recruitment, and this is associated with the firm’s capabilities and the level of male authority. For example, in the Najim firm, the size of the company limits the capacity of the management to provide female employees with professional development opportunities, such as training programmes. However, there is high level of flexibility in the firm and this is due to its female HR manager, who is also the owner. Therefore, there is no male authority in this firm. Equally, the male management of the Aram Design firm does not impact on the position of women in its workplace, as there is a low degree of male authority and a high degree of flexibility given to female employees in their work and opportunities for self-improvement. Conversely, in the Sarai firm, there is flexibility in the workplace, but there is also male authority exercised in terms of the nature of the jobs available in the firm, which currently limits the scope of female employment, as they are in the engineering sector. However, the

work environment is mixed gender, with male and female colleagues communicating with each other, without the need for specific permission, which indicates flexibility and low control on women in the workplace.

These cases highlight the complexity and variation of gendered management-worker relations in the Saudi private sector. The above Table shows the various qualifications held by women employed in paid jobs across different sectors. Therefore, it is evident that Nitaqat has resulted in the employment of women with different levels of education and skill by enabling them to access the labour market, especially in jobs and sectors that were completely male-dominated before Nitaqat. As discussed in these cases, women with a lower level of formal education only gained the opportunity to do paid work after Nitaqat, especially in low-paid jobs in the retail sector, where feminisation was imposed on shops such as in the Alkabda firm. Overwhelmingly, however, there was found to be low progress in female professional development or in their advancement to senior positions, due to the individual capabilities of SMEs and the nature of the work in some sectors.

Moreover, this research found that female managers had a positive influence on female development in the workplace, as well as on their position and abilities, enabling them to make a contribution to their firms. However, in terms of the influence of male managers on female employees within highly patriarchal firms, where female employment merely serves to fill low-level job gaps as a means of complying with Nitaqat, the influence of male managers was disadvantageous to women, limiting their development in the firms. Moreover, the findings revealed that in situations where the male management treated women positively and gave them a sense of independence, female employment had been a conscious choice (for example, in architecture and engineering). This is because some male employers had chosen to employ women for specific jobs. For instance, in architecture, women are often employed in the field of interior design in Saudi Arabia, as this domain is associated with femininity. These women help fulfil their employers' ambitions and generate profit for them. Meanwhile, in engineering, women do the same work as men in administrative jobs, but their tasks form part of a work cycle that cannot be completed without men.

In the following Chapter, the key findings of this research will be discussed in relation to the main insights gathered and the theories explored in the Literature Review, with a view to interpreting the data collected in this research.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the lack of knowledge regarding female labour within the highly patriarchal society of Saudi Arabia. It critically discusses the key findings of this study and explores their significance, with reference to the relevant literature using the theoretical lens of gendered power relations in the workplace. One of the key things to emerge from this study is the way in which it has illuminated women's experiences of work, using a gendered power relations approach, set within the context of a patriarchal society. In illuminating the female experience, this study has been able to discern the ways in which women in different work contexts have responded to the various challenges faced in SMEs.

The main purpose of this chapter is to shed some light on the implications of feminisation in the Saudi private sector, under the Nitaqat programme. Four key themes are explored here: the gendered nature of Nitaqat, the gendered nature of the Saudi workplace environment, the gendered nature of Saudi HR management, and the experiences of women in the workplace. Collectively, these themes reveal a complex, interrelated picture of female employment in SMEs in Saudi Arabia, under the Nitaqat programme.

Nitaqat has played a major role in stimulating the feminisation of employment, which has enabled Saudi females to access paid work in the private sector (Renard, 2014; De Bel-Air, 2015; Alsulim, 2017; Alfarran et al., 2018). This current research supports findings on the implications of feminisation as a result of Nitaqat in some sectors (De Bel-Air, 2015; Alfarran et al., 2018). This present study found that the requirement for the retail sector to be 100% feminised restricts firms from rejecting the employment of women. Feminisation has subsequently helped transform certain sectors, so that they are less male-dominated, with mixed-gender workplaces. The extent of this change in the work environment varies according to the level of feminisation implied; resulting in some variation in managerial behaviour and in responses to these changes.

For this research project, five case studies were conducted, namely different firms across four employment sectors: retail, construction, architecture, and engineering. The research findings subsequently raise a key question over whether female employment results from compliance with Nitaqat and the need for firms to survive in the labour market, or whether it is viewed as an opportunity for firms, thus acting as an incentive. In turn, these different

possibilities influence the responses of HR management in the treatment of female employees and as a result, the experiences of female employees in these sectors.

6.2 The Gendered Nature of Nitaqat

The insights derived from the findings of the current study bridge the gap in the literature with regard to the lack of studies in this context on female employment and gender in the private sector (Nasseef, 2015; Abulkarim, 2018; Alfarran et al., 2018). Moreover, the findings add depth to Alfarran's view (2016) that variations in female employment result from women lacking the necessary skills for firms in sectors affected by Nitaqat, which has created challenges in some sectors.

In terms of exploring variation in female employment, this research has not only revealed the outcomes relating to employment sectors but has also examined the influence of the Nitaqat programme and its implications for feminisation. On the one hand, it was found in this study that female employment can merely be the product of compliance with the required Nitaqat quotas, which were imposed for two main reasons: (1) the need to feminise specific types of firm, and (2) the fact that few Saudi males will accept to work in the low-paid jobs that were previously filled by foreign workers. Meanwhile, on the other hand, some firms have met the Nitaqat Saudization requirements by employing Saudi men and so female employment is seen as an opportunity by these companies, which were not permitted to hire women prior to the introduction of Nitaqat. This finding provides an understanding of the variation in outcomes of feminisation in firms affected by the Nitaqat requirements. It thereby contributes to the literature on the influence of Nitaqat on female employment and shapes the discussion in this study; helping to identify the implications of feminisation under Nitaqat.

The Literature Review in this study confirmed that Saudi society is a distinctive and highly patriarchal society, where men are financially responsible for the home and the main role of women comprises family responsibilities (Walby, 1989; Elamin & Omair, 2010; Alqahtani, 2012; Fallata & Moghadam, 2012; Alfarran, 2016). Al-Rasheed (2013) argues that the low participation of women in the Saudi workforce is due to family restrictions in the public sphere, which create barriers to women entering the labour market. However, the current research suggests that there are some problems with this argument, because when Nitaqat was first implemented, some families objected to their female members joining the workforce. The introduction of Nitaqat, however, has helped to break down these barriers and created opportunities for women to work in mixed-gender environments

in male-dominated sectors. The above finding therefore supports De Bel-Air's (2015) argument that the implementation of Nitaqat has increased feminisation, which has reduced the obstacles faced by Saudi females when attempting to enter hitherto male-dominated sectors. The current research disputes the argument relating to the challenge posed to women seeking to work in sectors such as engineering and architecture, which in particular are traditionally male-dominated in Saudi Arabia (Elamin & Omair, 2010; Metcalfe, 2011). This research subsequently reveals that Nitaqat has an indirect influence on female employment, with evidence to show that in sectors like architecture and engineering, there is a willingness to hire women as a valuable human resource and as a means of investing in the labour market. In the process, the management of firms in these sectors can demonstrate a desire to promote the professional development of female employees, and in turn, these female staff may express a level of satisfaction with their jobs in these firms. However, this promotion of women still takes place under a male authority figure and is driven by the firm's desire to profit from investment in these female employees.

Feminisation has therefore clearly contributed to women accessing jobs in male-dominated sectors, thereby increasing Saudi female employment in certain domains. Moreover, this female employment in male-dominated sectors can, whether directly or indirectly, be the result of the Nitaqat requirements, which have been interpreted in different ways by firms; some have hired women merely to survive and some have viewed the Nitaqat requirements as an opportunity.

In some cases, however, as in the Alkabda (retail) firm and in the male-dominated Marouj (construction) firm, examined in the current study, it would appear that the women were purely employed as a means of ensuring the statutory survival of these firms. These Cases reinforce Bassnawi's (2017) finding that 'fake Saudization' indicates low motivation by management to hire Saudi women. For example, there is a requirement for 100% feminisation in certain sectors (for example, in some retail areas); thus, fake Saudization represents a means of reducing the cost of hiring a 100% Saudi female staff by recruiting less costly non-Saudi labour to do the actual work, given that foreign employees are paid lower salaries. However, in the Marouj firm, 100% feminisation is not compulsory, but women are hired, due to the lack of Saudi males who are willing to work in low-paid jobs. Fake Saudization seems to be due to a lack of trust in female employees. In turn, female employees tend to feel discontented and resentful about their status as mere 'commodities' in firms, recruited to achieve a numerical target set by Nitaqat. Furthermore, although the

literature reveals that there are strict fines for firms who are caught engaging in fake Saudization (Alshanbri et al., 2015), the current research suggests that this is still taking place in some firms (Alkabda and Marouj), especially as there is no consistent enforcement of feminisation or imposition of fines by the Saudi Ministry of Labour. From the managerial responses obtained in this research, it is clear that the Saudi Ministry of Labour understands the challenges faced by firms in certain sector, with regard to finding Saudi female employees to meet Nitaqat requirements. Therefore, no serious action is taken.

Aside from the above, although Nitaqat offers opportunities to female employees, the jobs available to them are overwhelmingly low paid; a finding that is consistent with Alfarran (2016). These low-paid jobs also carry low prestige in the labour market and prior to the introduction of Nitaqat, were seen as jobs for non-Saudi workers (Brinton, 1995; Aalwedinani, 2016). The current research confirms that this is evident in sectors where female employees are treated as a resource for firms' survival, hereby they are employed instead of foreign workers to meet the firm's labour requirements. In these cases, the women are expected to accept jobs immediately, apparently due to the limited opportunities available for them in the Saudi labour market. It supports the argument that Arab women tend to lack opportunities in the workplace (Khalaf et al., 2015).

Likewise, the findings in the current study corroborate the factors identified in the literature regarding workplace segmentation in secondary-level jobs, referred to as 'low-level jobs'. Here, there is a socio-cultural enforcement, where men are seen as superior and exercise authority in high-level positions, while women have family responsibilities that inhibit them from attaining anything other than secondary-level jobs (Bradley, 1999; Elamin & Omair, 2010). Another reason for this segmentation in the workplace has been cited as women's low level of education and poor job skills, which means that they are often limited to low-level jobs in feminised sectors with limited opportunities to progress in their work (Joekes, 1995; Jaumotte, 2003; Bugra & Cakar, 2010; Alfarran, 2016). Therefore, the low-level of employment opportunity for women is not simply a reflection of male authority under patriarchal influence; it is also about limited scope for employment, especially in male-dominated sectors where many jobs are still considered to be 'male jobs'. This reinforces the argument that male jobs are more controlled, and men are preferred for these positions, consequently affecting the opportunities for professional development that are available to women in such workplaces (Walby, 1986). In the present study, this phenomenon is demonstrated by the implications of feminisation for both the Marouj (construction) and Sarai (engineering) firms, resulting from the nature of the work

(contractors, builders, etc.). These jobs are traditionally seen as more appropriate for men, thus reducing the opportunities for female employees in these sectors.

Nevertheless, a key insight into the indirect consequences of Nitaqat is that it has opened up opportunities for women to work in the private sector in general. Notwithstanding the commodification approach evident in some firms, prior to the introduction of Nitaqat, women with a lower level of education (not university graduates) had little access to paid work. Nitaqat has changed this situation, as seen in the Alkabda firm. The present study reveals that Saudi women are developing power resources, because of the opportunities stimulated by Nitaqat, especially in environments where their contribution is more valued. Women are consequently work in jobs that match their skills and qualifications, with opportunities to work in middle-level jobs, for example, in the case of Aram Design, an architectural firm. In these circumstances, it would seem that Nitaqat had impacted positively on gendered power relations, paving the way for better opportunities for women to attain middle-level jobs, which was a challenge prior to the introduction of Nitaqat. It signifies that Nitaqat has created the potential for more Saudi women to hold higher-level positions in business in the future. However, from a managerial perspective, women are employed in specific sectors, such as interior design, where they are considered to be more suitable, due to the creativity required in these jobs (Franchini & Garda, 2018). In short, Nitaqat has facilitated the success of gendered employment and the creation of positions for female Saudi employees at different levels in paid work, within male-dominated sectors. However, from the employer's perspective, this female employment is intended to help fulfil business ambitions and make a profit. Thus, women are becoming independent, but remain subjugated to male authority, were the objective is to hire them and develop their abilities, purely to generate profits.

6.3 The Gendered Nature of the Saudi Workplace Environment

Since Nitaqat has increased the opportunities for women to work in gendered sectors, it has also required male-dominated firms to establish mixed-gender workplaces and prepare private sections for female employees (Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018). The employment of women therefore requires firms to make spatial changes to the workplace and these changes will depend on the managerial response to female employment. In turn, this influences the workplace environment by introducing segregated sections. This managerial response can then either take the form of male authority being exercised over female employees, or the establishment of supportive mixed-gender environment. The

findings show the mixed-gender environment being seen as an obstacle (i.e. in the Alkabda and Marouj firms), due to socio-cultural gender issues and the impact of male authority on the provision of gender-specific sections, which change the workplace environment. This finding suggests that women can challenge or limit male flexibility and movement in their workplaces, as can be seen from the above-mentioned firms. It raises issues associated with segregation and male authority, because some employers prefer not to hire female employees, due to the need to provide separate female sections (Alfalih, 2016), even if they still need female employees to survive. In the Marouj firm, although there was a private section with facilities and privacy for its female employees, these facilities were of poor quality, as they had previously been used by low-level foreign workers prior to the introduction of Nitaqat. It indicates low interest on the part of the management in female engagement in the workplace.

The consequences of female employment are further restricted by cultural issues relating to the workplace. One issue faced by female employees is the requirement to wear a hijab in a mixed-gender environment during working hours. This is challenging in the Alkabda firm, due to the inadequate workplace conditions and the long working hours, as there is no private section or female staffroom in the shop. The findings from two of the firms (Alkabda and Marouj) reveal that female engagement in the workplace is of low priority, as it is a source of segregation, and so there is no investment in female sections. This means that the female staff at Alkabda and Marouj are less likely to be less satisfied in their work environment and more likely to have diminished power in the workplace. Here, the segregation seems to hinder the progression of women towards high-powered positions, and the implication of feminisation in the workplace is that it maintains male authority over female employees. This supports Elamin and Omair's (2010) argument regarding the influence of socio-cultural norms on segregation in the workplace. These norms maintain male authority in high-level jobs, due to the belief that high-level positions require interaction with male employees, which is more appropriate for male employees.

