



**MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE NURSE MANAGERS
IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH IN SAUDI ARABIA PRE- AND POST-PROMULGATION OF
VISION 2030: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Salma Alshammari

Cardiff University

School of Healthcare Sciences

2024

Abstract

Despite significant progress under Vision 2030 to enhance women's status in Saudi Arabia, the rise of mid-level female nurse managers to senior positions has remained slow. While women dominated the nursing field, male nurses often ascended to top positions more quickly. This study addressed the gap in understanding why mid-level female nurses faced delays in reaching more senior roles in Saudi Arabia. My thesis explored the lived experiences of mid-level female nurse managers, focusing on the challenges they encountered and strategies they used within a male-dominated healthcare environment. It aimed to understand the underrepresentation of women in senior managerial positions and the impact of the Vision 2030 reforms. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), qualitative data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six mid-level female nurse managers in major hospitals in Hail City, Saudi Arabia. The data were translated and analysed, with each interview individually analysed, and cross-case comparisons made. A feminist lens was used to interpret the findings and provide deeper insights into women's lived experiences. The study revealed significant challenges for female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia's male-dominated healthcare sector. Despite socio-political reforms under Vision 2030, cultural norms and societal expectations continue to impact their professional lives. These factors often lead to internalised oppressive views, perpetuating marginalisation, and reinforcing systemic barriers. This study enhances the understanding of the specific challenges faced by female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. By delving into their lived experiences, it highlights invisible but impactful barriers to their progression, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to support women's advancement in managerial roles, beginning with women addressing these internalised views themselves.

Acknowledgements

I extend my special thanks to the women who participated in this study and shared their personal, sensitive, and complex experiences.

I am greatly indebted to everyone who has helped me throughout my studies. I especially wish to extend my gratitude to my supervisors, Dr. Jane Harden, Dr. Alison James, and Dr. Amie Hodges. Your support and encouragement, both academically and personally, have been truly inspiring. I appreciate the guidance and advice you provided, which helped me overcome challenges and navigate obstacles. Without your constant encouragement, this process would have been significantly more challenging and stressful than it was. Being your last PhD student, Dr. Harden, is an honour that I will cherish forever. Additionally, exceptional thanks to Professor Katie Featherstone, whose outstanding supervision during the first year of my PhD journey laid a solid foundation for my research. I would like to express sincere thanks to my examiners, Dr. Steven Whitcombe and Dr. Sue Schutz, for their careful examination of my thesis and their valuable feedback.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the Ministry of Education for the scholarship that made this study possible. Thank you to the School of Healthcare Sciences members and librarians at Cardiff University for making everything easier and smoother. Special thanks to the IPA group at the school for the enriching sessions, which greatly enhanced my research.

I am deeply indebted to my husband Dr. Yousef for his endless love, patience, and understanding. Thank you for every cup of coffee, your belief in me, and for enduring my mood swings, all while working on your thesis. Your constant support and presence by my side have been my main sources of strength. Without you, this journey would have been far more difficult. To my little one, Yara, your love, and patience have been my driving forces. I know I have missed countless moments with you, but your smiles, hugs, and innocent words of encouragement have given me the strength to persevere.

To my parents, words cannot express the depth of my gratitude for your constant support and encouragement throughout my academic journey. You have been my greatest pillar of strength, providing me with the confidence and motivation to pursue my dreams. To my sister and brother, your support and encouragement have been constant sources of motivation. Special thanks to my

beloved sister, Dr. Bodor, who spent six months in the UK to support me and my husband during our PhD journey, providing care and love to my daughter. Your presence has been a great source of comfort and inspiration, and I am deeply grateful for your sacrifice and support.

To my dear friends, Dr. Fathiyyah, and Aseel, your friendship, support, and encouragement were invaluable. Your belief in me has meant the world and helped me navigate the challenges of this journey. Finally, a deep heartfelt thanks to my friend, Alanoud Alotibi. You were there for me during the most difficult times and provided invaluable support during my first days in Cardiff. Your kindness, compassion, and support have made a significant difference.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved grandfather and grandmother who left this life during my PhD journey. Your spirits have been with me every step of the way, inspiring me to persevere and achieve my dreams. I hope that this work makes you proud.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	1
Chapter 1- Introduction	1
1.1 Introduction to the Thesis.....	1
1.2 Justification for the Study.....	2
1.3 The Research Question, Aim, And Objectives	3
1.3.1 Research Aim.....	3
1.3.2 Research Questions.....	3
1.3.3 Research Objectives.....	3
1.4 Researcher Involvement: Reflexivity.....	3
1.5 Structure of thesis.....	6
Chapter 2: Setting the Scene.....	8
2.1: Introduction.....	8
2.2: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.....	8
2.3 The religion of Islam in Saudi Arabia.....	9
2.4 Cultural Roots and Tribal Traditions in Saudi Arabia.....	10
2.5 Regional Perspectives: Women in Saudi Arabian Provinces.....	11
2.6. Situating women in the context of Saudi Arabia Pre-Vision 2030.....	12
2.6.1 Historical Trajectory and Contemporary Landscape.....	12
2.6.2 The Legal system in Saudi Arabia	13
2.6.2.1 The Male Guardianship System.....	13
2.6.2.2 Gender Segregation System.....	14
2.6.2.3 Other Legal Restrictions.....	15
2.6.2.4 Socio-cultural Constraints.....	15
2.6.2.5 Impact of Constraints on Women's Employment	16
2.7 The situation Today (The New Era) Promulgation of vision 2030	17
2.7.1 Vision 2030	17
2.7.2 Key elements of vision 2030.....	18
2.7.2.1 Women’s Empowerment	18
2.7.2.2 Legal and Legislative Reform for Women	19
2.7.2.3 Expanded Educational and Career Opportunities for Women.....	20
2.7.2.4 Promoting the Work Environment for Women	21
2.8. Healthcare system in Saudi Arabia.	23
2.8.1 Overview of Saudi Health System.....	23
2.8.2 Organisational Structure of the Health System in Saudi Arabia	24
2.8.3 Healthcare system in Saudi Arabia and Vision 2030.....	25
2.8.4 Nursing Profession in Saudi Arabia.....	26
Chapter 3 - Literature review	28
3.1. Introduction	28
3.2 Keywords and Search Strategy.....	28
3.3 Rational for Selection Criteria	32
3.4 Quality assessment of the studies.....	33
3.5 Barriers to women Management	34
3.5.1 Socio-cultural Barriers	35
3.5.2 Organizational Barriers	38
3.5.3 Economic	40
3.5.4 Personal and Psychological Barriers.....	41
3.6 Changes and Solutions to Women Empowerment	42

3.7 Summary	43
Chapter 4: Theoretical considerations.....	52
4.1 Introduction.....	52
4.2 Research Paradigm	52
4.2.1 The interpretive paradigm	54
4.2.2 Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Stance.....	55
4.2.2.1 Ontology.....	55
4.2.2.2 Epistemological.....	57
4.2.2.3 Axiology.....	59
4.3 Taking a Feminist Perspective.....	60
4.3.1 Feminism	60
4.3.2 Waves of Feminism	61
4.3.3 Feminist Principles.....	64
Chapter 5: Research Design.....	67
5.1 Introduction	67
5.2 Research Questions, Aims, and Objectives.....	67
5.2.1 Research Aim.....	67
5.2.2 Research Questions.....	67
5.2.3 Research Objectives.....	67
5.3 Research Design	67
5.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	69
5.4.1 Theoretical Underpinnings of IPA	70
5.5 Rationale for Selecting IPA:	75
5.6 Limitations of IPA research.....	76
5.7 Consideration of Alternative Approaches.....	77
Chapter 6: Study Methods and Data Management.....	79
6.1 Introduction.....	79
6.2 Study Methods.....	79
6.2.1 Sampling and Recruitment	79
6.2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria	83
6.2.3. Obtaining ethical approval	84
6.2.4 Access Negotiations and Arrangements.....	84
6.2.5 Recruitment Process.....	85
6.2.6 Data Collection Method.....	86
6.2.7 The Interview Process.....	87
6.3 Data Management.....	88
6.3.1 Data translation and management	88
6.3.2 Data analysis	89
6.3.3 Ethics Issues	91
6.3.4 Practicalities.....	93
Chapter 7: Women’s idiographic experiences.....	94
7.1 Introduction.....	94
7.2 Participant profiles	94
7.3 Women’s Idiographic Experiences	95
7.3.1 Sara (Threshold of Saturation)	95
7.3.2 Fatima (Psychological war)	107
7.3.3 Noura (I am intruder)	118

7.3.4 Malak (Headache)	127
7.3.5 Dina (vortex)	136
7.3.6 Leen (Explosion)	145
Chapter 8: Women’s shared Experiences.....	152
8.1 Introduction.....	152
8.2 Introduction to Group Experiential Theme 1: It’s a Man’s World.....	153
8.2.1 Being judged less capable: 'I Can See This in Their Eyes'	154
8.2.2 Being Invisible ““No opinion as a woman, I should obey only”	156
8.2.3 Vulnerability and Insecurity.....	157
8.2.3.1 Alienation Strategy “They Want Us to Hate the Place’	157
8.2.3.2 Difficult and tiring environment: “Not every girl endures”	158
8.2.3. Protective Needs: “I Need Protection”	158
8.3 Introduction to Group Experiential Theme 2: To fit into a man’s world.....	159
8.3.1 Forced to Abandon My Feminine Frame.....	160
8.3.2 Endless Proof	161
8.3.3 Readiness: “I am not ready yet”	162
8.3.4 Networking “we need doses of Vitamin W”	162
8.3.5 Silence: Women don’t speak Up.....	163
8.4. Introduction to Experiential Theme 3: Perpetuating the cycle of oppression	164
8.4.1 Women do not support each other "Women are Their Own Worst Enemies."	164
8.4.2 Derogating Each Other.....	165
8.5 Introduction to Experiential Theme 4: The Dual Burden.....	166
8.5.1 Marital Status	166
8.5.2 Motherhood	168
8.5.3 Family intervention	169
8.6 Introduction to Experiential Theme 5: Strategies and Enablers to Women Empowerment.....	170
8.6.1 Women Role Model	170
8.6.2 Qualification to Balance Discrimination.....	170
8.6.3 Emotional Intelligence.....	171
8.6.4 Vision 2030 “The reform plan marks a turning point for us”	171
8.5 Summary	173
Chapter 9: Discussion Chapter.....	174
9.1Introduction.....	174
9.2 Feminist Theory as a Lens	176
9.3 Recap of Research Questions, Aims, and Objectives.....	177
9.3.1 Research Aim.....	177
9.3.2 Research Questions.....	177
9.4 Integrating Current Research into Saudi Scholarly Perspectives.....	177
9.4.1 It’s a Man’s World.....	177
9.4.2 Women Shaping Themselves to Fit Men's World.....	182
9.4.3 Perpetuating the cycle of oppression	187
9.4.4 The Dual Burden.....	191
9.4.5 Strategies and Enablers to Women Empowerment.....	196
9.5 Summary.....	200
Chapter 10 – Conclusion	203
10.1 Introduction	203
10.2 Summary of Main Findings	203

10.3 Knowledge Contribution.....	204
10.4 Limitations of the Study.....	205
10.5 Recommendations	207
10.6 Future Research Directions.....	208
References.....	210
Appendices	
Appendix A: Legal Framework of Women Pre- and Post-Vision 2030.....	222
Appendix B: Ethical approval from Cardiff university.....	229
Appendix C: Ethical approval from Ministry of Health.....	231
Appendix D: Invitation letter (In English& Arabic)	232
Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet (In English& Arabic)	234
Appendix F: Consent Form Video and Voice.....	243
Appendix G: Exploratory Comments and Emergent Themes (Sample).....	247
Appendix H: Experiential Themes across participants	248
Appendix I: Reflective Journal	249
Appendix J: Critical Appraisal Checklist	250
Appendix K: Critical Appraisal Checklist for Cross-Sectional Study.....	255

List of Tables

Table 1: Concepts for the study literature search	29
Table 2: Search terms for databases	31
Table 3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria.....	33
Table 4: Summary of papers included in the narrative review.	45
Table 5: Summary of Feminist waves.....	64
Table 6: Participants' Inclusion and exclusion criteria.....	84
Table 7: Participants' Demographic profile.....	95
Table 8: Group experiential themes.....	153

List of Figures

Figure 1. The geography of Saudi Arabia (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.)	9
Figure 2. Regions of Saudi Arabia. (Abed et al. 2021).	11
Figure 3. Saudi Arabia -Global Gender Gap- 2023.....	19
Figure 4. Saudi Arabia -Global Gender Gap Index- 2023.....	19
Figure 5. Female Labour Force Participation Rate.....	21
Figure 6. Saudi Arabia's current healthcare system organizational structure.....	25
Figure 7. Saudi and non-Saudi nursing workforce based on gender.....	27
Figure 8. PRISMA chart for the literature review	34
Figure 9. Research design.....	60
Figure 10. Key Feminist Principles Guiding the Study.....	65
Figure 11. IPA Six stages developed from (Smith et al., 2009)	91
Figure 12: Personal Experiential Themes from Sara's Analysis.....	106
Figure 13. Personal Experiential Themes from Fatima's Analysis.....	117
Figure 14. Personal Experiential Themes from Noura's Analysis.....	126
Figure 15. Personal Experiential Themes from Malak's Analysis.....	135
Figure 16. Personal Experiential Themes from Dina's Analysis.....	144
Figure 17. Personal Experiential Themes from Leen's Analysis.....	151
Figure 18. Visualisation of themes.	152

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Thesis

This thesis explores the lived experiences of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia, a topic of significant importance given the sweeping socio-economic reforms and push towards gender equality under the government's 'Vision 2030' (Saudi Vision 2030 2016). As Saudi Arabia undergoes these transformative changes, it is crucial to understand how these shifts have impacted women nurses in managerial positions within the healthcare sector, which is essential for national development and public health. Despite progress in various areas, the experiences and contributions of female nurse managers are often overlooked in scholarly research, with existing literature largely focusing on fields such as education, business, and tourism.

In Saudi Arabia, managerial roles have historically been male-dominated, with women only recently making significant inroads, partly because of progressive policies aimed at enhancing women's roles in the economy and society. Despite these advancements, women continue to encounter significant challenges that hinder their career progression to senior managerial positions, particularly in the healthcare sector. The current body of literature fails to adequately address the lived experiences and professional trajectories of mid-level female nurse managers, neglecting a crucial group that directly influences health care delivery and policy implementation.

This study aimed to address this gap by investigating the experiences of mid-level female nurse managers, focusing on how they navigate their professional roles within the cultural, social, and organizational contexts of Saudi Arabia. Through an in-depth examination of their perspectives, challenges, and coping strategies, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of female management dynamics within Saudi healthcare.

Female nurse managers play a critical role in shaping healthcare practices and policies by working at the intersection of strategic decision-making and patient care. Their contributions are vital to the daily functioning of healthcare facilities and have broad implications for public health outcomes. By highlighting their experiences, this study aims to inform policymakers, healthcare administrators, and academic scholars about the unique challenges and potential strategies to support and advance women's management in healthcare. This, in turn, could lead to more effective implementation of Vision 2030's objectives, fostering a more inclusive and equitable healthcare system.

1.2 Justification of the Study

This study is driven by the need to understand the lived experiences of female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia, a group essential to the healthcare sector that is underrepresented in existing research. Saudi Arabia is undergoing significant socioeconomic reforms under Vision 2030, which aims to enhance gender equality and integrate women more fully into various professional sectors, including healthcare. Despite these progressive policies, women in managerial positions continue to face significant challenges that hinder their career advancement, particularly in traditionally male-dominated, and culturally conservative environments.

The existing literature has primarily focused on women in sectors such as education and business, overlooking the healthcare sector, where female nurse managers are crucial in influencing both patient care and policy implementation. This lack of focus represents a significant gap in our understanding of how these women navigate their roles and the unique barriers that they face. Moreover, the sociocultural context of Saudi Arabia, with its specific norms and institutional biases, presents unique challenges that are not adequately addressed by existing feminist theories, which are often developed in different cultural settings. By contextualising feminist perspectives within the Saudi healthcare sector, this study aimed to enrich the theoretical discourse on feminism in conservative settings and provide a deeper understanding of the interplay between gender, culture, and professional roles.

This study is important for several reasons. Academically, it addresses a gap in the existing literature by providing a detailed exploration of mid-level female nurse managers in the Saudi healthcare sector, an area that has been largely overlooked in favour of other sectors, such as education and business. Practically, the findings of this study offer policymakers and healthcare administrators evidence-based recommendations to support and enhance women's management in healthcare. Societally, understanding the barriers and enablers for women managers in healthcare supports the ongoing cultural shift towards greater gender equality in Saudi Arabia, aligning with the national goals of Vision 2030.

1.3 The Research Question, Aim, And Objectives

1.3.1 Research Aim

To examine how mid-level female nurse managers in the Saudi healthcare system understand and make sense of their experiences as they ascend senior roles.

1.3.2 Research Question

What are the unique experiences that define the professional journey of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia as they ascend to senior roles?

1.3.3 Research Objectives

- To conduct in-depth interviews with mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia to identify and understand their unique experiences and challenges in professional growth.
- To perform cross-case analyses to explore the key factors that facilitate or impede career advancement within the Saudi healthcare system.
- To analyse qualitative data to understand the role of societal, cultural, and institutional influences, including the impact of Vision 2030, on the career trajectories and development of these women.
- To develop recommendations based on the findings to propose potential strategies and support systems that could enhance the career progression and development of female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia.

1.4 Researcher Involvement: Reflexivity

Reflexivity is an integral part of qualitative research, particularly in studies employing methodologies like (IPA). Reflexivity in research is about embracing the researcher's role as an active participant in the research process and being mindful of the complex interplay between researcher and research subject, which is critical for maintaining the integrity and depth of qualitative inquiry (Finlay 2002; Smith et al. 2009) It is the process through which researchers acknowledge and critically examine their own contributions to the research process, recognizing the potential influence of their personal

preconceptions, cultural background, and assumptions (Finlay 2002). In the context of research, reflexivity involves a continual inner dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher's position and impact on the research, rather than striving for an illusory researcher neutrality (Berger 2015). A reflexive researcher actively engages with the question of how their interactions with the research and participants shape the interpretation of the data. This includes recognizing how their own experiences and identity "interact with, influence, intrude upon, or even potentially skew" the process of research (Ortlip 2008, p. 673).

In practice, reflexivity involved the use of a research journal, where the researcher documents their reflections on the research process. This helps in identifying any preconceptions that may affect the research and in striving for transparency in how these preconceptions are managed (Etherington 2004). Reflexivity is not only about self-awareness but is also an ethical imperative; it ensures that the research process is respectful and inclusive of the participants' experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). For instance, in a study exploring the experiences of female nurse managers, a reflexive researcher would be mindful of how their own gender, career experiences, and cultural understanding of managerial roles might influence their interactions with participants and their interpretations of the stories shared by these nurse managers (Smith and Osborn 2003). They would constantly question their own reading of the data and remain open to the participants' voices and perspectives, thus enriching the research with a multi-layered understanding (Smith et al. 2009). Since IPA involves an interaction between the researcher's understanding of the individuals' lived experiences and the individual's perceptions of the sense-making process (Smith et al. 2009), researchers are called upon to reflect on and become aware of their own assumptions (Smith et al. 2009).

This self-awareness is crucial for researchers to critically evaluate their interpretative role during the research process. In this study, I adopted an active interpretative stance and utilize a research diary to document my thoughts and feelings. This provided clarity on how these reflections influenced my actions and contribute to the overall research findings. In my research, I approach reflexivity with a deep awareness of my own role and potential preconceptions in the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Reflexivity, for me, is not just a methodological tool but a continuous, critical introspection about my interaction with the research and the participants. My background, experiences, and beliefs inherently influence my research perspectives. Being reflexive means actively acknowledging and scrutinizing these influences. For instance, in interpreting data, I am mindful of how my preconceptions could shape my understanding of the participants' narratives.

This self-awareness extends to every aspect of the research process from formulating questions to analysing responses. Engaging in reflexivity also involves recognizing the power dynamics at play between myself as the researcher and the participants. I am constantly aware of the impact my questions and presence may have on the participants and how this, in turn, influences the data gathered.

Furthermore, reflexivity in my research includes an ongoing dialogue with my supervisors and peers. Their external perspectives help me identify potential blind spots and preconceptions, ensuring a more balanced and critical approach to my work. My reflective journal is a key tool in this process. It is a space where I record my thoughts, feelings, and observations, both about the research process and my reactions to it (See Appendix I). This journal serves as a critical record, helping me trace the evolution of my thinking and ensuring that my interpretations remain grounded in the participants' experiences rather than my own assumptions. As a nurse with one year of experience in a hospital setting, I found myself in a unique position, working closely with my two sisters, who are also nurses, and a team of colleague nurses. This environment offered a first-hand perspective on the dynamics and challenges faced by mid-level female nurse managers as they navigate their path to senior managerial roles. My relative role in that setting provided a fresh and perhaps more observational perspective. I could see the managerial journey from the vantage point of an early-career professional, noting the skills, attitudes, and challenges that manager encountered. This view was enriched by the insights and experiences shared by my sisters and colleagues, adding depth to my understanding of the management journey in nursing. Being surrounded by senior nurses, including my sisters, colleagues and friends allowed me to witness the psycho-social aspects of management in nursing. Their discussions about professional growth, balancing responsibilities, and overcoming barriers in a predominantly female-led field highlighted the nuanced experiences of female nurse managers. field highlighted the nuanced experiences of female nurse managers. This proximity provided me with a closely informed perspective, enabling me to relate to and understand the views and experiences of those aspiring to or currently in managerial roles.

Even though I previously had insider connections, I now embrace a fully outsider perspective. This allows me to objectively observe the organizational culture and systemic factors influencing nursing management. No longer being a member of the nursing team, I can recognize the importance of mentorship, professional development opportunities, and the systemic challenges from an external point of view. Practicing reflexivity, I acknowledge how my past experience as a nurse and current detachment from the role might influence my perceptions and interpretations of nursing

management. This shift is critical for understanding the complex interplay of personal and professional experiences that shape the management journey of female nurse managers, providing a comprehensive understanding from outside the immediate nursing environment.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** This chapter introduces the thesis by outlining its aims, research questions, objectives, and justification for the study as well as the researcher Involvement.
- **Chapter 2: Setting the Scene:** This chapter sets the stage by providing essential background information on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, detailing its cultural, religious, and regional dynamics relating to women's roles in society and leadership. It highlights women before and after Vision 2030. It focuses on the impact of these shifts on women's management opportunities in the healthcare sector.
- **Chapter 3: Literature Review:** This chapter systematically reviews the literature on women in managerial positions in Saudi Arabia, focusing on the barriers and opportunities within the healthcare sector, and drawing insights from local contexts to outline the challenges and status of female nurse managers.
- **Chapter 4: Theoretical Considerations:** This chapter outlines the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the study.
- **Chapter 5: Research Design:** This chapter justifies using a qualitative research design and selecting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), detailing why IPA is suited for exploring the experiences of female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia.
- **Chapter 6: Study Methods and Data Management:** This chapter describes the study methods and data management strategies used in the research, including sampling, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations, emphasizing the rigorous process to ensure credibility and integrity in the research.
- **Chapter 7: Women idiographic experiences:** This explores and describes the participants' stories and experiences from an individual perspective.
- **Chapter 8: Women's shared Experiences:** This chapter discusses women shared experiences.
- **Chapter 9: Discussion Chapter:** This Chapter links the findings from women's experiences to the current study by comparing the results with the existing literature and emphasizing the unique contributions of this research.

- **Chapter 10: Conclusion:** This chapter concludes by summarising the study's contributions, acknowledging its limitations, and proposing avenues for subsequent enquiries.

Chapter 2: Setting the Scene

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed examination of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, setting the stage for subsequent discussion. It begins by exploring the Kingdom's fundamental elements, including its Islamic beliefs and tribal customs, the provinces of Saudi Arabia, and their varying levels of openness in terms of women's liberty and opportunities. Next, the narrative transitions to compare the situation of women before and after their transformative journey, emphasising the substantial changes ushered in by Vision 2030. The chapter further explores Saudi Arabia's legal and sociocultural frameworks and provides an in-depth look into the Saudi healthcare system, the nursing profession, and its importance in leadership. While the chapter touches upon past events, its primary focus is on the recent challenges and the current status of Saudi women.

2.2 The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is considered to be one of the largest countries in the Middle East and commands approximately 80 percent of its total geographical expansion (General Authority for Statistics 2021 (Figure 1); General Authority for Statistics 2015). It became an official country in 1932 when King Abdulaziz Al Saud united it (Alkuraya 2014). The country is known for its rich culture and strong ties with Islamic beliefs (The Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Washington DC n.d.). Over time, many tribes have played a major role in Saudi Arabia's history and still have a big influence today, especially in places where some people have more power than others (Charrad 2011). The confluence of historical significance and spiritual reverence has led Muslims worldwide to venerate Saudi Arabia as sacred land (Alothaimen 2005). Saudi Arabia has long been classified as one of the wealthiest countries in the Middle East, a status cemented after the discovery of oil in 1936 (Nurunnabi 2017). Boasting a population exceeding 32 million, Saudi Arabia comprises around 18.8 million Saudis, while non-Saudis constitute 41.6% of the total populace, underscoring a substantial reliance on foreign labour. (General Authority for Statistics 2022). This dependence has spurred initiatives to modernise the workforce, with a specific focus on incorporating more Saudi nationals, notably women. In response to the heavy reliance on foreign labour, Saudi Arabia has launched initiatives aimed at modernising its workforce, striving to cultivate a more self-sufficient labour market (Vision 2030 2016). The primary objective of these initiatives is to enhance the representation of Saudi nationals with a notable emphasis on promoting increased female

participation (Vision 2030 2016). This shift in focus signifies a profound transformation in the country's economy and workforce, aspiring to empower women by enabling them to assume roles that are traditionally dominated by men (Topal 2019). Concurrently, Saudi women have undergone remarkable transformations. A clear trend towards women's empowerment is emerging, as Saudi women are achieving advanced educational qualifications, gaining financial autonomy, and making strides in diverse public sectors (Varshney 2019). This progress can largely be attributed to the crucial legal reforms outlined in Vision 2030, which, as discussed in depth in this chapter, have provided women with expanded rights, enhanced mobility, and a multitude of economic opportunities (Rizvi and Hussain 2021). Over the past decade, rapid reforms have been observed, accompanied by a rising acceptance among men towards the evolving roles of women. While there have been progressive changes, some traditional attitudes towards working women persist (Almathami et al. 2022).



Figure 1. The geography of Saudi Arabia (Encyclopaedia Britannica [n.d]).

2.3 The religion of Islam in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is an Islamic state where adherence to Islam is obligatory for its citizens, as per legal mandates. The impact of Islam on societal norms in Saudi Arabia is substantial, encompassing its deep integration into the Kingdom's policies and political landscape. Islam serves as the fundamental basis of Saudi Arabian legislation, operating within the framework of the Sharia law. The country's Constitution, established in 1992, upholds the principles of fairness and parity in accordance with

Sharia law, regardless of gender (The Constitution of Saudi Arabia 1992). Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognise that the complete enforcement of these laws has faced obstacles, resulting in various challenges for women, particularly in the domains of education, employment, and leadership.

2.4 Cultural Roots and Tribal Traditions in Saudi Arabia

Before discussing the current situation of women in Saudi Arabia, it is essential to examine its history and cultural roots. The Saudi people originated from nomadic Bedouin tribes who lived in harmony with the environment. This attachment to nature and land remains an important part of Saudi culture (Al-Ahmadi 2011). Saudi Arabia is home to numerous tribes, each boasting its own unique tradition, customs, and social structure. These tribes have significantly contributed to the cultural diversity and social fabric of Saudi Arabia, enriching the nation's heritage (Al-Ahmadi 2011). Historically, Saudi Arabian tribes, organised around extended family networks, have fostered strong affiliations, offering members a sense of belonging, protection, and mutual assistance (Charrad 2011). Over time, local customs and religious principles derived from Sharia law have merged with the tribal system, leading to a fusion of religious and cultural elements that are deeply interwoven in the Saudi context (Al-Ahmadi 2011). Today, as Nieva (2015) outlines, the tribal system remains integral to the country's social structure, with family and tribes having powerful influences on societal structures. This tribal influence extends to all aspects of social interaction where affiliations, especially tribal connections, play a significant role in shaping individual lives (Paustian-Underdahl et al. 2014). Organizational loyalties and traditions often reflect tribal zones, with tribal reputation potentially significantly impacting individual freedom, as noted by LaPierre and Zimmerman (2012). The formation of Saudi Arabia resulted from the consolidation of various Arabian Peninsula-dwelling tribes under the leadership of King Abdulaziz. During this crucial juncture, an important condition was agreed upon to ensure that the tribes could maintain their customs and cultural practices, a factor that has allowed many tribal traditions to endure over time because of limited state intervention (Charade 2011). In recent decades, however, Saudi Arabian society has undergone rapid social transformation, transitioning from a nomadic and tribal society to one that is primarily characterised by urbanisation. This transition, while contributing to modernisation, has also posed challenges for the educational system, as it seeks to evolve while staying grounded in its deep-seated cultural and tribal traditions (Al-Ahmadi 2011; Kattan et al. 2016).

2.5 Regional Perspectives: Women in Saudi Arabian Provinces

The levels of openness and development across these regions are influenced by a combination of historical, geographical, and economic factors. In this context, "openness" refers to the degree of receptiveness to external influences, cultural exchanges, trade relationships, modernisation efforts, and the level of flexibility in adapting to global trends and values, while balancing them with traditional norms and practices. The Eastern Region, with its legacy in trade and abundant oil reserves, has cultivated extensive international ties (Salam et al. 2014). It is also more receptive to foreign businesses and expatriates, which contributes to its relative openness. The Western Region, with its historical prominence as the hub for the Hajj pilgrimage and its role as a port, has been exposed to a myriad of cultural influences, such as interactions with pilgrims from around the world, international trade, and maritime activities. This created a combination of traditions and practices, with an undertone of cosmopolitanism. The Central Region, which houses the capital city of Riyadh, leverages its position as the administrative and economic heart of the country. This centrality aids in driving modernisation and fostering connections on a global scale. Conversely, the Northern and Southern Regions, which are bound by geographical constraints and are anchored in strong tribal identities, have retained a more traditional culture. Rugged terrains and deep-rooted tribal affiliations have led these regions to maintain their distinct cultural identities, with limited intermingling with external cultures (Alyami 2016).

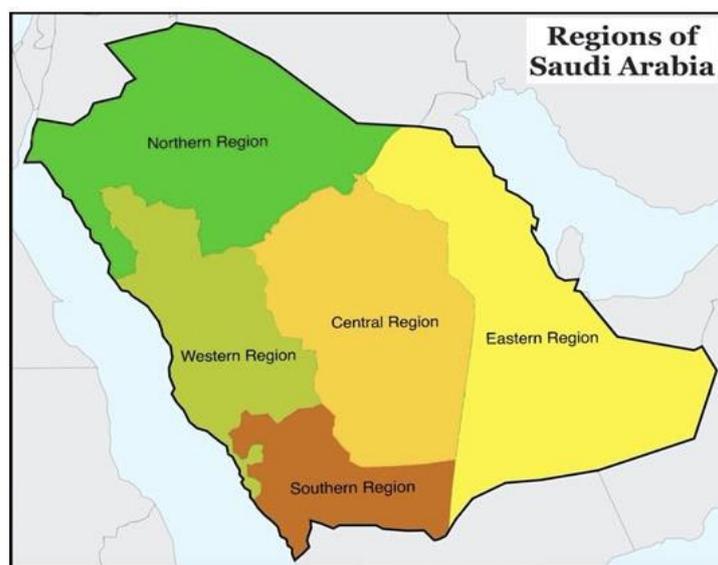


Figure 2. Regions of Saudi Arabia. (Aabed et al. 2021).

2.6. Situating women in the context of Saudi Arabia Pre-Vision 2030

This section outlines the status of women in Saudi Arabia prior to Vision 2030. It discusses how the legal system based on Sharia law and sociocultural norms shaped their lives and impeded their involvement in senior leadership.

2.6.1 Historical Trajectory and Contemporary Landscape

Throughout Saudi Arabia's history, the status of women has undergone significant changes due to various political, economic, and social developments (Varshney 2019). Over the years, several significant political events have played a crucial role in shaping the position of women in Saudi society, ranging from the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabian land in 1930 to the recent development of Vision 2030 (Nahshal 2020). Rapid economic growth and wealth generated from oil exports present new opportunities and challenges for Saudi society. With the influx of wealth, modernisation efforts were initiated, which had varying effects on the status of women. While some women gained access to education and employment opportunities, others faced increased conservatism in response to societal change (Le Renard 2014).

In the 1970s and the 1980s, Saudi Arabia experienced a conservative turn due to the influence of the Islamic revival movement (the Sahwa Movement). This era witnessed the enforcement of strict interpretations of Islamic laws and customs, leading to the implementation of gender separation policies and restrictions on women's participation in public life (Lacroix 2011). However, the situation for women began to evolve in the 21st century, with gradual reforms and growing emphasis on women's empowerment. King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, who ruled from 2005 to 2015, played a pivotal role in advancing women's rights. In 2011, King Abdullah announced that women would be granted the right to vote and run for office in municipal elections, marking a significant milestone in women's political participation in the country. Saudi Arabia is renowned for its deeply conservative nature, with intricately intertwined religions and gender politics (Hodge 2017). Before the implementation of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 initiative, which aimed to bring about comprehensive social and economic reforms, the status of women in the country was characterised by a combination of traditional societal norms and legal restrictions. The following section aims to provide an overview of the circumstances faced by women in Saudi Arabia before 2030.

2.6.2 The Legal system in Saudi Arabia

The legal framework in Saudi Arabia finds its roots in the nation's Islamic identity, deeply intertwined with the principles of Sharia (Islamic law), emphasising the paramount role of Islam in shaping its legal system (Alanzia 2020). This framework operates firmly within the contours of Sharia Law, forming the foundation upon which legislation and governance are built. The Constitution of Saudi Arabia, established in 1992, draws explicitly from Sharia law, with the distinct purpose of upholding justice and equitable rights for all genders (The Constitution of Saudi Arabia 1992).

The fabric of gender roles in Saudi society is intricately woven with the conservative interpretations of Islam. Aligned with Islamic principles, women are granted freedom to work, provided they do not impinge upon their domestic responsibilities (Vidyasagar and Rea 2004). These interpretations, rooted in conservatism, often highlight women's nurturing role. However, Charrad (2011) sheds light on the paradox that, despite Islam's intrinsic principle of gender equality, these conservative interpretations, largely influenced by male perspectives, have unintentionally amplified male empowerment. Charrad coins these interpretations as "multiple legal systems on the one hand and a history of active legal interpretation on the other" (p. 421). This entrenched perspective not only solidified Saudi Arabia's religious identity within its borders but also resonated across the broader Islamic spectrum. Consequently, numerous religious practices stemming from Islamic interpretations have sculpted women's status in Saudi Arabia, effectively limiting their career trajectories through practices such as gender segregation and the male guardian system. It is essential to recognise that while these laws were intended to be fully enforced, there were significant challenges in their execution. These challenges have led to disadvantages for women in areas such as education, employment and management. This highlights the major legal obstacles that women confronted in Saudi Arabia prior to the recent reform plan, all of which underscores the critical legal barriers faced by women in Saudi Arabia before the recent reform plan.

2.6.2.1 The Male Guardianship System

The concept of guardianship, in which women require male permission for certain activities, further constrains their autonomy and decision-making capabilities. The male guardianship system has been a part of Saudi Arabia's social and legal structure for many years (Alshahrani 2018; Ensor 2019). Traditionally, under this system, women were legally required to have a male guardian, typically a father, husband, or other male relative who would have significant authority over various aspects of

their lives. This system has been closely linked to the country's interpretation of Islamic law and societal norms as it reflects the belief that women require male protection and supervision (Alshahrani 2018; Alhajri 2020; Alharbi 2015). The male guardianship system has significant implications for women's autonomy and decision-making capabilities (Alharbi 2015). Under this system, women often require their guardians' permission to engage in essential activities such as travel, obtaining education, and even accessing healthcare (Alshahrani 2018). Women faced significant limitations in their mobility. They were unable to travel without the consent of their male guardians and often required a male relative to accompany them in public (Alharbi 2015). This system has created a significant level of dependence on male relatives, limiting women's freedom and restricting opportunities for personal growth and development (Alhajri 2020). For example, women were not allowed to travel without the consent of their male guardians, even for essential reasons such as seeking medical treatment or pursuing educational opportunities abroad (Alshahrani 2018).

2.6.2.2 Gender Segregation System

Dating back to the early months of 1990, Saudi Arabia introduced comprehensive gender segregation, a deeply ingrained tradition (Meijer 2010). Gender segregation in Saudi Arabia is influenced by a combination of legal systems and cultural norms. The legal system, heavily shaped by Islamic Sharia law, mandates gender segregation in various public domains, such as schools, workplaces, and public spaces, aligning with specific interpretations of Islamic teachings that emphasise modesty and separation between unrelated men and women (Meijer 2010). Additionally, women were required to adhere to a strict dress code, including wearing an abaya and head covering in public spaces. One vital explanation for the enduring prevalence of gender segregation in Saudi Arabia can be traced to the country's historical trajectory, marked by deliberate avoidance of Western colonisation (Kattan et al. 2016). This unique historical narrative has significantly contributed to the emergence of gender segregation as a defining hallmark of Saudi Arabian society. According to Al-Dabbagh (2008) "in the case of Saudi Arabia, the gender ideology promoted in the political culture idealizes women's domesticity, elevates sex segregation, and is intimately tied to the ideologies that legitimate the monarchy" (p. 3). This particular ideology advocates gender segregation across all facets of life, resulting in specific expectations for men and women (Alharbi 2015). For instance, in Saudi Arabia, occupations such as military roles, high-level management, and engineering are reserved almost exclusively for men, while women have traditionally found roles in sectors such as education and healthcare more accessible (Syed et al. 2018). As Al-Dabbagh (2008)

noted, there is a minimal, if any, overlap in the roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women within this framework.

2.6.2.3 Other Legal Restrictions

The legal framework in Saudi Arabia is characterised by myriad regulations that limit women's rights. The constraints women faced before the initiation of Vision 2030 emerged from the complex interplay between traditional interpretations of Islamic law and societal norms. These restrictions have significantly influenced various aspects of women's lives by impinging on their rights and opportunities in diverse ways. Notably, the legal system itself included laws that restricted women's autonomy.

These limitations encompassed constraints on driving, access to certain professions, and divorce proceedings. While the main text of this report outlines the broader impacts of these reforms, it also provides a detailed examination of specific legal changes before and after Vision 2030. For a detailed comparative overview of the legal rights and social standings of Saudi women before the Vision 2030 reforms and the subsequent advancements made in securing greater legal autonomy and social freedom for women within the Kingdom, please refer to Appendix A. This appendix enhances the discussion by offering additional context and depth (Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Washington DC 2019). Consequently, women in Saudi Arabian society have encountered numerous challenges in achieving gender parity and equitable opportunities (Hamdan 2020). Additionally, women's participation in political arenas was notably limited, with their involvement in voting or running for public office in municipal elections not permitted until 2015 (Quamar 2016). The depiction of women in the media has often perpetuated constraining and stereotypical portrayals, mirroring the entrenched societal constructs of gender roles. The mix of legal structures and cultural norms within the Saudi legal framework significantly impacted women's lives prior to the transformative Vision 2030 initiative.

2.6.2.4 Socio-cultural Constraints

Sociocultural norms and practices play a significant role in shaping everyday life and gender roles in Saudi Arabia. These norms and practices are deeply rooted in Islamic traditions and historical customs, and influence various aspects of social interactions, family dynamics, and women's roles in the community. In the past, the situation of women in Saudi Arabia was marked by numerous

challenges and limitations rooted in deeply ingrained sociocultural norms and traditional practices influenced by Islamic principles (Mobaraki and Söderfeldt 2010). As noted by Al-Ahmadi (2011), the tribal customs and cultures prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam played a significant role in shaping the conservative approach towards women in Islam, particularly regarding their decision-making capabilities. In 2017, Alharbi highlighted that Saudi Arabia had long been perceived as one of the most restrictive countries in the world for women. Despite constitutional provisions, societal norms and religious practices have hindered the realisation of women's rights and their engagement across various sectors of society.

Throughout the past years, women have contended with noticeable discrepancies spanning various domains, including education, employment, and leadership responsibilities (Alotaibi et al. 2017; Syed et al. 2018; Alsubhi et al. 2018). Frequently, women find themselves confined to conventional roles primarily as wives and mothers, with their engagement in public affairs relegated to a secondary position (Marinakou 2014). The contours of societal norms perpetuated the limitations of women's active involvement in public life. Moreover, these entrenched norms cast obstacles on the path of women seeking engagement in leisure activities, sports, and recreational pursuits (Syed et al. 2018), and the conservative interpretation of Sharia law, along with societal norms, imposed restrictions on women's autonomy and their ability to participate fully in public and private spheres (Le Renard 2014).

2.6.2.5 Impact of Constraints on Women's Employment

The impact of gender segregation on women's participation in the workforce was substantial, influenced by a combination of cultural norms and legal barriers. For example, women were required to use separate entrances and rooms causing organisations to avoid hiring women to eliminate associated costs (Syed et al. 2018). While certain women were able to find employment in sectors such as education, healthcare, and specific government positions, their opportunities were markedly constrained by the practice of gender segregation (Kattan 2016). This arrangement resulted in distinct limitations on the range of occupations that women could pursue, perpetuating a hierarchical division of roles based on gender. Moreover, the imposition of gender segregation often necessitates that women seek permission from male guardians to engage in formal employment (Kattan 2016). The requirement for male approval represents a significant impediment to women's autonomy and professional aspirations. The dependency on male consent engendered a system wherein women's access to the workforce was not solely contingent upon their skills and

qualifications but also on the consent of their male counterparts (Syed et al. 2018). Consequently, the interplay of gender segregation, cultural norms, and legal barriers culminated in a scenario in which women's participation in the workforce was circumscribed and subject to stringent constraints. While certain sectors offered limited opportunities for women, their capacity to explore diverse career paths and assert their professional agency remained substantially curtailed by these overarching factors (Syed et al. 2018).

2.7 The Situation Today (The New Era) Promulgation of Vision 2030

2.7.1 Vision 2030

Vision 2030, launched by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2016, outlines a comprehensive plan for the transformation of Saudi Arabia's economy and society. Saudi Arabia announced the adoption of Vision 2030 to improve its economic status and reduce its dependence on oil (Al-Hanawi et al. 2019; Albejaidi and Nair 2019). Vision 2030 is a long-term transformational program that aims to reconstruct Saudi Arabia's economic status from an oil-reliant economy to a post-oil economy, thereby placing the country in a more favourable, solid, and sustainable economic position. The reform plan is motivated, in part, by the global overproduction of oil and the expansion of solar power (Elneel and AlMulhim 2022).

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's fast-growing population has strained its budget and ability to sustain high living standards and high wages for its citizens. The Saudi population is expected to grow to 45 million by the end of 2050, which will further strain the country's ability to maintain the citizens' quality of life (United Nations 2004). Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is the government's roadmap to ensure the best future for Saudi citizens. The plan aims to build the best future for the Saudi Arabian community, whereby development of the country's economies is the investment rather than reliance on the oil source (Elneel and AlMulhim 2022; Moshashai et al. 2020). In this context, the plan seeks to minimise government spending and emphasise facilitating the participation of the private sector. Briefly, its ambitions include enhancing public-private partnerships and improving the business environment (Albejaidi and Nair 2019; Thompson 2019). Vision 2030 has highlighted many strategies to improve the quality of healthcare, education systems, and empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia. Such improvements can ultimately be accomplished through encouraging the private sector to offer various job opportunities to Saudi citizens (Elneel and AlMulhim 2022).

2.7.2 Key Elements of Vision 2030

A key piece of the Vision 2030 program is to improve unemployment by revitalising the private sector and reducing reliance on foreign workers. Notably, statistics showed a sharp rise of 11.5% in Saudi unemployment from 2016 to 2017 (General Authority for Statistics 2017). The Vision 2030 plan was formulated to ensure an optimal future for Saudi citizens, especially women. The plan pays particular attention to women's participation and empowerment throughout all levels and sectors and aims to improve gender equality through major changes in legislation (Hvidt 2018). The goal is to enhance the female workforce status by increasing women's recruitment and retention by up to 8% by 2030 (Moshashai et al.2020).

2.7.2.1 Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment has been identified as a key pillar of Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia with the aim of increasing women's participation in the workforce and promoting their status across various sectors. Efforts include easing restrictions on women's mobility and expanding opportunities for education and professional development. There has been a notable shift in attention to women's issues in Saudi Arabia under the leadership of King Salman Bin Abdulaziz. Since ascending to the throne in 2015, King Salman has engaged significantly in addressing the needs and rights of Saudi women, acknowledging their pivotal and historic role in the Kingdom's progress and advancement. This marked change has drawn observers' attention, who note the unprecedented focus on women's rights in the country over the past five years (Alnufaie and Beghum 2021).

According to the Global Gender Gap Report for 2023, Saudi Arabia holds the 131st position, illustrating the nation's endeavours and obstacles in bridging its gender disparity. This challenge primarily manifests in economic participation and opportunities, educational achievements, health and survival, and political empowerment (Figure 3) (World Economic Forum 2023). The report released by the World Economic Forum provides insights into the global status of gender parity and Saudi Arabia's progress. Over the past five years, Saudi Arabia's rankings have fluctuated: 141st in 2018 and 131st in 2023 (World Economic Forum 2023) (See Figure 4). Significant improvements include increased female workforce participation and educational reform. However, challenges persist in achieving full gender parity.



Figure 3: (Saudi Arabia -Global Gender Gap 2023)



Figure 4: (Saudi Arabia -Global Gender Gap Index 2023)

2.7.2.2 Legal and Legislative Reform for Women

Legal and legislative reforms for women refer to efforts to change and improve laws and regulations to promote gender equality and protect the rights and wellbeing of women. This encompasses a wide range of legal and policy changes aimed at addressing various issues affecting women's rights and empowerment (Oppenheim 2019; Alhussein 2014). The following are some key aspects of legal and legislative reform for women. The implementation of Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia has been a steadfast, long-term effort, especially evident in significant advancements in women's rights. These advancements include the ability to drive, hold managerial positions, travel without male permission, participate actively in sports, live independently, and serve in the military. A major

reform was the modification of the guardianship system in 2019, now allowing women over the age of 21 to travel abroad without male consent and enabling increased access to government services and legal rights without approval from the guardian (Rizvi and Hussain 2021; Alghamdi et al. 2022). The Saudi government, aligned with the Vision 2030 program, has taken substantial steps to address women's professional situations by eliminating cultural and religious barriers, such as the male guardianship system (Hvidt 2018). This system, which formerly gave male relatives full authority over certain aspects of women's lives and restricted their mobility, has significantly hindered women's rights and sustainable development in Saudi Arabia (Human Rights Watch 2016). Legislative reforms have been established to enhance women's autonomy and power, including custody rights regarding children and the right to seek divorce (See Appendix A). The government also lifted the women's driving ban, facilitating their mobility, which is crucial for the Vision 2030 plan. This has led to more women entering the labour force and increasing workplace productivity (Hvidt 2018). The Saudi Ministry of Labour and Social Development reported a decrease in reliance on private drivers, correlating with more women obtaining driving licences following these policy changes (Moshas Hai et al. 2018). Additionally, the inclusion of women in sports has increased dramatically, with a reported increase in female sports participation of approximately 149% (Alghamdi et al. 2022).

2.7.2.3 Expanded Educational and Career Opportunities for Women

The Saudization Program, officially known as Nitaqat, is a policy implemented by the Ministry of Labor and Social Development in Saudi Arabia. This policy mandates that companies and enterprises employ Saudi nationals up to certain levels, aiming to reduce unemployment among native Saudis, improve gender equality, and decrease the country's reliance on expatriate workers. The private sector in Saudi Arabia was predominantly occupied by expatriate workers from countries like India, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Arab countries such as Lebanon and Egypt before the implementation of Saudization (Al Abdulkarim 2018). This policy mandates private firms to adhere to certain quotas for Saudi employment, with the aim of enhancing Saudi participation in the private sector. Notably, the program has influenced both Saudi and foreign worker employment and has impacted the sustainability and productivity of private firms. While it has fostered Saudization, it has come at a significant cost to companies, resulting in higher exit rates and diminished employment in surviving firms (Al Abdulkarim 2018). Furthermore, the Nitaqat policy has specific repercussions on female employment in Saudi Arabia, revealing significant obstacles to their participation in the workforce, especially in multinational contexts (Alfarran et al. 2018). Hence, the primary goal of Vision 2030 is to boost overall workforce participation, with a special focus on increasing women's involvement.

This goal aligns with the 'Saudization' initiative, which aims to secure job opportunities for Saudi nationals, and the 'Feminisation' of the labour market, a movement dedicated to creating and enhancing job roles for women at various levels, including managerial roles (El-Bakr 2022). According to official statistics, Saudi Arabia's total population is approximately 32 million, with 11 million employed. Of these, approximately five million are Saudi nationals and the remainder are non-Saudis (General Authority for Statistics 2022). In the labour force, women's participation rate was 27.8%, in contrast to 80% for men (The World Bank 2022). The latest Women's Labour Force Survey report reveals significant progress, with the unemployment rate for Saudi women dropping to 15.4% in the fourth quarter of 2022. This indicates a decrease in the rates in the previous years. Along with the reduction in unemployment, there has been an increase in women's economic participation and employment across various sectors. The employment to population ratio for women rose from 30.4% to 27.6% in the fourth quarter of 2021, indicating a growing involvement in the workforce (see Figure 5) (General Authority for Statistics 2023).

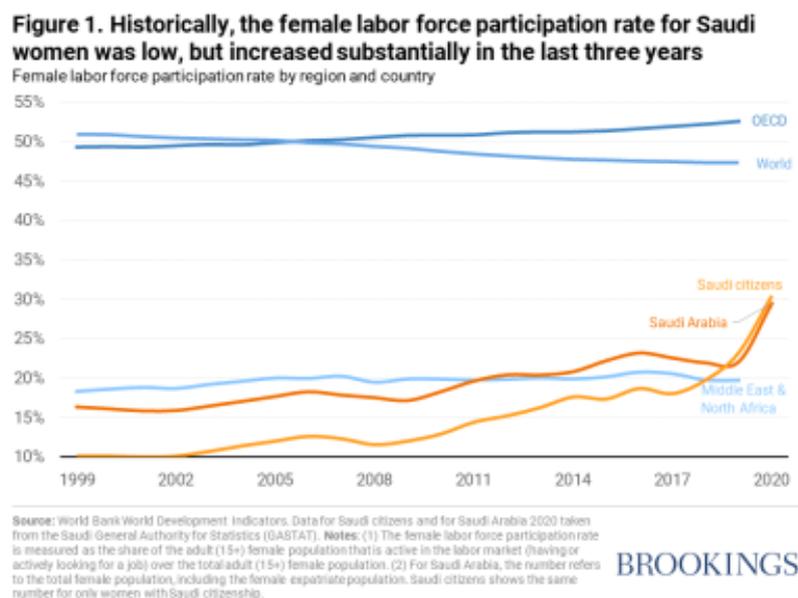


Figure 5: (Female Labour Force Participation Rate 2023)

2.7.2.4 Promoting the Work Environment for Women

Several important legislative changes have been implemented recently by the government to demonstrate its commitment to increasing female participation in the workforce, bringing the Kingdom closer to reaching Vision 2030, promoting equality, fairness, and modernising the employment sector. Vision 2030 recognises that women are an essential part of any successful modern nation (Vision 2030 2016). With increasing work opportunities for women, there is growing

policy concern to prevent cultural norms from being eroded and to avoid conflict in the workplace. One noteworthy development is the issuance of Resolution No. 684 by the Council of Ministers on 4 August 2019 which introduced enhanced protection and rights for female employees under the KSA Labor Law. One of the key provisions is the inclusion of a comprehensive anti-discrimination clause that prohibits any form of discrimination based on gender or other protected characteristics. Moreover, employers are expressly forbidden from terminating female employees or serving them with notice during their pregnancy, the maternity period, or any legally allowed period of sickness arising from pregnancy or maternity.

The Anti-Harassment Law in Saudi Arabia was introduced in May 2018 to address the issue of harassment and protect individuals, particularly women, from various forms of abuse and harassment in public and workplace spaces. This law aims to create a safer and more respectful environment for everyone in the country. Under the provisions of this law, individuals who commit acts of harassment can face penalties including imprisonment and fines. Article 6 of the law concerning the crime of harassment outlines the penalties for those found guilty of such offences.

“Subject to paragraph 2 of this article and without prejudice to any penalty prescribed by Sharia or any harsher penalty provided for by any other law, any person who commits a crime of harassment shall be subject to imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years and a fine not exceeding 100,000 riyals, or to either penalty; the crime of harassment shall be punishable by imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years and a fine not exceeding 300,000 riyals, or by either penalty” (Bureau of Expert Council of Ministers Resolution 2018).

The severity of punishment depends on the nature of the offence and whether it is a repeated or a persistent act. The law covers a wide range of behaviours that can be classified as harassment, including verbal, nonverbal, physical, or digital harassment. It applies to public places, workplaces, educational institutions, and other settings in which people interact. In addition, the reform plan places strong emphasis on transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption measures in Saudi Arabia's governance and economy. This aspect aims to establish a fair business environment, while promoting sustainable economic growth. Equally significant is the commitment to combat corruption through strict measures that hold individuals and entities responsible for unethical behaviour. These measures include increased transparency in public procurement, financial transactions, and government deals. The goal is to eliminate corrupt practices, rebuild trust, enhance credibility, and ensure that resource utilisation benefits the nation.

In addition, the reform plan under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 directly addresses the social practice of *wasta*—the use of personal connections to attain goals—which significantly impacts women's career growth and sustains male dominance across various sectors, thereby impeding women's professional development (Abalkhail and Allan 2016; Syed. et al. 2018). The National Anti-Corruption Commission, also known as the *Nazaha*, embodies the principles of integrity, honesty, and transparency in governance and public life. Its commitment to anti-corruption efforts and promotion of ethical conduct are essential in fostering a culture of accountability and ethical behaviour, which is crucial for the effective operation of institutions and societal welfare. At the vanguard of challenging practices like *Wasta* the *Nazaha* attempts to dismantle inequalities and foster equal opportunities for all, effectively decoupling professional success from personal affiliations (Vision 2030 2018).

2.8. Healthcare System in Saudi Arabia

At this stage, it is important for the reader to gain insight into the context of this study and the setting in which it was conducted. This section offers details regarding Saudi Arabia's health care system, the organizational framework of the nation's health system, and its nursing profession.

2.8.1 Overview of Saudi Health System

The healthcare setting of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has undergone significant changes, marked by advancements in its medical infrastructure. In recent decades, substantial improvements have been made in both the quantity and quality of health and healthcare services. Gallagher (2002) highlighted the noteworthy progress achieved by Saudi Arabia on a national scale, an achievement that stands out even among countries experiencing remarkable expansion of the healthcare system. Notably, Saudi Arabia has succeeded in providing a relatively high level of accessible care to various segments of the population.

The evolution of Saudi Arabia's healthcare journey can be traced back to the establishment of its first public health department in 1925 through a royal decree followed by the establishment of the Ministry of Health (MOH) in 1950. This growth is reflected in the current count of 487 hospitals with 72,981 beds, signifying approximately 2.2 beds per 1000 population (Ministry of Health 2017). Historical developments include the renaming of the Health Directorate in Jeddah as the Directorate of General Health and Ambulances in 1927 (Al-Rabeeah 2003). Subsequently, in 1951, the

Directorate of General Health and Ambulances was transformed into the Ministry of Health, overseeing 11 hospitals nationwide (Al Yousuf et al. 2002).

Recently, there has been substantial growth in the Saudi Arabian healthcare sector, as evidenced by a 2017 Ministry of Health report, which reported 423,940 health employees (Albejaidi and Nair 2019). Saudi Arabia's commitment to bolster its healthcare sector is exemplified by a significant budget increase of 4.8% allocated to the Ministry of Health (MoH) from 1970 to 2017, which has facilitated rapid progress in the healthcare delivery system, culminating in notable improvements in the population's health indicators, approaching levels observed in developed nations (Ministry of Health 2018). For instance, Saudi life expectancy has surged from 66 to 74.9 years, accompanied by declines in maternal, infant, and child mortality rates (Ministry of Health 2018). However, despite these achievements, challenges persist for the Saudi government in delivering quality healthcare, owing to the rapidly growing population. Projections indicate that, by 2050, the Saudi population could reach 45 million, further straining healthcare delivery. This challenge is compounded by the increasing prevalence of chronic and lifestyle-related diseases, including cancer, diabetes, obesity, and depression (Mansuri et al. 2015), which increases the burden on healthcare systems (United Nations 2013). To address this, Saudi Arabia is shifting towards a healthcare model that prioritises patient outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and quality of care as part of its Vision 2030 reforms (Albejaidi and Nair 2019). As the principal healthcare provider and financier, the Ministry of Health (MOH) manages 244 hospitals with 33,277 beds and 2037 primary healthcare centres (PHCs). This systematic approach has positioned Saudi Arabia favourably in 26th out of 191 countries in the World Health Organization's rankings (World Health Organization 2000). Despite these significant achievements, the healthcare system faces ongoing challenges that call for creative strategies and enhanced cooperation between the MOH and other sectors (World Health Report 2000).

2.8.2 Organisational Structure of the Health System in Saudi Arabia

Operating within a framework composed of three principal sectors, Saudi Arabia's healthcare system is comprised of the Ministry of Health (MOH) sector; the Other Government Healthcare (OGH) sector, which includes military, university, and royal hospitals; and the Private Healthcare Sector (PHS) (MOH, 2017) (see figure 6). The MOH, in accordance with regulatory guidelines, shoulders the responsibility of providing medical services across hospitals and secondary and specialised treatment centres. It also spearheads the development of comprehensive health strategies and plans that encompass the entire Kingdom. Both public and private entities provide healthcare services in the

country. However, the MOH sector stands out, offering the bulk (60%) of these services, whereas the OGH and PHS sectors each cater to approximately 20%. Between 2003 and 2015, the government allocated 6.49%–7.25% of its GDP to the healthcare budget, emphasising a significant reliance on public financing, which accounts for more than 75% of the country's healthcare spending. The MOH data emphasise a significant reliance on public financing, which accounts for more than 75% of the country's healthcare spending. As of 2020, the nation's health facilities included 78,596 hospital beds spread across 504 institutions, equating to roughly 22.4 beds for every 10,000 people. During the same period, the complete healthcare budget rose to 82 billion Saudi Riyals, representing nearly 8.1% of the national government's budget (MOH 2023).

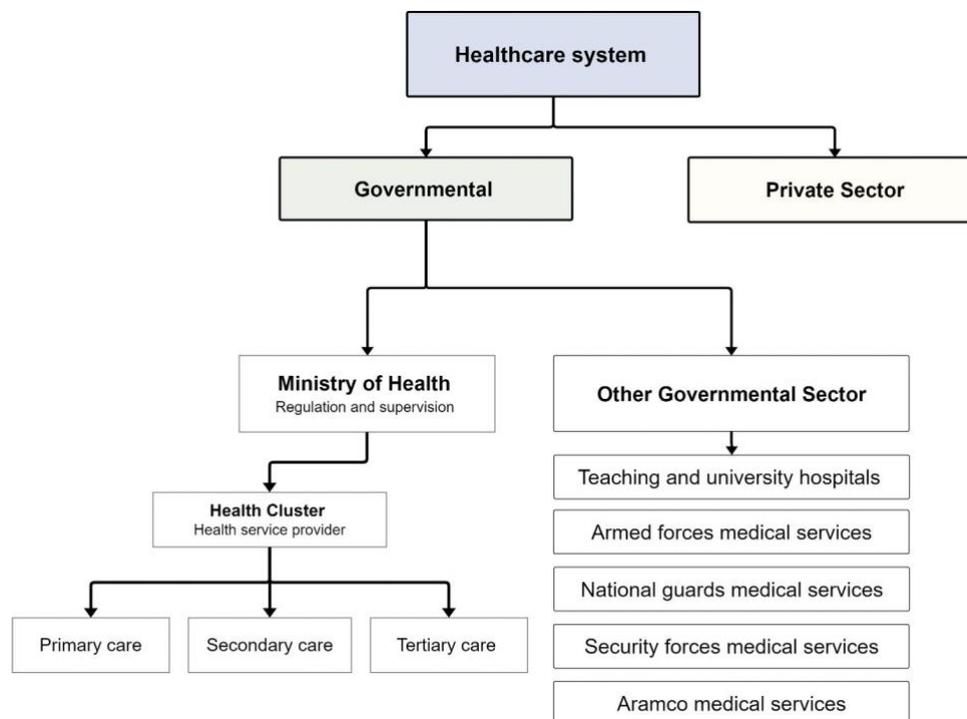


Figure 6: Saudi Arabia's current healthcare system organizational structure (Khalil et al. 2018; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2021).

2.8.3 Healthcare system in Saudi Arabia and Vision 2030

While Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 focuses on achieving transformation in all economic sectors, the healthcare sector is one of the important sectors addressed in the vision (Al-Hanawi et al. 2019; Albejaidi and Nair 2019). As noted above, one strategy is to increase the private sector to offer more healthcare-related jobs to Saudi citizens. The total number of Saudi healthcare providers represented only 44% of all healthcare professionals, and only 30% of all physicians worked in the healthcare field in 2017 (Ministry of Health 2018). A large number of Saudi individuals are required

in the healthcare sector to achieve Vision 2030 (Albejaidi and Nair 2019). In addition, the government recently launched the Model of Care program (MOC) to revamp the health sector and foster public–private partnerships. This initiative addresses issues such as poor pathway management, inadequate referrals, and communication gaps between healthcare providers and patients. To align with global healthcare enhancement frameworks, the MOC concept is drawn from the WHO, World Bank Group, Institute of Healthcare Improvement, and England’s National Health Service models (Ministry of Health 2017). Consequently, health clusters have been established nationwide, each serving approximately one million people, allowing seamless movement for medical professionals and enhancing patient access and care transitions (Ministry of Health 2017; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia 2021).

2.8.4 Nursing Profession in Saudi Arabia

Globally, nurses have been instrumental in advancing essential health priorities, including universal health coverage, mental and community health services, emergency preparedness, patient safety, and holistic patient-centred care (WHO 2020). Comprising an estimated 27 million nurses and midwives, the global nursing workforce constitutes nearly half the total health workforce. The World Health Organization (WHO) has underscored a significant shortage, particularly in nursing and midwifery, estimating that an additional 9 million professionals will be needed by 2030 to meet Sustainable Development Goal 3 on health and well-being.

In an Islamic historical context, Rifaida Al-Asalmiya is acknowledged as a pioneering figure in nursing, comparable to Florence Nightingale's impact on the West. Al-Asalmiya was celebrated for her caregiving during the early Islamic period and for establishing a clinic that served as both an educational and community care centre (Almalki et al. 2011). The nursing profession in Saudi Arabia was officially recognised in 1954 by the Ministry of Health (MOH), which launched the Health Institute Program in 1958 in collaboration with the WHO in Riyadh. This marked a significant milestone in the country's professional nursing education program (Almalki et al. 2011). Prior to 1960, the Saudi healthcare system largely depended on traditional healing methods without established medical or nursing institutions and saw limited local engagement in nursing (El-Sanabary 1993; Mufti 2000). The first official public nursing school was established in Riyadh in 1959 (Tumulty 2001). However, the nursing workforce is primarily composed of expatriates from diverse countries and cultural backgrounds (Almalki et al. 2011; Littlewood and Yousuf, 2000; Mufti, 2000).

In Saudi Arabia, the health sector faces challenges, such as limited capacity in nursing education and high reliance on expatriate nurses, with only 38% of nurses being Saudi citizens as of 2018 (MOH 2020). Modernising the nursing sector is crucial for creating a self-reliant healthcare system capable of meeting the needs of the Kingdom's growing and aging population (Alluhidan et al. 2020). Globally, the nursing workforce is predominantly female, with women making up 70% of the health and social workforce, compared to 41% across all employment sectors (WHO 2020). In 2018, 62% of Saudi nurses were female, in contrast to 91% of female nurses among foreign staff members.

International nursing professionals in the Kingdom are mainly from India, the Philippines, and Malaysia (Figure 7) (MOH 2018). These statistics emphasise the gender imbalance within the profession and highlight the potential for Saudi Arabia to transform its nursing sector into a global exemplar, offering a rewarding career path that ensures efficient and high-quality health care. The nursing sector in Saudi Arabia is currently undergoing significant changes, driven by economic progress, societal shifts, and the expansion of the local nursing workforce, adding complexity to the profession. Although the nursing profession in Saudi Arabia is relatively nascent compared to Western nations, it has seen substantial growth and development. Previously heavily reliant on expatriate nurses, Saudi Arabia's healthcare system is now experiencing a shift, with Saudi nurses increasingly representing the largest group of healthcare workers and becoming integral to healthcare delivery (Almutairi and McCarthy 2012; MOH 2018). The continuous evolution of the nursing sector is essential for the comprehensive transformation of the healthcare system (Al-Hanawi et al. 2019). As of 2020, the healthcare workforce in Saudi Arabia, mainly nurses, stood at approximately 196,701, with 42.9% being Saudi nationals, predominantly women (MOH 2022).

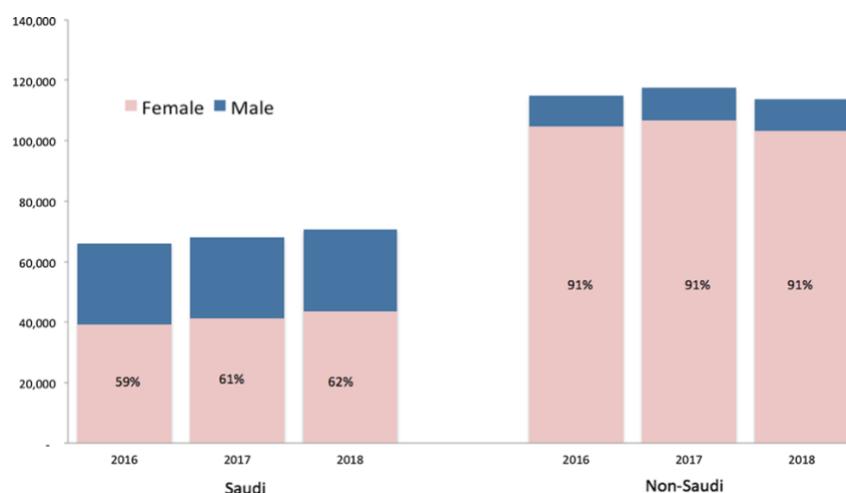


Figure 7: Saudi and non-Saudi nursing workforce based on gender (MOH 2018).