The findings therefore point to a structure of male authority being maintained with regard to women entering the workplace environment. On the one hand, control over women's mobility in workplace prevents them from communicating easily with the inner circle of male employees. This finding is consistent with the literature on male-dominated sectors, in that a lack of communication results from a lack of priority on the part of the management towards the professional development of female employees (Martin & Barnard, 2013). This is demonstrated in the present study in the case of the Marouj

(construction) firm, which does have a mixed-gender environment, but communication is restricted between male and female employees. Furthermore, the authority exercised by the male management over female employees' communication with male colleagues, restricts their ability to learn and develop their work skills. It would suggest that even in mixed-gender environments, employers may not be interested in promoting female communication, due to the influence of cultural norms. What results is that female employees are not always considered as a resource from which the firm can benefit, unless they are hired to fill vacancies as a means of meeting a firm's Nitaqat requirements.

Conversely, where female employees are seen as an opportunity (in the Najim, Aram Design and Sarai firms), employers demonstrate a greater willingness to have them in the workplace, and they are given higher priority. Consequently, evidence of a supportive work environment with privacy for female employees can indicate that women are valued and seen as a source of investment in the workplace. The findings of the current research show that although there is a segregated private section in the Najim, Aram Design and Sarai firms, there is a degree of flexibility, which enables communication in the workplace, with reduced male authority. This permits female employees a level of autonomy and results in them being able to improve in their work. However, the cultural issues surrounding communication between the genders is also considered in these firms.

The findings in the Najim from the current research demonstrate that Nitaqat has influenced and encouraged women to manage other women as staff, which enhances the opportunities for female employees to improve in their work, due to the absence of strict male authority in such companies. It is a situation that supports findings from the literature to suggest that male authority can have a negative impact on the advancement of female employees. Thus, many women prefer to start their own businesses (Roomi & Parrott, 2008). While this gives women a chance to exercise authority themselves, as seen from the woman owned Najim firm, it can also provide greater autonomy for female employee, with control over their privacy and empowerment by engaging with a female manager. In short, a woman-owned company or female management can increase women's power in the workplace.

In physical terms, the findings illuminate how the spatial dimensions of the segregated workplace are associated with the level of male authority over male-female communication and the way in which female employees are received at work in relation to the Nitaqat requirements. It highlights two important issues with regard to understanding female involvement in the Saudi workplace: (1) female employment, either as a means of

complying with Nitaqat or as an incentive, and (2) the level of male authority influencing female development and gendered power in the workplace. On one hand, this implies potential exclusion, but on the other, it can indicate an understanding of women's expectations. In sum, however, these restrictions in the workplace appear to be a manifestation of gendered patriarchal exclusion.

6.4 The Gendered Nature of Saudi HR Management

The Literature Review revealed a lack of research into HR practices in the Middle East, and in particular on gender studies in the workplace at a micro level (Sidani, 2005; Metcalfe, 2007; Melahi & Wood, 2013; Afiouni et al., 2014; De Bel-Air, 2015). The current research therefore contributes to the existing literature on gender studies in the sectors currently under study. At present, there is a low level of understanding of HR management in terms of encouraging female productivity at work, in order to achieve organisational objectives and meet Nitaqat requirements. Productivity is elicited from motivated employees by gaining the commitment of female employees or through more coercive methods, as is apparent in male authority and control over female employees. Alternatively, either management style may be adopted for a firm to ensure its survival. This research finding is in line with Mazzdares's (2016) view that the level of patriarchal authority will influence the progress made by women in the workplace. This finding indicates that varying levels of male authority affect female power in the workplace in different ways (this variation will be discussed in the following two sections). It supports Walby (1997), who emphasises that societies differ in their treatment of women, according to the level of authority that is maintained over them. In the Saudi context, society is distinctly patriarchal and so there were different levels of male authority exercised across the cases studied here. It helps to explain the findings from this study regarding the variable managerial responses to female employees.

In order to explore this theme, the following Table shows the **gendered management responses to female employment under Nitaqat** in the five Cases studied. It forms the basis for discussing the managerial findings in relation to the Literature Review and from the perspective of the theoretical lens adopted.

Table 11: Nitaqat’s influence on female employment in the firms

Name of Firm	Female Employment under Nitaqat
Alkabda (small retail firm)	Compliance with Nitaqat (100% feminised sector)
Najim (medium-sized retail firm)	Incentive and opportunity (indirect influence of Nitaqat)
Marouj (medium-sized construction firm)	Compliance with Nitaqat (Female employment to fill a gap, resulting from a lack of male Saudi employees)
Aram Design (medium-sized architectural firm)	Incentive and opportunity (Indirect influence of Nitaqat; firm has already met Nitaqat requirements by employing male Saudis)
Sarai (medium-sized engineering firm)	Incentive and opportunity (Indirect influence of Nitaqat; firm has already met Nitaqat requirements by employing male Saudis)

The Alkabda and Marouj firms appeared to be similar in their response to female employment in compliance with Nitaqat. However, they varied in that the Alkabda firm was required to be 100% feminised under Nitaqat, whereas the compliance of the Marouj firm with Nitaqat stemmed from the lack of Saudi males who were willing to work in low-level jobs, which had previously been undertaken by foreign workers. Thus, women were hired to fill these jobs. Conversely, there was a similar managerial response among the Najim, Aram and Sarai firms, where female employment was not a result of the Nitaqat requirements, but had been seen as an opportunity, initiated by Nitaqat, for female employment in male-dominated firms.

6.4.1 Management’s Compliance with Nitaqat

This section highlights enterprises where women are only employed to comply with the Nitaqat requirements, which was confirmed by Alshanbri et al.’s (2015) findings. This implies that firms aim purely to meet the numerical quotas imposed by Nitaqat, rather than investing in female employees for mutual benefit. The regulation of the feminised retail sector has influenced female employment in the Alkabda firm, while in the construction sector, there are no regulations requiring female recruitment, but women are hired to fill

job vacancies. Here, the argument is put forward that in order to be on the safe side under Nitaqat, jobs should be filled by Saudi nationals (Zaho, 2014; Peck, 2017). In these cases, women are employed so that the firm can meet Nitaqat objectives. Moreover, where the feminisation requirement applies, female employees are less costly to hire than men, and are more likely to accept such jobs, whereas male Saudis may reject these jobs for financial reasons, as they are usually low-paid and therefore, low-level jobs.

The findings from the Alkabda firm demonstrate the authoritarian practices that are typical of feminised sectors, where the authority of male managers influences the management style. This was found to apply when female employees were under a female HR manager, but also under the control of the male management. It represents an example of the coercive side of Nitaqat, which requires female employment in firms with little consideration of their skills in the labour market. A similar situation arises in terms of the low priority given to female employment in the Marouj firm (construction), where women were employed solely as a commodity to achieve the Nitaqat quotas. Although these women were subjected to a less strict management policy, due to it not being a feminised sector, it was the male employees in this firm who were entrusted with the senior jobs by the management. The finding suggests that the female employees were less highly valued by their management, because they were not considered as an investment. Overall, female empowerment was diminished in this workplace.

In both the Alkabda and Marouj firms, practices relating to male authority and restrictions on the advancement of female employees in the workplace were evident. However, the challenges faced by Saudi women in the workplace, which limit their opportunities, are more closely related to cultural influences than employment conditions (Metcalf, 2007; Alshehry, 2009; Al-Zahrani, 2010; Alfarran, 2016). These influences mainly consist of a patriarchal influence on men's view of female employees in the workplace, which also shapes the management of female employees and results in a lack of trust in them on the part of the management. It confirms findings reported by Al-Asfour et al. (2017), indicating that low trust in female employees can lead to a lack of opportunities for female professional development and advancement, with poor support in the workplace. Consequently, male management responses to female employment can hinder women's career progression. The current research and Alfarran's (2016) study both highlight how the low priority given to female employees by their management can even reduce their motivation to progress in the workplace.

Meanwhile, in the Alkabda and Marouj firms, women are employed purely to comply with Nitaqat, although the management's argument in these cases is that few women have the appropriate skills to fill these jobs. Female employees contribute to these firms financially as a low-cost source of labour to fill low-level jobs, which supports Walby's (1986) argument that female employees can be hired and fired quickly, due to the low cost of employing them. Such behaviour supports the argument that SMEs are less attractive to Saudi nationals (Azyabi & Fisher, 2014; Alsaleh, 2016). Nevertheless, the increasing availability of feminised employment in low-paid jobs is seen by firms as an opportunity to access cheap labour (Walby, 1990; Mezzadri, 2016).

The literature reveals that female employees in emerging economies accept poor working conditions under strict policies, due to the limited opportunities available to them in the labour market (Williams et al., 2013). The research conducted in the Alkabda firm confirms this situation, with female employees being subjected to long working hours and poor job conditions. Despite this, some Saudi women still accept these jobs. The phenomenon may be understood from Walby's (1986) finding that although women are often hired quickly, they still have a limited choice of jobs, due to the enforcement of patriarchy. Walby's conclusion clarifies the current finding with regard to compliance with Nitaqat in some sectors, which limits the opportunities afforded to female employees. It also supports the finding from the current research that women accept low-level jobs in the private sector, as they have limited opportunities to work in mixed-gender environments in the Saudi public sector.

The exercise of managerial control in senior job positions also influences female career progression in firms. This can be seen in the case of the Marouj firm, where women are only hired in low-status jobs to assist the HR manager, in compliance with the Nitaqat requirements. Skills development and opportunities for job improvement are only made available to male employees at Marouj, which supports Nasseef (2015) finding that the number of senior jobs for women is limited, due to prevailing belief amongst employers that these positions should be reserved for men only. Alqahtani (2012) confirms that the exercise of male authority over female employees creates barriers to the opportunities that are available to women. As long as this persists, especially where women are not hired freely and voluntarily, but rather as a means of fulfilling quotas so that firms can survive, and as long as there is male authority over female employees, there will be a lack of opportunities for female self-improvement in the Saudi workplace.

Another point raised in this study was that the lack of opportunity for female employees to advance in their work is somehow affected by the limited capabilities of SMEs. This finding is corroborated in the literature on the restricted capacity of SMEs to develop employees' skills (Couj, 2009; Alsaleh, 2016). Thus, the findings of the current study suggest that these limited opportunities for improvement result from the more favourable treatment of male employees.

Aside from the above, Adham (2018) suggests that patriarchy is not the only reason for gender-related issues in a 'male jobs' labour market. The low priority given to female employees can be due to an employer's desire to invest in the most appropriate employee for the job. For example, the construction sector requires manual skills; thus, male employees seen as the best fit, due to the nature of these jobs, as in the case of contractors or builders. The findings from the Marouj firm are consistent with the way in which male employees are favoured, based on the nature of the firm's business and specific gendered assumptions about the suitability of certain types of work for women. However, there is a paradox, as this research cannot ignore the role of patriarchy, which manifests in the management of female employees, the lack of investment in them, and the challenges faced by them in achieving job progression. Moreover, Adham's (2018) study was limited to just two firms, which has implications for an exploration of variation in female employment across sectors. In contrast, this present research has explored different responses to compliance with Nitaqat requirements, where female employment is not a choice. It demonstrates that patriarchy and male authority play a role in the management of female labour, which restricts women in the workplace.

Importantly, female employees remain an important indirect means of meeting the Nitaqat requirements, enabling firms to continue functioning in the marketplace. The findings from this study provide notable insights into the lack of specific regulations from the Saudi government regarding the management of female employees in a firm. This clarifies that management responses to female employees are influenced by concepts of male authority, whereby managers prefer to fill job positions with male employees (i.e. in Alkabda and Marouj). However, the Nitaqat requirements challenge this preference. Another argument regarding male domination in the workplace is associated with the dual role performed by most women (domestic responsibilities/work responsibilities). In some firms, this influences the level of trust in the commitment of female employees. Abbott et al. (2005) suggest that male authority over women means that women tend to be placed in low-paid jobs, due to their domestic responsibilities. It can also affect their progress at work, causing

issues for the male management through high turnover of female employees. Such staff turnover can equally result from the low level of trust placed in female employees by their management, manifesting as strict control in the workplace, as illustrated by the Alkabda firm. This research finding reinforces the suggestions made by Alfarran (2016) and Al-Abdulkarim (2018) that during the enforcement of Nitaqat, female employees accepted low-level jobs, as these were unlikely to be filled by male Saudis, as they had previously been performed by foreign workers. Therefore, the important role of female employment cannot be ignored by any firm, as it has helped to meet the job quotas established by Nitaqat.

6.4.2 Management under the Nitaqat Opportunity

The management of female labour and the response to female involvement in the workplace, where managers voluntarily hire women, without any pressure from Nitaqat, is a novel and yet to be explored finding of this research, with no apparent previous literature in the context. Alhalmli (2013) claims that there is a lack of studies on gender in the labour market or on a supportive workplace environment to promote economic development in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The question arises of how female employees are being managed in male-dominated sectors (for example, in the Aram Design, Najim and Sarai firms), where there is a clear desire to hire female employees. The findings show that greater autonomy is given to female employees to allow their voices to be heard. This has occurred in male-dominated sectors such as engineering (Ruby, 2015), where such findings have not been apparent or clearly stated in the literature. The current research affirms that women can access jobs in the Saudi engineering sector, as long as their skills are relevant to the job and they are valued in the workplace. Furthermore, there is a level of autonomy being practised, according to the sector, as this influences the nature of the jobs provided. In this current study, it was identified in the engineering sector, where surprisingly, women are favoured over men in administrative jobs to assist the management, due to their greater work commitment. It points to the value of women in the workplace and reveals the potential for a female sense of responsibility and independence, although currently, women tend to be in administrative and subordinate roles.

However, the obstacles to improving job levels seem to be dictated by the sector and type of job involved, with certain jobs in the engineering sector being considered unsuitable for women. Moreover, the findings suggest that it is not male authority as such that prevents women from progressing professionally to the same extent as their male colleagues at the

same level. Hence, this demonstrates that although there is a limited choice of jobs, there is a supportive managerial response to female employment and gender power relations, which promotes the progression and engagement of female employees in the workplace. Nevertheless, this employment also benefits firms' progress and even survival.

The complexity of this research finding, which contradicts the notion of female employees simply being hired to comply with Nitaqat requirements, supports Bradley's (1999) argument that women are valued less by employers for higher-level positions. This current study challenges this argument with respect to some firms, where the employment of women is seen as an opportunity, since the findings that indicate female employment as a management choice demonstrate that women are valued in the workplace. Interestingly, the most positive engagement of female employees was found in the Aram Design firm (architectural sector), where women were regarded as superior to their male colleagues at the same level. As a result, these female employees were granted a level of power in the workplace, which may be due to their management understanding women's needs and allowing them some autonomy in the workplace. In turn, these women expressed high job satisfaction and demonstrated good progress. The same outcome was identified in the Sarai firm (engineering sector), where the job satisfaction expressed by the female employees studied appeared to be based on trust and their work commitment, which in turn contributed to their progress in the work. Finally, it corresponds to Kabeer's (2016) argument concerning the productivity of female employees in patriarchal societies, when working in a mixed-gender environment.

Furthermore, this research sheds light on the valuable roles that female employees play in firms in the architectural sector, where they are placed at professional level and participate directly in the firm's advancement. A less authoritative male managerial response to feminisation was evident in this case, with female employees being granted a level of independence in the workplace. Regular meetings with female employees, their engagement with their work, and the contribution that they made suggests a level of managerial consideration for female autonomy. However, there was also some attention given to the flexibility required by female employees in their working hours to accommodate their domestic responsibilities (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). Such a finding confirms that the management of female employees is built upon trust and flexibility, which takes into consideration and does not ignore women's typical domestic responsibilities.

This study has similarly provided evidence of male management pushing female employees to achieve and prompting their roles in the labour market, which aligns with Shen et al. (2009), who consider that effective HR management involves enhancing employees' skills, which potentially reduces discrimination in the workplace, rather than practising gender bias, which leads to discrimination. This research has identified that in some cases, there is an equal opportunity for female employees to access training and develop professionally in a firm, based on the belief that female employees can add value to that firm. This trust on the part of the management for female employees is demonstrated in their commitment in the workplace. However, the level of freedom will vary from one firm to another, even where they have the same gender employment targets (female employment being seen as either an opportunity or an obligation) and job requirements.

In particular, this research presents interesting findings from the Najim firm, regarding evidence of female managerial authority and its impact on gender roles, resulting in the satisfaction of female employees. Female management can demonstrate more empathy towards female employees in the workplace and identify their need for professional development. The Najim firm is an example of Nitaqat contributing to the empowerment of Saudi women to manage female staff, without the need for male authority. However, the provision of opportunities for self-improvement is also affected by the fact that SMEs have limited capacity to offer such opportunities. Nevertheless, women who are given the freedom to do paid work and receive encouragement, from both male and female colleagues in meetings may be encouraged to share their voice for the purpose of making progress at work. This finding also shows that there is motivation in the market to employ women as well as men and their efforts are acknowledged. This was identified in the Aram Design and Sarai firms, where women were considered as a valuable resource. Two important insights were derived from the case studies on these firms; firstly, a clear effort had been made to encourage the commitment of female employees to their work, through the management's consideration of them as an investment for the firm, rather than as a commodity to fill gaps in their job quota without any investment in them. This point correlates with Forstenlechner et al. (2012) and Randree (2012), who argue in favour of the need to recognise the important role played by women in the workplace. Secondly, although there are limited jobs for women in some sectors, promoting female autonomy and showing trust in the work of female employees will encourage their loyalty in a flexible work environment. In turn, there will be fewer challenges to their involvement in male-dominated sectors.

Such complex findings present crucial insights into female management in SMEs under the Nitaqat programme, with regard to the purpose of female involvement in the workplace. Furthermore, this discussion reveals that variation in the management of female employees, including different levels of discrimination and limited opportunities, results from the nature of each sector's job requirements. It reinforces Alfarran's (2016) finding that variation across sectors is a possible outcome; indicating that the level of challenge faced by female employees is due to the job skills and requirements associated with certain sectors. It is demonstrated in the current research findings on the different managerial responses to female employees.

Furthermore, despite compliance with Nitaqat, the management of female employees is not even across all sectors, which is not solely due to male authority, but also relates to the nature of the actual jobs. This can present obstacles to women attaining these positions and limit their opportunities to progress to higher-level jobs. Moreover, varying degrees of flexibility and autonomy in the management of female staff in firms where women are valued would appear to relate to the nature of their jobs, resulting in slightly different management styles. Therefore, this finding adds to the existing literature on female employment and Nitaqat, whereby female employment is based on different approaches to the management of female labour. For instance, the hiring of female staff can either a choice, where it is optional, or compulsory, where it is based on a need for compliance. However, even within these approaches there can be some variation, according to the sector and level of male authority being exercised.

In summary, as discussed in the existing literature, the importance of patriarchy theory in understanding the position of women in the workplace (Walby, 1986) cannot be ignored. The findings in the current study support Walby's argument that the level of authority given to women in work depends largely on the context. It is also added in this current research that the potential level of gendered sources of power will depend on how women are introduced into the workplace, i.e. whether it is compulsory or optional to hire them under the Nitaqat programme, which will have an effect on the corresponding HR management approach. Gaining an understanding of gendered power in the workplace will help determine whether the engagement of female employees in the workplace is affected by a managerial response in support of female power at work, or whether it limits women's power by exercising male authority over female employees in the workplace.

6.5 Female Experiences of the Workplace (a Gendered Power Relations Perspective)

Walby's (1986) work has enabled a deeper understanding of the management of female employees in this research context, arriving at a point where conclusions may be drawn, regarding the experiences of Saudi female employees, which represent the core of this research. In order to understand these experiences, Bradley's (1999) gendered power relations approach was adopted to create a research framework, within which the experiences of female employees in the workplace were explored and illuminated. Bradley's seven dimensions were consequently utilised to lay a foundation of knowledge, relating to female experiences in SMEs under the implementation of Nitaqat. These experiences and the fact that the women were in paid work is consistent with Bradley's gendered power relations approach. Bradley's argument was that women under patriarchal influence are not victims of male-dominated management but can access different levels of power in different areas of the labour market. This supports the notion that in the current research context, women can access various sources of power via these power dimensions.

Moreover, these sources of power exercised in the workplace are found to be associated with managers' gender, which impacts on female satisfaction and provides women with the space to use these sources of power in significant practical ways. For example, it was found in the Najim firm that the female manager had a positive influence on female employees, enabling their voices to be heard, allowing them to share in the decision-making, and making improvements to the workplace. This finding is in line with evidence from Cotter et al. (1997) and Cohen and Huffman (2007) that female managers in the workplace can have a positive influence on female employees and reduce the cultural barriers to women accessing sources of power in the workplace.

In contrast, under male management, it was found that on one hand, a high degree of male authority tended to lead to firms merely complying with Nitaqat. Thus, such employers prevented their female employees from exercising or accessing sources of power. They also limited their opportunities. On the other hand, an unexpected finding in this Saudi context was that some male managers had a positive influence on female employees in their firm, allowing them to exercise a high degree of power. This was because the employment of these women had been a free choice, rather than being imposed by the Nitaqat requirements. However, it should also be considered that this example of positive male management was driven by male ambitions to profit from the women under their control. Consequently, women in this situation have their place in the labour market and are valued, but they are not fully independent in the workplace.

Importantly, this theme makes a new empirical contribution to the literature on the experiences of female employees in SMEs under the Nitaqat programme.

As claimed in the literature, there has been a lack of focus on Saudi females and the recent development in their role in the labour market (Forstenlechner et al., 2012; Alwaqfi & Alfaki, 2015). Furthermore, it is emphasised that there is a lack of studies relating to women's experiences, with the result that their voice needs to be heard in the Saudi labour market (Nasseef, 2015; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018; Alfarran et al., 2018; Alkhaled & Bergluned, 2018). In particular, the introduction of Nitaqat seems to have changed the position of women in the labour market and attention should be paid to studying their experiences in the wake of this initiative (Al-Abdulkarim, 2018). The current research, through micro-level analysis, explores and bridges this gap in the existing knowledge by examining female experiences and inviting Saudi female employees of SMEs to express themselves.

In this study, it is argued that the level of male authority influences female autonomy and empowerment in the workplace. This reinforces Jones and Clifton's (2018) argument that the acceptance of women accessing the workplace and their subsequent empowerment is built upon male authority and the level of discrimination in the working environment. This section makes an empirical contribution to existing information on the experiences of female employees, through the lens of Bradley's (1999) seven conceptual dimensions of gendered power relations. It presents snapshots of real female experiences in the exercise of power relations, which vary across firms in the Saudi SME labour market.

6.5.1 Positional Power

The dimension of positional power helps give some understanding of female empowerment through being in paid work and having a place in the labour market. The Nitaqat programme has brought about changes to the position of Saudi women by increasing their presence at different levels of the labour market. In the present context, this dimension is seen as the most significant in all the Cases explored. The findings show that although female employees face varying levels of male authority, according to the nature of the job, women have gained some level of positional power in the labour market. This is consistent with Bradley's (1999) point about power and authority being traditionally in the hands of men. However, can still access levels of positional power in the labour market.

In all the cases studied, the female employees had gained positional power, merely due to the fact of being in paid work. This finding supports the claim in the literature that although the overwhelming majority of women occupy low-level jobs in most developing countries, they are moving into new and higher-level positions (Walliams, Bradley, Devadason & Erickson, 2013). In the Alkabda firm, women have a position in the labour market in terms of being in paid work, but in the Najim firm, one woman had obtained power and responsibility through her role as business owner and HR manager. This corroborates the findings of Rommi and Parrott (2008), who argue that women surmount patriarchy by doing paid jobs and starting their own businesses. A similar situation of positional power was identified in the Aram Design firm, where there were women in middle-level jobs, equal to their male colleagues and exercising a level of autonomy in their professional positions. This finding offers a key insight into the way that female Saudi employees have at least gained positional power through their paid work as an outcome of the Nitaqat programme.

6.5.2 Economic Power

The dimension of economic power helps to demonstrate how women have gained control over economic resources. In this current study, such control involves being financially responsible for oneself through paid employment. This research supports Bradley's view that men tend to control capital and income in a firm. However, it is also found that women can have a level of economic power, as a result of their employment in jobs at different levels. Furthermore, paid employment provides a level of autonomy, which can reduce women's subordination to men in the home, even within a patriarchal society.

As discussed, female employment suits a range of managerial purposes, but the fact of women attaining positions of power in the workplace is associated with their management in different sectors. Therefore, it is concerned with the control maintained by firms, and the way that they interpret the role of female employees in each case, with regard to women exercising economic power. In the Alkabda firm, there was one example of a female employee being dismayed about her inability to make a profit for the firm through marketing activities in the shop, because all managerial influence in the company was in the hands of men. However, in the Aram Design firm, the female employees earned revenue for the company through their projects, but these profits were still controlled by the male management. The findings of this research also raise the issue of low pay for female employees, whereby they are recruited for low-paid jobs in firms that merely adopt

a compliance approach to Nitaqat. This finding demonstrates that male authority still equates to financial responsibility, even where there is more autonomy for women in a workplace, compared to other firms. However, women lack economic source of power in firms where their efforts are not taken seriously or valued. This is despite them becoming them empowered in situations where they earn their own salaries and are given responsibility for themselves, without being financially subordinated to men. It supports Walby's (1996) view that the feminisation of the workplace provides greater opportunities for women to earn a living and exercise a level of independence through being in work. Thus, the implications of feminisation under the Nitaqat programme are that it helps develop women's economic power. However, across the cases studied here, a degree of female economic power was found to exist, women were still bound to male authority, with most managerial and senior jobs being held by men.

6.5.3 Technical Power

Technical power manifests as male authority over the acquisition of technical skills. This dimension also refers to the level of patriarchy in a firm. Bradley (1999) states that men often claim that it is inappropriate for women to gain technical power, as it is more appropriate for men to learn and use technical skills, thereby resulting in gender segregation in the workplace.

It was observed in this research that where women were employed merely to fill job vacancies, they were not offered training programmes. Thus, these female employees had very limited technical power in firms that simply sought to comply with Nitaqat. This finding suggests that male authority cannot be ignored when considering women's skills (technical power) in the workplace. This was particularly evident in the Alkabda firm, where the female employees appeared to have a lower status because of their lack of skills, with no effort on the part of the management to help or encourage them to gain technical power. This supports Bradley's (1999) claim that male authority over technical power leads to gender segregation. However, the current research found that although 'female jobs' tend to be low in status, some female employees in these positions desire self-improvement and seek to empower themselves in the workplace; they are in favour of attempting to gain their male management's trust in them. However, this lack of confidence in female employees, and the women's own lack of belief in themselves is due to the influence of strict male authority. It confirms Almaky's (2007) point about women lacking self-confidence, which the above author believes will take years to change.

On the contrary, management that is prepared to invest in female employees will increase the technical power of those employees through the provision of training programmes, site visits to build female confidence, and empowering women in the workplace. Nevertheless, this study revealed that it should be taken into account that in certain types of jobs, technical power is not considered necessary for female employees, especially in SMEs, where it is likely to be a challenge to offer technical training programmes, due to cost or unimportance. In the engineering firm studied in this current project, for example, the women did not receive any technical training, as their jobs solely involved assisting the HR managers. This means that they did not need technical skills, due to the routine nature of their work, and in a direct sense, this had nothing to do with them being limited by male authority. Consequently, it may be concluded that the level of a woman's technical power is associated with a reluctance to contemplate skills development, while the job requirements within different sectors have a bearing upon the technical power acquired.

6.5.4 Symbolic Power

This dimension demonstrates the extent to which employees have a voice that enables the experiences and opinions of individual employees to be heard and valued. This is a key dimension in this research, as it helps make an original contribution to the exploration of female voices in the labour market at micro-level. Bradley (1990) considers this dimension to relate to female power, which enables women to express themselves and make a contribution in the labour market. The current research has revealed some variation in this symbolic power across cases and sectors. For example, the female employees in the Alkabda firm appeared to have no voice and were not encouraged to make any contribution, as they were considered as dispensable commodities, who could be easily replaced. A similar situation was found in the Marouj firm, where the female employees could not contribute any ideas in the workplace, because their voices were suppressed by male authority. However, there was an element of symbolic power in that their dual roles were recognised by the management (their work and domestic responsibilities). As a result, their working hours were more flexible than those of their male colleagues. Overall, the case study findings indicate that women's experiences under highly authoritative management (for example, at Alkabda and Marouj) limit them from expressing their voice in the workplace. Instead, these female employees remain subordinate to male authority and experience restrictions on contributing their voice and experience. As such, they cannot add value to the firm and consequently demonstrate low symbolic power. However, in other sectors (for example, at Aram Design, Najim and Sarai), where female employees

are seen as an investment, they have a level of autonomy to make contributions and gain experience in the workplace. This impression was strongest in the Najim firm, which is female-owned and managed; allowing for more female voices to be heard and representing a strong element of symbolic power.

Overall, in these cases, despite male authority and the influence of patriarchy, the female employees did have some ability to bargain, giving them a level of symbolic power in the workplace.

6.5.5 Collective Power

The dimension of collective power, which is defined as networking and communication in the workplace, according to whether women can challenge male discrimination and make connections in the workplace. Variation in the level of communication permitted for female employees, in light of the prevailing male authority and desire to integrate women into the workplace, can have an influence on women's self-improvement at work. This finding confirms that collective power in the workplace varies, since it demonstrates that firms with high levels of male authority exclude women from networking with male management and male colleagues. The situation in the Alkabda firm is an example of female employees with no collective power, as they are not involved in any networking, such as meetings or contact with the management. Interestingly, in the firms that were required to comply with Nitaqat feminisation requirements, the female employees claimed that they need to be able to network with male colleagues and the management, and some considered this networking to be tied to the potential to progress in their jobs. However, male authority had created obstacles to them developing collective power, which supports Martin and Barnard's (2013) argument that the failure of women to advance in the workplace and their lack of communication is due to the management attaching low priority to their professional development.