Chapter 3: Literature review

3.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews available literature on women in managerial positions in Saudi Arabia. It presents a narrative review conducted systematically. The literature reviewed explores the contexts of women nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. It aims to explore the distinct women nurse in management, and the challenges, complexities, and barriers, they encounter to provide a comprehensive understanding of the status of women in management within the broader Saudi Arabian context. However, it is worth noting that the available literature specifically focused on the experiences of female nurse managers within healthcare systems is limited, with very few studies capturing the perspective of female nurse managers themselves. Furthermore, there were challenges in reviewing the existing evidence in either Eastern and Western countries due to different contexts in terms of culture, religion, and education and economic growth. Due to these limitations, I have drawn from literature related to women's experiences in management within Saudi Arabia, where studies are more contextually relevant. While this review primarily focuses on women in management within the Saudi Arabian context, insights gained from reviewing literature across various fields can offer valuable perspectives on female managers in the healthcare system. These fields share the same cultural context, which may illuminate the unique experiences and challenges encountered by female nurse managers within the healthcare system. This chapter concludes with a summary of the articles reviewed.

3.2 Keywords and Search Strategy

This approach aimed to capture articles that specifically discussed women's career advancement into managerial positions in Saudi Arabia, while addressing critical themes related to women's experiences in managerial positions. The literature review aimed to explore women's situation in managerial positions in Saudi Arabia, to identify the gap in the body of knowledge, investigate further and possibly fill the identified gap. The initial research was conducted in January 2020, with an updated search executed on October 3, 2023. The literature review chapter was based on the final search, which was finalized in August 2024. The search focused on the following three concepts: Women, career advancement, gender equality, underrepresentation, bullying, challenges, management. The concepts and the associated search terms can be seen in Table 1. The search was supported by the help of a School of Healthcare subject library technician.

Women	Nurse	Career advancement	gender equalit*	Underreprese nt*	bullying	Challenge*	management
Female	Clinical nurse	advancing career	gender gap	glass ceiling”	harass*	resistance	Senior level
women	Nursing Practitioner	career ladder	sexism	Stereotyp*	oppress*	obstacle*	executive
Woman	Nursing Personnel	career mobility	“gender equalit*	family responsibilities	marginalis*	imped*	Top level
	Nursing Staff	Promotion	Gender dynamic	Feminism	Discrimina*	Experience*	health care management
		progression	implicit bias	<u>Patriarchy</u>		Opinion*	
		Equal opportunities	Gender bias	Religio*		attitudes	-
		Management development	gender ideology	social expectation*		opinion	
		Management aspirations	gender diversity	unconventiona l career			

Table 1: Concepts for the study literature search

I employed a comprehensive search strategy to maximize the retrieval of relevant literature. To systematically gather relevant literature, we conducted searches across multiple databases, including CINAHL via EBSCO, Scopus, Web of Science, ASSIA, Ovid Emcare, Medline via Ovid, APA PsycINFO via Ovid. (Table 2 Search terms for databases). The search was limited to papers written in English with a geographic scope of Saudi Arabia. The research topic exploring women in management within the context of Saudi Arabia presented a multifaceted challenge in terms of literature search. Traditional search techniques, such as the application of Boolean operators, were initially employed. These methods, rooted in combining specific terms and phrases, are a foundational approach to database searching (Hildreth 1997). However, when applied to this complex topic, they exposed their limitations. Specifically, while many articles might include terms like "women," "managers," and "Arabs", they did not necessarily address the unique intersection of these terms in the desired context. The result was a limited dataset that inadequately addressed the essence of the research.

To enhance the literature search's depth and relevance, I incorporated proximity operators to boolean operators. This approach aimed to cast a wider net, while ensuring precision in the captured articles (King's College London 2023). It dictates how close multiple search terms should be in search results, ensuring that the terms appear near each other in relevant documents. This nuance is especially helpful for topics where search terms might be related but not necessarily adjacent (King's College London 2023). It's important to understand that database platforms vary in their support for and implementation of proximity operators. For instance, Ovid employs the syntax "adj5" to indicate two terms should appear within five words of one another, while EBSCO platforms use "N5". Each database has its own syntax, which can introduce complexities to the research process."

My primary objective was to identify literature discussing women's management in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing themes like career advancement, gender equality, and management challenges. By incorporating proximity operators like "N5", I ensured terms appeared closely in the documents. This approach, allowing flexibility in terms' arrangement, is vital to understand the subtle connections between them. The use of proximity searching was crucial to navigate the limitations of standard Boolean searches. By integrating these search techniques, I achieved a more thorough exploration of the literature on the topic.

Database	Search Strategy
CINHAL via EBSCO	((women OR female OR nurse OR "clinical nurse" OR "nursing practitioner" OR "nursing personnel" OR "nursing staff") N5 (management OR executive)) AND (Saudi OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" OR KSA OR SA) ("Career Advancement" OR Promotion OR Progression OR Development) N5 ("Gender Equality" OR "Equal Opportunities" OR Sexism OR "Glass Ceiling") (Bullying OR Harassment OR Discrimination) N5 ("Family Responsibilities" OR "Unconventional Career" OR Challenges OR Obstacles OR Experiences)
Scopus	((women OR female OR nurse OR "clinical nurse" OR "nursing practitioner" OR "nursing personnel" OR "nursing staff") W/5 (management OR executive)) AND (Saudi OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" OR KSA OR SA) ("Career Advancement" OR Promotion OR Progression OR Development) W/5 ("Gender Equality" OR "Equal Opportunities" OR Sexism OR "Glass Ceiling") (Bullying OR Harassment OR Discrimination) W/5 ("Family Responsibilities" OR "Unconventional Career" OR Challenges OR Obstacles OR Experiences)
Web of Science	(women OR female OR nurse OR "clinical nurse" OR "nursing practitioner" OR "nursing personnel" OR "nursing staff") NEAR/5 (management OR executive) AND (Saudi OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" OR KSA OR SA) ("Career Advancement" OR Promotion OR Progression OR Development) NEAR/5 ("Gender Equality" OR "Equal Opportunities" OR Sexism OR "Glass Ceiling") (Bullying OR Harassment OR Discrimination) NEAR/5 ("Family

	Responsibilities" OR "Unconventional Career" OR Challenges OR Obstacles OR Experiences)
ASSIA	(women OR female OR nurse OR "clinical nurse" OR "nursing practitioner" OR "nursing personnel" OR "nursing staff") ADJ5 (management OR executive) AND (Saudi OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" OR KSA OR SA) ("Career Advancement" OR Promotion OR Progression OR Development) ADJ5 ("Gender Equality" OR "Equal Opportunities" OR Sexism OR "Glass Ceiling") (Bullying OR Harassment OR Discrimination) ADJ5 ("Family Responsibilities" OR "Unconventional Career" OR Challenges OR Obstacles OR Experiences)
Ovid Emcare	(women OR female OR nurse OR "clinical nurse" OR "nursing practitioner" OR "nursing personnel" OR "nursing staff") ADJ5 (management OR executive) AND (Saudi OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" OR KSA OR SA) ("Career Advancement" OR Promotion OR Progression OR Development) ADJ5 ("Gender Equality" OR "Equal Opportunities" OR Sexism OR "Glass Ceiling") (Bullying OR Harassment OR Discrimination) ADJ5 ("Family Responsibilities" OR "Unconventional Career" OR Challenges OR Obstacles OR Experiences)
APA PsycINFO via Ovid	(women OR female OR nurse OR "clinical nurse" OR "nursing practitioner" OR "nursing personnel" OR "nursing staff") ADJ5 (management OR executive) AND (Saudi OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" OR KSA OR SA) ("Career Advancement" OR Promotion OR Progression OR Development) ADJ5 ("Gender Equality" OR "Equal Opportunities" OR Sexism OR "Glass Ceiling") (Bullying OR Harassment OR Discrimination) ADJ5 ("Family Responsibilities" OR "Unconventional Career" OR Challenges OR Obstacles OR Experiences)
Medline via Ovid	(women OR female OR nurse OR "clinical nurse" OR "nursing practitioner" OR "nursing personnel" OR "nursing staff") ADJ5 (management OR executive) AND (Saudi OR "Saudi Arabia" OR "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" OR KSA OR SA) ("Career Advancement" OR Promotion OR Progression OR Development) ADJ5 ("Gender Equality" OR "Equal Opportunities" OR Sexism OR "Glass Ceiling") (Bullying OR Harassment OR Discrimination) ADJ5 ("Family Responsibilities" OR "Unconventional Career" OR Challenges OR Obstacles OR Experiences)

Table 2 Search terms for databases

Later, the titles and abstracts of the articles obtained were first examined. Based on this preliminary assessment, the full texts of pertinent articles were sourced. Their relevance to the study's objectives then determined their inclusion. All identified literature was considered, regardless of the research methodologies they employed. Refinement of the search was achieved using specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to Table 3 The review encompassed articles from 2003 to 2023, sourced from peer-reviewed journals and grey literature, including dissertations and theses. To guarantee the selection of the most relevant and up-to-date studies, the abstracts of these articles were cross-referenced with the inclusion criteria.

3.3 Rational for Selection Criteria

Although women around the world face challenges in reaching high-ranking positions, Saudi women encounter significantly greater obstacles. Until recently, Saudi women were not even allowed to drive, a stark example of the social and legal restrictions that limit their freedom of movement and access to equal professional opportunities (Al-Asfour et al., 2017). In light of these unique socio-economic and cultural contexts, I have chosen to exclude studies not specifically focused on Saudi Arabia or other developing countries from my literature review. This decision is based on the understanding that the dynamics of women in managerial positions can be significantly influenced by these regional contexts. Including studies from developed or irrelevant contexts may lead to conclusions and recommendations that are not applicable or effective within the targeted regions, thus necessitating a focused approach to truly address the specific challenges faced by Saudi women in managerial roles.

Additionally, I am focusing on articles published in English. English is widely recognized as the lingua franca of international academic discourse, making research accessible to a broader scholarly community. This inclusion criterion ensures that the findings are accessible to and can be scrutinized by researchers worldwide, which is particularly important in fields that benefit from diverse cultural perspectives. Furthermore, focusing on English-language publications helps maintain a certain standard of peer review and publication quality, as many leading journals publish in this language.

My review also omits literature reviews or meta-analyses that do not provide primary research insights specific to Saudi Arabia. My goal is to gather direct evidence and original research findings specific to this context. While literature reviews and meta-analyses are valuable, they do not offer the novel research data I need to draw specific, actionable conclusions for Saudi Arabia. I have decided to exclude studies on general management that do not specifically focus on women. The management challenges and opportunities for women can significantly differ from those faced by men, especially in culturally unique or conservative settings like Saudi Arabia. Focusing on gender-specific studies is essential to effectively address these unique factors. Furthermore, I am excluding research focusing exclusively on women in management in sectors or domains not relevant to my study. This ensures that the insights I derive are practical and actionable within the specific context I am examining, maintaining the relevance and applicability of my findings. Research on women in management in countries other than Saudi Arabia is also excluded. While comparative studies can provide insights, the unique cultural, legal, and social context of Saudi Arabia may make external findings less applicable. Focusing solely on Saudi Arabia ensures that the results are directly relevant

and tailored to the local context. Lastly, I am not including research that does not relate to women in management. As my study aims to explore this specific phenomenon, including studies not directly examining this topic would dilute the focus and relevance of my literature review. This criterion helps streamline my research process, ensuring that the studies I include are both relevant and capable of informing my specific research questions effectively.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies focusing on women in managerial roles in Saudi Arabia and all developmental countries in all fields. • Primary research studies conducted in the context of Saudi Arabia. • Articles published in English between 2003 to 2024. • Grey literature, including theses and dissertations, focusing on women leaders in Saudi Arabia. • Studies that provide insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by Saudi women in management. • Policies, laws, or official reports related to women in management in Saudi Arabia. • Research articles that examine the cultural, social, and economic factors influencing women's management in Saudi Arabia. • References that specifically address women's career deployment in Saudi Arabia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies not focused on Saudi Arabia developmental countries. • Articles not published in English. • Literature reviews or meta-analyses that don't offer primary research insights specific to Saudi Arabia. • Studies on general management without a specific focus on women. • Research focusing exclusively on women in management in sectors or domains not relevant to my study (unless specified). • Articles focusing on women in management in countries other than Saudi Arabia. • Research not related to women in management.

Table 3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

3.4 Quality assessment of the studies

The initial search yielded 344 papers addressing women's challenges in management across various fields in Saudi Arabia. Abstracts were screened to identify studies most aligned with the review objectives, resulting in the exclusion of 232 papers deemed irrelevant to the primary review question. This left 61 articles for further examination to assess their suitability based on inclusion and quality criteria. Papers were selected for their relevance to the study's aim, objectives, and research question. The modified online version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP), originally developed by the Public Health Research Unit at the University of Oxford, was used to evaluate qualitative studies (see Appendix J). This appraisal tool provided checklists tailored to various research designs, including those specific to qualitative studies. For quantitative studies, the

Critical Appraisal Checklist for Cross-Sectional Studies (Survey) was used (see Appendix K), adapted from the Center for Evidence-Based Management (July 2014). Each paper was thoroughly reviewed using these tools. This process resulted in a total of 25 articles, categorized by main themes and briefly summarized in Table 4. For further details, see the PRISMA diagram in Figure 9.

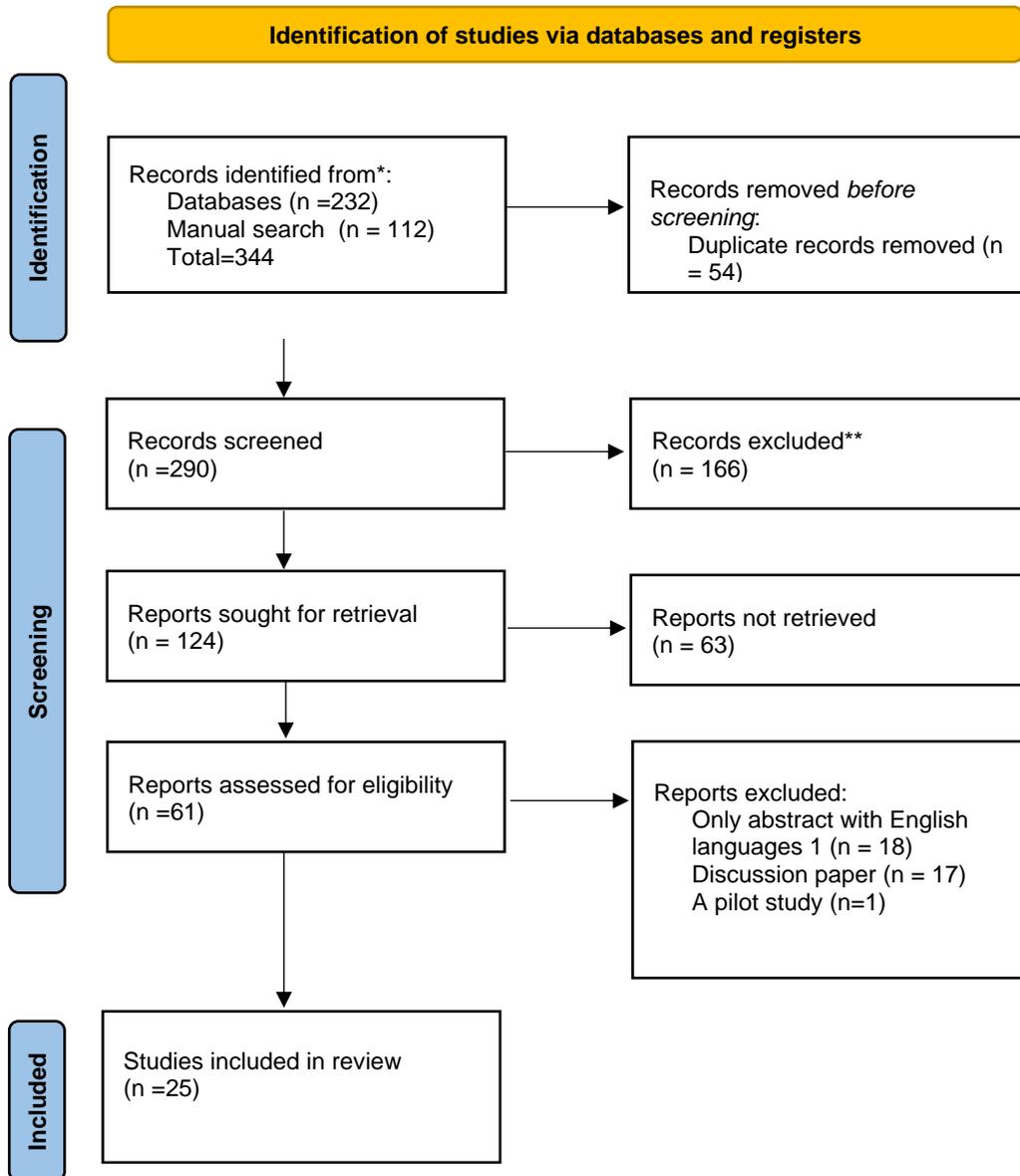


Figure 8 PRISMA chart for the literature review.

3.5 Barriers to Women Management

The increasing presence of women in senior management and decision-making roles signifies progress in providing leadership opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia. However, they encounter

a distinct set of challenges shaped by the unique cultural context (Alotaibi et al. 2017; Syed et al., 2017; Alsubhi et al. 2018). A key theme emerging from several studies is the variety of barriers faced by women managers in Saudi Arabia. These barriers can be categorized into four main challenges: socio-cultural, organizational, economic, and individual psychological barriers.

3.5.1 Socio-Cultural Barriers

Numerous studies have emphasised the profound impact of cultural and religious norms on the professional advancement of women in Saudi Arabia. The male guardianship system and entrenched gender roles are identified as significant obstacles. Cultural norms typically assign management roles to men, significantly affecting women's participation and acceptance of such positions. This societal structure is further supported by religious interpretations that restrict women's public involvement (Alsubaie and Jones 2017; Syed et al. 2018; Alhussein 2014; Sobaih and Abu Elnasr 2024; Akbar et al. 2023).

Traditional gender roles and societal expectations significantly limit professional opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia. The deeply ingrained cultural belief that men are the primary breadwinners and that women are primarily responsible for home and family duties perpetuates gender inequality. Although women often have higher qualifications and more experience, men are preferred for managerial roles because of entrenched cultural biases (Alsubaie and Jones 2017). Societal norms restrict women's mobility and reinforce male dominance, further limiting professional opportunities (Syed et al. 2018). Strict interpretations of Islamic doctrines, particularly those aligned with Wahhabi teachings, restrict women's participation in the workforce and limit their management aspirations (Hodges 2017). The male guardianship system allows men to control many aspects of their lives, including employment opportunities (Syed et al. 2018). This system grants men control over various aspects of women's lives, including their ability to work, travel, and make personal decisions, significantly limiting their autonomy and mobility (Alhajri 2020). Many women view the guardianship system as outdated and restrictive, questioning its relevance in the context of the recent policy reforms aimed at improving women's rights. The concept of social acceptability influences the type of job deemed suitable for women. Jobs involving public interaction or those in male-dominated fields are often considered inappropriate for women because of societal norms and family expectations (Syed et al., 2018). This perception restricts women to traditionally female-oriented fields, thus limiting their career advancement opportunities (Al-Asfour et al. 2017).

Gender segregation in educational and professional settings further compounded these barriers. Gender segregation limits women's participation in strategic meetings and access to resources, restricting professional interactions and networking opportunities and reinforcing the cultural norms of keeping men and women in separate spheres (Alsubaie and Jones 2017; Syed et al. 2018; Sobaih and Abu Elnasr 2024).

Family and community influence plays a significant role in shaping women's career choices and opportunities. Negative societal attitudes towards working women, especially in sectors like tourism, can discourage women from pursuing or advancing their careers (Sobaih and Abu Elnasr 2024). Lack of family support, particularly from male family members, can also be a critical barrier. Many women rely on their families, especially male relatives, for career guidance and support because of societal expectations (Abalkhail and Allan 2015).

Negative perceptions and stereotypes regarding women's managerial roles are pervasive. Traditional gender roles and cultural norms in partially segregated universities limit women's career progression through management (Akbar et al. 2023). Women often face scepticism about their ability to handle management demands, further perpetuating gender inequality in professional settings (Hodges 2017).

Cultural and religious factors significantly influence the role and expectations of women in Saudi Arabia (Al-Khater 2016; Syed et al. 2017; Alsubhi et al. 2018). Saudi women, who are immersed in an intricate blend of religion and culture, face multifaceted challenges (Al Alhareth et al. 2015). These unique regional challenges have enhanced our understanding of women's management roles in Saudi Arabia. Yet, a pronounced cultural perspective remains a primary barrier to female employment, firmly rooted in societal norms and steered by Islamic principles. Within this cultural milieu, men are predominantly seen as providers, which directly shapes the perceived roles and responsibilities of both sexes. Gender segregation, stemming from religious commitment to maintaining a moral work environment, restricts women's employment opportunities.

Akbar et al. (2023) provide an illuminating exploration of the variegated landscape of women's management across different institutional models within Saudi Arabian higher education. This study highlights how the structural configurations of universities—segregated (women-only), unsegregated (co-educational), and partially segregated—differentially impact women's management efficacy and opportunities. Partially segregated universities, where women's campuses

exist within male-dominated universities, pose significant challenges for female leaders, creating a sense of marginalisation and ineffectiveness in management roles. This setting contrasts with national reforms aimed at enhancing gender equality, suggesting a misalignment between policy intentions and on-ground realities. In contrast, women-only universities have emerged as empowering environments where female management flourishes, challenging prevailing assumptions, and underscoring the potential of tailored educational environments to promote effective female management. Akbar et al. (2023) critically assess the current dominance of the partially segregated model as outdated and ineffective for fostering women's management, calling for a reevaluation of organizational structures within Saudi Arabian higher education to better align with modern gender equality goals.

Many private sector entities hesitate to hire women because of societal norms and the anticipated costs of gender-segregated facilities. Mobility restrictions within the country compound these challenges, limiting women's participation across diverse labour market facets (Syed et al. 2017). Local cultural traditions rather than religion propagate negative stereotypes about women, making it difficult to distinguish religious practices from culture. The conflation of gender-biased interpretations of Islamic sharia with legalities intensifies the opposition to female employment. A vast array of research has emphasised the influence of traditional gender roles and societal expectations on women's management in Saudi Arabia (Al-Mah 2017; Al-Rasheed 2013). Such roles often confine women to domestic responsibilities, thus limiting their management opportunities (Ahmed and Al-Dosari 2015). Stereotypes questioning women's management competencies persist, further challenging women's attempts to break these moulds and increase management (El-Maghraby and Rao 2019). Societal pressure to align with deep-seated gender norms compounds this, often resulting in resistance and scrutiny when women pursue management (Khalifa and Elkelani 2018).

Empowerment and freedom to make decisions are critical for women leaders, as active involvement in decision-making processes is paramount. Several studies have highlighted the lack of empowerment that hinders women's managerial roles (Sabbagh and El-Masri 2014). Women leaders in Saudi Arabia grapple with balancing professional and personal lives, primarily because of societal gender expectations and family roles (Al-Ghamdi 2020; Alsubhi et al. 2018). This struggle intensifies with minimal support from male peers and superiors who might dismiss or actively undermine female leaders. Feedback from Saudi women highlights numerous professional obstacles (Al-Asfour et al. 2017).

3.5.2 Organizational Barriers

Organizational barriers present significant challenges to the career progression and management opportunities of women in Saudi Arabia. These barriers are multifaceted, encompassing discriminatory practices, structural impediments, limited organizational support, and inadequate policies and resources (Abalkhail 2017; Alsubaie and Jones 2017; Almalki et al. 2024; Akbar et al. 2023; Sobaih and Abu Elnasr 2024; Syed et al. 2017). For instance, discriminatory practices within organisations are prevalent barriers. Abalkhail (2017) revealed a prevalent bias towards male members, who were often given precedence over their female counterparts despite women holding superior qualifications and more extensive experience. Participants attributed this discrimination to religious and cultural factors that significantly influenced organizational culture in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Alsubaie and Jones (2017) highlighted that, despite women having higher qualifications and more experience, men are often preferred for management roles because of entrenched cultural and organizational biases. Furthermore, Al-Asfour et al. (2017) noted that women face gender discrimination and favouritism towards their male colleagues, which hinders their career advancement. These discriminatory practices are exacerbated by gender segregation in the workplace, which limits women's access to strategic meetings, resources, and networking opportunities (Abalkhail 2017; Alsubaie and Jones 2017; Syed et al. 2018).

In addition to discriminatory practices, structural barriers within organisations further complicate women's career progress. Almalki et al. (2024) and Syed et al. (2017) identify issues such as the centralization of decision-making, lack of clarity in management qualification criteria, and numerous administrative units as significant impediments. These structural issues hinder transparency and efficiency, making it difficult for women to ascend to management positions. Moreover, organizational policies and practices, including the male guardianship system, limit women's autonomy and professional mobility (Syed et al. 2017).

Another critical barrier is limited organizational support. Studies by Akbar et al. (2023) and Sobaih and Abu Elnasr (2024) indicate that women often lack sufficient support from university administrations and other organizational structures. This includes a lack of flexible work arrangements and insufficient policies to support work-life balance, contributing to the glass ceiling effect. Furthermore, women in Saudi Arabia often have restricted access to professional mentoring and networking opportunities because of cultural and religious norms that limit interactions between men and women (Abalkhail and Allan 2015).

Additionally, the absence of comprehensive policies and resources to support women's career advancement is a significant organizational barrier. Researchers note the lack of specific work quotas for women and insufficient anti-discrimination regulations (Akbar et al.2023; Sobaih and Abu Elnasr 2024; Alhussein 2014). This inadequate policy support limits women's career progression and representation in managerial roles. Historical gender segregation and recent royal decrees opening up job opportunities have not been sufficient to address deep-rooted organizational barriers (Alhussein 2014).

Networking and professional development are crucial to career advancement. However, women in Saudi Arabia face several significant barriers. Abalkhail and Allan (2016) highlight the role of *wasta* (social connections) in career progression. While *wasta* can facilitate career advancement, it often reinforces gender inequalities and dependency on male relatives, limiting women's access to resources and top organizational positions. Women without strong family networks face greater challenges in advancing to senior positions because of their limited access to promotions, training, and other career-related support (Abalkhail and Allan 2015). Similarly, Syed et al. (2017) conducted a comprehensive study of gender employment equality in Saudi Arabia, revealing the multifaceted challenges faced by women. These challenges were categorised into macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. At the macro level, systems like *wasta* (personal connections) and male guardianship were identified as barriers. At the meso level, workplace gender segregation has been highlighted, resulting in women occupying inferior ranks despite equivalent qualifications and professional experience (AlDoubi 2014).

Moreover, Abalkhail (2020) provides noteworthy insight into hierarchical dynamics, emphasising that these exist not only among men but also among women in professional settings. The study elucidates the "Queen Bee" phenomenon, where senior women often perpetuate patriarchal structures, consequently obstructing the career growth trajectories of their female subordinates. Drawing from semi-structured interviews with 30 women from public organizations, the research reveals that senior women's support, though seemingly unified and encouraging, often comes with strings attached, resulting in fragile professional affiliations. This dynamic deters women's climb to apex managerial positions, mirroring entrenched patriarchal norms and impeding women's management ascent (Abalkhail 2020). For example, Abalkhail (2017) conducted interviews with 22 women from two Saudi higher education institutions (HEIs), revealing a bias favouring male professionals. This bias often overshadowed female colleagues, even when women boasted of

superior credentials and broader experiential spectra. This was attributed to the religious and cultural elements ingrained in Saudi Arabia's organizational culture. Additionally, women's exclusion from pivotal board meetings curtailed their access to essential information and restricted their contribution to crucial matters related to female personnel. Alyami (2016) examined the ramifications of gender inequality on women's professional opportunities and earnings in Saudi Arabia. This study analysed the impact of societal narratives, religious beliefs, culture, and traditions on women's workplace roles, highlighting the primary sources of gender-based discrimination. Moreover, Abalkhail (2017) emphasised gender disparities in training opportunities, with women being offered fewer opportunities to enhance their management skills. This disparity further limits women's career progressions and management potential. Furthermore, Almaki et al. (2016) explored the connection between motherhood and career progression, suggesting that stress factors affect women both at home and at work. These factors include limited career opportunities, challenges juggling family and work, pregnancy and mobility issues, and gender inequality in the workplace. Organizational culture in Saudi Arabia often fails to adequately support women, making it difficult for them to balance their professional and familial responsibilities. Similarly, Syed et al. (2017) adopt a relational perspective to probe gender inequality in Saudi Arabia. This perspective examines how social discourses, religion, culture, and traditions influence women's roles at work and identifies the root causes of discrimination. Finally, Abalkhail and Allan (2016) discussed traditional gender hierarchies and patriarchal organizational structures in Saudi Arabia, noting that these benefit men by providing access to important individual and family networks. Women often face significant challenges due to these entrenched structures that limit their career progression and management opportunities.

In brief, organizational culture in Saudi Arabia presents significant barriers to women's career progression and management opportunities. These barriers are deeply rooted in the cultural, religious, and structural elements that perpetuate gender inequality. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policy reforms, enhanced organizational support, and a cultural shift towards greater gender equality in the workplace (Abalkhail 2017; Almalki et al. 2024; Akbar et al. 2023; Sobaih and Abu Elnasr 2024; Syed et al. 2017).

3.5.3 Economic Barriers

In Saudi Arabia, economic dependence on male family members limits women's career choices and financial independence. This dependence is perpetuated by societal norms that emphasise men as

the primary breadwinners, restricting women's economic opportunities and autonomy (Hakem 2017). Economic barriers include pay disparities and limited job opportunities in diverse sectors, which are critical issues affecting women's ability to achieve financial independence and career growth (Nieva, 2015). Hakem (2017) emphasised that women often have to exceed normal performance expectations considerably more than their male colleagues to gain similar recognition and opportunities for advancement. This economic pressure is compounded by the lack of acceptance from male counterparts and supervisors, which requires women to continually prove their worth.

3.5.4 Personal and Psychological Barriers

Societal expectations significantly impact women's self-confidence and self-efficacy, which are crucial for their professional development. The lack of self-confidence among Saudi women hinders their ability to secure senior positions, often resulting from limited training, education, and societal norms (Sobaih and Abu Elnasr 2024). Additionally, cultural norms that restrict women's interactions with male colleagues negatively impact their interpersonal skills, which are essential for top management (Alghamdi 2014). Access to healthcare services and the impact of workplace conditions on women's physical and mental health are vital aspects of their professional lives. Alghamdi (2014) noted that societal norms and institutional practices maintaining women's disempowerment in the healthcare sector include rigid gender roles and a lack of supportive structures for women's advancement. Similarly, Alboliteh et al. (2017) emphasised that dissatisfaction with working hours, lack of promotion opportunities, and desire to pursue further education are significant factors contributing to the high turnover rate among Saudi nurses.

Furthermore, balancing professional and personal responsibilities remains a significant challenge for female leaders. Societal expectations often place the burden of family and home responsibilities primarily on women, complicating their professional commitments and growth (Al-Ghamdi 2020). Women leaders express the need for continuous support and reforms to facilitate their economic participation and career advancement (Al-Asfour et al. 2017). Additionally, multiple studies have connected motherhood to career progression, suggesting a tangled web of stress factors affecting Saudi women both at home and at work. These include limited career opportunities, challenges juggling family and work, pregnancy and mobility issues, and gender inequality in the workplace (Almaki et al. 2016). Consequently, the pressure of job demands, and the pursuit of advancement can disturb women from their families. Saudi female leaders often grapple with organizational

challenges, from handling diverse personalities to managing heavy workloads and internal disagreements. The acceptance of women in managerial roles remains contentious, and their limited experience can pose challenges to adapting to certain situations, making it difficult for them to execute their responsibilities in evolving settings (Almaki et al. 2016).

Lack of Emotional Intelligence (EI) is a significant personal barrier to women in Saudi Arabia, impeding their professional and personal development. Emotional Intelligence is crucial for enhancing self-leadership, self-efficacy, and interpersonal skills that are essential for success in professional settings. Researchers have highlighted that high EI among female leaders correlates positively with self-leadership and effective management of responsibilities. For instance, Almadani and Alamri (2024) discovered a strong positive relationship between EI and self-leadership among female nursing managers, especially those with extensive management experience. Their study showed that higher self-leadership scores and prolonged managerial roles were predictors of higher EI levels. This finding implies that enhancing EI can enable women to transcend traditional norms and aspire to leadership positions.

3.6 Changes and Solutions to Women Empowerment

The need for significant legal reforms is paramount for enhancing women's autonomy and professional opportunities in Saudi Arabia. Researchers have emphasised the importance of abolishing the male guardianship system, which currently restricts women's autonomy in numerous aspects of life, including education, work, and personal freedom. Studies indicate that comprehensive anti-discrimination laws that protect women's rights in education, employment, and personal freedom must be implemented consistently and thoroughly to be effective (Alhussein 2014; Alhajri 2020). Additionally, research has shown that economic independence for women can be promoted through measures that ensure equal pay for equal work and that provide financial incentives for women entrepreneurs. Studies suggest that supporting women-owned businesses with grants, loans, and training programs can help bridge the economic gap and reduce financial dependence on male family members (Hakem 2017; Nieva 2015).

Ensuring equal access to quality education is crucial for women. This involves promoting mixed-gender academic environments and offering scholarships and support tailored specifically to women in higher education. Researchers have noted that reducing gender segregation in educational settings provides women with better networking opportunities and access to resources (Alotaibi et

al. 2017; Akbar et al. 2023). Moreover, developing Emotional Intelligence (EI) equips women with better handling of the pressures of balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. Studies have found that women with high EI are more adept at navigating complex social and organizational environments with resilience and confidence, which significantly aids their career progression and management effectiveness. Therefore, integrating EI development programs into training and professional development initiatives is proposed as a strategic measure to foster women's management growth in Saudi Arabia (Almadani and Alamri 2024). Research indicates that addressing the gap in EI can empower women to manage both professional and personal challenges more effectively, leading to improved career advancement opportunities and stronger presence in managerial roles. Furthermore, promoting digital literacy and providing access to technological tools are essential steps toward empowering women in the workforce. Researchers recommend incorporating technology training into educational and professional development programs to help women compete in a modern technology-driven job market (Almansour and Kempner 2015; Nieva 2015).