In contrast, where female employees were seen as beneficial to firms (for example, at Najim, Aram Design and Sarai), there was clear collective power in the workplace, due to the women being valued by their management and in the company as a whole. Here, male authority was low, and the women were able to build string networks with male colleagues and the management. For example, there is strong communication and flexibility between the manager and female employees in the workplace at Aram Design. This is also evident at Sarai, where there were no boundaries to communication between male and female colleagues in the workplace. In a firm where female employees contribute to the

workplace and where the firm's management believes in their abilities, they are likely to succeed. There are, however, different levels of job, where female employees can gain and retain collective power, due to their management's flexibility and low control, thereby allowing them to network with male employees and managers.

6.5.6 Personal Power

The dimension of personal power demonstrates an outcome of feminisation in firms that have made sense of female employees' personal power at an individual level, demonstrating attributes such as building confidence through being in paid work, aspirations and ambitions.

This dimension is explained as a female employee's ability to access and build knowledge and experience in paid work. The current research demonstrates women's efforts to present and depend on themselves, indicating interpersonal power in each case, with knowledge gained through their experience of paid work. For example, in the Aram Design firm, the female employees were found to have ambitions to build their skills through additional training programmes. In addition, the firms' management motivated the women to gain confidence in their work. This could be a demonstration of how motivation from men could play a role in increasing the personal power of female employees. Although the female employees' experiences varied across the cases in this study, the women all demonstrated personal power by reducing their subordination to men and becoming financially responsible through paid employment. The findings from the case study on the Alkabda firm revealed that despite the high level of male authority, the mere fact of being in paid work built up a sense of responsibility and ambition amongst the female employees. The implementation of Nitaqat has inspired Saudi women and given them opportunities to gain experience of the workplace, thereby enabling them to develop personal attributes and increase their self-confidence in work. However, male authority in firms that merely seek compliance with Nitaqat limits their opportunities for development in some firms.

6.5.7 Physical Power

The dimension of physical power refers to men's greater physical strength, whereby men have traditionally dominated in the workplace (Bradley, 1999). This dimension is the least significant of those examined in this study, but it is still important to mention this issue in relation to the challenges facing female employees in specific workplaces. In particular,

this dimension relates to the muscularity and nature of men's bodies, which gives them certain advantages in the workplace. For example, in the case study conducted in the construction sector, women cannot work in the building trade, not just because of male authority, but also because of the nature of some the jobs associated with construction. Consequently, women are restricted to working in jobs that are more suited to their capabilities in this sector. Another example was observed in the Alkabda firm, where one reason for hiring male supervisors, despite this being a feminised sector, was because it was the role of these male employees to transport heavy goods to the shop and arrange them. Thus, this dimension does not apply to female employees in Saudi Arabia.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has established an understanding of new gendered power relations in the Saudi context as an outcome of the Nitaqat programme, based on a discussion of key themes and in response to the research problem. These themes include the gendered nature of Nitaqat, the gendered nature of the workplace environment, the gendered nature of human resource management, and female experiences in the workplace (from a gendered power relations perspective). These are conceptualised differently according to the complexity of managing female employees, either as a source of added value for firms, or as a means of complying with Nitaqat. Based on a gendered power relations approach, this study explores how the exercise of male managerial authority under Nitaqat is evident across the Cases studied; identified as the subordination of women within Saudi Arabia's highly patriarchal society. Meanwhile, to varying degrees and in different ways, Saudi women themselves either submit to or challenge this dominance by accessing power resources.

Here, the female experience has been interpreted using Bradley's seven gendered power dimensions to provide a rich understanding of female experience to extend theoretical within the wider field of gender studies and establish a foundation for the literature on the Saudi context with regard to female experiences of working in SMEs. However, these experiences could be understood without ascertaining the level of male authority across the Cases. Using a gendered power relations approach enabled me, the researcher, to explore and make sense of the implications of feminisation under Nitaqat, in a way that accommodates its complexity and variation. For the female employees, working in the firms was not only a source of subordination to male managerial authority in general, but also a source of power; in particular, affording them a greater degree of economic and

positional power. The value of this research is that it has explored this dynamic in different ways, from the perspectives of female experience and the management across the Cases.

Likewise, this study has identified that the nature and level of male domination can vary, with the effect that women's experiences also vary. Consequently, some women gain a level of control that transcends patriarchy. Through the theoretical lens, it was observed that these differences between women's experiences are not simply due to them being victims of male authority or cultural norms, but result from their own motivation, combined with the space allocated to them by managers to make contributions and achievements. This unexpected transformation in the position of women in the context of Saudi SMEs has benefited women at different levels, by giving them responsibility and experience in paid work. Thus, the implementation of Nitaqat has allowed female employees access to hitherto male-dominated sectors, despite working in a coercive environment, because of opportunities permitting them to work in mixed-gender environments in male-dominated sectors. These gender power dimensions refer to women's experiences and demonstrate that women can establish levels of power in a patriarchal society, such as Saudi Arabia. This research study upholds Bradley's (1999) belief that in some situations, power can be controlled by women. Here, it is illustrated in a case study conducted in the Saudi retail sector, in a small, female-owned company, where the owner was also the HR manager, responsible for both male and female employees in a mixed-gender environment. Thus, women are empowered where this situation enables them to make changes to their firms and contribute to decisions in the workplace over their employment as women, therefore presenting a picture of the positive influence of female managers on female employees' sources of power. Similar phenomena were observed in the Cases where women played a role in supervising female employees. This appeared to offer women a level of independence and opportunities to contribute to the workplace, albeit under male authority (as in the case of architecture and engineering).

Bradley's seven dimensions help illustrate that in this research context, despite women having a presence and power in work, the level of that power is restricted by men. This study therefore confirms Bradley's point that the shifting role of Saudi women and the implications of feminisation for the labour market has resulted in women accessing and exercising sources of power. However, what was found in this study was that the exercise of this power influenced by male authority and the nature of the job in the distinctive Saudi context.

These findings comprise an original contribution to the gender literature in terms of the workplace, based on an exploration of gendered employment, which creates positions for women in male-dominated sectors. The implications of feminisation present insights into the gendered workplace, revealing transformation in spatial dimensions. The gender-segregated work environments that result from this transformation either lead to more authority being exerted over female employees or prove to be an investment and source of power in the workplace.

Finally, the contribution of this study clarifies that although variation and complexity were evidenced across the cases, the complexity emerges from the influence of the nature of the firms, the response from the management, the women's experiences, and the levels of power held by women in the workplace. The value of using the theoretical lens of gendered power relations in the workplace also makes a conceptual contribution to gender studies. The next Chapter will summarise this research contribution and address the research questions in relation to this contribution.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter draws conclusions from the study's exploration of the management of female employees and their experience of working in SMEs in the Saudi context. As such, this research makes an original and distinctive contribution to knowledge and empirical research, using the insights generated through the adoption of a gendered power relations approach, in order to understand the experiences of Saudi women in the workplace under the Nitaqat programme.

In reference to the theoretical framework of this study (as outlined in Chapter 3), the researcher concludes that Nitaqat directly and indirectly constitutes a driver of female engagement in the labour market, whereby firms become increasingly feminised and wider opportunities open up for women in new sectors. This brings about ongoing change in women's positional power and access to paid jobs. Conversely, variation in managerial response and individual experience was revealed. Answers to the research questions and an exploration of the implications of Nitaqat for female employment in SMEs, bearing in mind the current research objectives, will be discussed in the next section.

7.2 Addressing the Research Questions

The inductive nature of this research enabled in-depth interpretation of the data and critically shaped the research process, in an attempt to answer the research questions. To facilitate this process, the questions were linked to a number of research objectives. These are set out as follows:

Objective 1 (OB1): To explore the impact of Nitaqat on female employment in SMEs (gender bias).

The current researcher identified an increase in female private-sector employment under Nitaqat. It would appear from this empirical objective that Nitaqat has had a direct influence on some firms, and an indirect effect on others. The fact that some firms are hiring women without any direct pressure from Nitaqat is important. In this sense, Nitaqat and related initiatives are registering rather than initiating change. Thus, it could be stated that there are two implications of Nitaqat: on one hand, there is no option but for certain sectors to be feminised or fill job gaps with women to survive, while on the other, there is the option for firms to become feminised and benefit from female employment. This

means the influence of Nitaqat has increased female employment, but the act of hiring women may merely be for the purpose of fulfilling a numerical quota, rather than because women are viewed as a valued human resource. The other influence of Nitaqat on female employment in SMEs may be observed in the workplace environment (Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018). By making the /Saudi workplace environment mixed gender, Nitaqat also gives rise to the need for private sections for female employees. However, it can be difficult for SMEs to arrange female-only sections, in spite of this being a significant prerequisite for female involvement in the workplace. Furthermore, gender segregation and restrictions on women communicating in some firms helps perpetuate male authority over female employees.

Objective 2 (OB2): To explore the management of female labour in the context of the Nitaqat programme.

This study is one of the first to be conducted on the management of female labour in the Saudi context in SMEs, giving it significance, due to its originality. This second empirical objective was to explore HR managers' responses to female employment (RQ2) and identify the variation in the purpose of their employment and the level of male authority within the firm. There is discussion in the literature regarding the low priority given to female employees in male-dominated sectors. However, the current research identified an unexpected outcome of female employment, namely that it is viewed as an opportunity and source of investment, which allows female employees a level of autonomy in the workplace. This points to variation in the male management of female employees in SMEs. Moreover, in order to understand the management of female employees, it is important to consider how they are utilised as a source of survival or investment. This influences the management of female employees in the workplace, where strict male authority is maintained, along with gender segregation, and few, if any, opportunities for improvement are available to female employees. Conversely, where there is management that supports women in the workplace, female employees are regarded as valuable and are granted a degree of autonomy, which enables them to have their voice heard.

Objective 3 (OB3): To explore the experiences of female personnel in the context of the Nitaqat programme.

This is the third empirical objective of this research, which explores female experiences. These experiences varied across the cases, as the women had different voices and different

sources of power in the workplace. Using a gendered power relations approach provided rich understanding of these experiences, thereby defining the theoretical objective of this research as follows.

Objective 4 (OB4): To theorise the developing position of Saudi women in a gendered workplace.

Objectives 1-3 are empirical, whereas Objective 4 relates to theory; more specifically, the adoption of a gendered power relations approach in an attempt to understand the relationships between female employees and their managers in Saudi workplaces.

Meanwhile, Objectives 3 and 4 correspond to the third research question (RQ3). They are linked by the underpinning theory, consisting of Bradley's gendered power relations approach. As a result, the experiences of Saudi women and the fact of whether or not women can access power in the workplace are found to be subject to the seat of authority in the firm. Bradley's gendered power dimensions shed light on how female employees build their positions in paid work at different levels, through implied feminisation under Nitaqat. Bradley asserts that women should not be subordinate to male authority in patriarchal societies. Thus, although this authority is highly visible in some firms, through their work at different levels, female employees can develop themselves in personal and professional ways, becoming financially independent, which breaks the pattern of subordination to men. This theoretical approach is helpful for exploring the progress made by Saudi women in the labour market. Moreover, in some cases, women can share their knowledge and experience, especially if there is less male authority in the workplace. This study found this phenomenon in firms where women are valued and allowed to exercise some power in the workplace.

7.3 Contributions to Knowledge

The current research responds to calls for more studies on gender in the Middle East, especially at micro-level (Sidani, 2005; Metcalfe, 2007; Melahi & Wood, 2013; Afiouni et al., 2014; De Bel-Air, 2015), and in particular the limitations involved in studying the implications of feminisation in the context of Nitaqat (De Bel-Air, 2015; Nasseef, 2015; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018; Alfarran et al., 2018). The original contribution made within a gendered power relations approach demonstrates that female Saudi employees in private-sector firms are not just oppressed/subjugated, with power exercised over them by male-dominated management in a highly patriarchal society, but also have scope for their own

empowerment and sources/dimensions of power upon which they can draw. This is important, because it should not be assumed, especially from a patriarchal perspective, that these women are doubly oppressed: by the culture/society on one side and on the other, through their subordinate position in the workplace, dominated by male managers. Moreover, the gendered power relations approach permits an exploration of, and accounts for, the variation that is evident across the cases; it allows for contingency and enables a depth of understanding that a narrowly patriarchal approach would not. The contribution of this research is therefore expected to enrich the pool of knowledge within gender studies in general, and in particular, frame women's experiences of SME workplaces in Saudi Arabia. The following points comprise the key contributions of this research:

1. The study explores the gendered nature of Nitaqat in SMEs in the Saudi workplace, which contributes to the literature on the feminisation of the labour market and the experience of the Nitaqat gender gap (Alfarran, 2016; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018). The gendered nature of the Nitaqat programme has transformed the experience of female employees in the Saudi work environment. This study has explored and made sense of complexities, similarities, and variations in the management of female employees in the Saudi private sector.

2. The complexity, variation and dynamics of managing female labour under the Nitaqat regime will help fill the gap in the HR management area of gender studies (Sidani, 2005; Metcalfe, 2008; Elmain & Omair, 2010; Al-Abdulkarim, 2018). This is achieved by providing useful insights into the distinction between different levels of influence on the management of female employees in the workplace, with particular reference to the jobs within their sectors, management approaches, and the female employees themselves. These represent factors of influence on gender power amongst Saudi women who work in SMEs. In turn, these variations make for differences and complexities between firms.

The influence of masculinity on managerial responses to female employees (for example, in the construction sector) often leads to women being in low-paid jobs, not just because of male authority, but also because of the nature of the work (due to so-called 'male jobs'). Thus, HR managers may not consider women's voices when making decisions or allocating staff to high positions. However, in cases where women are valued, for example in the architectural sector, their managers give them more opportunities to access and implement sources of power in the workplace. Nevertheless, from the employer's perspective, women are employed in these roles, because the work requires creativity, with female employees being seen as the best fit. Therefore, the presence of women is valued by

the management as a means of achieving business objectives.

3. The experiences and voices of female employees in the Saudi private sector makes a contribution to knowledge in the area of gender studies in the workplace, and the transformation in the position of Saudi women in the labour market (Nasseef, 2015; Alfarran, 2016, Al-Abdulkarim, 2018).

The changing expectations and aspirations of female Saudi employees have been defined and explored. Through feminisation in the labour market, there has been some level of independence gained by women, exhibited as manifestations of autonomy amongst female employees. These have been accompanied by the breaking down of male authority barriers, as Saudi women slowly gain power in the workplace.

4. In addition, with reference to all the above, a gendered power relations approach was adopted from Bradley (1999) for the purpose of this research. This study has given insights into the experiences of female Saudi employees, examining the variations and similarities in the contributions made by their employment, and looking at how they gain a sense of power in a male-dominated workplace. It enabled a rich understanding to be gained of women's experiences and their source of power, thereby extending knowledge of gendered power relations in the context of Saudi Arabia.

Within the theoretical framework, developed for this study, solutions have been formulated that should add to existing empirical findings on the gender power dimension, thereby enabling a comprehensive understanding and making sense of the human resource management of female labour. In this regard despite the ongoing presence of male authority and patriarchy in the research context, the current research makes an empirical contribution by demonstrating that management can vary in the authority granted to women, with investment in female employees, who are valued by the management, rather than viewed as a challenge to the firm. As a result, women can be engaged in a positive workplace. However, the strict management of women can create problems that influence female advancement, knowledge acquisition, and commitment in the workplace. Moreover, Bradley's theory promotes an understanding of female employees and their experience, as they endeavour to establish themselves in positions in male-dominated sectors as an outcome of Nitaqat. Where this is successfully achieved, women can exercise their source of power in the workplace to transcend patriarchal influences. However, this varied across the Cases examined in this study.

Bradley's seven power dimensions have helped explore the sources of power that are available to women under the influence of managerial gender roles in the workplace:

- This research has explored workplace situations with a high level of male authority (the Alkabda and Marouj firms), where there are limitations on female sources of power, especially their voices (symbolic power), prospects for self-development (personal power), and communication (collective power), as they are employed purely to comply with the Nitaqat requirements.
- This research has explored the unexpected finding that the exercise of power by female employees is more significant where there is less male authority, and women are seen as an opportunity, due to Nitaqat (as in the case of Aram Design and the Sarai firm). However, although this has given women an opportunity to work in various sectors, it has also gained advantages for the employers:
 1. In Aram Design (the architectural sector), the male managerial role is a positive one, enabling female employees to draw upon sources of power based on their position, personal skills, symbolic voices, and collective (communication) power. In turn, this has a positive influence on women's experiences. They work in specific types of job, thereby contributing to their firm's profits and the fulfilment of their employers' business ambitions.
 2. In the Sarai firm (the engineering sector), although there is a positive managerial response to the employment of women, together with investment in female employees, giving them space to exercise sources of power in the workplace, female employees still work under a male authority figure.
- This research has explored the positive impact of female managers in promoting female employment in the Saudi context (for example, the Najim firm). It has used Bradley's theoretical lens, which illustrates high positional power, allowing high symbolic power for female employees' voices and development. This means that the gender role contributes significantly to a female source of power. Moreover, this Case was the only one to show female empowerment in the workplace, thereby contributing to the relevant Saudi literature by highlighting that Nitaqat is one of the reasons for increasing female employment and independence, but it is not a programme that can empower women in the workplace in all cases. Specifically, female empowerment in the workplace was evident in a situation where female employees were managed by female managers.

- Through its exploration, this research has identified that the most significant source of power in all cases is positional power, where women are in paid jobs as a result of Nitaqat. Another source is economic power, where women gain independence from their families by earning their own money. However, the weakest power source is physical power in male-dominated sectors, although this represents an unimportant source of power for female employees in the Saudi context.

This research contributes theoretically through applying Bradley to enable an understanding of women's experiences in different settings, such as Saudi Arabia. It raises the prospect of distinct 'gendered power sources', as discrete systems with distinctive characteristics of their own, which vary from organization to organization, and also from country to country. What this research explores in each case are distinct 'gendered power sources', based on the responses to Nitaqat, management policy and practice and the experience of women. This research explores the experience of women in the Saudi private sector, at different levels, highlighting distinct gendered power sources. Differences reflect how gender and power relations operate, with women having access to sources of power in different ways, and to different degrees, according to the context.

Moreover, the outcome of this research expanding on existing knowledge of Bradley's gender power dimensions within the distinctive Saudi context. This new knowledge could then be used to interpret similar contexts within gender studies and the labour market in general. In particular, a gendered power relations approach can help explain the position of female Saudi employees in the private sector (SMEs) under the influence of Nitaqat.

The findings of this research contribute to current broader debates concerning the development of feminisation and role of women in Saudi Arabia, not just for the purpose of this research on HR management, but in more general terms to include economic and political developments in the position of Saudi women in the labour market .

The next section will reflect on the research process, which enabled original contributions to emerge from this study.

7.4 Reflections on the Research Process

The reflexive position adopted in this research is a self-conscious kind of reflexivity, whereby, as the author, I referenced data that would ensure a transparent narrative, with clarity of meaning (Perriton, 2001). As this research centres upon gender, reflexivity was

essential for interpreting the women's voices captured in the data collection.

Since I am a Saudi woman, in the initial stages of this research, I was mainly interested in exploring the experiences of Saudi women in SMEs, as an outcome of the Nitaqat requirements in Saudi Arabia. With growing interest in SMEs, in light of the development plans under Saudi Vision 2030 – which aim to boost female participation and achieve broader economic development – a lack of existing knowledge of the experiences of female Saudi employees in SMEs encouraged me to explore women in these positions, using a micro-lens to observe their first steps towards entering male-dominated employment sectors.

The dearth of knowledge on the topic of Saudi women in the labour market and the management of female employees in Saudi SMEs added complexity to the current research. I designed this study to address the research problem, adopting an inductive exploratory approach, with the aim of interpreting meaning rather than testing theory. The interviews helped to gather detailed data from both human resource (HR) managers and female employees. This fieldwork experience increased my awareness and influenced my critical thinking on Saudi women, which enabled me to understand the factors underpinning their experiences. In this regard, I considered it appropriate to explore the topic by undertaking semi-structured interviews with HR managers as the first step, in order to explore their managerial responses to female employment in their firms and the opportunities and challenges associated with it. Secondly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the female employees of these firms, with information being obtained on their extensive experience, which provided meaningful data for this research. Most importantly, I endeavoured to maintain high quality in this research, which meant triangulating the qualitative data gathered, so that it was optimal for answering the research questions. Moreover, in some cases, the opportunity to adopt a micro-ethnographic approach, enriched the responses provided by the female employees and allowed for close observation of their workplace environment, thereby reinforcing the validity of the collected data. This micro-ethnographic experience enhanced my analytical skills in interpreting the research data effectively, through face-to-face interaction with the participants.

Thirdly, gaining permission to take photographs brought the data to life; specifically, building a picture of the workplace environment as it is encountered by female employees. These methods guided and informed the current empirical research.

The rich data obtained from managers and female employees in this study were interpreted by undertaking thematic analysis, which extracted themes from the data. These themes displayed variation between and within sectors, thus enabling a comprehensive understanding to be obtained of these complex situations. The detailed data provided key themes for discussion in the context of the relevant literature. Meanwhile, the theoretical lens through which the research data were examined, built on Bradley's theoretical power dimensions approach, in order to explore female employees' experiences at work across the Cases. The value of Bradley's theoretical approach to this topic of female employment in a patriarchal society enabled me to interpret the position of women and explore power in the workplace. This constitutes an original contribution of this study.

As a result, this empirical study has yielded detailed insights into and knowledge of female Saudi employees' experiences of working in SMEs and conversely, the responses of HR management to these female personnel. At the end of this research journey, I have improved my critical thinking on the position of Saudi women and their aspirations, while identifying the challenges that they face and the opportunities that are open to them. In short, I have had an opportunity to access different perspectives, in contrast to the starting point of this study. For example, my focus has turned towards exploring the experiences of Saudi women alongside current female empowerment trends in Saudi Arabia. This research therefore represents a foundation on which further knowledge can be constructed on the future position of Saudi women in the workplace and gender power in the private sector (SMEs).

7.5 Strengths, Limitations and Future Research

This study has provided deep insights into five workplaces in Saudi Arabia, based on a case study approach. However, despite numerous strengths of this research design, there are also a number of limitations that should be noted, implying opportunities for future study.

Although one limitation of this research is the number of sectors explored, it does not affect the quality of the rich and extensive data obtained. The in-depth study of five firms was in itself effective, as the findings clearly demonstrate variation in management responses. Furthermore, by applying a gendered theoretical framework, it was possible to illuminate the experiences of female Saudi employees working in SMEs, so that fruitful and informative contributions can be made to knowledge on feminisation under Nitaqat.

To be more precise, this study was limited to four sectors and so further research is recommended, extending to SMEs in other sectors, in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of female employees' experiences and managerial responses to them in the workplace. Such research would add to, confirm or even challenge the present findings.

Secondly, it was not possible to carry out an ethnographic study on each Case, which limited the observational data that could have added to the information on female employees' experiences and the workplace environment. However, the micro-ethnographic studies included for two of the Cases were sufficient to enrich the depth data obtained from the interviews.

Thirdly, with regard to the research sample, the study did not include data on the attitudes of Saudi male employees towards women in the workplace. Instead, the main focus of the investigation in this study was on the issue of female Saudi employees' experiences in the gendered workplace. Consequently, the views of male employees in this regard were not awarded the same attention in this study.

7.6 Future Research

This research builds on the foundation of changing female roles and power positions in Saudi Arabia, producing findings that could be used in gender and power studies within the private sector, thereby increasing their generalisability.

It would be useful to study relations between male and female employees in /SMEs, specifically in the context of changing female employment roles in the Saudi labour market.

Future studies could also be conducted on the role of Saudi women, using a wider sample of mixed-gender firms. Such studies could look in particular at management and business opportunities for women, and the role played by these openings in the labour market.

Lastly, the context of this study is Saudi Arabia, a GCC country. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that although this research contributes to gender studies in general, there are distinct differences in the countries of the GCC. These differences are exemplified in the level of influence of socio-cultural gender norms, economics, and politics. Hence, studying other GCC countries would enable a more holistic understanding to be gained of the role of gender in the private sector, where employment programmes are implemented to enhance opportunities for female employment.

This empirical research has explored the complex balance between male authority and female power in the workplace. Overall, it has provided a useful understanding of the position of female employees within male-dominated business sectors in Saudi Arabia. Finally, from a broader perspective, this research acknowledges the widening and transformative role of women in Saudi Arabia, which challenges distinctive socio-cultural norms and allows women to embark on gaining positional power in the workplace.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Interview Questions/English Version

Interview with Female Employees

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my PhD study. My research looks at the impact of the implementation of the Nitaqat programme on the HR management of female employees in the private sector. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated. I would like you to be as honest as possible; Please be assured that all your responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and no identifying information will be published. You are free to withdraw at any time before data analysis begins on 1/10/2017.

Participant ID:
Time of interview:
Date:
Venue:

General Questions:

1. What is your current work?
2. How did you get your current job?
3. Please tell me about your work history. What is your background?

4. Please tell me about your personal experiences.

Current Work:

5. What are your current job features?
6. To what extent do the level of your qualifications correspond to your current job?
7. How have the training programmes provided helped you in your current job? What kind of training programmes have you received in the workplace?
8. How satisfied are you that you have received the correct training and performance assessment from your management? Why/why not?
9. How do you see your work environment? Do you feel comfortable in it and why/why not? For example, do you have a separate area, or do you work in a mixed environment? Why/why not?
10. If you need to contact your managers, please tell me about your experiences of communicating with them.
11. What is your main motivation for working in the private sector? Why?
12. What is your experience of working in your sector and has it contributed to your personal development? If so, in which ways?
14. Do you work full time during the firm's official working hours and how flexible is the management about your working hours?

Future:

15. Based on your position in the workplace, how and where do you see yourself in the future?
16. Have your aspirations changed in any way? If so, how?
17. Are you aware of the Saudi government's implementation of the Nitaqat programme with regard to increasing female employees' participation in the labour market? Do you think the Nitaqat programme has helped in offering you an appropriate job? If so, why and how?
18. How does change in the labour market impact on the workplace in relation to female employees?
19. Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you. These are all the questions I have for you, but if there is anything else you would like to share in relation to your own experience of entering the private sector, I would be very happy to include this information in my research.

Interview with HR Managers

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my PhD study. My research looks at the impact of the implementation of the Nitaqat programme on the HR management of female employees in the private sector. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated. I would like you to be as honest as possible; please be assured that all your responses will be treated in the strictest confidence and no identifying information will be published. You are free to withdraw at any time before data analysis begins on 1/10/2017

Participant ID:
Time of interview:
Date:
Venue:

General Questions:

1. Please tell me about your career, background.

2. Please tell me what you think are the main features of the Saudi labour market.

- How do you see the effect of the Nitaqat programme, introduced in 2011, as a regulation imposed to increase the number of Saudis hired?
- How have you responded to the Nitaqat programme 2011, in terms of increased

female opportunities in your firm?

- How does this impact on hiring women in your firm?
- To what extent is your firm interested in employing women? Was your firm interested in employing women before Nitaqat in 2011? How did this change after Nitaqat? If so, Why?
- Tell me how you hire women, and how is this linked to their qualifications/skills/experiences? Or do you hire women just to meet the Nitaqat requirement? Please give reasons for your answers.
- Does the increase in the number of female employees contribute to the firm's income or create challenges? Or does it not have any effect? Please give reasons for your answers.
- What challenges do you face due to employing female workers?

HR Practices:

3. As you are an HR manager, what does your firm do to ensure that female employees add value to the firm and make a contribution?

- How have the rules in your firm changed after employing women, if at all?
- How has employing women affected training programme processes, if at all? Do you conduct training programmes as part of the recruitment process?
- How do you manage female attendance in the workplace?
- How do you monitor female employees in the workplace?
- How has Nitaqat affected your personnel in terms of working hours? Does your policy require them to always work the entire official working day?

4. How do you keep female employees satisfied in their jobs?

- How far does female participation influence the firm's environment? Is the effect positive or negative? Why?
- How has Nitaqat influenced the workplace in terms of gender segregation? Please give reasons for your answer.
- How do you communicate with female employees? Is this different from your

communication with male employees? If so, how and why?

- How do you assess female employees' performance? Is this different from your assessment of male employees' performance? If so, how and why?
- To what extent do you see the importance of rewarding female employee's contributions to your firm? Please tell me about your reward system for female employees, if applicable, and the reasons why you established it.

5. Fake Saudization:

- I've heard about organisations making fake Saudization claims and registering women in their firms, although they have no real work. What do you think about these firms?
- Have you heard about firms that have been inspected by the Saudi Ministry of Labour? If so, how has this influenced these firms and why?
- **Would you employ women in your firm just to meet Nitaqat requirements? Why/why not?**
- If yes, do you have female workers who are just registered in your firm and do not actually work in order to fill the Nitaqat quotas?
- If yes, how do you justify these fake positions to the inspectors?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you. These are all the questions I have for you, but if there is anything else you would like to share in relation to your own experience of entering the private sector, I would be very happy to include this information in my research.