Studies have also highlighted the necessity of ensuring access to comprehensive healthcare services and promoting a supportive workplace environment to address the physical and mental health barriers faced by women. Policies that promote work-life balance and reduce stress and burnout among working women are crucial (Alghamdi 2014; Alboliteh et al. 2017). Establishing formal mentoring programs and encouraging networking opportunities can significantly enhance women's career progress. Studies have highlighted the importance of creating women-centric professional groups to provide support and resources, helping women navigate the professional landscape more effectively (Abalkhail and Allan 2015; Abalkhail and Allan 2016). Finally, actively promoting women's managerial roles and supporting female leadership styles are essential to achieving gender equality in managerial positions. Researchers stress the need to challenge stereotypes and cultural biases regarding women's capabilities to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for female leaders (Alotaibi et al. 2017; Hodges 2017).

3.7 Summary

In conclusion, the previous studies highlight the extensive barriers Saudi women face in their professional lives, including cultural, social, religious, and organizational obstacles. These challenges are deeply rooted and multifaceted, impacting women's autonomy, economic independence, access to education, development of emotional intelligence, and managerial roles opportunities. Various

studies have proposed solutions, such as legal reforms, economic incentives, educational enhancements, and EI development. Achieving gender equality in Saudi Arabia requires a holistic approach that integrates policy reforms, cultural shifts, and organizational changes to address these barriers.

NO	Codes	Author/ Year/ Country	Title of the study	Aim	Study Design/ Method	Findings	Methodological quality
1.	Challenges	Alsubaie & Jones. (2017) KSA	An Overview of the Current State of Women's Leadership in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia and a Proposal for Future Research Directions	Highlight current state and propose future research directions for women's leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia.	Synthesis of existing literature.	-Women have made progress in higher education leadership despite social, religious, cultural, and organizational barriers.	-Lack of transparency in the selection process for included studies; may not capture all relevant research. -No specific criteria or tools were provided for assessing the quality of studies. -Attempts to generalize results across different regions without accounting for specific socio-cultural dynamics.
2.	Challenges	Syed et al (2018) KSA	Gender equality in employment in Saudi Arabia: a relational perspective	Examines gender inequality in Saudi Arabia using a relational perspective of multilevel influencing factors.	Qualitative study using thematic analysis based on 21 in-depth interviews with female employees in various sectors.	Identified multilevel factors affecting women's opportunities, such as cultural norms, social power, gender segregation, and discrimination. Experiences vary by social class and identity, emphasizing intersectionality and male guardianship's role.	- Most of the participants were 11 single women, which may influence the results and limit their relevance to the general population. - The study did not fully explore the perspectives of male counterparts or other stakeholders, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the gender dynamics at play.
3.	Challenges	Al-Asfour et al. (2017) KSA	Saudi women's work challenges and barriers to career advancement	Explore work challenges and barriers faced by Saudi women and understand their career development experiences.	Phenomenological qualitative approach using 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Saudi women.	Saudi women face limited job opportunities, excessive workloads, pregnancy-related issues, restricted mobility, and gender discrimination. Despite challenges, many women see themselves as successful.	-The study did not mention the criteria for recruitment such as age, and education level. - The study does not provide insights into how the interview questions were formulated. -The study mentions convenience sampling and personal connections but lacks detail on how participants were selected beyond that. -While there is mention of ensuring confidentiality, the study lacks in-depth reflection on potential biases or influences the researchers may have had.

4.	Challenges	Alhussein, (2014) KSA	Triangle of change: the situation of women in Saudi Arabia	To explain the complex interactions between social, legal, and economic factors influencing the situation of women in Saudi Arabia.	Analysis of the interplay between legal, social, and economic factors, informed by recent developments in the country.	Saudi women face significant legal, social, and economic challenges that restrict their rights and opportunities. Recent reforms, including royal decrees, have improved job opportunities and visibility for women, but substantial obstacles remain.	- Limited by the reliance on qualitative analysis and specific socio-political context.
5.	Challenges	Sobaih & Abu Elnasr (2024) KSA	Challenges to Cracking the Glass Ceiling among Saudi Women in the Tourism Industry	Explore barriers faced by Saudi women in reaching top managerial positions in the tourism industry and how to overcome these obstacles.	Phenomenological qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with Saudi women in senior management in tourism. Analyzed thematically.	Findings identified four main barriers to career progression: Social and cultural, regulatory, organizational, and personal Barriers	- The study does not provide insights into how the interview questions were formulated - While ethical considerations are mentioned, there is insufficient information on how ethical approval was obtained and any challenges encountered. This transparency is essential for assessing the ethical rigor of the research. - Findings of this study align with the research by Alhussein, (2014) KSA
6.	Barriers	Akbar et al. (2023) KSA	Women's leadership gamut in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector	Explore women's leadership in three types of university settings in Saudi Arabia: gender-segregated, unsegregated, and partially segregated	Feminist institutional theory perspective with a feminist qualitative approach. Conducted 14 semi-structured interviews in three university settings	Barriers to women's leadership are most significant in partially segregated universities, making women leaders powerless. Women's leadership thrives in women-only settings, indicating the partial segregation model is ineffective	- Interesting use of feminist theory. - The research question and aims are not explicitly stated in a clear and concise manner, which can leave readers uncertain about the specific focus of the study. - While the study acknowledges the complexities of Saudi culture, it may not fully account for regional differences within Saudi Arabia, as attitudes and barriers can vary significantly across provinces and institutions. - There are no explicit recommendations for future research.
7.	obstacles	Alotaibi et al. (2017) KSA	A critical analysis of the literature in women's leadership in Saudi Arabia	Explore women's leadership opportunities in Saudi Arabia amid increasing participation in senior management and decision-making roles.	Critical analysis of literature on women's leadership in Saudi Arabia across various fields of employment and public life.	Significant progress in women's leadership despite obstacles. Women joined the consultative assembly, became deputy	- Comprehensive overview of progress and challenges. - Relies on existing literature and secondary data. - Did not provide sufficient detail on how they assessed the quality of the included studies,

8.	Networking	Abalkhail, & Allan (2016). KSA& Gulf counties	<i>Wasta</i> and women's careers in the Arab Gulf States.	The aim of the study is to explore the phenomenon of <i>wasta</i> and its impact on women's career advancement in public sector organisations in the Arab Gulf States	The study used a qualitative approach, interpretive phenomenological approach, conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 18 female managers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE to understand the role of <i>wasta</i> in their career progression	The study found that <i>wasta</i> , an informal network of family and friend connections, significantly influences women's career progression in the Arab Gulf States, often leading to both career advancement and emotional frustration due to reliance on these networks	-Provides comprehensive insights into <i>wasta</i> within a non-Western context. -Highlights the socio-cultural factors influencing women's careers. -Lacks male perspectives for comparative analysis. -There is a limited use of direct quotations from participants' interviews. -Does not mention the transcription and translation processes. -Findings are consistent with research conducted by Syed et al. (2018).
9.	Social change	Alhajri,(2020). KSA	Women's Perspectives on Social Change in Saudi Arabia	The aim of this study is to uncover the impact of the male guardianship system on the lives of Saudi women.	This exploratory (Narrative analysis) qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews to collect in-depth narratives from 16 Saudi women.	The study found that most Saudi women do not view the male guardianship system as beneficial or protective. They question its purpose and relevance, especially given recent policy reforms that have not been implemented.	-The use of non-academic articles undermines the study's rigor and requires careful evaluation. -Participants avoid discussing issues like religion and women's rights, which limits the depth of the findings. -The absence of recordings hinders the capture of emotional cues and body language, affecting data richness.
10.	Acceptance women leader	Dahlan 2023 KSA	Current state of female leadership in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia	The aim of this study is to explore the current state of female leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia and understand women's perceptions and experiences in these role	This qualitative study conducted semi-structured interviews with 23 male and female academic professionals from various Saudi higher education institutions. Data were analyzed using a thematic approach with NVivo 12 software	The study found that acceptance of female leaders in Saudi higher education is influenced by factors such as age, educational background, and leader proficiency.	-Includes perspectives from both male and female academic professionals. - The study does not mention obtaining ethical approval, raising questions about the ethical considerations in the research process. -Cultural sensitivities influenced participants' openness and data depth.
11.	Women's managers mentoring and networking	Abalkhail, & Allan (2015). KSA, UK	'Women's career advancement: Mentoring and networking in Saudi Arabia and the UK',	To understand women managers' perceptions of mentoring and networking for career development in Saudi Arabia (SA) and the UK.	Qualitative study with in-depth interviews of 44 women managers (28 from SA and 16 from the UK).	SA women rely on family members due to lack of formal programs/ SA women depend on family networks (<i>wasta</i>) due to cultural restrictions	-Provides comparative insights into two different cultural contexts. - The study does not mention obtaining ethical approval.
12.	Challenges	Al-Ghamdi, N., 2020 KSA .	The challenges and opportunities faced by Saudi Arabian women leaders in education during a period of rapid	The study aimed to understand the professional and personal challenges and opportunities faced by	The study employed a qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews to gather data.	The findings highlighted the complex interplay of cultural, social, and professional dynamics affecting women leaders. Key themes included the influence of cultural and religious norms on women's leadership roles and the	-The hesitation of women to discuss their views affected the depth of the data collected.

			change in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia	women leaders in education in Saudi Arabia.		challenges they face in navigating these influences within their professional environments	
13.	Barriers	Almalki et al., (2024) KSA	Current situation and barriers to women's leadership in health care education in Saudi Arabia: A cross-sectional study.	To explore the representation of female academic staff in leadership roles within Saudi health academic institutions and identify barriers to their advancement.	Quantitative study, a cross-sectional study using an adapted self-reported online questionnaire	Significant structural, cultural, and personality-related barriers were identified, affecting female leadership in academia, including centralized decision-making, lack of clear organizational bylaws, and challenges in balancing professional and family responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The reliance on social media and email invitations could introduce selection bias, as it may not reach all eligible participants. -The questionnaire was adapted from a previously validated tool, but no evidence is provided to confirm the reliability and validity of the adapted version. -The study employs statistical methods to analyse the data, but details on specific statistical tests used could be clearer. -The study does not provide confidence intervals for the main results, limiting the precision of the interpretation of the findings.
14.	Social and cultural barriers	Hakem, (2017) KSA	Women and the Vision 2030: Opportunities and Challenges in Saudi Arabia.	The study investigates the challenges and barriers Saudi women face in the workforce, particularly focusing on social, cultural, and governmental influences.	This qualitative study uses a phenomenological approach with interviews from Saudi women to understand their experiences and perspectives.	Saudi women encounter significant social and cultural barriers, including gender segregation and patriarchal traditions, which affect their participation in the workforce. However, changes in government policies have begun to provide more opportunities for women.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The absence of a robust theoretical framework to guide the analysis weakens the overall understanding of the challenges faced by women in the workforce. -The study did not adequately explain the interview guidance. - Findings of this study align with the research by Akbar et al. (2023)
15.	Obstacles	Hodges (2017) KSA	Cracking the walls of leadership: women in Saudi Arabia	To understand the obstacles faced by professional Saudi women in organizations and their experiences in leadership roles.	The study utilized qualitative research with interviews of 25 professional women in Saudi Arabia, exploring their perceptions and experiences.	The study found that professional women in Saudi Arabia face social, religious, cultural, and organizational challenges that hinder their leadership opportunities. Key factors impacting their leadership include societal views of women's roles, religious doctrines, and lack of organizational support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Although the study advocates for policy changes, it lacks specific, actionable recommendations for implementation. -Findings were interesting.
16.	Emotional Intelligence	Almadani & Alamri (2024) KSA	Emotional Intelligence among Female Nursing Leaders in a Transformational Era	To assess Emotional Intelligence (EI) among female nursing leaders in Saudi hospitals and its impact on leadership during a transformational period.	A correlational study involving 232 female nursing leaders using an online survey.	Positive association between EI and self-leadership, especially in experienced leaders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The theoretical context could benefit from a more detailed discussion on how EI specifically applies to the challenges faced by female nursing leaders in Saudi Arabia. -Could not be generalised because it is a qualitative study.

17.	Social women entrepreneurship	Nieva, (2015) KSA	Social women entrepreneurship in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	To enhance social entrepreneurship among Saudi women and improve their socio-economic involvement.	Descriptive-qualitative study Utilizes surveys, interviews, and document analysis, focusing on 30 women entrepreneurs and 30 stakeholders.	Key Activity: Training and development. Challenges: Financing, regulatory frameworks, and technical support.	-The research design and participant recruitment strategies lack clear justification. -More detail is needed on data collection and analysis, particularly regarding saturation and how contradictory findings were addressed. -The findings should be presented more transparently, emphasizing their implications for practice and policy.
18.	Structural, Subjective Precarity	Aldossari & Chaudhry (2022) KSA	Gendered precarity in Saudi Arabia: Examining the state policies and patriarchal culture in the labor market	To explore how state policies and cultural norms in Saudi Arabia impact the structural and subjective experiences of precarity in the retail sector.	Qualitative analysis based on 26 in-depth interviews with diverse stakeholders in the Saudi retail sector.	Structural Precarity: Stemming from governmental and socio-religious influences affecting job security and conditions. Subjective Precarity: Individual experiences of increased public visibility leading to challenges such as sexual harassment, especially for women.	-Did not mention the study objectives clearly. - The recruitment method employed in the study requires further clarification. -Although the study captures some male perspectives on the impact of women's integration into the labour market, it could delve deeper into men's experiences regarding gender dynamics and precarity, providing a more balanced understanding. -It seems that this study recommended by Dukhaykh and Bilimoria 2020, Who suggested to the further study to include men participants
19.	Leadership Self-Efficacy	Almutairi (2020) KSA	Leadership Self-Efficacy and Organizational Commitment of Faculty Members: Higher Education	Examine the relationship between leadership self-efficacy and organizational commitment among faculty members in Saudi Arabian universities.	Quantitative study, The descriptive correlational design, Survey research with 400 faculty members from three public universities using the Pearson product correlation coefficient.	Positive correlations between leaders' self-efficacy and three types of organizational commitment: affective, continuance, and normative.	-The correlational design limits the ability to draw causal inferences from the data, which could restrict the implications of the findings. - The study focuses only on three universities in specific regions, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to

							other institutions in Saudi Arabia or beyond.
20.	Non-traditional careers	Dukhaykh&Bilimoria 2020 KSA	The factors influencing Saudi Arabian women's persistence in nontraditional work careers	To explore factors influencing Saudi Arabian women to persist in nontraditional work careers in male-dominated and gender-integrated environments.	Qualitative research through semi-structured interviews with 30 Saudi women, employing grounded theory methods for data analysis.	Women in nontraditional careers face underestimation, lack of access to resources, cultural fears, and social rejection. Key factors supporting persistence include self-efficacy, optimistic vision, positive male work relationships, and family support.	-While the study acknowledges cultural barriers, there may be insufficient discussion on how cultural norms and values specifically shape women's narratives and experiences in their work environments.
21.	Women advancement in Saudi University	Almansour & Kempner, (2015) KSA	Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrhman University's challenge: transition from a local to a global institution	To investigate the transition of Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrhman University (PNU), the largest women's university globally, from a local to a global institution within Saudi Arabia's unique cultural and economic context	Qualitative case study using interviews, documents, and descriptive data.	Globalization Efforts: PNU is striving for global recognition through partnerships with international universities and by adapting its curriculum to meet international standards. Institutional Obstacles: Centralized decision-making and resistance to change within staff layers impede progress. Cultural Obstacles: Balancing local cultural values and global educational standards is challenging.	-The study lacks detailed transparency regarding the data collection process and the criteria for participant selection.
22.	Factors motivating women to enter the nursing	Alboliteeh et al. (2017) KSA	The Profile of Saudi Nursing Workforce: A Cross-Sectional Study.	The study aimed to understand the factors motivating Saudis to enter the nursing workforce, examine differences between male and female motivations, perceptions of the profession, and future plans.	Quantitative study, a across-sectional design using a questionnaire was employed. Data collection took place in Ministry of Health (MOH) hospitals in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, from December 2013 to April 2014. The study included 741 Saudi Registered Nurses who completed the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were used for analysis.	The majority of respondents were female (74.8%), young (mean age 27 years), and relatively inexperienced (77% with fewer than 5 years of experience). Main motivations for joining the nursing profession were altruistic (helping others, caring for people). Gender differences were noted in specific motivations and perceptions. A significant proportion of nurses considered leaving the profession due to long working hours, lack of promotion opportunities, and the desire for further education.	-While the sample size is substantial, the absence of a clear justification based on statistical power analysis raises concerns about the potential for Type I or Type II errors in the study's conclusions.

23.	Political changes (Saudisation)	Alghamidi (2014) KSA	Saudisation and Women's Empowerment through Employment in the Health Care Sector	The study aims to explore how Saudisation can be utilised as a tool to empower Saudi women within the health care sector.	The research employed a qualitative design using feminist geographies and a gender perspective. It involved semi-structured interviews with Saudi women working in the health care	Institutional and societal norms disempower women, yet Saudisation offers potential tools for empowerment. The necessity for higher education, improved job opportunities, and more significant personal independence among Saudi women was highlighted.	-The study captures a snapshot in time, which may not reflect the evolving nature of women's leadership experiences as societal norms continue to shift. -The study limitations were not clearly addressed.
24.	Challenges and Opportunities in education	Abalkhail, (2017) Saudi Arabia KSA	Women and Leadership: Challenges and Opportunities in Saudi Higher Education	To explore the perceptions of women managers regarding the influences on their career progression to leadership positions within Saudi Arabian higher education institutions.	A qualitative, interpretive methodology was utilized, focusing on in-depth interviews with 22 female managers across Saudi public universities	The study highlights significant challenges such as gender segregation, discriminatory practices in promotion and recruitment, and restricted access to professional development. Facilitating factors include access to higher education, support from male family members, and women's inherent strengths and resilience	-The study's methodology was not clearly stated, which raises concerns about the rigor and transparency of the research process. -The theoretical framework guiding the study was not clearly defined.
25.	Queen Bee Wasta	Abalkhail, 2020 KSA	Women managing women: Hierarchical relationships and career impact'	To understand the experiences of Saudi Arabian women working under female managers and determine how these relationships impact their career prospects.	A qualitative study, utilized in-depth interviews with 30 women working in public organizations in Saudi Arabia.	Positive Impacts: Some women received empowering career guidance and support from female managers. Negative Impacts: Many women experienced Queen Bee behaviours from their female managers, including aloofness, aggressive communication, and career obstruction. This led to negative organizational outcomes like increased sickness absence, turnover, and reduced productivity. Queen Bee Behaviour Drivers: These included competition, fear of weakness, and family background.	-The methodology is not clearly articulated. -The theoretical framework guiding the research is not explicitly defined. -The study does not sufficiently discuss its limitations.

Table 4 Summary of papers included in the narrative review.

Chapter 4: Theoretical considerations

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the philosophical and theoretical foundations of the study. It details the research paradigms that guide this enquiry, with the interpretive paradigm selected as the core framework for the study. Furthermore, the ontological, epistemological, and axiological aspects that shape the research approach are scrutinised to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the theoretical bases of the work. The alignment of these elements with the research question is also explored. This paradigm is particularly influenced by the feminist lens to understanding how female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia approach their reality.

4.2 Research Paradigm

Researchers in healthcare professions encounter significant challenges when selecting appropriate methodological approaches for their research questions. This complexity arises from the diverse available research frameworks suitable for different types of enquiries. A foundational challenge includes identifying the problem, formulating the research question, and choosing a suitable methodology and design, particularly for PhD researchers (Khankeh et al. 2015). The research paradigm plays a crucial role in guiding me in identifying the most suitable methodology for acquiring the necessary data to answer my research questions. Therefore, it is essential for me to thoroughly understand the research paradigm to design rigorous and effective research that adequately addresses the specific questions of my study.

Research paradigms are fundamental frameworks that guide researchers in understanding and investigating the world. Each paradigm embodies a distinct set of philosophical assumptions about knowledge and reality (Creswell 1998). The term 'paradigm' encapsulates a comprehensive philosophical approach that informs the researcher's worldview and interpretation of reality (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017). It embodies the researcher's underlying beliefs, visions, and understanding of the world (Mackenzie and Knipe 2006). A paradigm serves as a philosophical lens that influences the conceptual framework, research design, and analysis methods (Weaver and Olson 2006). Essentially, a research paradigm comprises three core components: ontology, which is concerned with the nature of reality; epistemology, which pertains to the nature of knowledge and how it is obtained; and axiology, which deals with the role of values in research (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

The research question in my study was approached using qualitative methodology. This field of research incorporates a variety of methods, each grounded in different research paradigms and theoretical frameworks (Silverman 2013). It is critical to understand that a research paradigm does not involve a stringent set of directives; instead, it should be viewed as a set of flexible, evolving guidelines that facilitate the creation and solving of research problems (Kuhn 1970). The methodology selected must be transparent and consistent with the chosen paradigm, and it is incumbent on each researcher to justify their methodological choices. In qualitative research, the notion of an absolute 'right' or 'wrong' method does not exist. Researchers are afforded the liberty to anchor their investigations in various paradigms, based on their choice of perceived utility and relevance in specific research contexts. This adaptability in the methodological approach allows for a nuanced and context-sensitive exploration of research questions.

The positivist paradigm advocates that reality is objective and can be described by measurable properties that are independent of the observer and his or her instrument. It is grounded in the belief that phenomena should be observed empirically and explained using logical analysis, akin to the methods used in natural sciences. This paradigm asserts that social reality can be understood through unbiased observations and reasoning (Lincoln and Guba 1985). In contrast, the interpretive paradigm suggests that reality is not static or objective but is socially constructed through human interaction and interpretation. Researchers within this paradigm seek to understand the subjective meaning and symbolic nature of the social reality. They focus on the complexity of human experience and acknowledge that their interpretations of this experience are inevitably influenced by their backgrounds and perspectives (Schwandt 2000; Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Interpretivists recognise that their interpretative processes are inherently influenced by their personal backgrounds and perspectives (Geertz 1973). This paradigm advocates a qualitative approach, aiming to comprehend phenomena through the lens of those experiencing them, and emphasises the significance of individual sense-making processes in shaping actions and perceptions (Creswell 2013; Schwandt 2014). Meanwhile, the critical paradigm is informed by critical theory and is concerned with addressing power structures and issues of social justice and inequality. It seeks to empower individuals to challenge and change their social realities. This paradigm assumes that social reality is shaped by historical, social, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors, which can create inequalities within society. Researchers working within this paradigm strive to shed light on these imbalances and work toward societal transformation (Crotty 1998). Finally, the pragmatic paradigm is not dedicated to any one system of philosophy or reality. This approach primarily involves solving the problems and providing practical solutions. pragmatists' value in practical applications and

outcomes over philosophical discourse allows them to use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. They focus on the research question and use all available approaches to understand the problem, reflecting a more eclectic and practical approach to research (Morgan 2007). In this study, I adopt an interpretive paradigm influenced by feminist theory that serves as the foundational epistemological stance.

4.2.1 The interpretive paradigm

In the exploration of female nurse managers' experiences, the interpretive paradigm was chosen for its acute focus on grasping subjective experiences and intricate meanings within their respective social and cultural contexts (Denzin and Lincoln 2011; Smith and Osborn 2008). This paradigm was instrumental in exploring the layered perceptions and internal realities of these female managers, providing an invaluable lens for examining their unique lived experiences. At its core, the interpretive paradigm in research is rooted in the principle of understanding the world through the lens of participants (Thanh and Thanh 2015). By prioritising the individual experiences of these nurse managers, the research transcended traditional observational methodologies, venturing into profound depths of personal and professional narratives. This depth is essential to unravel the motivations, aspirations, and challenges unique to women in middle management in the healthcare sector (Creswell and Poth 2017). Central to this paradigmatic approach was the acknowledgement of the significant role played by cultural and societal contexts in shaping these experiences (Geertz 1973). The study embarked on an in-depth investigation of how the specific sociocultural environment of Saudi Arabia influenced the career paths and experiences of female nurse managers.

This highlights the intricate relationship between management positions, societal norms, and cultural dynamics, offering a nuanced understanding of how individual agencies intersect with broader social structures. Through this interpretive framework, I sought to capture the distinct perspectives and worldviews of participants (Braun and Clarke 2006). By analysing their experiences against the backdrop of their unique backgrounds and personal beliefs, this study provides insights into the varied ways managers perceive and navigate their professional landscapes. This understanding is fundamental to appreciating the diverse strategies and methodologies adopted in their roles (Eatough and Smith 2008). The interpretive paradigm's emphasis on lived experiences (Langdrige 2007) is particularly relevant in this context. This study aimed to accurately represent the daily realities, ambitions, and challenges faced by nurse managers. This approach yielded a detailed narrative of their professional journeys. This study revealed the complex layers inherent in

the professional lives of nurse managers (Van Manen 1990). It facilitated a deeper comprehension of the multifaceted challenges they encountered and the strategies they employed and allowed us to draw a clear picture of their unique journey to career advancement to a top position (Charmaz 2006).

4.2.2 Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Stance

4.2.2.1 Ontology

The process of designing a research methodology starts with the branch of ontology, which is primarily concerned with what exists in the human world and what knowledge can be acquired in this world (Anfara and Mertz 2014). With the help of ontology, researchers can recognise the extent to which the objects they are researching are 'real' and what 'truth claims' can be made regarding these objects (Moon and Blackman 2014). The spectrum of ontological stances ranges from naïve realism to relativism, which assumes that there is a single reality that can be understood using appropriate research methods, whereas the latter implies that realities exist as multiple mental constructions that change depending on the subject and context in which they exist (Crotty 2020).

In this study, the ontological perspective was firmly rooted in the interpretive paradigm, emphasising the subjective and constructed nature of reality (Crotty 1998). This perspective recognises that the reality of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia is not a singular, objective entity but rather a tapestry of personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and social environments (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This ontological stance acknowledges the unique perspectives that each female nurse manager brings to their professional world, which are influenced by individual journeys, societal norms, and cultural values within the healthcare sector (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This study further explores the concept that our perception of the 'real' is deeply influenced by social, cultural, and individual contexts (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This viewpoint acknowledges the existence of multiple realities, each uniquely experienced and understood by individuals or groups (Geertz 1973). Thus, I adopted a bounded relativist position according to which multiple realities exist but are bounded by specific contexts and interactions (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). This choice was made because the lived experiences of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia are context-specific phenomena, meaning that each individual's experience is shaped by personal, cultural, and societal factors unique to the Saudi Arabian healthcare sector. The existing literature indicates that individuals' experiences are

influenced by their interactions and environments, highlighting that while there are multiple realities, these are shaped and bounded by specific contextual frameworks (Crotty 2020). Although there may be individual variations between women in this study regarding opinions, the shared cultural and organizational context acts as the boundary within which these multiple realities are constructed.

To fully understand the complexities of human life, especially in a context as unique as that of female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia, it is essential to explore these varied, subjective realities, recognising that each represents a different facet of human experience (Schutz 1967). This study employed a bounded relativist ontological perspective, which is especially suitable for exploring the experiences of female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. As Schwandt (2000) described, ontology involves the study of being, in which personal and social contexts significantly shape one's reality. This approach aligns with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) assertion that reality is interpreted through individual experiences and interactions, a concept crucial for exploring subjective experiences in specific cultural contexts such as Saudi Arabia. As discussed by Crotty (1998), bounded relativism in ontology proposes that our understanding of reality is constructed through experiences and social interactions within certain boundaries. This perspective is particularly relevant for this study, where understanding the nuanced experiences and perceptions of female nurse managers in culturally specific settings is crucial. The realities of these managers' experiences and challenges are perceived not as objective truths, but are shaped by their individual contexts, cultural backgrounds, and personal interactions.

Further supporting this approach, Baxter and Jack (2008) advocated qualitative research methods that investigate individual experiences, particularly in culturally rich settings. In Saudi Arabia, the experiences of female nurse managers are likely influenced by unique societal norms and cultural dynamics. Therefore, adopting bounded relativist ontology allows for an in-depth exploration of how these managers navigate their professional roles within the framework of Saudi culture. Patton (2002) also supported the use of a bounded relativist approach in such contexts, emphasising the importance of understanding the perspectives and experiences of individuals within their specific environments. By adopting this perspective, this study aims to capture the essence of these mid-level female nurse managers' experiences and understand their challenges, strategies, and successes within the unique sociocultural context of Saudi Arabia.

4.2.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology enquires about the nature of knowledge (Barnett-Page and Thomas 2009). It is concerned with our perceptions of knowledge, as well as the ways in which knowledge is captured and created (Creswell and Creswell 2017). This philosophical realm enables researchers to understand and capture the nature of knowledge and provide insights into queries such as what can be discerned about reality, the inherent nature of knowledge, the elements that constitute and corroborate knowledge, and the connection between knowledge and existence (Willig 2008). There are two primary philosophical approaches to the field of epistemology: positivism and interpretivism. These perspectives offer distinct frameworks for understanding how knowledge is acquired and understood. A positivist approach is often aligned with quantitative research methods to explore the relationship between philosophical stances and research methodology. This paradigm is particularly effective when the research objective is to gather numerical data and address questions regarding numerical accuracy, as in quantitative surveys. A positivist stance in healthcare research is valuable for advancing knowledge within a structured objective framework (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). A key aspect of positivism is the formulation and testing of the hypotheses from a scientific perspective. Research under this framework typically informs evidence-based clinical practices, including randomised control trials and retrospective cohort studies. However, positivism is not always suitable for all types of research (Robson and McCartan 2016). For instance, in studies aiming for deep interaction with participants, such as the current study, which focused on understanding participants' experiences, the positivist approach may not be ideal because of its emphasis on minimal researcher-participant interaction and its objectivist nature.

By contrast, Creswell and Poth (2018) explored the interpretivist philosophical stance, shifting the focus from merely observing and recording objective data to understanding participants' perspectives and exploring their sense-making processes using qualitative methodologies. This approach is appropriate for the current study's aim and objectives, which seek to delve into the participants' lived experiences. Scotland (2012) highlighted that the interpretive paradigm rejects the notion of a foundational base for knowledge, implying that knowledge is constructed and subjective. Furthermore, as noted by Bryman (2012), a notable characteristic of the interpretivism paradigm is that the knowledge gained is often context specific and not necessarily generalisable to other settings. This paradigm values the depth and richness of subjective experiences, making it a suitable approach for studies that require nuanced understanding of individual perspectives.

Having identified the nature of 'things' in the previous section, it is crucial to define how I create knowledge by selecting and justifying an epistemological stance. The methodology literature outlines three main epistemological positions based on the relationship between the object and subject (Hathcoat et al. 2019). Objectivism posits that meaning resides within an object and that objective reality exists independently of the subject (Hathcoat et al. 2019). The other end of the spectrum is subjectivism, which suggests that it creates meaning and imposes it on an object (Saunders and Lewis 2014). Finally, constructivism offers a more balanced view, proposing that meaning is created through the interplay between the subject and object, with the reality of the object still being constructed by the subject (Kumar 2008).

Given that the experiences of mid-level female nurse managers in rising to senior positions are deeply embedded within their sociocultural context, my research adopts a constructivist stance. This approach allows for generating a contextual understanding of how nurse managers perceive their professional roles, navigate their responsibilities, and make sense of their experiences within the unique environment of the Saudi healthcare system. Each nurse manager has her own views, values, and beliefs, which inevitably shape their perceptions and experiences (Creswell and Poth 2018). This implies that multiple realities are likely to exist, each influenced by individual nurse managers as well as the meanings they attach to their professional and personal worlds (Lincoln and Guba 1985). A constructivist stance recognises the multiple realities and contextual factors that shape them. However, adopting a purely subjectivist epistemology would not be appropriate as it could overlook the shared aspects and broader patterns within these experiences. Conversely, objectivism, which denies the existence of multiple sources of meaning, is also unsuitable for this study (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Instead, a constructivist approach provides a balanced framework to explore the complex interplay of personal, professional, and cultural factors influencing the experiences of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia.

The current study sought to investigate and understand the lived experiences of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. This exploration aims to gain a subjective understanding of how each nurse managers perceives her professional role and challenges, navigates her responsibilities, and makes sense of her experiences within the unique context of the Saudi healthcare system. Simply collecting descriptions of these experiences might overlook the individual and societal nuances that characterise each participant's journey. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a constructivist lens, as advocated by scholars such as Creswell and Poth (2018), to ensure that the accounts

provided by these women are recognised as deeply personal and individualised experiences shaped by their interactions and contexts.

By integrating a constructivist approach, this study acknowledges that each female nurse manager's experience involves a complex interplay of personal, professional, and cultural factors. According to constructivism, knowledge is developed and influenced by human activities and interactions between people and their surroundings within a social context (Crotty 2003). Knowledge is acquired through people's life experiences and ideological stances, as well as elements that have meaning in participants' worlds, such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings (Bryman 2012; Holloway and Galvin 2016). As Schwandt (2000) emphasised, this perspective allows for an in-depth understanding of the subjective realities of participants, viewing their experiences as both influenced by and contributing to their social and professional environments. This approach aligns with the work of Baxter and Jack (2008), who highlight the value of qualitative methods in capturing the rich, contextualised experiences of women, especially in culturally and professionally diverse settings. Thus, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive and empathetic portrayal of the experiences of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia, considering their unique positions within a cultural context.