Appendix II: Interview Questions/Arabic Version

مقابلة شخصية مع موظفة:

شكراً لك على إبداء الموافقة على إجراء هذه المقابلة الشخصية في إطار دراستي التي أجريتها للحصول على درجة الدكتوراه. يتناول بحثي أثر تنفيذ برنامج نطاقات على إدارة الموارد البشرية للنساء العاملات في القطاع الخاص. لذا فإن تعاونك معي في هذا الصدد هو محل تقديري وامتناني. وأود أن تكوني صادقة قدر الإمكان وتأكدي أن جميع ردودك سيتم التعامل معها بأقصى قدر من الخصوصية وأنه لن يتم نشر أية معلومات تتعلق بالهوية الشخصية. ولكم مطلق الحرية في الانسحاب في أي وقت قبل إجراء تحليل البيانات بتاريخ 2017/10/01 م. إذا اخترت الانسحاب قبل هذا التاريخ، سيتم سحب بياناتك من البحث.

هوية المشاركة:
وقت إجراء المقابلة الشخصية:
التاريخ:
المكان:

أسئلة عامة:

1- حدثيني عن حياتك قبل بدء العمل هنا؟

- أعطيني نبذة عن حياتك وحدثيني عن نفسك؟
- ما هو نوع المسؤوليات التي تقع عاتقك خارج نطاق عملك؟
- هل لديك مسؤوليات أسرية وإلى أي مدى ينعكس تأثيرها على وظيفتك الحالية في رأيك؟

2- حدثيني عن خبرات عملك السابق؟ إن وجدت.

- إذا كان الجواب بـ "نعم" فما هي الميزات الرئيسية لعملك السابق؟
- كيف حصلت على وظيفتك الحالية؟
- لماذا تعملين في القطاع الخاص؟ وما هو الدافع الرئيسي وراء عملك هنا؟

3- حدثيني عن عملك؟

- ما هي ميزات وظيفتك الحالية؟
- حدثيني عما يشتمل عليه روتين يوم العمل اليومي؟
- إلى أي مدى تتوافق مستوى مؤهلاتك مع عملك الحالي؟
- ما هي الخبرات التي حصلت عليها من عملك في القطاع الخاص؟ هل تعتقد أن ذلك يسهم في تنمية شخصيك؟ وبأي طريقة؟
- هل واضح لديك ما يجب عمله في عملك وما هي الآليات المستخدمة لمساعدتك في الشركة وفي عملك؟
- أخبريني عن ما يرضيك في عملك وما هي النقاط التي غير راضيه عنها ، ولماذا؟

4. ما هو شعورك إزاء وظيفتك الحالية؟

- هل تشعرين أنك محل تقدير ويستفاد منك بصورة مثمرة في شركتك؟ ولماذا؟
- إشرح لي إسهاماتك في الشركة؟

5. ما هي المساعدات التي تقدمها لك الشركة في عملك، وما هو نوعها؟

- إلى أي مدى أنت راضية عن تلقي التدريب المناسب وتقييم الأداء من قبل إدارتك؟ ولماذا؟
- حدثيني عن برامج التدريب المقدمة لك؟ وكيفية تقديم البرامج التدريبية التي ساعدتك في وظيفتك الحالية؟ وما هو نوع برامج التدريب التي حصلت عليها في مكان عملك؟
- ما هو انطباعك عن بيئة عملك؟ وهل تشعرين بالراحة فيها، ولماذا؟
- هل لديك منطقة منفصلة أو تعملين في بيئة مختلطة؟ ولماذا؟
- ما هو انطباعك عن تواصلك مع مديريك، إذا كنت بحاجة إلى التواصل معهم؟
- كيف أثر هذا عليك وهل تواجهين أية صعوبات عند محاولة التواصل مع مديرك؟ ولماذا؟
- ما هو الدافع الرئيسي وراء عملك في القطاع الخاص؟ ولماذا؟
- إلى أي مدى تتعامل الإدارة معك بمرونة؟ هل تعملين بدوام كامل أثناء ساعات العمل الرسمية بالشركة؟
- من وجهة نظرك ما هي الفائدة التي تعود عليك من عملك؟
- كيف يساعدك ذلك في سير حياتك المهنية ... حدثيني عن ذلك؟

المستقبل:

6- كيف ترين نفسك في المستقبل، استناداً إلى وضعك الحالي الحالي في مكان العمل؟

- هل تغيرت طموحاتك بأي حال من الأحوال؟ وكيف؟
- كيف تشعرين أنك قد تغيرت كشخص، أو تطورت، أثناء الفترة التي قضيتها في وظيفتك الحالية؟ وحياتك المهنية؟ هل أنت بحاجة لمزيد من التعلم؟ ما هي الطرق ولماذا؟
- هل سمعت عن برنامج نطاقات الذي طُرح في عام 2011 م؟
- إذا كانت الإجابة بـ "نعم" هل أنت على علم بتنفيذ الحكومة السعودية لبرنامج نطاقات فيما يتعلق بزيادة مشاركة النساء العاملات في سوق العمل؟
- كيف ترين أثر التغييرات في سوق العمل على مكان العمل، بالنسبة للموظفات؟
- هل تعتقد أن برنامج نطاقات يقدم لك وظيفة مناسبة؟ ولماذا؟
- إذا كانت الإجابة بـ "لا" (يشرح الباحث بإيجاز برنامج نطاقات)، ثم يطلب من الموظفة التفكير ملياً في خبراتها المتأينة من وظيفتها الحالية، بعد طرح برنامج نطاقات في عام 2011 م).
- هل هناك أي شيء آخر ترغبين في إضافته؟

شكراً جزيلاً... كانت هذه هي كل الأسئلة التي لدى بالنسبة لك، ولكن إذا كان هناك أي مسألة أخرى ترغبين في إثارتها فيما يتعلق بخبرتك المتأتمية من العمل في القطاع الخاص، فيسرنني أن تُدرج هذه المعلومات في بحثي.

انتهت المقابلة.

مقابلة شخصية مع أحد مديري الموارد البشرية:

شكراً لك على إبداء الموافقة على إجراء هذه المقابلة الشخصية في إطار دراستي التي أجريها للحصول على درجة الدكتوراه. يتناول بحثي أثر تنفيذ برنامج نطاقات على إدارة الموارد البشرية للنساء العاملات في القطاع الخاص. لذا فإن تعاونك معي في هذا الصدد هو محل تقديري وامتناني. وأود أن تكون صادقاً قدر الإمكان وتؤكد أن جميع ردودك سيتم التعامل معها بأقصى قدر من الخصوصية وأنه لن يتم نشر أية معلومات تتعلق بالهوية الشخصية. ولكم مطلق الحرية في الانسحاب في أي وقت قبل إجراء تحليل البيانات بتاريخ 2017/10/01 م. إذا اخترت الانسحاب قبل هذا التاريخ، سيتم سحب بياناتك من البحث.

هوية المشارك:

وقت إجراء المقابلة الشخصية:

التاريخ:

المكان:

أسئلة عامة:

1- أعطني نبذة عن حياتك المهنية؟

2- حدثني عن أهم ميزات سوق العمل السعودي في رأيك؟

- ما هو انطباعك عن أثر برنامج نطاقات الذي طرح في عام 2011 م باعتباره لائحة مفروضة لزيادة عدد الموظفين السعوديين؟
- كيف استجبت لبرنامج نطاقات 2011، من حيث زيادة فرص النساء في شركتكم؟
- كيف يؤثر هذا على توظيف النساء في شركتكم؟
- إلى أي مدى تهتم شركتكم بتوظيف النساء؟ وهل كانت شركتكم مهتمة بتوظيف المرأة قبل طرح برنامج نطاقات في عام 2011 م؟ وكيف تغير ذلك بعد نطاقات؟ ولماذا؟
- ما هي الطريقة المتبعة في توظيف المرأة لديكم، وكيف يرتبط ذلك بمؤهلاتها/مهارتها/خبراتها؟ أو هل توظفون المرأة فقط لتلبية اشتراطات برنامج نطاقات؟ ولماذا؟
- هل يسهم زيادة عدد النساء العاملات في دخل الشركة أم يخلق تحديات؟ أو أنه ليس لديه أي تأثير؟ ولماذا؟
- ما هي التحديات التي تواجهها بسبب توظيف النساء العاملات؟

3- بصفتك مدير للموارد البشرية، ما هي السياسة التي تتبناها شركتكم لضمان أن تمثل الإناث قيمة إضافية وتقدم إسهامات للشركة؟

- كيف تغيرت اللوائح المعمول بها شركتكم بعد توظيف الإناث؟
- كيف أثرت الإناث الموظفات على سير برنامج التدريب؟ هل تقومون بإجراء برامج تدريبية كجزء من عملية التوظيف؟
- كيف تدير مسألة حضور النساء في مكان العمل؟
- كيف يتم رصد (مراقبة) أداء المرأة في مكان العمل؟
- كيف أثر برنامج نطاقات على سوق عملكم من حيث ساعات العمل؟ هل تشترط سياستكم عليهن العمل دوماً طوال يوم العمل الكامل؟

4- كيف تحافظ على رضا الموظفات في مكان العمل؟

- إلى مدى تؤثر مشاركة الإناث على بيئة العمل في الشركة؟ وهل التأثير إيجابي أم سلبي؟ ولماذا؟
- كيف أثر برنامج نطاقات على مكان العمل، من حيث الفصل بين الجنسين؟ ولماذا؟
- كيف تتواصل مع الموظفات؟ وهل يختلف ذلك عن الموظفين الذكور، ولماذا؟
- كيف تُقيّم أداء الموظفات؟ وهل يختلف ذلك عن الموظفين الذكور، ولماذا؟
- إلى أي مدى ترى أهمية مكافأة إسهامات الموظفات في شركتكم؟ أعطني نبذة عن نظام مكافآت الموظفات لديكم، ولماذا؟

سعودة وهمية:

- لقد علمت أن ثمة مؤسسات تقدم طلبات سعودة وهمية وتسجل النساء في شركاتهم، على الرغم من أنه ليس لديهن أي عمل حقيقي. فما رأيك في هذه الشركات؟
- هل سمعت عن الشركات التي تم تفتيش عليها من قبل وزارة العمل السعودية؟ وكيف أثر ذلك على الشركات، ولماذا؟
- هل تقوم بتوظيف الإناث في شركتكم فقط لتلبية اشتراطات برنامج نطاقات؟ ولماذا؟
- إذا كانت الإجابة بـ "نعم" فهل لديك موظفات تم تسجيلهن ولا يعملن بالفعل لمجرد اكمال نصاب برنامج نطاقات؟
- إذا كانت الإجابة بـ "نعم"، فكيف تبرر الوظائف الوهمية أمام المفتشين؟
- هل هناك أي شيء آخر ترغب في إضافته؟

شكراً جزيلاً.. كانت هذه هي كل الأسئلة التي لدى بالنسبة لك، ولكن إذا كان هناك أي مسألة أخرى ترغب في إثارتها فيما يتعلق بخبرتك المتأتمية من العمل في القطاع الخاص، فيسرنني أن نُدرج هذه المعلومات في بحثي.

انتهت المقابلة.

Appendix III: Participants' Consent Forms



PhD Researcher: Saja Albelali
Business School, University of Portsmouth,
Email: saja.albelali@myport.ac.uk.

Supervisor: Dr. Steve Williams
Portsmouth Business School,
University of Portsmouth, Richmond Building
Portsmouth, PO1 3DE
Email: stephen.williams@port.ac.uk.

Consent Form: Female Employees

Title of Project: **The Impact of Quota System Regulations on the HR Management of Female Employees: The Case of Private-Sector Firms and the Nitaqat Programme in Saudi Arabia**

REC Ref No:

Please tick boxes to confirm

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 1/3/2017 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time before data analysis starts on 1/10/2017, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that data collected during this study, *could* be requested and looked at by regulatory authorities.
4. I agree to the data I contribute being stored securely and until all academic publications (PhD thesis, journal articles, book chapters and conference presentations) have been completed. The data will be kept by the researcher only.
5. I agree to allow third party academic researchers to use research findings only if needed and I understand that all data will be anonymised.
6. I consent to my interview being audio/video-recorded. The recording will be transcribed and analysed for the purposes of the research.
7. I agree to the researcher keeping my name in code in a personal file, which only the researcher can access, in case I wish to withdraw from the study before data analysis starts on 1/10/2017; I understand that all my data will then be destroyed immediately.
8. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of Person Obtaining Consent:

Date:

Signature:

Note: When completed, one copy to be given to the participant, one copy to be retained in the study file.

Consent Form: HR Manager



Interview Consent Form

PhD Researcher: Saja Albelali
Business School, University of Portsmouth
Email: saja.albelali@myport.ac.uk.

Supervisor: Dr. Steve Williams
Portsmouth Business School,
University of Portsmouth, Richmond Building
Portsmouth, PO1 3DE
Email: stephen.williams@port.ac.uk.

Title of Project: The Impact of Quota System Regulations on the HR Management of Female Employees: The Case of Private-Sector Firms and the Nitaqat Programme in Saudi Arabia

REC Ref No:

Please tick boxes to confirm

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 1/3/2017 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time before data analysis starts on 1/10/2017, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that data collected during this study *could* be requested and looked at by regulatory authorities.
4. I agree to the data I contribute being stored securely and until all academic publications (PhD thesis, journal articles, book chapters and conference presentations) have been completed. The data will be kept exclusively by the researcher.
5. I agree to allow a third party 'academic researcher' to use the research findings, only if needed and I understand that all data will be anonymised.
6. I consent for my interview to be audio / video recorded. The recording will be transcribed and analysed for the purposes of the research.
7. I agree to the researcher keeping my name in code in a personal file that only the researcher can access in case I would like to withdraw from the study before data analysis starts on 1/10/2017; I understand that all my data will then be destroyed immediately.
8. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of Person Obtaining Consent:

Date:

Signature:

Note: When completed, one copy to be given to the participant, one copy to be retained in the study file.

Appendix IV: Observation Form

Observation Data Collection Form for Female Employees:

Day:
Data:
Time:

Observation Data Collection Form for Female Employees:

Day:
Data:
Time:

Themes:	Observation	Thoughts and Impressions
Female role in the workplace. (position, contribution)		
Female attitude, behaviour		

Workplace environment (mixed, separate)		
Relationship with managers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending meetings with managers • Communication • How they communicate • What managers do for them (e.g. rewards, etc.). • Type of language used; female employees being valued, etc. 		
Working hours (Flexibility, etc.)		
Women's level of satisfaction with the workplace (how happy they are/aren't) (HR practices, training programmes provided and their frequency and type, etc.)		
Female commitment in the workplace (observation hints - punctuality; focus on job; time actually spent on tasks, etc.)		
How engaged are the female employees? (observation hints - job commitment, etc.)		