4.2.2.3 Axiology

In the context of this research, axiology relates to the value-laden aspects of the study, particularly focusing on ethical considerations and the impact of values on the research process. As Smith and Osborn (2008) underscore, axiology is a critical component in qualitative research, playing a key role in recognising and addressing the influence of both the researcher's and participants' values. This aspect is especially pertinent in exploring the lived experiences of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia, where this study emphasises ethical sensitivity and cultural respect. The values and beliefs of the participants, who are deeply ingrained in the sociocultural fabric of Saudi Arabia, are integral to their experiences and perceptions of their managerial roles. This axiological stance is in line with Creswell and Poth's (2018) principles, emphasising the importance of ethical considerations in research, particularly when dealing with personal and professional narratives.

Additionally, I adopted a reflexive approach, continually examining my preconceptions, a practice recommended by Charmaz (2006). This reflective stance is vital to ensure that the researcher's values do not overshadow the authentic voices and experiences of participants. Such an approach is crucial for a nuanced understanding of management dynamics within the Saudi healthcare sector

and allows for authentic representation of participants' experiences. Additionally, I recognise the importance of conducting ethical research, particularly when exploring the personal experiences and professional challenges faced by female nurse managers. Ethical research practices, including obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and being sensitive to participants' experiences are paramount, as highlighted by Patton (2002). This axiological commitment ensured that my study upholds participants' dignity and autonomy, offering them a safe and respectful platform for sharing their stories. The axiological perspective of my study is founded on the profound respect for the values, beliefs, and experiences of nurse managers. This is coupled with a commitment to conduct research ethically and responsibly. This approach not only enhances the depth and authenticity of the findings but also aligns with the study's interpretive paradigm, prioritising the understanding of lived experiences within the specific socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia.

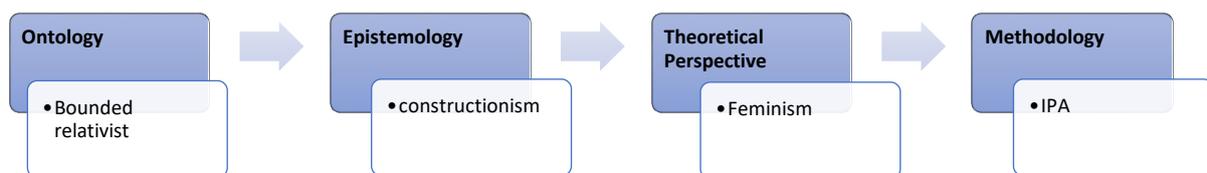


Figure 9: Research design

4.3 Taking a Feminist Perspective

4.3.1 Feminism

The feminist perspective adopted in this thesis is informed by several core principles that critically guide the investigation into the realities faced by mid-level female nurse managers aspiring to senior positions in the healthcare sector. While the terms 'feminism' and 'feminist theory' are frequently used interchangeably in scholarly works, it is essential to note that feminism fundamentally advocates for social, economic, and political equality between the sexes (Oxford University Press 2017). Originally rooted in Western cultures, feminism has been embraced globally and supported by various organisations that champion women's rights and interests (Brunell and Burkett 2016). Feminism is a multifaceted social and political movement that aims to achieve gender equality and dismantle systems of oppression based on gender (Hooks 2000). It encompasses a wide range of ideologies, theories, and practices aimed at challenging and transforming societal norms, structures,

and institutions that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality (Hooks 2000). Furthermore, feminism advocates the empowerment of women, recognition of women's rights, and promotion of gender equity in all spheres of life (Parsons 2002). The concept of feminism evolved over time, with different waves marking significant shifts in feminist thought and activism. The feminist lens was employed after the stages of data analysis. The analysis process was initially inductive, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data. Upon reflection of the findings, a feminist perspective was subsequently applied to deepen the interpretation and provide a more nuanced understanding of the emergent themes, particularly in relation to gender dynamics. This post-analysis application of a feminist lens ensured that the data informed the theoretical approach, rather than the reverse.

4.3.2 Waves of Feminism

The initial phase of the feminist movement, spanning the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was primarily centred on obtaining voting rights and improving legal recognition for women (Rampton 2015). Early feminists during this period laid the groundwork for later legal rights movements (Andermahr et al 1997; Humm 1990). Women's suffrage was achieved through relentless campaigning and was gradually influenced by international movements, with American women securing the vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 (Cotty 1987). Philosophers like Mary Wollstonecraft, who advocated for women's education (Wollstonecraft 2016), and Susan B. Anthony, a prominent figure in the women's suffrage movement in the United States, were pivotal (Gordon 2005). After achieving significant milestones in legal rights, feminist activism declined until the resurgence brought about by World War II. The war effort led to unprecedented labour participation by women, significantly altering public perceptions of women's capabilities and roles in society (Purvis 2008).

The resurgence of feminism in the 1960s, known as the second wave, broadened the movement's focus to include a wider range of issues, such as workplace rights, reproductive freedoms, and sexual liberation (Evans 2003). This wave was characterised by radical questioning of traditional gender roles and was influenced by a variety of social movements at the time, leading to a more nuanced understanding of gender discrimination (Evans 2003). Theorists such as Betty Friedan, whose book, 'The Feminine Mystique', reignited feminist activism in the U.S. (Friedan 2016), and Simone de Beauvoir, who penned 'The Second Sex,' which laid out the existentialist framework for feminist theory (de Beauvoir 1949), were crucial figures.

The third wave of feminism, emerging in the early 1990s, marked a significant shift in feminist thought by emphasising diversity, individualism, and a broader spectrum of issues (Aikau et al., 2007). Distinct from its predecessors, this wave is characterised by its challenge to traditional definitions of femininity and its embrace of postmodernism, which values contradictions and acknowledges the complexity of individual identities (Burkett and Brunell 2018). The central theme of the third wave was intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s. This framework highlights the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, which apply to individuals and create overlapping systems of discrimination or disadvantage (Crenshaw 1989). This wave of feminists highlights the significance of individuality and varied personal experiences in shaping one's political views (Heywood and Drake 1997). They critiqued second-wave feminism for its predominant focus on the experiences of white, middle-class women, arguing that such an approach led to essentialist and reductionist views (Henry 2004; Springer 2002). Third-wave feminism strove for an anti-essentialist and intersectional approach, exploring these themes in depth while emphasising inclusivity in feminism by engaging with global and multicultural perspectives, anti-racism, and transgender politics (Baumgardner and Richards 2000). This wave also responded to perceived notions of 'victimhood' prevalent in second-wave feminism, focusing instead on individual agency and the ability to navigate structural constraints (Henry 2004). Influenced by poststructuralist thought, third-wave feminists sought to "deconstruct the hegemonic assumptions of a unified, coherent identity", positing that identities are fluid, diverse, and continuously shaped by socio-organizational contexts (Weedon 1997, p32). Poststructuralists have highlighted the dynamic interplay between social contexts and individual subjectivities, illuminating how these interactions influence available subject positions (Weedon 1997).

During the 1990s, scholarly exploration of gender and management underwent significant transformation (Batliwala 2011). This period marked a philosophical shift in research orientation, moving away from mere comparative analyses of men and women towards a deeper understanding of the unique experiences and career paths of women managers in various sectors. Scholars have begun to focus on the intricate dynamics of women's work lives and the systemic barriers they face, emphasising the need for a feminist perspective in management studies (Eagly and Karau 2002; Morrison et al. 1992; Kanter 1977). One pivotal work was Rosabeth Moss Kanter's 'Men and Women of the Corporation' (1977), which, although earlier, laid the groundwork for later studies by highlighting the structural constraints that women faced in corporate environments. Kanter's

research illuminated how organizational structures and cultures perpetuated gender disparities, influencing subsequent scholarship in the 1990s, which delved deeper into these issues. By the 1990s, there was a noticeable shift. Scholars such as Eagly and Karau (2002) introduced the role congruity theory, which explored the prejudice women faced when their management behaviours did not conform to traditional gender roles. This work underscores the importance of understanding the social and cultural expectations that shape women's management experiences. Moreover, scholars have begun to adopt an intersectional approach, recognising that women's career paths and management experiences are shaped not only by gender but also by other identity factors such as race, class, and sexuality. Crenshaw (1989) introduced the concept of intersectionality, which became crucial in feminist scholarship, to examine how overlapping social identities contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege. As research has evolved, there has been a growing emphasis on understanding the strategies that women managers use to navigate and succeed in male-dominated environments. Morrison et al. (1992) in their influential work, 'Breaking The Glass Ceiling', provided insights into the barriers women faced and the strategies they employed to overcome them. This book has become a touchstone for understanding the complexities of women's career advancement in corporate settings. This scholarly shift reflects a broader movement within feminist theory that sought to highlight and validate the diverse experiences of women in management roles. By focusing on individual agency and the ability to navigate structural constraints, feminist scholars have aimed to deconstruct traditional notions of management and promote a more inclusive understanding that accommodates the realities of women's work and careers.

The current wave of feminism continues to build on these foundations, advocating for social justice, inclusivity, and intersectionality in addressing various forms of oppression. Defined by its use of technology and social media to mobilise campaigns around issues such as sexual harassment and body positivity. Tarana Burke, the founder of the #MeToo movement, and Laura Bates, founder of the Everyday Sexism Project, were prominent activists of this wave (Mendes et al., 2018). See table 5 summary of feminist waves.

Wave	Theorists	Definition	Focus Points
First Wave	Mary Wollstonecraft, Susan B. Anthony	Focused on legal issues such as suffrage and property rights.	Women's suffrage, legal equality
Second Wave	Betty Friedan, Simone de Beauvoir	Broadened to include equality and anti-discrimination laws beyond voting rights.	Gender equality, workplace rights, reproductive rights, sexual liberation
Third Wave	Kimberlé Crenshaw, Naomi Wolfe	Emphasized personal narratives and identity politics, focusing on diversity and inclusivity.	Intersectionality, identity politics, diversity, inclusivity
Current Wave	Tarana Burke, Laura Bates	Utilizes digital platforms to combat sexual harassment, assault, and to promote body positivity.	Social media activism, #MeToo, body positivity, intersectionality.

Table 5: Summary of Feminist waves

4.3.3 Feminist Principles

Throughout history, feminist theory has expanded into a variety of principles frameworks for understanding challenging the structures of power and inequality that affect gender dynamics in society (Saunders and Kashubeck-West 2006) At its core, feminist theory seeks to articulate and address the ways in which women, and other marginalized groups, are disadvantaged within social, economic, and political arenas. This overarching goal is supported by several key principles (Hooks 2000). This research is particularly pertinent as the nation progresses toward its Vision 2030 goals, which aim to enhance the role of women in the workforce and promote gender equality across all sectors. Thus, the nature of this study demands a nuanced application of key feminist principles to explore and articulate the realities of women managers, and the key feminist Principles guiding the Study: empowerment, agency and autonomy, gender equality, social justice, and intersectionality (see figure10).

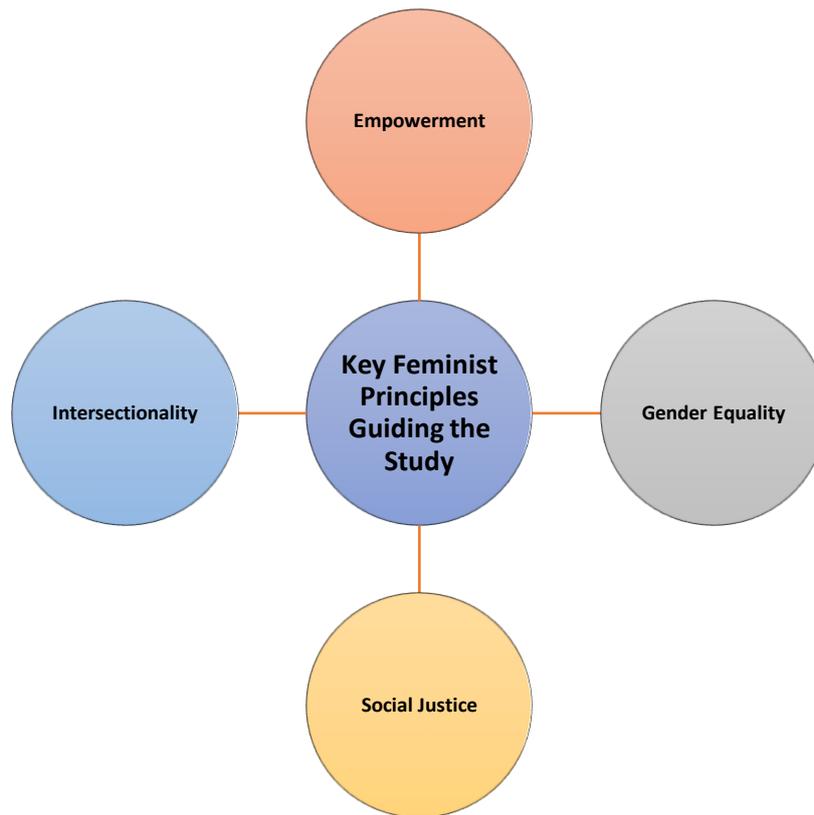


Figure10: Key Feminist Principles Guiding the Study

Empowerment is a key theme in feminist theory, emphasising the process through which individuals and communities gain the strength and agency to overcome obstacles and make positive changes in their lives. Feminist empowerment specifically focuses on addressing power imbalances, enhancing the agency of women and marginalised groups, and promoting social justice in various societal domains (Hekman, 1999). In the context of feminism, empowerment is more than just the ability to make choices; it encompasses having the power, capability, and opportunity to influence change. It is about enhancing an individual's control and influence over resources and decisions that impact their lives. Kabeer (2017) defined it as the process through which people who previously lacked the capacity to make significant life decisions gain that capability. Thus, the principle of empowerment was central to this investigation. It explores how these women empower themselves and others by employing personal and professional strategies, such as mentoring, networking, professional development, and personal assertiveness, to overcome challenges. Thus, in this study, I aimed to understand the critical resources and support deemed essential by these managers to secure empowerment in their professional roles, aligning with Vision the 2030 emphasis on promoting women's engagement in all sectors (Vision 2023 2016).

Feminist theory offers a profound critique of the structures of power and inequality that pervade society, focusing particularly on the experiences of women and other marginalised groups. Rooted deeply in the pursuit of justice, it advocates tirelessly for equality and equity across genders. This pursuit is not just about achieving parity, but ensuring that systemic injustices are dismantled and patriarchal structures that perpetuate gender disparities are reformed (hooks 2000). Therefore, Gender Equality is critically explored within the framework of the forward-thinking context. My focus was on the structural and policy-related aspects of gender equality within the Ministry of Health, to assess how gender dynamics influence women's managerial opportunities. This included a look at policies on promotion, work-life balance, and persistent gender discrimination that contribute to the underrepresentation of mid-level female nurse managers at the senior level.

Feminist theory is inherently transformative, seeking not only to address individual injustices, but also to catalyse broader social change. This transformative agenda involves reevaluating and reshaping cultural values, social norms, and institutional practices to foster a society that genuinely values gender equity (Walby 2011). Social Justice addresses broader societal norms and values that impact the roles and expectations of female managers in healthcare. This principle is closely related to empowerment and equality but focuses on external societal attitudes toward female management in healthcare, particularly any cultural beliefs that might affect their advancement (Acker 2006). I investigated disparities in treatment and expectations compared with their male counterparts, providing insights into the cultural shifts necessary under 'Vision 2030'.

Central to feminist discourse is the concept of intersectionality introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw. This principle recognises that discrimination does not occur in isolation but intersects with various social identifiers, such as race, class, and sexuality, creating complex layers of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw 1989). By acknowledging these intersections, feminist theory broadens its understanding, allowing for a more nuanced approach to gender issues, as they intersect with broader social contexts. In this study, intersectionality plays a crucial role in exploring the intricate and cumulative ways in which multiple forms of discrimination, including racism, sexism, and classism, intertwine, and intersect, particularly in the lives of marginalised groups or individuals. The analysis considers how intersecting identities such as gender, race, professional role, and socioeconomic status affect experiences of oppression and privilege among female nurse managers.

Chapter 5: Research Design

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines and justifies the study design. Additionally, it provides a rationale for the selection of a qualitative research design and explicates the choice of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) over other possible methodologies.

5.2 Research Questions, and Aims

5.2.1 Research Aim

To examine how mid-level female nurse managers in the Saudi healthcare system understand and make sense of their experiences as they ascend senior roles.

5.2.2 Research Questions

What are the unique experiences that define the professional journey of mid-level female nurse manager in Saudi Arabia as they ascend to senior roles?

5.3 Research Design

Research designs can be categorised into qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Creswell and Creswell 2018). Quantitative research is characterised by the collection and analysis of numerical data. It is often associated with a positivist epistemological stance, aiming to test theories or hypotheses using measurable variables and statistical techniques (Creswell 2014). This design is prevalent in studies that require objective measurement and quantification of patterns, behaviours, or phenomena. Qualitative research focuses on understanding human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour. It is primarily exploratory, aimed at gaining insights into underlying motivations and reasons (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Qualitative methods involve collecting and analysing non-numerical data, such as text, audio, or video, to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. This approach is often associated with a constructivist or interpretivist perspective that emphasises the subjective interpretation of social phenomena (Silverman 2013). Qualitative research is particularly effective in exploring complex issues, understanding phenomena in depth, and providing rich and detailed data that cannot be quantified (Marshall and Rossman 2016). Mixed methods research combines qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study or series of studies. It offers a more comprehensive understanding by integrating numerical data with a

detailed contextual analysis (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). This approach is beneficial for exploring complex research questions, in which both statistical trends and in-depth understanding are valuable. By merging the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, mixed-methods research provides a complete understanding of the research problem (Creswell et al. 2011).

Research design refers to the structured process and scientific approach used in studies to gather, analyse, and interpret data, which is a systematic approach guiding the selection of techniques for data collection and analysis, fundamentally shaping how research questions are addressed (Creswell and Creswell 2018). The choice of research design is influenced by the nature of the research question, the researcher's influence on the phenomena under study, and the focus on contemporary versus historical phenomena (Creswell et al. 2011). The focus of my research was to explore the experiences of nurse managers. For this purpose, a qualitative approach appears most appropriate for expanding knowledge in this field. This approach enables a deeper comprehension of the participants' personal experiences, offering the flexibility to explore both the researchers' perspectives on the subject and insights that arise from the data, as noted by Creswell (2012) and Esterberg (2002). The strength of a qualitative approach lies in its open-ended, exploratory nature, which allows for unrestricted and evolving descriptions. It is particularly effective in uncovering new phenomena or conditions rather than merely confirming pre-existing hypotheses (Elliott and Timulak 2005).

In this study, a quantitative research design was not used, primarily because of its differing epistemological orientation and philosophical underpinnings. Quantitative research, often influenced by the principles of positivism, posits that empirical evidence obtained through scientific methods is the sole path for discovering objective truth and reality (Creswell 2014). This approach typically emphasises the primacy of empirical data and measurable evidence as the foundation of legitimate knowledge. Moreover, the focus of this research is to explore lived experiences, a domain inherently subjective and not readily amenable to quantification, especially when the phenomenon in question is not yet fully understood (Merriam and Tisdell 2016). The subjective nature of experience and depth of human phenomena often extend beyond the scope of what can be captured through standard quantitative methods. Conversely, qualitative research is oriented towards seeking meaning and comprehending processes and phenomena. It emphasises narratives, individual experiences, and the nuances of language (Braun and Clarke 2013). Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to establish cause-and-effect relationships using numerical data, qualitative

research aims to unearth themes emerging from narratives that reflect common human experiences. This approach aligns more closely with the objectives of this study, which aims to delve into and understand the rich and complex tapestry of human experiences, making qualitative research a more fitting choice.

5.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Broadly, IPA is concerned with 'being-in-the-world' and 'lived experiences' (Larkin et al. 2011). IPA is a research method that helps capture the subjective meanings of participants' experiences and understand how they make sense of their reality. IPA is based on interpretivist epistemological positioning and builds on the theory of interpretation (hermeneutics), which aids in understanding participants' lifeworlds (the theory of phenomenology). The primary aim of this study was to investigate how female nurse managers make sense of their experiences in reaching senior managerial positions in the Saudi healthcare sector within their social realities. I adopted IPA as a methodological approach to facilitate an in-depth examination of narratives detailing the lived experiences of this process (Smith 1996). IPA has been widely adopted in the field of psychology and has expanded to several health-related disciplines, including nursing (Smith et al. 2009). It has been introduced as a unique research methodology because of the failure of the quantitative approach to provide explicit information in psychological research (Smith 1996). IPA is a research methodology used to discuss embedded issues in a psychological rather than quantitative manner. Smith (1996) thus argued that a paradigm shift in this field is necessary to enhance and deepen psychological knowledge. IPA is a qualitative methodology employed to determine the means by which individuals make sense of salient experiences (Smith et al. 2009). IPA is an idiographic method that attempts to understand participants' unique experiences instead of generating the general experiences of large groups of participants (the nomothetic approach) (Smith et al. 2009). This approach was presented as a unique research methodology that enables a particular experience to be narrated in its own distinctive manner using its own terms (Smith et al. 2009). The assumption underlying this idea is that people are actively involved in the world, and IPA invites them to reflect on their knowledge by including their thoughts, feelings, and actions (Smith et al. 2009). The role of the researcher in IPA is engaging with that knowledge to explore how individuals understand and perceive their lived experiences by "standing in their shoes . . . insofar as this is feasible" (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014 p. 8) while acknowledging that doing so is complicated. This means that IPA acknowledges the role of the researcher's conceptions in co-constructing and interpreting the mid-level world of female nurse managers. Smith and Osborn (2003) state that "The participants are trying to make sense of their

world, and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (p. 51). Typically, researchers use IPA to obtain insider perspectives on phenomena by closely examining participants’ concerns. Furthermore, participants’ stories were interpreted to gain an understanding (Larkin et al. 2006). IPA researchers tend to enter the participants’ world and make sense of their personal lives. As participants turn their unique experiences into dialogues, the researcher attempts to aid them in exposing hidden stories or challenges.

IPA was applied in my study as a structure for exploring mid-level female nurse managers’ lived experiences in reaching senior positions, as well as their interpretations of their social worlds and how they make sense of their experiences. The theoretical foundation of IPA is based on hermeneutic phenomenology and integrates both descriptive and interpretive concepts. This double hermeneutic intent towards understanding and interpreting participants’ lifeworlds is manifested by examining experiences, life events, cultures, and languages (Larkin et al. 2006).

5.4.1. Theoretical Underpinnings of IPA

- **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology offers a philosophical approach to exploring the human experience and ‘the way in which things are perceived as they appear to consciousness’ (Landridge 2007, p. 10). In simple terms, phenomenology can be referred to as the means through which a particular experience is studied (Smith et al. 2009). This research method aims to explain the essence of a particular phenomenon from the viewpoint of the individuals who have experienced it (Teherani et al. 2015), as well as the experiences of certain groups of individuals who share similar circumstances and experiences (Creswell 2012). Phenomenology has been widely applied in nursing research. IPA has been influenced by many phenomenological proponents including Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and Gadamer (Smith et al. 2009). Although different phenomenologists focus on different aspects of philosophy, they aim to understand human experiences (Smith et al. 2009). In healthcare and nursing, there are two fundamental approaches to phenomenological research: transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology and hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology (Bradbury-Jones and Irvine 2009).

Phenomenology was originally conceptualised by Edmund Husserl and later expanded and reworked by Heidegger (Smith et al. 2009). His contribution has been labelled transcendental phenomenology (van Manen 1990). Husserl (1927) was interested in how we come to understand individual

experience. Husserl stated that it is important to carefully examine each individual's experience in phenomenology (Smith et al. 2009). He theorised that phenomenology is a method by which to explore participants lived experiences and their sense of those experiences (Smith et al. 2009). This means that phenomenology enables researchers to study and understand people's experiences of their own rights (Smith et al. 2009). Transcendental phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of consciousness by providing a detailed description of experience (Annells 1996). Husserlian transcendental phenomenology is a way of describing the reality of research participants based on their own perceptions (Smith et al. 2009). Husserl considered intentionality an essential aspect of consciousness (Smith et al. 2009). He argued that consciousness is associated with objects in reality, and individuals are therefore intrinsically connected to the objects they perceive in their world (Giorgi 1997). This embodiment is inconsistent with the previous prevailing theory of 'things existing independently from the human subject' (Ferro, 2019). The notion of intentionality helps clarify that 'no subject [is] without an object to relate to (Ferro 2019 p570). As Langdridge indicated, 'whenever we are conscious, we are always conscious of something, which centres attention on how humans are aware of all the things they perceive while they are conscious (Langdridge 2008 p1127). Husserl sought ways to help the individual precisely identify their own experiences in order to understand the given phenomena and determine the essential features of each experience (Smith et al. 2009). Husserl stated that in order to understand a phenomenon, 'we must go back to the things themselves' (Husserl 1900, 1970, p. 252). Smith et al. (2009) interpreted Husserl's use of 'things' as meaning the experiential content of consciousness. Husserl adopted the concept of the phenomenological method, which means to remove all individual pre-understandings of the world and to view the world as if for the first time (Langdridge 2008). Smith et al. (2009) claimed that Husserl's aim in applying the phenomenological method was to explore the special features of the human conscious experience. He asserted that people should disengage from their natural attitudes or the ways they encounter them every day in order to discern the essence of objects as they appear (Smith et al. 2009).

Husserl's phenomenological philosophy has been criticised by existential phenomenologists, such as Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, who described it as a non-ideal phenomenological feature (Langdridge 2008). They stated that applying the concepts of *epoche* and phenomenological or eidetic reduction, which aim to bracket our presumptions and preconceptions, assists researchers in their attempts to provide rich and detailed descriptions of particular phenomena (Giorgi 1997). They also acknowledged that while we are actively striving to bracket our presumptions and preconceptions, it is not reasonable to assume that these are a 'view from nowhere' (Ricoeur 1996).

Heidegger therefore proposed the concept of *dasein* to show that 'all experiences are grounded in our embodied being-in-the-world', which means that individuals are unable to completely separate from their context (Langdrige 2008). Reflexivity and reflectivity are required during the research process to achieve epochs (Smith et al. 2009).

Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty radically modified Husserl's theory by challenging the assumptions regarding how phenomenology can guide meaningful study (Lopez and Willis 2004). Heidegger (1993) believed that Husserl's descriptive approach was insufficient for understanding certain phenomena. Heidegger's work has been acknowledged as the root of hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry. He was in agreement with Husserl's notion that it is necessary to comprehend 'the things in their appearing', together with a greater focus on enhancing the aspect of existence (Langdrige 2008). In essence, hermeneutic phenomenology explores the meaning of a phenomenon in the process of discovering human experience (Crist and Tanner 2003). What distinguishes Husserl's approach is that he was adept at understanding the meanings embedded in participants' everyday experiences (Lopez and Willis 2004; Racher and Robinson 2003). Heidegger's theory introduces an existential phenomenological rather than a theoretical approach (Langdrige, 2008). In contrast, Husserl was limited to providing a philosophy of the structures of individuals' beliefs instead of focusing on 'human nature' (Langdrige 2008). Heidegger was obsessed with the 'ontological question of existence' as well as the way reality appears to us beyond the surrounding relationships and activities (Smith et al. 2009, p. 16-17). He established a central perspective focused on the idea of 'being in the world' (Bradbury-Jones and Irvine 2008); in other words, the way humans exist and act in the world (van Manen 1990). This 'being' provides valuable experiences, senses, practices, and languages (Van der Zalm and Bergum 2000). Heidegger further asserted that human experiences should be examined in their context and lifeworld (i.e., the way people perceive the world). My study aims to understand how women in managerial roles make sense of their experiences, explore the hidden stories behind mid-level female nurses' under-representation in a senior managerial position, and try to make sense of their experiences in pursuing managerial positions in the healthcare sector through the lens of *dasein* (i.e., being with). This 'being' can provide valuable experiences, feelings, senses, practices, and languages (Van der Zalm and Bergum 2000). The context of women's experiences is embodied in their historical, sociocultural, and personal background (Crotty, 1996). Like Husserl, I did not pursue the universal 'essence' of an experience; rather, I aimed to understand individuals' perceptions and experiences.

- **Feminist Phenomenology**

Feminist Phenomenology, the intersection of feminism and phenomenology, enriches our understanding of lived experiences through a gender-conscious lens (Fisher and Embree 200). Feminist phenomenology elucidates the influence of sex and gender on individual experiences and worldviews, expanding to examine the socio-political implications (The PhilPapers Foundation [no date]) Traditionally, feminism, which advocates for gender equality, and phenomenology, which seeks to deeply understand lived experiences, have increasingly been recognised. The idea that phenomenology is relevant to feminist issues and benefits from interacting with other fields depends on the broad and forward-thinking definition of phenomenology. Phenomenology is considered feminist, as long as it explores questions of gendered experiences and sexual differences. This opposes the traditional limited view that confines phenomenology to the perspective of a supposedly neutral, individualistic ego. Instead, issues of gendered embodiment and sexual hierarchy are integral to phenomenology's goal of capturing the full richness and complexity of real human experiences (Arendt 1998).

Feminist phenomenology began gaining significant attention around the mid-20th century, as scholars started exploring how gender influences personal experiences and perceptions (Heinämaa and Rodemeyer 2010). Feminism fundamentally aims to dismantle gender-based disparities, whereas phenomenology focuses on elucidating the everyday lived experiences of individuals (Fisher and Embree 2000). Feminist phenomenology extends this exploration to include how these experiences are distinctly shaped by gender, integrating additional layers of analysis concerning race, culture, religion, and other identity markers (Heinämaa and Rodemeyer 2010). This approach challenges traditional phenomenological perspectives which often reflect predominantly male viewpoints, thereby marginalising women's experiences and those of other genders (Fisher and Embree 2000).

Feminist phenomenologists argue that, to comprehend the complexity of lived experiences, one must consider how gender roles and expectations influence these experiences. They posit that understanding gender's impact helps reveal broader socio-political implications, thereby enriching the phenomenological inquiry (Simms and Stawarska 2013) For example, by applying a feminist phenomenological lens, research can uncover how societal norms and gender dynamics shape professional roles and identities within specific contexts. In my thesis, employing Feminist Phenomenology allows me to uncover how gender influences their professional experiences and management aspirations. Through this lens, I explore not only the individual and collective

experiences of these women, but also how their professional environments are shaped by broader gendered expectations and institutional norms.

- **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutics is a key component of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and the theory of interpretation (Smith et al. 2009). It was initially developed to interpret and understand biblical texts, but gradually evolved to analyse a wider range of content, such as literary works (Smith et al. 2009). Smith et al. (2009) discussed the most important and influential hermeneutic phenomenological theorists: Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Gadamer. Heidegger was interested in discourse analysis, which offers the possibility of bringing in understanding the features of talk-in-interaction to the phenomenological project' (Heidegger 1947,1993). He contributed significantly to the links between phenomenology and hermeneutics by adopting the idea of *dasein* (Moran 2000). He stated that the interpretation method requires engagement with the world and an understanding of the meaning of the object itself; we are therefore eventually required to engage our previous experiences and knowledge in the interpretation phase (Heidegger 1927,1962). Heidegger (1927,1962) mentioned that 'an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us' (p. 191). Although our prior experiences and knowledge may aid our understanding of participants' experiences, they can also impede the process of interpretation. We should, therefore, attempt to constantly have an open mind so that we are ready to discover the meaning(s) of a particular experience.

IPA has adopted a double hermeneutic approach 'whereby the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to them' (Smith et al. 2009, p. 10). According to Smith et al. (2009), researchers have two roles. First, the researcher can be considered an individual who has their assumptions and experiences, and as a participant within a study. Second, the researcher needs to be able to enter a participant's world using the information provided by the participant. The interpretation of the information was based on the researcher's perspective. Therefore, this study employed double hermeneutics to understand the lived experiences of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi hospitals, particularly regarding the challenges and obstacles they encountered when attempting to advance to senior managerial roles. It was important to understand how the world appeared to women and nurses within their specific contexts and realities. Interpretive phenomenology allowed for an in-depth exploration of how mid-level female nurse managers made sense of their experiences within different social, professional, and personal environments. It further enabled the researcher to reflect on the reality of female

nurse managers, particularly concerning their social and cultural challenges, and how these challenges were negotiated. The detailed accounts of these women's experiences helped create a greater understanding of what it means to be a female nurse manager who is hindered from progressing to a higher-level position in the Saudi Arabian context (Smith et al. 2009).

- **Idiography**

Nomothetic research has been criticised by Smith et al. (2009) because of the generalisability of claims on the sole basis of individual behaviour. IPA differs from other approaches because of its idiographic nature. The idiography aims to explore each participant's individual experiences. It describes an in-depth analysis of single cases, with the goal of examining an individual's perspective in a unique context. The main goal of the idiographic approach in research is to discover each participant's experience before generating general statements (Eatough and Smith 2008; Smith et al. 2009). IPA seeks an idiographic perspective by examining each participant's personal perspective and experience before exploring convergence and divergence across groups (Smith, 2009). Each participant's findings are separated by bracketing to 'maintain sensitivity to each person's unique story' (Smith et al. 2009, p. 29). This study maintained an idiographic approach using the transcripts obtained from each participant.

5.5 Rationale for Selecting IPA

Although IPA originated in the field of health psychology research, it has been successfully adopted in diverse disciplines, including social, clinical, and counselling research (Smith 2004). IPA provides rich and detailed information that illuminates the understanding of experiences within nursing management contexts, while the majority of IPA applications focus on patient perspectives of healthcare, illness, and healthcare decisions (Anderson 2019). Indeed, there is a lack of articles exploring healthcare providers' experiences, including nursing. Reid et al. (2005) declared that IPA is a highly valuable approach for exploring areas that have received little attention. Thus, I feel that this is an opportunity to contribute to the global literature on mid-level female nurse managers' experiences by offering insight into their experiences. IPA was selected as the most appropriate research methodology for this study for the following reasons.