Appendix V: Sample Translation and Professor's Agreement

▪ اخبريني عن مايرضيك في عملك وما هي النقاط التي غير راضيه عنها ، ولماذا؟

راضيه عن الراتب، راضيه عن بعض الزملاء والاداره معاملتهم جيده، ساعات العمل جيده ، البيئه امم يعني،، غير راضيه عن عدم ثقه الاداره فينا ولاتعطينا القدره ان احنا نشتغل ونحن مرتاحين، غير راضيه عن المشاكل مع المشرفين لانهم لايقدرن شغلنا ولايعطونا القوه والدعم اننا نشتغل،، انا يهمني الاخترام والتقدير على شغلنا وهذا الي احتاجه

- **Tell me about your work that you are satisfied with and any areas that you feel dissatisfied with. Why/why not?**

I'm satisfied with my salary and satisfied with working with some of my colleagues. The management's communication with us is good. The working hours are good. The environment...ummm... I'm dissatisfied, because I feel that the management doesn't trust us, and this stops us from feeling comfortable at work. I'm dissatisfied, because of the problems, which supervisors create for us. They don't appreciate our work, nor do they even give us any support or encouragement. It is important for us to receive respect and appreciation of our work; this is something I need.

○ كيف استجبت لبرنامج نطاقات 2011، من حيث زيادة فرص النساء في شركتكم؟

- برنامج نطاقات لا يركز على النساء لكن زادت الفرص، عندنا مثلاً قطاع التجزئة أصبح يوظف النساء 100%، لكن الشركات الخاصة مثلاً والمتأثرة أكثر هي الصغيرة والمتوسطة، فكيف استجبت لهذا المسار في فرص النساء؟

مدير الموارد البشرية: سوق التجزئة على ما أتوقع هي كانت فرض من وزارة العمل عن تحويل القطاعات، والآن نحن نسمع عن سوق العمل بأن وزارة العمل تفرض المستلزمات النسائية، بفرض 100% تكون نسائية سواء بالمولات أو خارج المولات وهذا شيء جيد، ونحن نرى أنه حاصل من البدايات وليس اختراعا جديداً، بالعكس هو نظام كان من المفترض أن يطبق بغض النظر عن النطاقات أو غير النطاقات، لكن هذا الأمر خدم في توظيف البنات.

عبارة عن موظف واحد من الجنسية السودانية، والمحاسبة أيضاً من جنسيات HR أنا بدأت في 2006 وكان عندنا ال عربية وأجنبية وكلهم رجال. تقريبا في 2011 بدأنا في عمل قسم للنساء، بل قبل ال 2011 في 2009 تقريبا، بدأنا نحن من عندنا

• **How have you responded to the Nitaqat programme 2011, in terms of increased female opportunities in your firm?**

In the retail sector, I guess this has been imposed by the Labour Ministry. We have heard that the Labour Ministry wants to require shops catering to women to be 100% staffed by women, whether inside or outside of shopping malls, which is good. We have seen this happen before; it is not something new in the labour market. In fact, this policy should have been implemented before, regardless of Nitaqat or any other policy. However, this policy does help female employment. I started working here in 2006, and we have had just one HR manager from Sudan. We have also had accountants from other Arabic countries or foreign countries, and all of them have been males. We created the female section on our own initiative in approximately 2011, or even before that, in 2009.

▪ **هل تغيرت طموحاتك بأي حال من الأحوال؟ وكيف؟**

ايه نعم اكيد تغيرت، سابقا كانت طموحاتي ادخل الجامعه، واتخرج ولكن لما اشتغلت طموحي اني اكبر وانافس في سوق العمل في هذا المجال، تغيرت طموحاتي لاني صرت مسوله عن نفسي استلم راتب ومسوله عن نفسي طول ساعات العمل مافي احد يراقبك مافي اي شي، وتعودت اني اتحمل مسولية نفسي خاصه اننا في مجتمع المراه تكون تابعه للرجل.

• **Have your aspirations changed in any way? If so, how?**

Yes of course they have changed. Previously, my ambition was to complete university. However, when I got a job, my ambitions changed, and I wanted to improve myself and compete in the labour market in my field. My ambitions changed, because I'm now responsible for myself, and I receive a salary. Also, I'm responsible for myself during working hours and no one monitors me. Especially in Saudi society, women are used to depending on men.

• **لقد علمت أن ثمة مؤسسات تقدم طلبات سعودة وهمية وتسجل النساء في شركاتهم، على الرغم من أنه ليس لديهم أي عمل حقيقي. فما رأيك في هذه الشركات؟**

- بالنسبة لي لا أؤيد هذا الأمر وخصوصاً أن سوق العمل مفتوح وأيضاً هذه المؤهلات موجودة سواء من الذكور أو الإناث لا يوجد ما يمنع تعيينهم.

قد يوجد بعض من البنات لا تريد العمل ويسجلها فقط

- إذا كانت لا تريد العمل فيوجد غيرها العمل لا يقف عند شخص معين صحيح، مثلاً بعض أصحاب العمل قد يقول لا أريد ان اتعب نفسي بالبحث يوجد اجانب ويراتب أقل فيقوم بتسجيل أسماء الموظفين في المصانع مثلاً يقوم بإعطائهم رواتب 1500-2000 ثم يقوم بتوظيف الرجال الأجانب فكيف ترى هذا الأمر؟

- بالنسبة لي لا. هذا الامر ليس من صالح الجميع اساسا. تعتبر هذه ثغرة أو تحايل على النظام وانا لست موافقا على هذا الأمر.

- **I've heard about organisations making fake Saudization claims and registering women in their firms, although they have no real work. What do you think about these firms?**

I don't agree with this in any way, especially as I think that the labour market is open to everyone, and men and women may both have qualifications. There is nothing to stop them being employed.

It may be that some women don't want any real work, but just want to be registered in the system. But if she doesn't want to work, then there are others who do. Work will not stop for a particular person.

You are right. For example, some employers might say that they don't want to make the effort to look for the appropriate Saudi employee, as there may be foreign employees who will work for a lower salary. They may register a female employee, for example in manufacturing, and pay a salary for them of around 1500-2000 SR, and then employ foreign male employees instead of female ones. So how do you see that?

In my opinion, this will not benefit anyone. This results in there being a gap in the labour and it is illegal... I disagree with it.

Proof of Agreement

Khaled Hussainey

To: Saja Abdulmohsen A Albelali

Re: samples

29 September 2017 at 16:04

Inbox - Google 

 New contact info found in this email: Khaled Hussainey khaled.hussainey@port.ac.uk

Dear Saja,

I have reviewed your translation and I am happy to confirm that the translation is accurate and valid.

Best wishes,

Khaled

Khaled Hussainey
Professor of Accounting and Financial Management
Portsmouth Business School
University of Portsmouth
Room 6.22 Richmond Building,
Portland Street
Portsmouth, PO1 3DE
United Kingdom

Appendix VI: Ethical Approval



27 April 2017

☐

☐

Saja Abdulmohsen Albelali
PhD Student, OS&HRM
Portsmouth Business School

Dear Saja

Study Title:	The impact of quota system regulations on HR management of female employees: The case of private sector firms and the Nitaqat programme in Saudi Arabia
Ethics Committee reference:	E442

Thank you for submitting your documents for ethical review and for your very thorough amendments to your application. The Ethics Committee was content to grant a favourable ethical opinion of the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation, revised in the light of any conditions set, subject to the general conditions set out in the attached document, and with the following stipulation:

The favourable opinion of the EC does not grant permission or approval to undertake the research. Management permission or approval must be obtained from any host organisation, including University of Portsmouth, prior to the start of the study.

Summary of any ethical considerations:

Ethics Committee is happy to grant a Favourable Ethics Opinion but would ask you to note two minor points:

- 1) The Committee accepts that raising the issue with interviewees of 'fake Saudisation' is always going to be sensitive, no matter how the questions are phrased. We therefore recommend that, prior to broaching this topic in interviews, you remind interviewees that their answers are confidential and that organisations and individual interviewees are afforded anonymity.
- 2) We recommend that you correct the Richmond Building postcode on all the information sheets in Appendix 6. It should be PO1 3DE

Documents reviewed

The documents reviewed by Sara Thorne [LCM] + PBS Ethics Committee:

<i>Document</i>	<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>
Ethics Review Application Form	V1	9 Mar 17
Invitation Letter	V1	9 Mar 17
Participant Information Sheet	V1	9 Mar 17
Consent Form	V1	9 Mar 17
Observational Data Collection Form	V1	9 Mar 17
Ethics Review Application Form	V2	10 Apr 17
Invitation Letter	V2	10 Apr 17
Participant Information Sheet	V2	10 Apr 17
Consent Form	V2	10 Apr 17
Observational Data Collection Form	V2	10 Apr 17

Statement of compliance

The Committee is constituted in accordance with the Governance Arrangements set out by the University of Portsmouth.

After ethical review

Reporting and other requirements

The attached document acts as a reminder that research should be conducted with integrity and gives detailed guidance on reporting requirements for studies with a favourable opinion, including:

- Notifying substantial amendments
- Notification of serious breaches of the protocol
- Progress reports
- Notifying the end of the study

Feedback

You are invited to give your view of the service that you have received from the Faculty Ethics Committee. If you wish to make your views known please contact the administrator.

Please quote this number on all correspondence: E442

Yours sincerely and wishing you every success in your research

A handwritten signature in blue ink, enclosed in a thin black rectangular border. The signature is stylized and appears to be 'S. Williams'.

Chair

Email:

Enclosures:

“After ethical review – guidance for researchers”

Copy to:

Stephen Williams

Appendix VII: Letters of Invitation to Interview/Observation

Invitation Letter: HR Managers

REC Ref No:

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Saja Albelali. I am a Saudi PhD student from the University of Portsmouth, UK, and I am conducting research on **the impact of quota system regulations on the HR management of female employees: the case of private-sector firms and the Nitaqat programme in Saudi Arabia.**

I am interested in interviewing Saudi **HR managers** in small and medium-sized private firms (SMEs) in Saudi Arabia to evaluate the impact of the Nitaqat programme on the HR management of Saudi female employees working in the private sector.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study, as the contribution of HR managers such as yourself is crucial to this research.

During the research, I will carry out a **semi-structured interview with you.** This interview is expected to take one to two hours and will involve discussing questions related to the research, which will help me answer the research question regarding the impact of the Nitaqat programme on the HR management of female employees working in the private sector.

All data from the interview will be recorded using a digital voice-recording device.

All information about you will be kept secure and no information which might identify you (your name, organization or address) will be provided to anyone else. No research data collected during your participation and which may appear in any academic publication or account of the research will create any risk to you or your organisation. The researcher will ensure that no data that could identify an organisation or participant appears in any publication; the researcher will share only the research findings.

Please contact me via email or telephone, if you are interested in taking part in this research. Taking part in the research is voluntary, so your company and any individual can withdraw from participation at any time, before the research data analysis starts on 1/10/2017. Thank you for taking the time to read this invitation letter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any inquiries.

Yours faithfully,

Saja Albelali

saja.albelali@myport.ac.uk

Contact number: 07463701593

PBS Ethics & Combined Protocol Application Version 3.0-January 2016 David Carpenter
– University Ethics Advisor

Invitation Letter: Female Employees (Interview)

REC Ref No:

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Saja Albelali. I am a Saudi PhD student from the University of Portsmouth, UK, and I am conducting research on **the impact of quota system regulations on the HR management of female employees: the case of private-sector firms and the Nitaqat programme in Saudi Arabia.**

I am interested in interviewing Saudi **female employees** in small and medium-sized private firms (SMEs) in Saudi Arabia to evaluate the impact of the Nitaqat programme on the HR management of Saudi female employees working in the private sector.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study, as the contribution of female employees such as yourself is crucial to this research.

During the research, I will carry out a **semi-structured interview with you.** This interview is expected to take one to two hours and will involve discussing questions related to the research, which will help me answer the research question regarding the impact of the Nitaqat programme on the HR management of female employees working in the private sector.

All data from the interview will be recorded using a digital voice-recording device

All information from you will be kept secure and no information which might identify you (your name, organisation or address) will be provided to anyone else. No research data collected during your participation and which may appear in any academic publication or account of the research will create any risk to you or your organisation. The researcher will ensure that no data that could identify an organisation or participant appears in any publication; the researcher will share only the research findings.

Please contact me via email or telephone, if you are interested in taking part in this research. Taking part in the research is voluntary, so your company and any individual can withdraw from participation at any time before the research data analysis starts on 1/10/2017. Thank you for taking the time to read this invitation letter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any inquiries.

Yours faithfully,

Saja Albelali

Saja.albelali@myport.ac.uk

Contact number: 07463701593

PBS Ethics & Combined Protocol Application Version 3.0-January 2016 David Carpenter
– University Ethics Advisor

Invitation Letter: Female Employees (Observation)

REC Ref No:

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Saja Albelali. I am a Saudi PhD student from the University of Portsmouth, UK, and I am conducting research on **the impact of quota system regulations on the HR management of female employees: the case of private-sector firms and the Nitaqat programme in Saudi Arabia.**

I am interested in observing Saudi **female employees** in small and medium-sized private firms (SMEs) in Saudi Arabia to evaluate the impact of the Nitaqat programme on HR management of Saudi female employees working in the private sector.

I would like to invite you to participate in my research study, as the contribution of HR managers such as yourself is crucial to this research.

During the research, I will be **observing female employees in your firm.** This observation is expected to take place in your workplace for a period of up to two weeks. This observation is important for this ethnographic case study, as it will provide data that cannot be obtained from interviews and will help answer the research question regarding the impact of the Nitaqat programme on HR management, after female employees were employed in the private sector under the Nitaqat programme.

The data will be recorded in field notes. All information obtained from you will be kept secure and no information which might identify you (your name, organisation or address) will be provided to anyone else. No research data collected during participation and which may appear in any academic publication or account of the research will create any risk to you or your organisation. The researcher will ensure that no data that could identify any organisation or participant appears in any publication; the researcher will share only the research findings.

Please contact me via email or telephone if you are interested in taking part in this research. Taking part in the research is voluntary, so your company and any individual can withdraw from participation at any time before the research data analysis starts on 1/10/2017. Thank you for taking the time to read this invitation letter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any inquiries.

Yours faithfully,

Saja Albelali

saja.albelali@myport.ac.uk

Contact number: 07463701593

Appendix VIII: Information Sheets



PhD Researcher: Saja Albelali
Business School, University of Portsmouth,
Contact number: 07463701593
Email: saja.albelali@myport.ac.uk

Supervisor: Dr. Steve Williams^[1]_[SEP]
Portsmouth Business School,
University of Portsmouth, Richmond Building
Portsmouth, PO1 3D
Email: stephen.williams@port.ac.uk

HR Managers - Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project: The Impact of Quota System Regulations on the HR Management of Female Employees: The Case of Private-Sector Firms and the Nitaqat Programme in Saudi Arabia

REC Ref No:

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Whether or not you decide to participate in the study is entirely up to you. However, before you decide, I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. I will go through this information sheet with you, to help you decide whether or not you would like to take part and I will answer any questions you may have. I think this should take about five minutes. Please feel free to talk to others about the study if you wish. Do ask if anything is unclear.