Furthermore, IPA was chosen over another qualitative method, as its theoretical foundations consider the complexity of the human whole, involving thoughts, feelings, and reactions (Smith 1996). IPA's inductive, interpretive analysis is better suited to addressing the research questions,

which seek to discover the lived experiences of female nurses who have limited opportunities to enter senior positions.

The idiographic component pertains to investigating each individual's subjective lived experience in a particular social, cultural, economic, and political context rather than at the group level (Smith et al. 2009). Smith and Osborn (2014, p. 1) stated that IPA is useful to explore areas "considered complex, ambiguous and emotionally laden". Within a male-dominated society, female nurses' experiences in reaching senior roles are key examples of a complex phenomenon. The complex interaction between self-concept and society is difficult to articulate (Smith and Osborn 2014). Through IPA, we can enable women to probe and recount important and sensitive aspects of their experiences in their own worlds.

A small homogeneous strategy approach was found to be the most suitable, since the current research aimed to examine the living conditions of female nurses working in mid-level management who share a similar experience. In most IPA studies, a small number offers a micro-level reading of the participants' stories, which allows access to an understanding of these scarce experiences (Smith and Osborn 2014). Hence, the inductive nature of IPA allows embedded concepts and unexpected experiences that cannot be revealed by observation to be uncovered. I was attracted to IPA as it is open to various epistemological stances (Larkin et al. 2006). Smith highlighted that the IPA itself is considered an epistemological stance. I was attracted to analysing strategies, and the steps of IPA offer a clear guideline that enables the researcher to craft their research.

5.6 Limitations of IPA research

Although IPA offers rich and textured insights into participants' lived experiences, it is not without its limitations. One of the primary constraints of IPA lies in the generalisability of its findings. Due to its intensive focus on detailed and personal narratives, IPA typically involves smaller sample sizes, which means that the findings are less about population-level generalisations and provide a deeper understanding of individual experiences (Smith et al. 2009). The intricate nature of this analysis often means that the research cannot be readily extrapolated to a wider audience but offers valuable depth within the specific context studied. In addition, the time-intensive nature of IPA poses a significant limitation. The detailed analysis required in IPA, from transcription to the nuanced interpretation of data, requires considerable time and investment from researchers. Such an investment can pose challenges, particularly in larger studies, where the volume of data may be

overwhelming (Reid et al. 2005). The method's reliance on the researcher's interpretative role further compounds this issue, as the subjective nature of interpretation requires rigorous reflexivity to maintain analytical integrity. This subjectivity underscores the need for researchers to consistently reflect on their preconceptions and influence on their interpretations (Smith 2004). Furthermore, the emotional toll of conducting IPA research should not be underestimated. As researchers engage deeply with participants' stories, which may often include distressing or traumatic experiences, the emotional impact on both the researcher and the participant can be profound, potentially influencing the data collection and analysis process (Larkin et al. 2006). Finally, the complexity of IPA can be challenging. Researchers must be adept at identifying, analysing, and interpreting both the descriptive and interpretive elements present within the data. This level of complexity requires a certain acuity in analytical skills, making IPA a method that is both challenging and rewarding for

5.7 Consideration of Alternative Approaches

It is essential for the research methodology to present a solid theoretical and philosophical foundation to provide a strong and reasonable rationale (Pringle et al. 2011). To analyse the data, multiple highly regarded qualitative methodologies were reviewed and evaluated. My main goal for this study was to closely highlight the participants' lived experiences, and IPA is a phenomenological methodology that seeks to achieve this (Smith et al. 2009). Grounded theory is an inductive approach that aims to develop theory through in-depth interviews, observations, memos, and field notes (Charmaz 2008). IPA is more appropriate in this thesis, as the initial aim of this study is to reveal notions and practices that are deeply embedded within society and impossible to uncover through observation. My aim is not to develop a theory of a particular phenomenon that explains various social processes (Charmaz 2008). My research dataset is not meant to focus on the level of large-scale social settings; instead, it is intended to explore individual experiences by offering a detailed analysis of each case (ideographic).

Furthermore, ethnography involves researchers immersing themselves in a specific cultural or social setting to observe and interpret behaviours, practices, and interactions (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). This method could have been used to study organizational culture and dynamics within the Saudi healthcare system, providing a broader context for the experiences of female nurse managers. However, ethnography requires prolonged engagement in the field and focuses more on cultural

practices than individual subjective experiences, making it less appropriate for the in-depth exploration required in this study.

Also, thematic analysis is considered the most suitable method for any study (Marks and Yardley 2004). It is applied to analyse and interpret text and visual data in coding and categorising transcripts. My focus is not on measuring the frequency of meanings but rather on understanding the meanings of participants' experiences (Boyatzis 1998). The role of the researcher in the thematic analysis framework is to examine the data and identify themes across the entire dataset (Joffe and Yardley 2004). Applying thematic analysis is beneficial; however, the study aims to completely immerse the participants in their living worlds rather than produce general claims. The framework analysis approach is appropriate for applied policy research (Srivastava and Thomson 2009). It would be preferable to adapt this approach "to research that has specific questions, a limited time frame, a pre-designed sample, and a priori issues" (Srivastava and Thomson 2009, p. 73). The main purpose of framework analysis is to categorise and reveal themes before starting a study (Ritchie and Spencer 2002). My aim is to develop initial themes after close reading and rereading of each case. Thus, this method could not be applied in the current study.

Furthermore, Narrative Analysis examines the stories individuals tell about their lives and experiences, focusing on the structure, content, and context of these narratives (Riessman 2008). While this approach could provide rich insights into the personal and professional journeys of mid-level female nurse managers, it emphasises the storytelling aspect more than a deeper interpretative understanding of the experiences and meanings that participants attach to them. Therefore, Narrative Analysis was considered less suitable for this study's objectives, and the case study approach entails an in-depth investigation of a particular case or a small number of cases within the real-life context (Yin 2018). It could have been used to examine the career trajectories of a few selected mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia in detail. While Case Study research provides comprehensive insights into specific instances, it may not capture the broader range of experiences and interpretative depth offered by IPA.

Chapter 6: Study Methods and Data Management

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections: The first section discusses the study methods, and the second section provides details on data management.

6.2 Study Methods

This section provides a comprehensive description of the methods used to select the sample and execute the data collection and analysis processes guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Additionally, it includes an in-depth examination of the ethical considerations addressed throughout the study.

6.2.1 Sampling and Recruitment

- **Sampling**

Sampling in research refers to the process of selecting a portion of the population to represent the entire population. As defined by Babbie (2016), sampling is the process of choosing a representative subset of a population to generalise the findings to the entire population. This process is critical in both qualitative and quantitative research as it allows researchers to conclude a larger group based on the data collected from the sample (Bryman 2016).

In quantitative research, sampling often involves random selection to ensure that every individual in the population has an equal chance of being included, thereby making the sample representative of the population (Trochim and Donnelly 2008). While qualitative research typically focuses on non-random sampling methods, such as purposive or convenience sampling, in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research question (Patton, 2015). There are three common methods used in qualitative research: snowballing technique, convenience sampling, and purposive sampling. As Noy (2008) described, snowball sampling involves participants referring to others they know, which is particularly useful in accessing a wider network of potential participants. Convenience sampling involves the selection of participants who are readily available and willing to participate (Etikan et al. 2016). Purposive sampling is the deliberate choice of participants because of their specific characteristics or knowledge relevant to the research question.

This method is crucial to ensure that the study includes individuals who can provide in-depth and relevant information based on their roles, experiences, or perspectives directly related to the focus of the study.

In this study, I initially employed purposive sampling to select women managers who were specifically knowledgeable and experienced in the study's focus. The focus was on mid-level female nurse managers, such as managers, directors, and charge nurses, who held positions relevant to the research question. After establishing a foundational group of participants through purposive sampling, the study then transitioned to snowball sampling. In this context, the selected women managers were asked to identify and refer to other women in managerial positions within their professional networks who could contribute additional perspectives or experiences relevant to the study.

Combining purposive and snowball sampling in my study offers strategic advantages. It starts with a targeted approach to gather deep, relevant information, and then broadens the scope to include diverse perspectives within the same professional sphere. This combined approach not only enriches the data collected but also enhances the overall depth and breadth of understanding of the phenomena under study (Sadler et al. 2010). The primary reason for using purposive sampling in this study is its ability to target participants who have specific characteristics, knowledge, or experiences that are relevant to the research question. Patton (2015) emphasised that purposive sampling is effective for identifying and selecting information-rich cases that yield insights and in-depth understanding. In the context of this study on mid-level female nurse managers, purposive sampling ensures that the participants were directly relevant and have experiences or perspectives that are crucial for answering your research questions. This method is particularly suited for qualitative research, where the goal is to explore complex phenomena and understand nuances, rather than to generalise findings to a larger population (Bryman 2016).

After establishing a base through purposive sampling, employing snowball sampling allowed me to extend my reach and to access a broader network of participants. This method is particularly beneficial in research where participants are part of a specific subgroup or professional network that might be difficult to access using conventional sampling methods (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). In my study, snowball sampling became advantageous after the initial purposive sample was collected, as it enabled me to influence the networks of the initially selected nurse managers to identify additional participants who could offer further insights into the research topic. Noy (2008)

pointed out that snowball sampling is particularly useful for reaching hidden or hard-to-access populations, which can be the case in professional settings where specific roles or experiences are less visible.

This combined approach of starting with purposive sampling and then expanding through snowball sampling was particularly effective. It not only ensured that the initial participants were highly relevant to the research topic but also influenced their professional networks to access a broader range of participants. This strategy was instrumental in reaching a wider array of female managers, many of whom might not have been accessible or identifiable. The use of purposive sampling in this study was not just a necessary step, but also functioned as a critical bridge to reach other participants, especially given the sensitive nature of the topic concerning gender issues in management. Patton (2015) noted that purposive sampling is instrumental in selecting participants with specific characteristics or knowledge pertinent to the research question. Despite these challenges, this initial phase was indispensable for establishing the foundation for this study. Implementing purposive sampling was challenging because many potential participants were unwilling to take part in this study and often hesitant to share experiences related to sensitive matters. This reluctance made the initial phase of the data collection particularly lengthy. However, once the first two participants were recruited through purposive sampling, their involvement became a crucial bridge that facilitated further recruitment.

The first two participants, Sara and Fatima, were selected purposively and met the study's inclusion criteria. Their participation lent credibility to the study and reassured the other potential participants. As they began referring to colleagues within their professional networks, the process of expanding the participant pool became significantly more manageable. The transition to snowball sampling, as described by Biernacki and Waldorf (1981), was markedly smoother after the successful implementation of purposive sampling. The initial participants' referrals encouraged their colleagues to participate, creating a chain reaction that allowed for a more diverse and comprehensive collection of data. In this sense, the initial purposive sampling phase was critical, acting as a bridge that connected me to a broader range of participants who were otherwise difficult to access, especially given the sensitivity of the research topic. The effectiveness of this method in facilitating access to hidden or less accessible populations, as highlighted by Noy (2008), was demonstrated in my study, where direct approaches were initially met with resistance, but were later eased through the networks established via purposive sampling.

- **Sample Size**

In this study, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed as a guiding methodological framework, necessitating a nuanced approach to participant recruitment (Smith 2012). Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were synergistically utilised to ensure a rich and varied collection of participants' experiences. Purposive sampling was implemented as a systematic strategy to identify individuals who were most likely to provide depth of insight due to their direct experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation (Gray 2014). This deliberate selection was foundational in assembling a sample with the capacity for providing rich, detailed narratives essential for IPA, which thrives on the careful examination of how individuals make sense of their life experiences (Smith et al. 2009; Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014).

The snowballing technique complemented the purposive approach by aiding in the identification and recruitment of additional participants who were not readily accessible or visible within the targeted demographic or who may have been part of the hard-to-reach populations. This technique is particularly valuable in navigating the challenges associated with reaching individuals, who could offer substantial contributions to the complexity of the issues being explored, a process well-documented in the existing literature (Naderifar et al. 2017). By integrating purposive and snowball sampling, the study was designed to recruit participants with shared demographic features and embrace the diversity within those demographics, enriching the dataset (Smith et al. 2009). The small sample size intrinsic to IPA facilitated an in-depth exploration of each participant's narrative, uncovering the essence of their lived experiences of the central phenomenon (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014). The number of participants was thus not predetermined but was instead contingent upon achieving sufficient depth of data and richness of cases to fulfil the aims of the IPA study (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2014). IPA studies typically involve a small sample size, which allows researchers to conduct a detailed and comprehensive analysis of each participant's lived experiences. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that the goal of IPA is not to make broad generalizations but rather to provide an in-depth understanding of how individuals perceive and make sense of their personal and social worlds. The small sample size was intentional, facilitating a nuanced exploration of the richness of each individual's narrative. Turpin et al. (1997) indicate that doctoral programs in clinical psychology within the UK suggest that an optimal sample size for an IPA study is between six to eight participants. This recommendation is based on the rationale that such a sample size provides a sufficient opportunity to explore both the convergences and divergences in the experiences of the individuals involved (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014).

6.2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In the planning phase of the IPA study, I recruited six participants. This number was chosen to strike a balance between the in-depth individual analysis required by IPA and the practical considerations for conducting a thorough and manageable study. A sample size of six aligns with the recommendations for IPA research, where smaller, more focused samples allow for a detailed and nuanced analysis of each participant's lived experiences (Smith et al. 2009).

Homogeneity refers to the selection of a sample with shared experiences or characteristics that are relevant to the research question. This is critical in IPA because it ensures that the findings are grounded in the commonalities of shared experiences. Smith et al. (2009) emphasize the importance of a homogeneous sample to enable the researcher to understand the phenomenon more deeply within a specific context. A homogeneous group provides a focused lens for exploring a phenomenon, thus enhancing the interpretative aspect of the analysis. While homogeneity is sought, it is important to note that variations within the sample are still valuable, as they can provide a spectrum of perspectives on shared experience and add richness to the data. To ensure the homogeneity of my sample, participants were carefully selected based on specific inclusion criteria. This homogeneity is crucial in IPA because it ensures that the study is focused on and meaningful. This allows for the exploration of a phenomenon within a particular group that shares a common context (Smith et al. 2009). Ensuring homogeneity aids in the depth of interpretive work, as the analysis can delve deeply into the shared experiences of the participants, which is at the core of what IPA aims to achieve (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014).

Six mid-level female nurse managers (managers, directors, and charge nurses) were recruited from three hospitals in northern Saudi Arabia. Participants who shared this experience and demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, language, nationality, qualifications, and culture) were recruited. First, I gained access to a list of all mid-level female nurse managers within the three selected hospitals. This is to ensure that women are able to speak, share, express, and reflect on their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. I collaborated with the head of employment affairs and nursing managers in each hospital to identify the remaining nurses who met the inclusion criteria (see table 6).

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saudi women: Only women of Saudi nationality were included. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-Saudi women: Women who were not of Saudi nationality were excluded from the study.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants had to be female nurse managers in mid-level managerial roles, such as directors or charge nurses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bedside nurses: Nurses who were in bedside, non-managerial positions were not included.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in the selected hospitals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment outside selected hospitals: Nurses who did not work in the selected hospitals were excluded from the study.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants must hold at least a bachelor's degree in nursing: Participants were required to hold at least a bachelor's degree in nursing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower educational qualification: Nurses who only possess a diploma were not included in the study.

Table 6: Participants' Inclusion and exclusion criteria

6.2.3. Obtaining Ethical Approval

The research governance process involved securing ethical approval from Cardiff University's School of Healthcare Sciences (HCARE) Research Review and Ethical Screening Committee (RRESC). This research proposal has been submitted for a thorough review (See Appendix B). Following the local ethical approval, national ethical clearance was obtained from the Ministry of Health for research activities within three main hospitals: King Salman Specialist Hospital (KSSH), King Khaled Hospital (KKH), and Hail General Hospital (HGH) in Hail City, Saudi Arabia (See Appendix C).

6.2.4 Access Negotiations and Arrangements

Negotiations for access commenced after receiving ethical approval from the School of Healthcare Sciences (HCARE) at Cardiff University. Initially, discussions were held with the training and education department as well as the research department of the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, negotiations took place with the chief nurse at the King Salman Specialist Hospital (KSSH), King Khalid Hospital (KKH), and Hail General Hospital (HGH), to secure permission for the study to be conducted. The target demographics for the study included all mid-level female nurse managers at the aforementioned hospitals, encompassing nurse directors, nurse supervisors, and head nurses.

6.2.5 Recruitment Process

The recruitment process for this study was meticulously executed following ethical approval from the School of Healthcare Sciences (HCARE) at Cardiff University. Participants were recruited from main hospitals in Hail City, Saudi Arabia. The aim was to ensure that the sample was appropriate for the research objectives and reflective of the target population. The participants' contact information was obtained from the Department of Employment Affairs. The lists of female nurse managers in mid-level management positions, such as directors and charge nurses, were provided by the human resources departments of the selected hospitals. These individuals were targeted because of their alignment with the study's focus on managerial experience. Potential participants were first contacted via short message service (SMS) or phone calls to explain the study's aims and screen them according to the inclusion criteria. Interested individuals were then emailed a formal invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix D), which included the participant information sheet (see Appendix E) and consent form, provided in Arabic (see Appendix F). The informed consent form detailed the study objectives, data collection methods, anticipated time involvement, and privacy and confidentiality measures. It also offered the research team's contact details for any queries. A screening process was conducted to confirm the eligibility of interested participants, ensuring they met the inclusion criteria of Saudi nationality, employment in a designated managerial role, and possession of at least a bachelor's degree. The interviews were initially planned to be conducted face-to-face. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, arrangements were made to conduct interviews via Zoom to ensure the safety of all participants. The flexibility of Zoom allowed for scheduling interviews at the participants' convenience, with efforts made to accommodate their schedules and minimise disruptions to their work. Following the completion of the interviews, participants were asked to refer to colleagues who met the study criteria. This approach was particularly beneficial for reaching a broader participant pool during the pandemic, when traditional face-to-face recruitment methods were not feasible. Throughout the recruitment process, regular updates and reminders were communicated to maintain their engagement and interest in the study. All recruitment procedures were conducted with utmost respect for potential participants' time and contributions, adhering to ethical guidelines. In line with ethical approval requirements, it is imperative that all participants have a comprehensive understanding of the study's purpose, which encompasses its objectives, benefits, potential risks, and data confidentiality measures (Best and Kahn 2006; Jones and Kottler 2006; Elliott 2005). Participants were also informed about the length of the interview and the amount of information they would expect to share via zoom meetings. Once the signed consent forms were received, they were signed, and scanned copies were sent back to

the participants. The dates and times for the zoom interviews were arranged considering the convenience and personal circumstances of each participant (McCosker et al. 2001).

6.2.6 Data Collection Method

- **Semi-Structured Interview**

Data were collected between January and March 2021 using semi-structured, one-to-one interviews, and the method recommended for use in IPA studies. Smith et al. (2009) stated that IPA is best applied to data collection methods that "invite participants to offer a rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences," and "facilitate the elicitation of stories, thoughts, and feelings about the target phenomenon" (p. 56). Following this guidance, semi-structured interviews were selected as the method for this study because they are commonly used in IPA to produce idiographic data (Reid et al. 2005). This interviewing style is particularly effective in allowing participants to freely discuss their experiences and other areas relevant to the research question (Smith et al. 2009). As the researcher, my responsibility during the interviews was to shape the conversation with guiding questions (Kvale 2007) while carefully avoiding the expression of personal opinions to prevent influencing the interviewees. A flexible interview guide was developed by employing a funnelling technique to transition from general to specific concerns (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Descriptive questions were introduced at the beginning of each interview, and more sensitive questions were reserved until rapport was sufficiently established. Prompting and probing questions were used to encourage the participants to delve deeper into their stories.

The interview schedule was not followed rigidly; not all questions were asked during each interview or in the same sequence. This approach allowed the participants to direct their conversations and further explore their unique experiences and knowledge. Video and audio calls were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Although Smith et al. (2009) suggested that not all prosodic features needed to be transcribed, significant pauses and non-verbal expressions, such as laughter, were noted to assist with interpretation.

- **In-Depth Online One-to-One Interviews**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-depth online one-to-one interviews were conducted via Zoom to understand the lived experiences of female nurse managers facing barriers to career progression in senior positions in the healthcare sector. Zoom was chosen for its popularity and functionality in online meetings (Archibald et al. 2019), and interviews were recorded using Zoom's recording

features. Creswell (2013) and Nicholas et al. (2010) noted that online interviews can provide participants with a secure and comfortable setting that is conducive to discussing sensitive issues. Privacy was ensured by utilising Cardiff University's email system for meeting invitations and by managing Zoom's waiting room and passcode settings to prevent intrusion. Local recording on Zoom facilitated the secure storage of interview files directly on my desktop. Participants were asked to provide consent on separate consent form sheets for video or audio recording to ensure their privacy, especially given the sensitive topics discussed, and to mitigate participation bias or non-response bias.

6.2.7 The Interview Process

An introductory meeting was scheduled according to each participant's availability to clarify the study details before obtaining their consent. The participants were given adequate time to review this information during the introductory session. Consent forms written in Arabic (see Appendix F) were obtained from each woman who agreed to participate, outlining the study objectives, potential risks and benefits, and the data management process for maintaining confidentiality. It also informed them of their right to withdraw at any time, without repercussions. Elliott (2005) emphasized the need to inform interviewees of the interview length to set expectations for the information-sharing process. Once signed consent forms were received, I signed them and sent the scanned copies back to the participants. Interviews were arranged to accommodate suitable times for the participants, including breaks, as the interviews lasted between one and two hours, allowing for emotional pauses, if needed. Appropriate dates and times for the interviews were set considering the personal nature of the discussions (McCosker et al. 2001). I conducted two interviews with each participant to build rapport and gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. The first interview aimed to gather general information about the participants, reassure them, and establish a connection for the second interview. The second interview allowed participants to share more detailed insights and express themselves freely about their experiences. This facilitated a thorough exploration of specific themes, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of each participant's perspective. After completing both interview sessions, I analysed the data collectively rather than treating each session separately. This integrated approach enabled me to identify overarching themes and patterns across both interviews, leading to a more nuanced interpretation of the findings.

6.3 Data Management

This section describes the methodology employed in data translation and the measures enacted to safeguard the data. Subsequently, it articulates the process of data analysis. Moreover, the chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of ethical review considerations, processes undertaken, and permissions obtained. The section concludes by detailing of the study's nature and reflexivity practices.

6.3.1 Data Translation and Management

In qualitative research, the transcription and translation process are crucial for maintaining the integrity and accuracy of the data. This study involved transcribing audio and video recordings of interviews from Arabic, the language in which they were initially conducted. This transcription process was vital to capture the essence of the conversations, including tone, pauses, and other nuances. Once all data was collected, stringent and rigorous methods were implemented to ensure the credibility and precision of the findings.

Qualitative research heavily relies on interpreting meanings, and language disparities can significantly affect the understanding and interpretation of these meanings at various stages, potentially compromising the credibility of the research. The risk of losing essential meanings is particularly high when findings are published in a different language than the one used during the research process, or when there are linguistic and cultural differences between the researchers and participants (Van Nes et al. 2010). To mitigate potential bias, an independent translator with no prior relationship to the study or the researcher was engaged. This translator was adept in understanding the cultural and linguistic nuances of both Arabic and English, crucial for maintaining data credibility. The translation process was comprehensive, ensuring the English translations were verbatim and included every detail from the original Arabic transcripts, such as hesitations, pauses, laughter, and various emotional sounds, preserving the authenticity of the interviews. This approach is in line with Guba and Lincoln's (1994) recommendations for maintaining credibility in qualitative research. The translation process involved both the researcher and the translator thoroughly reviewing each transcript to fully understand the content. The translator started with simpler terms and expressions, then conducted multiple readings of the material, making detailed notes and observations, particularly on sections requiring further clarification. This was to ensure that the translations were not only accurate but also coherent and understandable. To effectively translate

Arabic idioms into the English language, assistance was sought from friends and colleagues. This thorough and careful approach was essential to maintain the integrity of the data, making it a time-consuming yet vital part of the research process.

In this study, back translation was omitted due to the extensive length of each interview. To ensure a deep understanding and familiarity with the content, I engaged in an exhaustive review process. This included multiple readings of the transcribed documents, frequent relistening to the recorded interviews, and revisiting the transcribed texts whenever required during the data analysis phase. This approach was instrumental in preserving the fidelity of the women's statements and minimizing the influence of researcher bias on the findings.

6.3.2 Data Analysis

Data gathered during the semi-structured interviews was then analysed using an iterative and inductive cycle process versus a linear approach (adapted from Smith et al. 2009). The analysis gradually developed from individual-based to a more shared understanding and from a descriptive to an interpretative level (Smith et al. 2009).

- **Process of (IPA)**

The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) process applied in this study is rooted in the methodologies outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) (See Figure). IPA, as a qualitative research approach, is particularly adept at investigating how individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds. This method is especially valuable for data derived from semi-structured interviews, as it allows for an in-depth examination of the participants' lived experiences and perceptions.

The IPA process encompasses several distinct yet interrelated steps:

- **Initial Reading and Re-reading:** The process begins with a comprehensive reading of the interview transcripts. This stage goes beyond a preliminary overview; it involves a deep immersion in the data to grasp the participants' perspectives fundamentally, as emphasized by Smith et al. (2009).

- **Initial Noting:** After the initial reading, the researcher engages in the process of making descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual notes. This stage is inherently exploratory, aiming to capture the essence of the participants' expressions, in line with the guidelines provided by Smith et al. (2009). An example from participant (See Appendix G).
- **Developing Emergent Themes:** Following the notation, the notes are reviewed to identify emerging patterns or themes within the data. This stage marks a shift from merely describing the content to interpreting the underlying meanings and significance, a process central to the IPA methodology as described by Smith et al. (2009).
- **Searching for Connections Between Themes:** After the identification of emergent themes, the researcher seeks connections and relationships between these themes. This step is instrumental in constructing a more cohesive and comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences, following the approach recommended by Smith et al. (2009).
- **Moving to the Next Case:** After conducting a thorough analysis of one interview, the researcher proceeds to the next, applying the same meticulous process. This step is crucial to ensure that each case is treated as unique, capturing the individuality of each participant's experience as Smith et al. (2009) suggest.
- **Looking for Patterns Across Cases:** Post-analysis of individual cases, the researcher then identifies patterns and themes across different interviews. This step is key in uncovering shared experiences and perceptions among participants, leading to broader insights, in line with the practices recommended by Smith et al. (2009) (See Appendix H).
- **Writing Up:** The final step is the integration of the thematic analysis into a coherent narrative. This narrative not only presents the findings but also connects them to existing literature and theoretical frameworks, as advocated by Smith et al. (2009). Throughout the IPA process, the researcher maintains a reflexive stance, acknowledging and contemplating their role and influence in interpreting the data. This reflexivity, as Smith et al. (2009) affirm, is vital in ensuring the research's credibility and rigor. Ultimately, the IPA process culminates in a detailed and nuanced understanding of the participants' lived experiences, offering significant insights into the researched phenomenon.

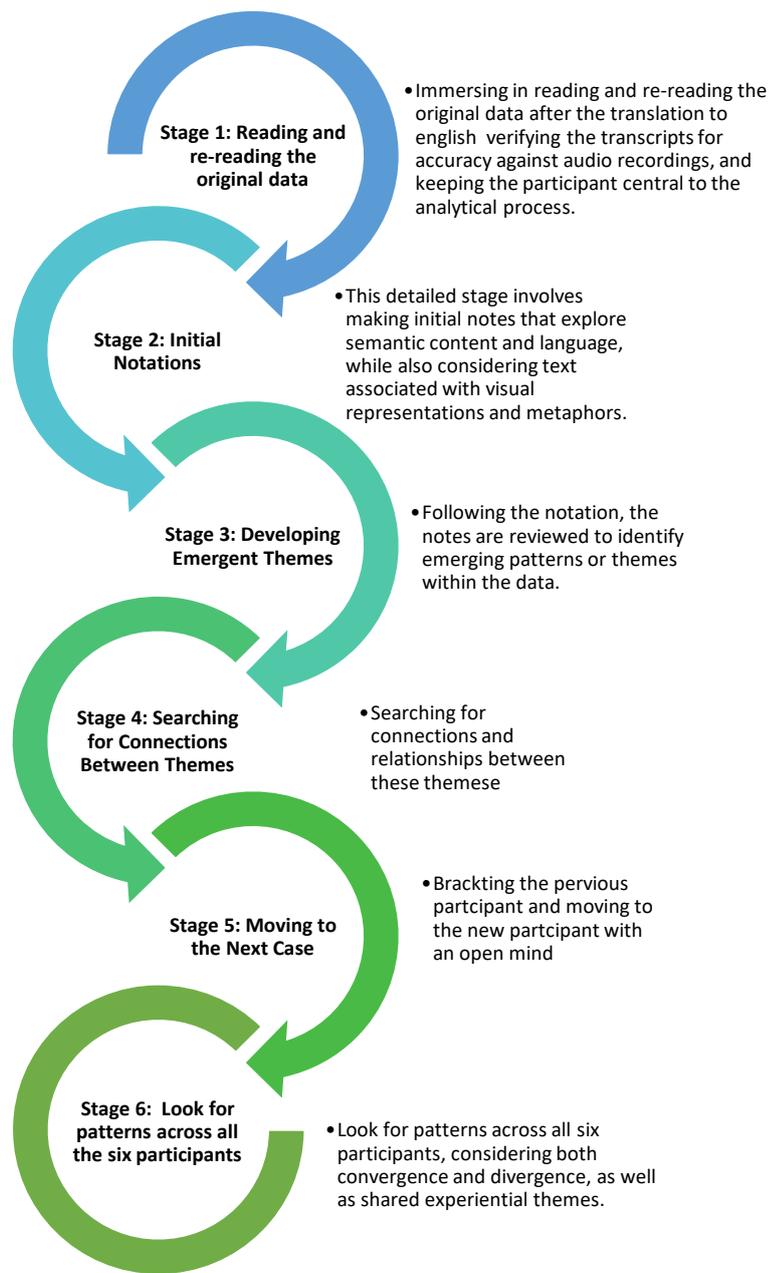


Figure 11 IPA Six stages developed by Smith et al. (2009)

6.3.3 Ethics Issues

Throughout the duration of the study, firm adherence to the approved proposal was maintained. The autonomy of the participants was a priority, with measures taken to ensure that individuals could make an informed and voluntary decision about their participation. Participants' autonomy was valued during the study by ensuring that prospective participants were able to voluntarily decide whether to take part in the study. Also, full disclosure regarding the nature of the study and

the right to refuse to participate or withdraw was provided in the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form. Comprehensive information about the study's scope and the participants' right to decline or withdraw at any point was clearly outlined in the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form, which can be found in (Appendices C and D).

In this study, the emotional nature of examining sensitive and personal details was recognized (Dickson-Swift et al. 2008; McIntosh and Morse 2009). Mitigating potential psychological and social harm to participants was considered. The risks associated with participation were minimal, as the study involved no physical harm or medical intervention, but rather verbal discussions. Nonetheless, there was a slight possibility of psychological distress due to conversations about career progression and management attainment, which could be emotionally charged subjects for participants. Cowles (1988) highlighted that discussing sensitive topics might trigger emotional reactions such as anger, sorrow, embarrassment, and anxiety. Participants might have felt discomfort when narrating their experiences related to lack of family support, cultural barriers, and workplace bullying including gender discrimination. To minimize this, participants were reassured that the research aimed to contribute to existing knowledge without judgment or criticism. A working relationship was established with a multidisciplinary team across various healthcare institutions to provide necessary support to any affected participants.

Elliott (2005) underscored the importance of informing participants about the interview's length beforehand. Interviews were scheduled on participants' off days to avoid any work-related conflicts. Considering the stress levels that could arise from the interview duration, each session was limited to one hour, including breaks, to mitigate emotional and physical strain. A tranquil environment for virtual interviews was created to reduce participants' vulnerability, promote open conversation, minimize distractions, and ensure recording clarity (McCosker et al. 2001). Appropriate strategies and skills were employed for discussing sensitive topics, which included establishing rapport and using open-ended questions effectively (Elmir et al. 2011). In preparation, I engaged with recent research and attended additional research courses and seminars at Cardiff University. Participants were kept informed of any new risks or benefits discovered during the study. The well-being of researchers is crucial in ethical research practice (Williamson and Burns 2014). Protecting researchers from psychological harm involved strategies such as debriefing with mentors, maintaining a reflective journal, and adopting coping strategies to manage distress. To mitigate risks and prevent burnout, a week-long break was taken after each interview, which also allowed for managing information and preparing for subsequent sessions. Virtual meetings minimized the risks

associated with lone working, and precautions were in place to ensure the researcher's safety, including the preparedness to end interviews.

6.3.4 Practicalities

During all the study stages including the data analysis process, presentation, and publication, the participants were provided alternative names to maintain their identities and strictly confidential and to achieve the anonymity concept. As Creswell (2002) emphasizes, it is imperative to code all interview documentation to safeguard participant information. The participants' Zoom call files were set to automatically download onto the researcher's laptop hard drive. Rerecording the interviews allowed for a meticulous analysis of participants' responses and the collection of additional information. Participants provided consent for either video or audio recording of interviews, respecting their privacy given the sensitivity of the topics discussed. This approach also aimed to mitigate participation bias and non-response bias. Anonymized data were shared only with my supervisors and an external translator responsible for converting the transcripts from Arabic to English. In compliance with the Data Protection Act (1998), all records and data containing personal details like names, addresses, and phone numbers were securely protected against unauthorized access, accidental loss, and damage. In Saudi Arabia, all physical files and recordings were securely stored in locked cabinets at the three hospitals, accessible solely by the researcher until transcription and verification of the data. Post-verification, all files and recordings were scheduled for destruction. All electronic information was encrypted and safely stored on the Cardiff University H drive server, protected by a password. The researcher's laptop, also password-protected and for her exclusive use, was utilized for data storage. Interviews conducted via Zoom were automatically downloaded and saved. The data was kept in an encrypted section on the laptop (Data Protection Act 1998). Following Cardiff University's guidelines, both electronic data and paper records are securely stored for a period of 10 years at the university before destruction.

Chapter 7: Women Idiographic Experiences

*"Here is to strong women: May we know them. May we be them. May we raise them." —
Unknown*

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed presentation of each participant's experiences, focusing on the nuanced accounts of women who are female nurse managers. By exploring each woman's unique experiences, I sought to illuminate the distinct and rich qualities that characterise their journeys. Prior to engaging with collective insights that manifest across various cases, it is crucial to comprehend these unique experiences in isolation. The following chapter (Chapter 8: Cross-case Analysis) is dedicated to an in-depth exploration of these shared experiences through a comparative analysis aimed at uncovering common thematic elements and patterns.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms are used to refer to each participant and all quotations are anonymised. Direct quotes are presented in italics, while my own words are presented in regular font. Before exploring the analysis, a brief biography of each woman is provided with a summary of the interview pattern and uniquely naming their experiences based on the distinctive and resonant words and phrases they used to describe their journeys. This is followed by a figure illustrating the emergent experiential themes and identified sub-themes. The analysis includes the identification of key themes, which are organised into headings based on each woman's accounts. Each theme is accompanied by a detailed description of their experiences using their own words, and sub-themes are included as subheadings within each theme. To maintain transparency and reliability, each woman's narrative concludes with a figure that presents the quotes used to generate the overarching experiential themes and sub-themes that emerged from their interviews.

7.2 Participant profiles

The table (7) developed to present participant information in the study is structured to provide a comprehensive overview of each participant's background while maintaining their anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. The columns of the table are organised to include key demographic and professional details. This table is instrumental in providing a quick yet detailed snapshot of the participants' personal and professional backgrounds, aiding in understanding their experiences and perspectives within the context of the study.

Pseudonym	Highest Degree	Age	Year of Experiences	Current Role	Marital Status	Children
Sara	BSN, MSN in Administration, and Leadership	35	13 years	Nursing Director	Divorced	3
Fatima	BSN, Masters student in critical care, final year.	31	9 years	Head Nurse	Single	-
Malak	BSN	27	4 Years	Supervisor	Divorced	3
Noura	BSN	31	8 Years	Head Nurse	Engaged	-
Dina	BSN, Master's in Public Administration	29	8 Years	supervisor	Single	-
Leen	BSN	35	13	Head nurse	Divorced	1

Table:7 Participants' Demographic profile

7.3 Women's Idiographic Experiences

7.3.1 Sara (Saturated from Management)

- **Participant Profile**

I recruited Sara as a first participant purposively through direct communication. She was aged thirty-five, recently divorced, and lives with her three children. She is working as a nursing director, educated to a master's level in Nursing Administration and Leadership, and worked in two mid-level positions. Sara's experience of mid-level managerial position was unique in its nature as she worked in two different mid-level leadership roles for a prolonged period without promotion to senior levels.

- **Interview Pattern**

During the interview, Sara demonstrated a strong willingness to share her opinions and experiences. However, given her recent divorce, I was cautious about potentially evoking negative emotions. Despite her confident demeanour, as the discussion progressed, Sara's linguistic pattern shifted noticeably, with frequent hesitations, pauses, and repetitions, as well as the use of the phrase "*I mean*" throughout her dialogue. She also expressed feelings of vulnerability and sadness, and avoided answering several questions regarding her family support, particularly that of her ex-husband. For instance, when I asked about her ex-partner's support, she responded,

“My father was following up with me, asking what happened and always aware of the new things happening. My ex-husband also during that issue....yes [pause].”

The incomplete sentence suggests that Sara may have used her father's support as a diversion to avoid discussing her ex-husband. Alternatively, it may imply that she required more time to reflect on her response. The interview with Sara revealed four personal experiential themes which are presented with its quotes in Figure12.

- **Introduction to Sara's Experience**

The term “*saturation*” appropriately portrays her state concerning her managerial journey. This saturation pertains to reaching a point of exhaustion due to the demands and challenges inherent in managerial roles. Sara's experience is vital as it offers a nuanced exploration of the complexities faced by female nurse mid-level managers in the Saudi Ministry of Health. Her experience is not only a reflection of her journey but also represents the stories of many women in similar situations. Her position as a nursing director, combined with her personal life as a recently divorced single mother of three, offers unique vantage points. Sara has remained in a mid-level position for 13 years without advancing to a senior level. Her narrative could provide insights into the systemic barriers and organizational system that contribute to such stagnation, especially for women in managerial roles. As a single mother, Sara's experiences reflect the challenges of managing professional responsibilities alongside significant personal obligations. Her story could shed light on how such responsibilities impact career progression, particularly for women nurses in managerial positions. At the outset of the interview, Sara articulated her primary motivation for assuming a managerial role as her aspiration to wield influence. She felt empowered and driven to pursue managerial position within a tightly knit group, recognizing the impact her words had on employees and the positive reception they garnered. This affirmation further fuelled her ambition for higher positions:

“Honestly, you will be shocked! One thing that pushed me to take a managerial role is my stupid manager. Sorry for using such a word, but he needs to learn how to lead. This made me choose to lead. I felt more influential and respected when we operated as a close-knit group. Even my stupid manager would listen and adopt my opinions, so I asked myself, why not?”

In the excerpt above, Sara uses the phrase '*you will be shocked*' to preface her criticism of '*stupid managers*'. This might suggest a sarcastic undertone, adding irony to her critique. She labels her direct manager as '*stupid*' and criticizes his leadership skills, indicating suppressed anger or frustration. This emotional outburst may suggest suppressed anger. Despite this, Sara maintains that

effective leadership requires influence and acceptance, qualities she believes she embodies. The possible sarcasm in her statement could subtly underscore her disdain for inadequate management.

Sara's impetus for management derives from her desire to effect positive change and exert influence on others, as she explains:

"The feeling that you can do something, that you have authority. This is strength, a feeling of empowerment, means that you have powers and that you are able to modify, change, develop and improve."

She derived satisfaction and fulfilment from achieving goals and witnessing tangible outcomes. Sara also places value on managing subordinates, learning from them, and fostering positive transformation in their lives:

"When you see that you are improving and changing and then you see the results, it gives you a nice feeling, it gives you motivation even."

Sara regarded her managerial role as a privilege, which elicits positive emotions. She articulates:

"I believe this matter is not an easy or possible one! I feel special, a feeling of distinction because of the position."

Moreover, she experiences a sense of uniqueness as she earns the trust and confidence of others, bolstering her own self-assurance.

"The trust feeling, and that people are believing in you has increased confidence in me. I felt contented and satisfied, especially after achieving something, especially after I had graduated with a master's degree and had the position. Reaching your goal is a great feeling."

Sara demonstrated a deep-seated passion for instigating change, influencing others, and fostering both personal and collective development within the workplace. For her, management revolves around exerting influence and nurturing growth. In her own words:

"I focused on education. I mean, frankly, at the beginning, I focused on quality and education. Then, I focused on how I train people... I mean, I don't focus on programs, but I tried to implement the 'shadowing' method of training. I love this method. This method of education is predicated on the idea that while learning the basics, you heighten your learning by observing and experiencing others."

She elaborated on her management approach, particularly emphasizing her commitment to empowering team members to assume managerial roles. Sara offered a concrete example of how she mentored her deputy, who lacked prior management experience, to ascend to the role of Deputy Director of the Nursing Department. Sara underscored the significance of providing requisite training and support to team members to enable them to lead and make informed decisions. She firmly believes that empowering team members constitutes a fundamental aspect of achieving success as a manager.

"By doing so, I'm empowering them... empowerment...I give the person in charge his space, I don't lead them, like doing what is called centralization in management..."

Sara's narrative in her experience with male managers begins with a reflection on the systemic sidelining of her opinion, encapsulated in her own words:

"...In the beginning, it seemed as if I was prohibited from dissenting; my role was to comply without question."

This statement sets the stage for our nuanced exploration, highlighting the intersection of gender bias and power dynamics through her linguistic choices, which signal both compliance and the burgeoning spirit of resistance. Despite feeling marginalized, Sara's resilient spirit is evident as she insists on asserting her viewpoint in an unsupportive environment. She articulates, *"As a woman, I felt my opinion was not solicited, but I didn't see this as a hindrance because I insisted on asserting my viewpoint."* This quote underscores her resilience and serves as a linguistic marker of rebellion against the oppressive dynamics she faces, showcasing her determination to be heard. Sara's encounters with her manager exemplify her struggle for recognition, revealing a nuanced form of marginalization. She recounts,

"Whenever I approached him [her manager] with any issue, I encountered unsatisfactory responses, and he consistently opposed my decisions. Later, I would discover he had adopted the very actions I initiated..."

This narrative segment, rich with Sara's direct language, highlights her initial invisibility and the covert acknowledgement of her value, a complex interplay of visibility and appropriation without recognition.

Sara directly challenges the stereotypes surrounding women in management, questioning the pervasive belief in women's inherent weakness with clarity and conviction:

"There is a certain stereotype about women that she is weak...They still see women as ineligible of holding managerial positions and as weak and never strong..."

Her assertive language contests these stereotypes and advocates for the recognition of women's strengths and capabilities in managerial roles, drawing from her own observations and experiences.

Sara articulates a clear stance on the capabilities of women as managers, positing that they inherently have a stronger sense of responsibility and effectiveness in managerial roles. Her conviction is supported by her observations within her own field, where she has noticed a qualitative difference in departments led by women.

"Women have a higher sense of responsibility. Although I am convinced that in bearing responsibility, women are stronger, I am also convinced that women's management is better than men. I mean, it has been proved that places, where women managers are different. I mean, if there is a male manager and a woman in the same field, the woman always will be better. For example, I can see our department men heads are changing constantly."

Drawing from her experience as nurse manager, Sara compares her and her female deputy's punctuality and dedication to their work with their male counterparts, who she perceives to often delay and procrastinate. This contrast serves to reinforce her belief in the higher sense of responsibility among women:

"I mean, women have a higher sense of responsibility. A woman's sense of responsibility is much higher than men. For example, as a mid-level nurse managers me and my deputy are very punctual on time and keen on our work; we deliver reports early, while males do not. I mean, men usually delay, they are usually late, and it is normal for them to delay their work. There is a little procrastination. I truly believe a woman's sense of responsibility is much higher."

The challenges of working in a male-dominated workplace are poignantly described by Sara, who shares her experiences of exhaustion and drained out:

"Not every girl endures this. It is really tiring. I reached burnout. In an environment like this, you need to fight, quarrel, and handle pressure. This consumes women's energy and power even if they achieve their goals. The dominant nature of men makes them aggressive and cruel when a woman tries to lead. Not every girl can bear this situation. Management is not difficult in every environment, but for me, it was exhausting and annoying."

These quotes imply that Sara found working in a male-dominated environment to be exhausting and draining, highlighted by terms such as "difficult," "endured," and "tiring."

She also described feeling "saturated" when reflecting on her experiences, indicating the numerous obstacles she faced in advancing to managerial positions. Despite her passion for management, she finds the role to be positive yet extremely tiring. Regarding her future aspirations, she conveys uncertainty and suggests she might not pursue a prominent managerial role due to the considerable effort required and her doubts about having the energy to do so again.

"...But I can't hide the truth that as a woman, I have become like saturated... managerial positions with men are pretty difficult, frankly. I mean, if I leave the place, I don't think that I will try having another one again. Aaah, frankly, although I am passionate about management, it is tiring... although it is positive, it is really tiring....."

On her management journey, Sara candidly discusses the emotional aftermath following a tense encounter with her manager. This episode significantly eroded her sense of security and trust within the workplace, elements she considers foundational to any manager's relationship with their administrative counterparts. Sara elucidates this period of introspection, sharing:

"After that, I started thinking about the issue and did not feel safe at that time. I started to think and stop for a while to rest because I was not comfortable. There was no trust and trust is very important between the employee and his boss. I did not feel safe until..."

Her narrative further delves into the impact of perceived administrative practices on her self-confidence and professional well-being. Sara articulates the strategies she contemplated for self-protection against what she perceived as potentially damaging administrative actions:

"I was thinking about how to protect myself... because I lost confidence due to administrative abuse which could inflict damage on me, for example, getting transferred from my place to another. I mean, I was afraid of many things, and that made the best of me."

Sara's fear of being transferred, viewed as a punitive response to circumstances she felt were beyond her control, underscores the vulnerability and isolation she experienced within her managerial role.

Sara provides an observation on the women's support within management support structures. Her insights reveal a nuanced understanding of the disparities in collegial support between male and female managers. Sara says:

"I noticed that male managers do support each other when they are in position, but female managers are quite the opposite; they don't support each other."

Her reflections offer a critical perspective on the underlying issues that hinder solidarity and progression among female managers, serving as a poignant illustration of the challenges faced by women in achieving senior positions within their professional spheres.

Sara's efforts to bridge this gap among female managers underscore her commitment to fostering a supportive network, yet she encounters resistance:

"I tried to contact other women nurse managers to share experiences, work together and support each other but they are aware and reluctant, and I hardly hear about women that they support each other."

The use of *"aware and reluctant"* in Sara's narrative suggests a conscious recognition among female managers of the need for mutual support, juxtaposed with a persistent reluctance to actualize this support. This hesitation, as Sara identifies, stems from *"unprofessionalism and immaturity, and possible jealousy,"* which further impedes female managers collaboration.

During the interview, Sara captures the nuanced lack of assertiveness and silence among female managers, and how these factors embolden men in perpetuating gender discrimination. She reflects:

"Few female managers defended themselves. In my experience, female managers at my level face similar challenges but often choose silence over confrontation. This behaviour, influenced by historical treatment, empowers men to persist with dominant behaviour. The scarcity of female managers amplifies this silence, thereby making men more audacious. This pattern continues due to the lack of confrontation from women who may not see value in challenging such behaviour."

Sara suggests that the minimal representation of women in management can foster a sense of isolation, deterring them from speaking out. This silence might suggest approval to male counterparts, perpetuating practices that suppress female voices.

She further explores the reasons behind the absence of assertiveness:

"The absence of assertiveness could be linked to fear or traits typically ascribed to women. It might also stem from ignorance, a fear of job loss, or other personal concerns."

Sara's experience pre- and post-Vision 2030 illustrates a marked shift in professional inclusion:

"For example, before there was no call for meetings for women in meetings at regional levels...but now it is different. I'm more involved in meetings."

Despite new changes in Saudi Arabia, opening of doors for women in professional circles and enabling women such as Sara to attend work meetings, Sara still feels pressured to adopt masculine qualities to gain respect. Sara describes a moment when she felt compelled to step outside traditionally feminine traits and adopt behaviours typically associated with masculinity to ensure she was taken seriously. She mentioned:

"I mean, the situation sometimes forces me to get out of my frame as a woman, as I have to raise my voice. I have to, umm... In one of the situations that happened to me, I got upset in the middle of a meeting, hit the chair and said I was not going to complete the meeting and left... This reaction helped me a little, as they understood that yes, it is true that Sara is a woman, but they started treating me as they do with their male colleagues. I felt that I was the same as them... neither from the point of view of respect nor from the point of view of dealing with the opposite. I felt that there is more respect now although that was not easy to get, but.... umm (withholding the rest of the details) and that is it. (silence)..."

From the above quotes, the use of " *forces me to get out of my frame as a woman* " can indeed reflect a form of resilience and the adoption of adaptive methods. When individuals, like Sara in the previous analysis, feel compelled to step outside their typical behaviour or comfort zones due to external pressures or constraints, their response often involves resilience—the capacity to endure and bounce back from challenges. Additionally, adopting behaviours or methods that are not inherently natural to women but are necessary for success or survival in a given context showcases their adaptability. These adaptive methods are strategies or changes in behaviour that women employ to better navigate their circumstances, often in response to specific demands or barriers encountered in their environment. Her description captures moments of acute tension and resolution. This act of defiance, though momentarily effective in altering her colleagues' perceptions, reflects Sara's internal struggle to conform to masculine norms to assert her management. Sara belief that management necessitates the adoption of masculine qualities:

"Leadership is a masculine trait, and if a girl wants to be a leader, she must have some masculine qualities."

This quote suggests leadership within a gendered discourse, emphasizing the societal expectations placed on women managers.

Sara's experience further underscores the significance of male endorsement in her career advancement. She asserts

"I need the support of the male manager; I don't think I will reach a senior position without male empowerment..."

This extract highlights a systemic dependency on male networks for career advancement. This reliance on male validation not only speaks to the gendered barriers within professional environments but also to the strategic adaptations women like Sara employ to progress in their careers.

Sara's narrative illustrates the profound effect of previous marriage on her management. Sara shared her feelings of conflict and guilt she navigated as she balanced her professional ambitions with the expectations placed upon her as a wife. She articulates the emotional toll exacted by her ex-partner's perception of her dedication to work, revealing:

"My ex-partner made me feel that my focus was more on my work, and I am an indifferent wife even though he knew that it was important for me, and no matter how hard I work, I'm made to feel as if it's wrong to focus on my work."

The profound guilt Sara experienced, perceived as "negligence" due to her professional commitment, underscores a significant conflict between her dedication to her career and her partner's expectations of her role within the marriage. This tension culminated during an attempt at reconciliation with her ex-husband:

"When my ex-husband tried to reconcile with me, he was asking me to leave my position, saying that it has taken a lot from me, meaning he did not want me to continue with it."

Sara's recounting of her ex-husband's request for her to abandon her management role illustrates the direct clash between her personal and professional life. Despite these marital challenges, Sara's resolution is evident:

"I would not give up my job because someone was not supportive, because if he was supportive and helpful, he would not have asked this of me."

Sara highlights the burden of family responsibilities borne by women, implying that these responsibilities are significant and perhaps uniquely challenging for women.

"It is because of the culture of society in addition to family responsibilities. Women have a family and children, and she needs more support, and not every woman receives the same support."

From the quote above, Sara implies that the culture of the society plays a significant role in shaping women's experiences, particularly in relation to family and possibly career.

Also, Sara shares:

"My family responsibilities affected my ability to reach more senior positions, especially since I became a single mom. This is one of the things that made me stay at a middle level and not go to a more senior level."

This quote from Sara underscores the impact that single parenthood has had on her career decisions, suggesting that her family commitments have taken precedence over professional opportunities.

Sara experienced a dichotomy of support within her family. Her father and brothers offered unwavering encouragement, contrasting sharply with her mother's negative perception of Sara's managerial role. Sara stated:

"My mother would say that the reason for all the problems I'm having is my work and the position I'm holding... My family's reaction upsets me, I wanted everyone to be proud of me."

This disparity in familial support highlights the emotional toll that conflicting family opinions can exert on professional aspirations

At the end of the interview, Sara explicitly states that she has no desire to continue in managerial positions currently. Through her reflections, Sara weaves Maslow's hierarchy of needs into her understanding of management progression, suggesting that her journey towards occupying a senior role is intricately linked with satisfying her essential and psychological needs.

She articulates a profound connection between personal upheavals and her professional trajectory, revealing how her recent separation and the search for a stable foundation have posed substantial obstacles to her self-actualization and the enhancement of her assertiveness as a manager.

"Perhaps my recent separation, or the fact that I haven't yet found stability, has impacted me... It's natural for someone who's been disrupted to experience a setback and struggle to attain self-actualization."

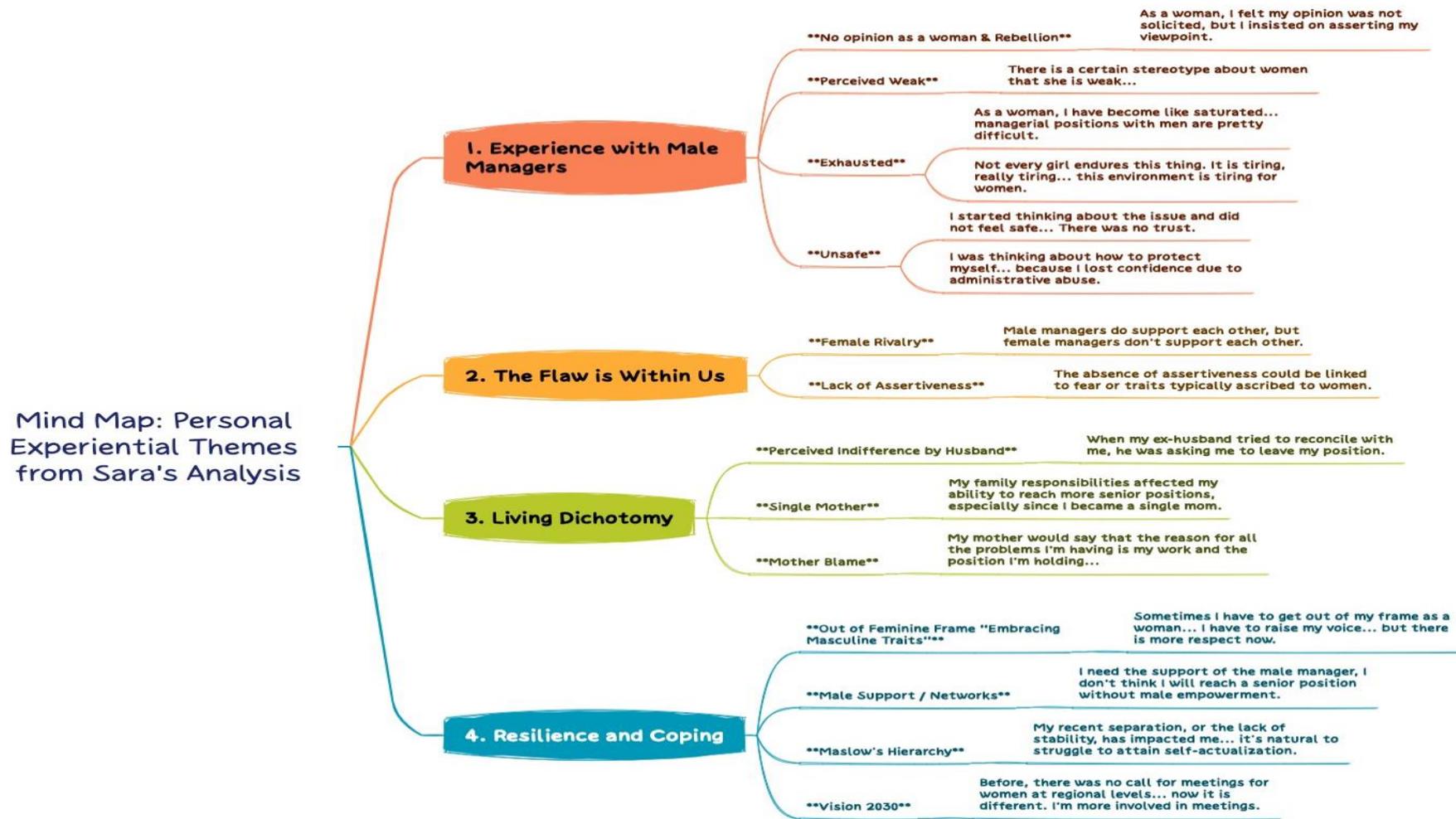


Figure 12: Personal Experiential Themes from Sara's Analysis

7.3.2 Fatima (*Psychological war*)

- **Participant's Profile**

Fatima is in her early thirties and studying for a master's degree in critical care nursing. She is the youngest daughter in her family and grew up in a family where her decisions are valuable and respected, she responded, *"they believe in me and they believe that I will take the right decision, they know this thing and they know my personality"*. Fatima worked in multiple regions such as northern and western regions and has held several official positions in the health care industry. For instance, she was a nursing supervisor for almost six years, and she is now a head nurse. The importance of discussing Fatima's case in this thesis is, as she indicated, that during her tenure as a nursing supervisor *"there was no Saudi female nursing supervisor. I was the first one"*. Thus, the interview was a source of valuable information with regards to women's management in the workplace. This is because Fatima actively expressed her opinions on issues including gender discrimination in the workplace in relation to management and the decision-making process.

- **Interview Pattern**

Fatima appeared very confident and articulate during the interview, and she was only participant agreed to conduct a video interview. However, her linguistic pattern changed significantly to an angry, sarcastic and tense tone once the dialogue deepened. Fatima's non-verbal communication suggested a disillusionment and exasperation in discussing her personal managerial experiences and how male colleagues and managers have treated her. She closed her eyes, avoided eye contact throughout the various discussions, messed up her hair, clapped her hand, and adjusted her glasses when her responses were disapproving of the situation. Fatima's interview lasted ninety-two minutes. Initially, the interview with Fatima seemed to be a form of catharsis for her. This was evident from the beginning of the interview when, after the participant was told that the interview would be informal and that she could comfortably tell stories of her own unique experiences, she responded with *"my heart is full"*. This phrase usually carries negative connotations in Arabic culture, which means *"I have a lot to say"*. At the beginning the second interview, Fatima felt that she achieved her desire from the interview by releasing her negative feelings, she expressed *"I feel that I have spoken out my heart"*. Additionally, the emotional release was clear, particularly given that, after Fatima explained some of her experiences, she apologized and said *"Sorry, I feel that I gave you negative energy in such a bad way"*. The interview with Fatima presented six personal experiential themes which are presented with its quotes in Figure 13.

- **Introduction to Fatima' Experience**

Overall, Fatima's experience with management position seemed negative as she described it as " *the worst experience on earth,*" underscores the depth and intensity of the obstacles she encountered in her career advancement. Her management experience was enriched and unique, marked by her position as the first Saudi female nursing supervisor in Northern Saudi Arabia. Fatima's experiences in two different regions of the country further enriched her narrative, as she noted the huge differences between them.

"For your information, I worked here in the North region and worked in western region as well, and I had almost more than one experience, an experience in hail and another out of it, so I will speak more transparently about this issue."

Fatima's experience as the first Saudi female nursing supervisor at her hospital in Hail City captured the challenges faced by women in managerial roles within conservative societies. Sara reflected that she faced resistance from societal norms and beliefs about female in managerial role as she embarked on her pioneering role. Contrasting her struggles with the more supportive environment in Medina, where female employees reached higher positions due to the encouragement of their direct managers, Sara emphasizes the importance of management support in overcoming gender barriers and promoting gender equality in the workplace.

"I was in an area of Northern, which has a different culture from that of Western Saudi Arabia. At that time, there was no Saudi female nursing supervisor. I was the first one. Ummm, at that time facing our society, which I lived in was never easy. Maybe it was the set of beliefs and thinking that they have about having a female manager over male employee. Some mentalities don't accept that a female can be a manager over them.....I worked in Hajj season and meanwhile, I know some girls in Medina city, who are telling me about such great experiences, females there are reaching higher – fire – higher positions, just because their direct managers are supporting them they don't discriminate between male candidates or female candidates, they even treat them in a good way and support them whenever they need, they think that it's a female and that they should respect their feelings as well."

Her use of 'at that time' indicates a past more fraught with difficulties, a time before the societal changes that have begun to reform the women's situation in Saudi Arabia.

Fatima felt that experiences with male managerial role as like a "psychological war":

" It is a psychological war with male managers, even if it is not a physical war the psychological work is more destructive, these people here are so insensitive, they don't feel about each other, they don't have any feelings for others, even if they do look how they think.."

Her use of the metaphor of a "psychological war " implies that Fatima's experiences have taken a toll on her psychological well-being. Perhaps she felt constantly on edge, and under pressure.

Fatima was expecting full empowerment from her male senior manager when she reached a mid-level position. However, she felt that he had not been there for her, and she expressed her frustration and disappointment in the following quote:

"I even asked him for empowerment and authority...unfortunately I didn't find that, I told myself that this time I will pressurize myself, and would tell him that I'm needing your support, he read the message but did not reply and I didn't see any kind of support from his side."

Fatima articulated a sense of constraint as a manager who, despite her position, was suspended from using her authority. Her narrative reveals her annoyance:

"[she] wasn't comfortable they didn't empower me and didn't allow me to use my authority...there was a significant level of interference in all the decisions I made"

Her statement implies that this interference from the management reflects a lack of trust and respect for her professional judgment, potentially undermining her ability to fulfil her duties effectively as a manager.

Fatima felt that she was not trusted as a manager, and her duties were reduced, particularly in the decision-making process. Fatima expressed that the senior male managers perceived a female manager as:

"Merely a tool in their hands. She is not supposed to make or take any decisions. She should not even express her opinions or views."

Her observation that when a female becomes a manager, she feels they are treated as "merely a tool in their hands" suggests a belief that women in management roles may not be given the respect, autonomy, and authority they deserve. This language implies a perception of women in management roles being manipulated or controlled by others, rather than being granted the autonomy and authority they deserve. She built on this perception as:

"Their idea [reference to male managers] is to appoint a submissive woman who takes orders from them and obeys them. They prefer female managers with weak personalities".

The participants highlight a deliberate pattern of exclusion and unwelcoming behaviours in the workplace.

Fatima assumed that some male manager used religious interpretations to maintain their privileges and reduce women's management representation, despite the historical involvement of women in religious matters.

"one of the things that I can't say that they think about, and they see it from a cultural perspective that a woman cannot lead, despite the fact that aah, too many times, during the days, if you read history – if you read in history you will find that history tells us about the fight, women used to fight next to Prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him]. He did not say that she is a female and should not be in battlefield, but here they take it from the habits and norms perspective and they see it through a religious lens, for example, I've had a problem, and I went to the higher authority, and he was a man manager, but he did not want me to talk to him while we are alone in the room, I don't know what was he thinking about (laughter) I don't know what was the idea, but he refused to meet me even, he brought another one (laughter) and I talked and discussed the matter with him."

Fatima's excerpt suggested a critique of the prevailing cultural perspective that women cannot lead, citing historical examples of women fighting alongside Prophet Muhammad upon him as evidence to the contrary. However, she encountered a personal experience with a male manager who refused to meet with her alone due to her gender, citing religious prohibitions against men and women being alone in a closed room.

From the above excerpt, Fatima shared her thoughts against the cultural belief that women are not fit for management, mentioning that women have held significant roles, fighting alongside Prophet Muhammad upon him. Yet, she faced a direct challenge in her own career when her male manager wouldn't meet with her privately, using religious reasons to justify the avoidance.

At the same time, Fatima added that she was surprised by the assumptions held by her male managers regarding her questioning her communication abilities:

"he [male manager] put all the blame on me that I lack communicating skills and that I can't communicate properly! Not true! my communication skills are good; this is an excuse for other underlying reason."

Fatima stated that the judgment of her lack of communication skills by her male manager is identified as a façade for other underlying reasons. Fatima's words suggested that the reluctance of

her male manager to engage in direct communication with female managers is rooted in deeper societal fears from social criticism and pressures. These pressures are historically and culturally conditioned by interpretations of Islam, which have significantly influenced the status of women in Saudi Arabia in the past.

Nevertheless, on a deeper level, Fatima reflected how societal expectations differ for males and females yet lead to a shared struggle:

"As for my experience, it was not easy from either the male or the female side when I was my direct manager's supervisor (the Nursing Director). He was supportive at first, but after a while people started talking to him asking how he let women hold management positions, and how he let them come to evening shifts. I think that's why they appoint male managers"

Her account reflected that Saudi male senior managers might be pressured to conform to certain stigma by employing other male managers to avoid direct communication with Saudi female managers as it is not expected in some conservative families, females may face different pressures being Endure pressures from men resulting from societal pressures that resulting in deprived of their career advancement. Fatima's personal experiences, particularly her transition from receiving initial support to facing societal pressure when her male manager is criticized for allowing women to hold management positions and work evening shifts.

Fatima revealed a perceived consensus within her professional environment that women are not suitable for management roles. This perception is entrenched in the stereotype that women are inherently weaker and driven by emotion, which makes them unfit for management:

"They still see women as ineligible of holding leading positions, and as weak and never strong. They have this thought that woman is driven by her feelings and emotions for which she should not be in leading positions."

Fatima revealed a punitive approach towards women in management roles, describing ongoing troubles aimed at making her despise her position as a form of "taming":

"I told you I am still under the punishment of accepting the position, I mean they're still making trouble for me, they still doing things till today... The purpose was to make me hate the position and refuse to hold any position in future since I am nearly graduating with master's degree, so it's a kind of taming me (sarcastic laughter) ... it is a punishment so next time I would not accept any position, and the other thing is that they want me to transfer to another place because...."

Also, she notes:

"Authority is used in a way that discourages aspirations to management due to the potential negative impact from higher-ups," leading to a profound aversion to her role and the professional field itself."

Fatima shares her experience of women in management overall as difficult, she stated:

"... But there are still obstacles for women. When we see the experience of men and women, we come to know that the experience of women is very difficult."

And

".... it was not easy; it was difficult. It would have been easy if there was a better environment, easy if it was in major cities. It was difficult because their thinking is still that the community's habits and norms come first."

Fatima, on the other hand, expresses a resolution to protect herself from the harm that could arise from the challenges she faces. She imagines a world where women have special protections against unjust removal from their positions. She envisions an authority dedicated to defending women's rights in the workplace, suggesting that such a body would create a deterrent against discriminatory practices.

"I wish that there is an authority that protects women whenever she is harmed psychologically or any manager harms her or any kind of oppression that she faces, a proper authority that supports you no matter if you are a Health sector employee or an employee anywhere, an Authority that supports woman."

Fatima highlights internalized sexism's role in limiting women's management roles, explaining,

"There were women who stood against other women, out of envy maybe...Some women do not accept, and cannot digest, the success of another woman while they accept the successes of a man."

Her experiences underline the challenges posed by women working against one another, fuelled by envy or misunderstanding, which obstructs women's path to management.

Fatima identifies fear as a key factor hindering women from speaking up:

"Women don't speak up because they are afraid to lose their position."