I am Saja Albelali, a PhD student in the Organisation Studies and Human Resources Department at the University of Portsmouth in Portsmouth, UK.

Study Summary:

This study is concerned with investigating the impact of the Nitaqat programme on the HR management of female employees in the private sector. It is important to study this, because so far, no study has evaluated the impact of the Nitaqat programme on HR practices related to female employees. I am seeking participants who are Saudi HR managers or female employees, working in small and medium sized firms (SMEs). Participation in the research would require you to participate in an interview, taking approximately one hour of your time.

Inclusion: Human resource (HR) managers and female employees.

Exclusion: Managers who are not responsible for HR practices related to female employees; male employees; foreign employees (these will not be included in the research).

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of this study is to fill the gap in knowledge of the Nitaqat programme, exploring the impact of Nitaqat on the management of female employees in the private sector. This area needs to be studied, because so few studies have been conducted on female labour in general, and because there is a gap in the existing studies on the position of female employees in Saudi Arabia. In particular, no study concentrating on female employees has provided clear information about the extent to which quota systems impact on HR practices relating to female employees, from a managerial perspective. This research will examine the experience of female labour in the private sector, using interviews and observations to help answer the research questions.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited, because your position as an HR manager means that it is important to obtain answers related to HR practices specifically for female employees, such as training programmes catering for them, and the recruitment process. Your answers will fill gaps in understanding the managerial perspective for the purpose of this research, in terms of exploring the impact of the Nitaqat programme on your HR practices for female employees, from the managerial perspective; this can be obtained only from your experience.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for the study. We describe the study in this information sheet. If you agree to take part, we will ask you to sign the attached consent form, dated, version number,

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part in this study, the researcher will provide you with a copy of this information sheet, which explains in detail the purpose of the study and why your participation is important. She will then give you a consent form, which explains the research topic. You will tick boxes on it to show that you understand that the researcher guarantees your data will be kept confidential and your anonymity will be maintained. If you choose to participate and sign the consent form, the researcher will interview you for one to two hours in your workplace. The interview will be recorded using a digital voice-recording device, after you have given your permission on the consent form. You can ask any question you wish during the interview and if any question is unclear, I will explain it further for you. You can also ask any question you wish during the observation and, if you feel that you no longer want to participate in the research, you can withdraw from it at any time, without giving any reason, up until the data analysis begins on 1st October 2017.

Expenses and payments

No payment will be made to your organisation, to you. or to the researcher. However, you can ask for copies of any findings from the research, as these could be useful for you in terms of increasing your knowledge of HR practices and female employment.

Is there anything else I will have to do?

No, but please remember the timeframe for the observation is very important, as I live in Portsmouth in the UK. Thus, it is crucial for me that you come to the interview on time. The interview will be planned for a time that is appropriate for you and your management. The interview will be face to face and will not last for more than one to two hours.

What data will be collected and/or what measurements taken?

The interview will be made up of questions related to the Nitaqat programme and HR practices for managing female employees in your organisation. The researcher will conduct the semi-structured interview in your language, which is Arabic, and questions will be based on the purpose of the research. The researcher will record your voice using a digital voice recorder during all of the interviews. Your name will be kept coded in a separate file, so that your data can be identified, if you decide you want to withdraw from the study before 1st October 2017. All data will be kept fully secure and stored in the researcher's desk, which is locked with a personal key that only the researcher has access to.

What are the possible disadvantages, burdens and risks involved in taking part?

Your participation will be entirely voluntary on your part. This information sheet explains in detail all information needed for this study and the consent form will be given to you on the day that the observation starts, so that you have all the information you need to be able to make a choice. It is entirely up to you whether you participate in this study. If you feel you want to withdraw, you can, without giving any reason.

What are the possible advantages or benefits of taking part?

Participating in this research will not be of any direct benefit to you, but you will be taking part in a study and contributing to the research results, thereby helping to gain a greater understanding of the impact of the Nitaqat programme on HR practices related to female employees in the Saudi private sector. A review of the research results will be given to you.

Will my participation in the study be kept confidential?

This research data will be kept completely confidential. All recorded data, locations, and names of individuals and organisations will be kept secure. Each individual's name, with their identifying code, should they wish to withdraw, will be kept securely in a specific file with all the other research data (organisations, locations, personal identities) in the researcher's personal desk, which is locked with a key that only the researcher can access. All names will be anonymised and no name or identifying information will be mentioned in any academic papers, research publications or books, but a code will be used instead for each participant, when recording the interviews and transcribing notes.

The researcher is aware of the need to preserve the anonymity of individuals by using data that includes no names or job titles. As mentioned previously, the researcher will only use a specific personal file for individuals' names and codes, in order to be able to identify these individuals, if they wish to withdraw before the data analysis begins (1/10/2017). Therefore, all data related to such participants can be destroyed and will not be used in the research. Moreover, this file will be safely destroyed after data analysis has taken place, using document shredders on the fourth and fifth floors of the University of Portsmouth Business School. The extracted data will then be kept 10 years, according to the requirements of the University of Portsmouth Research Data Management Policy.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

As a volunteer, you can end your participation in the observation at any time, or withdraw from the entire study at any time before the start of the data analysis, without explaining why you no longer wish to participate. If you do withdraw from the study after some data has been collected, you will be asked whether you are happy for this data to be retained and included in the study. Conversely, if you prefer, any data that has already been collected can be destroyed and excluded from the study. However, once the research has been completed and the data analysed, it will not be possible for you to withdraw your data from this study.

What will happen to the results of this research study?

The research results will be published in a PhD, which may be accessed in the University of Portsmouth's library. The results may appear in papers, conference proceedings, academic journals or book chapters. However, you will not be identified in the research results.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a query, concern or complaint about any aspect of this study; in the first instance, you should contact me, the PhD researcher, if appropriate. There will also be a member of the academic staff listed as the supervisor, whom you can contact. If there is a complaint, please contact the supervisor with details of the complaint. The contact details for both the researcher and supervisor are presented on page 1 of this document.

If your concern or complaint is not resolved by the researcher or their supervisor, you should contact the Head of Department:

Dr. Gary Rees
Head of Organisation Studies and Human Resource Management
Portsmouth Business School
Tel: 0044 (0) 2392848583
Fax: 0044 (0) 23 92 844037

If the complaint remains unresolved, please contact:

The University Complaints Officer:
Tel: 023 9284 3642
Email: complaintsadvise@port.ac.uk

Who is funding this research?

The Saudi Embassy in London is funding this research. None of the researchers or study staff will receive any financial reward for conducting this study.

Who has reviewed this study?

Research involving human participants is reviewed by an ethics committee to ensure that the dignity and well-being of the participants are respected and that they are protected. This study has been reviewed by the Portsmouth Business School Research Ethics Committee, who have given a favourable opinion.

Further information and contact details

If you would like further details about research in the University, please use the following link to the University of Portsmouth research website: <http://www.port.ac.uk/research/>

If you would like details on research carried out in the Portsmouth Business School, please use the following link to the Portsmouth Business School research website:
<http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/faculties/portsmouthbusinessschool/research/>

If you would like further information about this project, please contact the PhD researcher, Saja Albelali:

Tel: 00447463701593
Email: [saja.albelali @myport.ac.uk](mailto:saja.albelali@myport.ac.uk)

Thank you for your kind co-operation

Thank you taking the time to read this information sheet and for considering volunteering for this research. If you do agree to participate, your consent will be sought; please see the accompanying consent form. You will then be given a copy of this information sheet and your signed consent form to keep.

Female Employees – Information Sheet (Interviews)



PhD Researcher: Saja Albelali
Business School, University of Portsmouth,
Email: saja.albelali@myport.ac.uk.

Supervisor: Dr. Steve Williams
Portsmouth Business School,
University of Portsmouth, Richmond Building
Portsmouth, PO1 3D
Email: stephen.williams@port.ac.uk

Title of Project: The Impact of Quota System Regulations on the HR Management of Female Employees: The Case of Private-Sector Firms and the Nitaqat Programme in Saudi Arabia

REC Ref No:

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Whether or not you decide to participate in the study is entirely up to you. However, before you decide, I would like you to understand why this research is being done and what it would involve for you. I will go through this information sheet with you, to help you decide whether or not you would like to participate and will answer any questions you may have. I think this should take about five minutes. Please feel free to talk to others about the study if you wish. Do ask if anything is unclear.

I am Saja Albelali, a PhD student in the Organisation Studies and Human Resources Department at the University of Portsmouth in the UK.

Study Summary:

This study is concerned with investigating the impact of the Nitaqat programme on the HR management of female employees in the private sector. It is important to study this, because so far, no study has evaluated the impact of the Nitaqat programme on HR practices related to female employees. I am seeking participants who are Saudi HR managers or female employees working in small and medium sized firms (SMEs). Participation in the research would require you to participate in an interview, taking approximately one hour of your time.

Inclusion: Human resource managers and female employees.

Exclusion: Managers who are not responsible for HR practices related to female employees; male employees; foreign employees (these will not be included in the research).

What is the purpose of this study?

The aim of this study is to fill the gap in knowledge of the Nitaqat programme, exploring the impact of Nitaqat on the management of female employees in the private sector. This area needs to be studied, because so few studies have been conducted on female labour in general, and because there is a gap in the existing studies on the position of female employees in Saudi Arabia. In particular, no study concentrating on female employees has provided clear information about the extent to which quota systems impact on HR practices relating to female employees, from a managerial perspective. This research will examine the experience of female labour in the private sector, using interviews and observations to help answer the research questions.

Why have I been invited?

You have been invited, because your position as a female employee means that it is important to obtain answers related to your experience of working in the private sector under the Nitaqat programme. Your answers will help fill gaps regarding the experiences of Saudi female employees for the purpose of this research, and regarding the impact of the Nitaqat programme on HR practices related to female employees. Your perspective as a female employee will be useful in filling this gap.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether you want to volunteer for the study. We describe the study in this information sheet. If you agree to take part, we will then ask you to sign the attached consent form, dated, version number,

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you take part in this study, the researcher will provide you with a copy of this information sheet, which explains in detail the purpose of the study and the reason why your participation is important. She will then give you a consent form, which presents the research topic. You will tick boxes on it to show that you understand that the researcher guarantees your data will be kept confidential and that your anonymity will be maintained. If you choose to participate and sign the consent form, the researcher will interview you for one to two hours in your workplace. The interview will be recorded using a digital voice-recording device, after you have given your permission on the consent form. You can ask any question you wish during the interview and if any question is unclear, I will explain it further for you. You can also ask any question you wish during the observation and, if you feel that you no longer want to participate in the research, you can withdraw from it at any time, without giving any reason, up until the data analysis begins on 1st October 2017.

Expenses and payments

No payment will be made to your organisation, either to you or to the researcher. However, you can ask for copies of any findings from the research, as these could be useful for you in terms of increasing your knowledge of HR practices and female employment.

Is there anything else I will have to do?

No, but please remember the timeframe for the observation is very important, as I live in Portsmouth in the UK. Thus, it is crucial for me that you come to the interview on time. The interview will be planned for a time that is appropriate for you and your management. The interview will be face to face and will not last for more than one to two hours.

What data will be collected and/or what measurements taken?

The interview will be made up of questions related to the Nitaqat programme and HR practices for managing female employees in your organisation. The researcher will conduct the semi-structured interview in your language, which is Arabic, and questions will be based on the purpose of the research. The researcher will record your voice using a digital voice recorder during all of the interviews. Your name will be kept coded in a separate file, so that your data can be identified, if you decide you want to withdraw from the study before 1st October 2017. All data will be kept fully secure and stored in the researcher's desk, which is locked with a personal key that only the researcher has access to.

What are the possible disadvantages, burdens and risks involved in taking part?

Your participation will be entirely voluntary and your choice. This information sheet explains in detail all information needed for this study and the consent form will be given to you on the day that the observation starts, so that you have all the information you need to be able to make a choice. It is entirely up to you whether you are part of this study. If you feel that you want to withdraw, you can, without giving any reason.

What are the possible advantages or benefits of taking part?

Participating in this research will not be of any direct benefit to you, but you will be taking part in a study and contributing to the research results, thereby helping to gain a greater understanding of the impact of the Nitaqat programme on HR practices related to female employees in the Saudi private sector. A review of the research results will be given to you.

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What will happen to the results of the research study?

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What if there is a problem?

If you have a query, concern or complaint about any aspect of this study; in the first instance, you should contact me, the PhD researcher, if appropriate. There will also be a member of the academic staff listed as the supervisor, whom you can contact. If there is a complaint, please contact the supervisor with details of the complaint. The contact details for both the researcher and supervisor are presented on page 1 of this document.

If your concern or complaint is not resolved by the researcher or their supervisor, you should contact the Head of Department:

Dr Gary Rees
Head of Organisation Studies and Human Resource Management
Portsmouth Business School
Tel: 0044 (0) 2392848583.
Fax: 0044 (0) 23 92 844037.

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Who is funding this research?

The Saudi Embassy in London is funding this research. None of the researchers or study staff will receive any financial reward for conducting this study.

Who has reviewed this study?

Research involving human participants is reviewed by an ethics committee to ensure that the dignity and well-being of the participants are respected and that they are protected. This study has been reviewed by the Portsmouth Business School Research Ethics Committee, who have given a favourable opinion.

Further information and contact details

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If you would like details on research carried out in the Portsmouth Business School, please use the following link:

<http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/faculties/portsmouthbusinessschool/research/>

If you would like further information about this project, please contact the PhD researcher: Saja Albelali:

Tel: 00447463701593.
Email: saja.albelali@myport.ac.uk

Thank you for your kind co-operation

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for considering volunteering for this research. If you do agree to participate, your consent will be sought; please see the accompanying consent form. You will then be given a copy of this information sheet and your signed consent form to keep.

Appendix IX: Training Certificate



Appendix IXX: Research Ethics Review checklist:

FORM UPR16

Research Ethics Review Checklist



Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Research Degrees Operational Handbook for more information)

Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information		Student ID:	706629
PGRS Name:	Saja		
Department:	Busniess school	First Supervisor:	Steve Williams
Start Date: (or progression date for Prof Doc students)	31/1/2016		
Study Mode and Route:	Part-time <input type="checkbox"/>	MPhil <input type="checkbox"/>	MD <input type="checkbox"/>
	Full-time <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	PhD <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Professional Doctorate <input type="checkbox"/>

Title of Thesis:	Female Labour in Saudi Arabia under the Nitaqat Programme: A Gendered Power Relations Approach
Thesis Word Count: (excluding ancillary data)	83,000

If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study

Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).

UKRIO Finished Research Checklist: (If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/)	
a) Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
b) Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
c) Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
d) Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
e) Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>

Candidate Statement:	
I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)	
Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):	E442
If you have <i>not</i> submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain below why this is so:	
Signed (PGRS):	293
	Date: 18-10-2019 Saja