Fatima's perspective emphasizes the potential risks involved in being assertive, particularly the fear of job loss, which can be a powerful motivator for maintaining the status quo.

Fatima envisions a future where women are not only encouraged to pursue management positions but are also prioritized over men in certain contexts. She asserts:

"women will get the priority over the male and if there is a competition woman is prioritized over males."

Fatima's goal is to dismantle the notion that women are less capable and to create a system that values and supports their contributions. By prioritizing females over males and advocating for a more balanced and inclusive workforce, Fatima aims to break down gender barriers and create a more equal and supportive professional environment. She believes that through intentional efforts to challenge gender stereotypes and biases, women can be empowered to reach their full potential. Fatima's perspective reflects a commitment to empowering women, eliminating discrimination, and fostering an environment where everyone can thrive based on their skills and abilities, regardless of their gender.

Fatima's aspirations and motivations for holding a high position of management. She expresses a deep desire nurturing women in any position, acknowledging the oppression and underestimation they face in society. Fatima states:

"I aspire to empower and support every woman/every woman in any/in any position no matter what position she has because here Woman is oppressed... she is more powerful than the man."

Her goal is to create a society where women are not afraid and are prioritized over men, even in positions of competition.

She shares her personal drive and reasons for aspiring to a management position. She highlights specific experiences and observations that fuelled her determination to make a positive impact on the workplace. Her motivation also stems from her desire to improve the working conditions for the staff. She witnessed instances where the staff was neglected and had to work without proper discussion. Fatima states:

"I wanted to make things easy for the staff, I wanted to create a good relation and cooperation between the head and the staff."

Her goal was to establish a healthy and collaborative environment where employees feel valued and supported. Her drive for management goes beyond personal reasons. Fatima emphasizes that holding a position was not merely an aim for personal gain, but rather a means to alleviate workplace stress and create a positive atmosphere. She states:

"I wanted to create a healthy environment and encourage the staff and make them work not as if they are forced to! I wanted to eliminate this toxic work environment and reduce problems and disputes among employees and make them cooperative with each other."

Her motivation to management reflects her deep commitment to improving the workplace and fostering a harmonious work environment. She aims to eliminate toxic dynamics and replace them with a cooperative and supportive atmosphere. Her personal experiences and observations of the staff's challenges fuel her determination to create positive change as a manager.

During the interview, Fatima actively advocates for women's rights and gender equality. She expresses her desire to bring about change and establish specific rules that address the treatment of women differently from men. Fatima believes that women should be treated better than men in certain situations, aiming to address the unique challenges and needs faced by women. Her advocacy includes advocating for policies that consider the psychological effects on women and protect them from unfair removal. Through her advocacy efforts, Fatima demonstrates her commitment to empowering women and creating a more inclusive and supportive society.

"I will make a change, there will be some rules that concern women, how women should be treated in a way which will be completely different from men, not equally, although I am with equality, but a woman should be treated better than men ... for example if you want to remove a female from a certain position you have to consider the psychological effects and before terminating her, you appoint her to any other position and then tell her about that, a rule that would say it is strictly prohibited to remove her from any position until there is an official notice, or anything – Anything – a real thing then this is logical"

Fatima's perspective is driven by her belief in feminism and her desire to promote gender equality. She acknowledges that her thinking may be considered feminist, but she embraces it wholeheartedly, stating:

"It might be a feministic thinking but (a joyful laughter) no problem this is my plan, I want to support women woman and woman because woman is the other half of society."

She envisions a future where her daughters do not have to face the challenges and inequalities she has encountered.

Also, she expresses a sense of necessity to adopt certain behaviours characteristic of male managers:

"I have to behave like them [male managers] ...sometimes I need to be harsh as them "

Fatima's statement highlights the existence of gendered expectations in management roles, wherein certain behaviours are associated more closely with masculinity. This suggests adaptation or assimilation to conform to prevailing management norms or expectations, which may be perceived as predominantly masculine. The use of the word "have to" implies a perceived obligation or pressure to conform and to be taken seriously, rather than a voluntary choice.

Fatima articulates her deep appreciation for women's presence in management positions and their significant contributions, emphasizing the value they add to the professional environment.

"I really love to deal with a woman. Woman understands me better and it is easy to deal with them"

She reflected the importance of shared experiences, particularly when dealing with sensitive personal matters such as health-related issues.

"In fact, if my manager is a female, I believe she will accept me and understand me more than men. I do not have a problem that men and women are in management position, but for example, during the menstrual cycle, as a female, I face difficulty in telling a male supervisor that I need to see the doctor because according to the system if you want to see the doctor you are supposed to write the reason for that. I find it easy telling a woman and sharing such feminine stuffs with her."

Her comfort in discussing 'feminine stuff' like the menstrual cycle with female supervisors underscores the need for empathetic management that acknowledges and accommodates gender-specific needs. Fatima's preference for female interaction in the workplace is rooted in her belief that women understand each other better, which facilitates smoother communication and cooperation.

Furthermore, the participant a personal testament to the power of female understanding in managerial roles. Upon discovering that the manager handling her case was a woman, she

experienced an overwhelming sense of relief and ease, contrasting sharply with her past apprehensions with male investigators.

"I felt so comfortable that the one who was investigating was a female, I was so comfortable I can't tell you how much, when she was talking to me, I was comfortable too – too comfortable, previously are used to go to a male.... Today when I went and she was a female she was to understand, that is why I am saying a female will understand a female, she was to understand and girls are always understanding, I explained everything comfortably and they supported me and then when I get back from there, I was so comfortable while previously I used to get out having too many bad feelings."

Fatima's repeated use of the word "comfortable" and phrases like "girls are always understanding" highlight a profound level of trust and ease when dealing with female management. This experience not only provided her with emotional support but also reinforced her belief in the importance of women in senior management roles to create a more inclusive and empathetic work environment.

At the end of the interview, she touches on the empowerment and challenges within her role. She acknowledges the progress towards empowerment and management opportunities for women, aligning with the goals of the 2030 vision. This indicates a recognition of initiatives aimed at gender equality and women's empowerment within her context. Despite advancements, Fatima notes the enduring presence of traditional gender narratives or stereotypes. This suggests that while progress has been made, societal attitudes and perceptions regarding women's roles may still be behind institutional changes.

"...we are living the 2030 vision and empowering women and giving them management is in all its aspects. But the idea of women is still there"

Her words reflect the dual reality of advancing management opportunities and the persistence of traditional gender narratives.

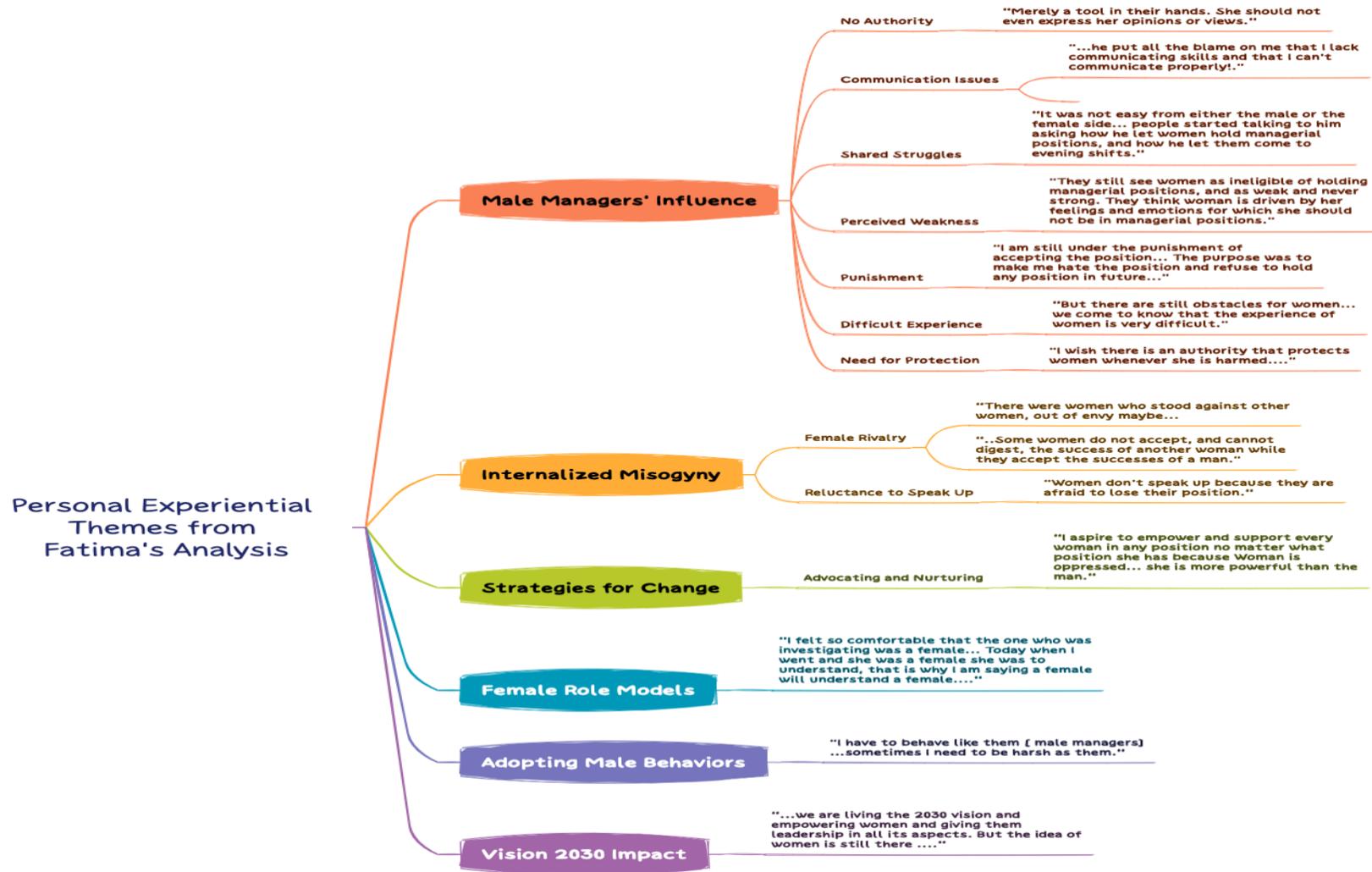


Figure 13: Personal Experiential Themes from Fatima's Analysis.

7.3.3 Noura (*I am an intruder*)

- **Participants Profile**

Noura was aged thirty-one and was born and raised in the west of Saudi Arabia. Noura's family moved to the northern region, which made her experience a myriad of challenges in managerial roles. Noura was recruited via snowballing technique and had worked for four years as a clinical midwife followed by another four years as a head nurse. Her transition into managerial roles, however, was marred by a series of frustrations and disappointments. Noura was eager to share her views in my research because she wanted to understand why she "*faced great hostility from people in the workplace*". Her explained how race impacted her career progression and how she felt unempowered in her management experiences because of racism. She hoped that the interview would enable her to reflect on her experience as a Saudi women manager working in another region and from different tribe. The interview with Noura was the longest, lasting 126 minutes, which included pauses and breaks.

- **Interview Pattern**

It was apparent that Noura was experiencing a mix of emotions; she appeared upset, afraid, and nervous. Despite these feelings, the interview proceeded smoothly, with Noura showing a strong willingness to share her story, and I felt able to probe. Her experience in a mid-level position was described as "*tragic*" and "*too stressful*". Linguistically, she frequently used words associated with fear, indicating a significant level of apprehension in her experiences, Noura used peaceful language in her dialogue; she often used words like "*putting out the fire*" and "*I don't like to provoke her anger*". The experiential themes and subthemes that emerged from Noura's interview are presented with its quotes in Figure 14.

- **Introduction to Noura Experience**

Noura perceived her experience as an outsider during her management journey with a keen sense of self-loneliness. A person who comes from a different region and tribe often perceives herself as an "*intruder*" in a traditional community. What makes Noura's experience in management unique from other participants, is that she illustrated the intersectionality of sexism and racism.

Noura always knew she was meant for more than just being a regular nurse. She says,
"I don't feel... I mean, frankly, I said I wasn't seeing myself as ordinary staff."

This suggested that she always believed she could do more and aimed to be a manager.

Also, Noura felt that the position increases her feelings of confidence she stated:

"I mean, apart from fear, I felt that I have my place as soon as I accepted the position, it is nice to have people call you the 'head', 'where is the head of the department', these words felt so nice, and asking who is controlling the department is very nice. It is a nice feeling, honestly until now- it is a very nice feeling when all decisions come from me (pause)."

Noura felt alone because she was different from the others at her workplace. She was brown, but that wasn't a problem; people treated her well and never made fun of her colour. The real problem was that she came from a different tribe and place. Some people couldn't understand how she got a high job without being from the Hail region. What bothered her was the treatment she received from her tribe.

"I am brown, not white... but it's something normal, I didn't feel that it was...In terms of colour um, no I didn't suffer from the colour, but I suffered from racism because of the tribe. In terms of colour, no, I have never faced racism rather they were respectful, and the managers didn't say anything and no one has teased me because of my colour. The only thing I suffer from is tribal prejudice and racism, how did you come and how did a person who is not from the Hail region be appointed in such a high position? I still ask this question until today."

The fact that Noura came from another region made her feel like an intruder. In her opinion, women managers from the same region and tribe were accorded a level of respect and acceptance not shared by her as she is from a different region. she affirmed:

"I swear by God, women from the same region and tribe receive better treatment than those not from here."

*"I held a position for six months, which was quite long since I was not from the north. My family name ends with ** which clearly indicates that I'm not from this region for which I received criticism, that a girl not from the north can hold a position... [hitting something with her hand]."*

The attitude, as Noura observed, was that only Hail residents were deemed fit for management and managerial roles within the hospital. She explained:

"They believe that only those from Hail should hold positions; if you're not from here, you're not seen as deserving of such responsibilities."

Noura felt this regional and racial preference played a role in her professional side-line. In addition, she expressed a sense of restriction and non-belonging to any management position as she articulated.

When asked if she wanted to attain a senior position, Noura appeared very cautious and frightened to experience more:

"I feared to experience what I have experienced in the past. I was suffering from racism." He wanted all the administration staff to be of his same tribe. You understand me, how!"

The level of racism she experienced in her first mid-level managerial position was described as "the highest level", "too high" and "unimaginable". According to her, discrimination was the most pressing problem she faced during her management journey. Due to "racism" from the top management, she resigned. She explained that she had experienced "bad feelings" in her previous position because she did not receive sufficient support. Her resignation expressed an awareness of shifting emotions toward her previous department. "I loved it", she said, and after her resignation, she expressed that "I stayed there for perhaps eight months before I hated the department".

Noura's lived experience within her professional career is overshadowed by the weight of external perceptions. Her recounting of the words, "How come that she is from out of Hail," articulates a sense of otherness that is imposed upon her. This phrase, overheard and internalized, resonates with the questioning of her legitimacy based solely on her geographic origin. This questioning — "How come" — implies a degree of incredulity from others. For Noura, this is an articulation of her struggle against the external perceptions that fail to see beyond her regional identity. It is a poignant reflection of her confrontation with a barrier that stands apart from her professional abilities or her personal aspirations.

Her narrative captures a hidden challenge, that defines her as an 'outsider.' The external perceptions she faces are not passively observed; they are felt experiences that impact her perception of self within the professional community. She is hearing these words; and she is living the reality they impose, one where her origins and tribe become a focal point of her identity, overshadowing her contributions and achievements.

Noura felt isolated and alone while working in this position. In her words, "There was no help, no one helped me," a reflection of her solitary experience within the organization. Her absence of guidance and validation was more pervasive than merely the absence of physical assistance. Her experience was exacerbated by the feelings of upheaval in her department, likened to the disarray of an "auction." This metaphor illuminated her struggle for stability and control in an environment where she felt unprepared and unsupported.

Furthermore, Noura expressed a sense of loneliness, capturing her experience with the emotional phrase:

"There was nothing as if you were working with yourself. explicitly entered by pressing myself mo my body means my body is normal you either fix everything or not. I went through. You can't imagine how I went on a stress rather than a physical one, and if it is a physical one it can be released after taking rest but it was a mental one, too – too – too much stress that you won't imagine"

The repeated sentiment that she received no assistance underscores the emotional and professional challenges she faced, emphasizing her isolated journey.

Noura began her account by detailing the intense hostility she encountered at the hospital, emphasizing the role of the CEO:

*"I faced great hostility from people – too much, you won't imagine how much"
"If we put a bottle of water on a table, he would say why did you put it there and – why and would say you don't deserve to be department heads, and you don't know how to become department heads."*

She further illustrated the nature of this hostility through specific interactions with her manager. The anecdote about the bottle of water serves as a microcosm of the larger issue: her manager's criticism over such trivial matters. The rhetorical questioning, *"Why did you put it there?"* is not an inquiry seeking an answer but a form of indirect criticism that undermines Noura's competence and decision-making. This repeated scrutiny, encapsulated in the word "why," resonates as a persistent interrogation, contributing to an oppressive environment.

The definitive statement from her manager, *"You don't deserve to be department heads,"* explicitly challenges her professional legitimacy and authority. Such language suggests actively working to strip her of her professional identity and self-belief.

She suggested that the manager's purpose behind his behaviour is to make them hate the workplace. She suggests,

"He wants us to hate the place, he was there to make us hate the place."

"He made her hate the place and when she left, he tried the same with me several times, but he couldn't, rather whenever he gave me a notice or a comment it made me stronger not weak, but he could do that with my friend."

Although she discussed previously only being discriminated against because she is not from the same region or tribe, she later emphasizes gender as a major issue in Hail, contrasting it with more progressive attitudes in Riyadh and the Western Region.

"They believe men are more eligible and deserving not women, and we have this mentality here in Hail- sorry to say-, but it is not really the same if you go to the western region or to Riyadh city, where there are women who are hospital managers there, but here it is not possible as they think how a women can be the manager and under her men are working? How a woman is supposed to direct men"

In the other hand, Noura's reflections suggested a belief that the lack of solidarity among women in her workplace contributes to their underrepresentation in senior positions.

"... women discourage each other..."

Noura experienced unexpected hostility from her head nurse [a woman] during her management journey. She received various indirect passive aggressive strategies in the form of refused annual leave and increased workload. she interpreted the reason behind her behaviour was competition so: *"Because they wanted to give me the other department's head position, I was a bachelor's degree holder while she was a diploma holder"*.

Despite all these challenges, Noura hasn't given up. She's determined to reach higher positions and prove herself. she says, showing her determination to succeed.

"I challenge myself and I challenge the people around me"

Noura's story is about not giving up, even when things get tough. She shows us the importance of believing in ourselves, fighting for our dreams, and the need for support along the way.

"Basically, I challenge myself and I challenge the people around me and I pray that I reach their [senior] position someday and achieve what I want. If God wills, If the Almighty wills"

Her determination to *"reach higher positions and prove myself"* suggests the importance of self-belief and perseverance in the face of adversity. Despite challenges, Noura remains steadfast, driven by the hope that *"If God wills, If the Almighty wills,"* she will achieve her goals. Her journey underscores the power of staying strong, challenging oneself and others, and the significant role of faith and support in overcoming obstacles and reaching success.

When she was asked if she had applied to a senior position before and she responded:

"If I apply now, they will not accept me mainly because my degree is not a higher degree like theirs, I will be rejected- rejected immediately"

Noura believed the qualification is the only obstacle she faced right now to reach senior roles and she is applying to study a master's degree next year.

"..I'm trying hopefully to complete my master's degree. I want to change my position. I want to leave the hospital. I mean, I want to be a manager outside the hospital, a manager who's bigger than the head of the department. I want to hold a position that is higher, I want to develop myself. I mean, I don't feel like I don't want the same place all along. I mean, for three or four-five years, I don't want to stay as a head of the department- a head, a head, no, I want to develop, go farther, I mean, I'm looking at this hopefully, God, and make it possible for me to leave this place and hold the highest position."

However, that she wants the degree to balance all type of discrimination such as sexism and racism to reach a senior level when she stated:

"I can confront them and sue them to the court that how a person is having a less degree than mine and still holds a higher position, they can't say anything then and nothing can defend that neither a colour or a tribe. It is true I have a degree that is higher than the degree he has and I'm more qualified than you and more deserving of the position you are holding apart from being racist. But now I can't do that since I have a lower degree than them so I can't say anything..."

Noura found herself tolerating or enduring whatever mistreatment although she was emotionally impacted. She has chosen ignorance as a response to any mistreatment from her female manager:

"I did ignore her, and I would work and do my tasks normally and leave the hospital"

Noura justified that she has been challenged with maintaining a sense of professionalism while keeping her emotions intact about what's happening to her. In the beginning, it was unclear why she uses silence as a response.

After a deep prompt, she justified that she was trying to manage her emotions from provoking her direct female manager to perpetrate more mistreatment

"I don't want them to be more hostile towards me, so I'm putting out fires."

The use of metaphors such as "*putting out fires*" transforms the abstract concept of conflict management. This reflects Noura's efforts to maintain peace and avoid exacerbating conflict in a more impactful and accessible way.

The mother of Noura felt concerned about her daughter's aspirations to pursue further education abroad. In attempting to alleviate these concerns, Noura articulated the significance of her goals:

"I expressed to my mother my desire to advance in my academic pursuits."

Noura found herself at a crossroads when she had to choose between following her professional desires or her mother's desire.

According to Noura, the consequences of her mother's disapproval on her studying abroad significantly diminished her chances of attaining senior positions promptly:

"I encountered formidable opposition from my mother regarding the completion of my studies, as I aspired to enhance my qualifications and ascend to a more senior role. Each time I broached the subject, her response was consistent: 'My daughter, you are gainfully employed and earning a salary; why pursue further education?'"

Noura surmised that her mother's protective instincts were at the forefront of her intervention. Despite her recognition of the deep-rooted concern, it was evident that this maternal protection manifested itself as a barrier to her ambitions:

"Her overprotection was evident; she expressed a deep fear that I would venture overseas for my studies, [sighed]".

Despite understanding her mother's perspective, the underlying sentiment expressed was unsupportive.

Noura expressed her concerns about the potential challenges she might face if she will attain a senior position, especially regarding the acceptance of her fiancé and society. She acknowledged that while her fiancé currently supports her ambitions, she can't predict whether he will continue to feel the same once she achieves higher status and her social circles expand. This uncertainty seems to stem from a deeper awareness of societal norms and expectations, especially concerning gender roles and professional success. Her statement:

"Not that much, he might not accept the idea of me being better than him and he doesn't like that...I mean, it is an instinct in humans."

This quote suggests that Noura believed there is an inherent competitive nature in people that could cause her fiancé discomfort if she surpasses him professionally.

She further concerned about societal pressures:

"Maybe the society around me won't accept that a female is the boss and is controlling men, women, and companies and everything."

This reflects her understanding of the potential resistance she might encounter from a society that may not be fully comfortable with women in managerial roles.

Noura appeared to be preparing herself for the obstacles ahead, acknowledging that her journey will not be without its detractors:

"Nothing is easy at its beginning; there must be some hurdles and obstacles, there must be people who object and others who pull your leg and try to destroy what you built."

Her final thoughts, *"We live in a society that never says yes easily,"* captured the notion that societal change, especially regarding gender roles and expectations, is often slow and met with resistance. Despite these anticipated challenges, Noura's determination to advance her career and her expectations of her fiancé's support indicated her hope for a more accepting future.

Personal Experiential Themes from Noura's Analysis

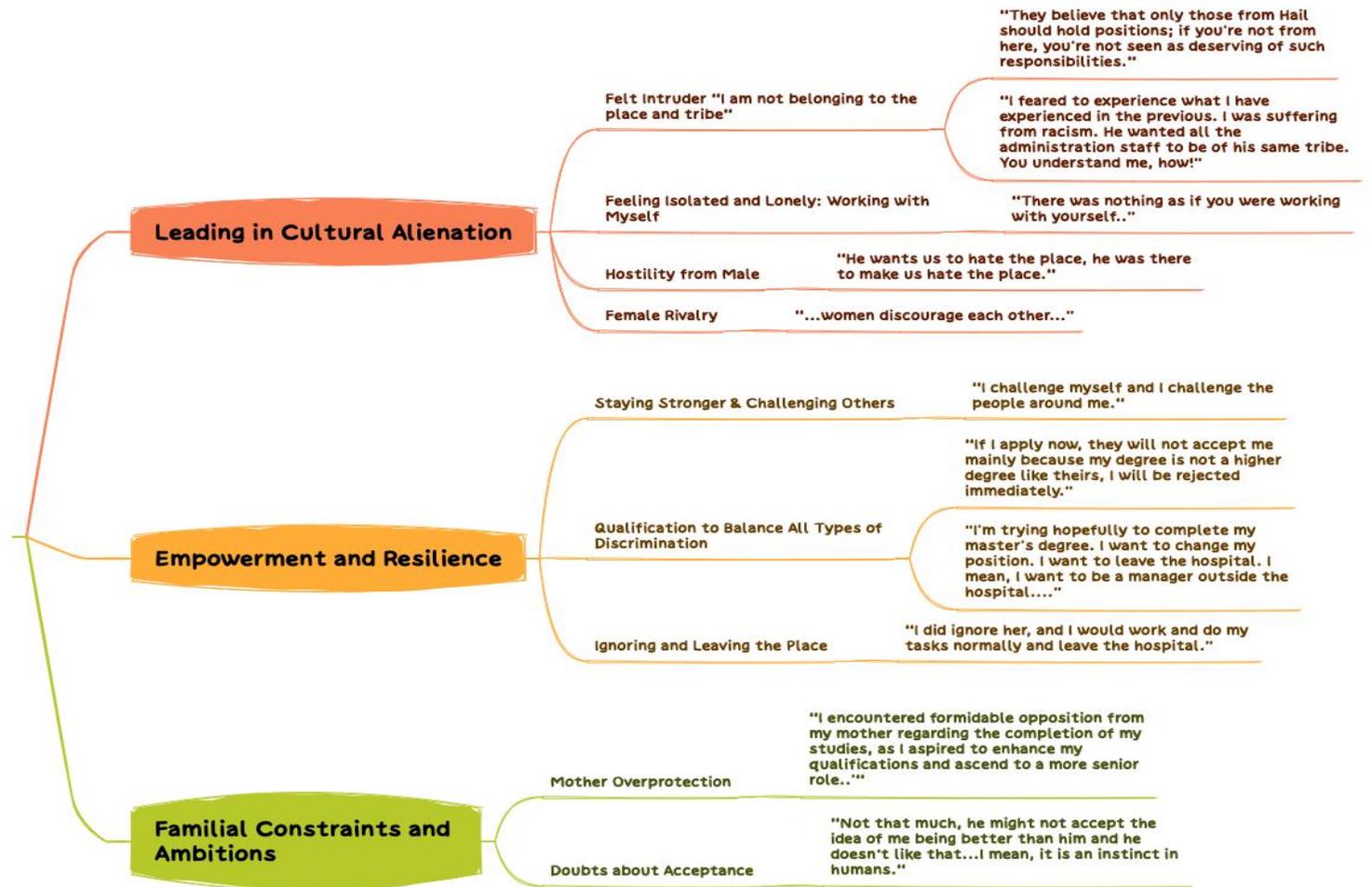


Figure 14: Personal Experiential Themes from Noura's Analysis

7.3.4 Malak (Headache)

- **Participant Profile**

I recruited Malak using snowballing techniques. She was twenty-eight and had been a nurse manager for four years, previously working as a head nurse and supervisor in two main hospitals in the north of Saudi Arabia. Her total experience in mid-level management is eight years. Malak is a single mother of three children. Unlike the other participants, Malak implied that she never experienced 'sexism' during her management journey due to her limited contact with male managers at the senior level, based on her request. She felt supported by her male colleagues.

- **Interview Pattern**

During the interview, Malak was a quiet yet assertive and articulate individual. She was open and eager to allow me to probe and explore her experiences, beliefs, and attitudes. However, at the beginning of the interview, it took a lot of effort to extract specific details about her experiences with male managers, as she had limited stories to share. Malak often veered off-topic and spoke more about her management achievements to showcase her capabilities and skills as an effective leader. However, she quickly returned to the main discussion. Most of her responses were prefaced with phrases like 'faultless,' 'to be a role model,' 'perfect,' 'to shine my name,' and 'aware of everything' because she was keen on embodying the perfect leader in her eyes. Malak seems to attempt for perfection and aims to be a good example, inspiring others with her responses: "*You should work efficiently and be a role model for the staff you work with; that was my concern.*" Malak's interview lasted for 90 minutes. A summary of the experiential themes that emerged from her interview is detailed in (figure 15).

- **Introduction to Malak's Experience**

Malak perceived the management path as "*great pressure, big responsibility, and headache,*" as she stated, "*even when I go home, the responsibility goes with me*". She thinks this feeling is a major impediment to remaining in managerial positions.

Malak felt frustration with the expectation to vocally promote her accomplishments, firmly believing that her efforts should speak for themselves. She adamantly stated, "*I do not talk; I do work,*" emphasizing her dedication to her tasks without seeking recognition through words. Instead, she invited others to witness the tangible evidence of her contributions by examining her files, daily activities, lectures, and reports.

"I'm among those people who would do things and kept on telling people that I did this and that, but there are some who would do a trivial thing and would tell everyone about it [laughter], everyone knows about it."

And

"I do not speak; I'm not skipping any work. Why don't you come and see the files I have? Look at the activities I do every day, the lectures I'm giving, and those who attend them. Look at the reports sent to health affairs. This is what bothers me. Why don't I post or publish my work? Why are you guys talking? Just come and see for yourself."

Her words capture a contrast between her personal values and the prevailing expectations of her environment regarding self-promotion.

As Malak observed individuals receiving praise for incomplete work, while silently working without recognition, she grew increasingly perplexed. Unlike others, she preferred to let her actions speak for themselves, rather than merely talk about their achievements.

"I'm among those people who do things without telling people that I did this and that. Yet, there are some who do something minor and ensure everyone knows about it [laughter]; everyone knows about it,... I do not talk; I do work, and I'm not skipping any work. Why don't you come and see the files I have?"

According to Malak, strategic flattery is crucial for attaining recognition in a profession that often does not value women's contribution. Despite her preference for actions over words, she acknowledged the need to actively showcase her accomplishments in settings that habitually overlooked them. Her frustration stemmed from the disproportionate acknowledgement she received, which she attributed to her reluctance to promote herself. She felt the need to flatter senior managers in order to gain recognition.

In order to receive acknowledgement, Malak felt compelled to exceed normal performance standards. She expressed:

"I felt that along my journey, I was required to perform at higher levels than men and female to be taken seriously for candidacy for higher positions."

On the other hand, Malak reflected on how *Wasta* was prevalent in the past, significantly impacting her career progression before the implementation of Vision 2030. She observed individuals holding positions despite lacking the qualifications and abilities required for those roles.

"..in the past, I saw people holding positions, and they are frankly not deserving since they have too many objections on them (laugh). They hold positions, I don't know I mean I think through Wasta (Vitamin W) or something like that, because if you take it on the bases of abilities, there are more deserving people, and they do not hold positions (pause)."

During the interview, Malak humorously referred to the practice of nepotism as "*vitamin W*," playfully highlighting its widespread use as a means to secure senior positions. This term effectively conveys her dissatisfaction with the prevalent use of nepotism and its negative impact on fair career progression. She stated that *Wasta* was prevalent in Saudi Arabian society, particularly in the northern region in the past, noting that it was deeply ingrained in the social fabric and intertwined with tribal racism. She mentioned that individuals from the same family or relatives were often prioritized for promotions. She stated:

"They are all from the same family, which means we in the north still have favouritism."

When asked if the same favouritism occurs when the manager's relative is a female, Malak confirmed, '*yes, even with the girls; he does the same.*' She discussed how nepotism worked to diminish women's authority, despite government support for gender equality. Also, she thinks that in somehow

".. nepotism can circumvent legal regulations... Certain individuals were able to bypass these conditions, while others could not."

Although Malak opposed nepotism, she believed that building connections and networks could increase the number of female nurses in senior management positions. In addition, she expressed her desire to earn a master's degree to improve her qualifications and reach senior level by her efforts.

"Nowadays, nepotism has shrunk, and if it exists, it is likely to be conducted under the table. If the anti-corruption authority knows about it, they will take legal action. Currently, I have applied for a master's degree and plan to build connections and networks with male and female leaders. I believe they will recognize me and nominate me based on my qualifications, inshallah."

Malak emphasized the significance of adequate preparation and support for individuals assuming new management roles. She shared her experience with being suddenly thrown into leadership role for which she felt ill-prepared. She acknowledged that lack of preparation the manager random choices was a reason to fail the first position after a short period of time although she has a strong desire to be in a managerial position, stating:

"They held me in front of the cannon, and I was the deputy, so I had to hold the position, but it lasted for nearly three months and then I moved. I did not want, but I wanted to try to be honest, and everyone refused it"

This statement captures her predicament, using the metaphor of being 'held in front of cannon' to articulate the intense pressure and lack of volition she felt in her first significant management challenge. This suggests her feelings of vulnerability and compulsion.

In addition, Malak admitted that her hatred for men in the past was a significant barrier to her management development. Malak chose to lead a pure women's department to avoid any communication with men. Indeed, this has minimized her chance to reach the senior level for a while. Malak expressed her negative feeling toward all men by saying:

"My experience [her marriage experience] was quite a bit, not a good one, a separation experience, and there were problems like this. It was my job at the time, and I hated men [laughter]; I didn't want any contact with males, but after things calmed down and things became fine, on the contrary, praise be to God, things got normal. I give them lectures and go with them to train them. And by God, there is no obstacle. I do not feel that an obstacle is the most important - the most important thing is competency."

Malak discussed gender stereotypes and the perception of inadequacy associated with women in senior positions. She draws attention to the impact of these stereotypes on women's self-perception and their opportunities for advancement in senior roles. She expresses her observations and beliefs:

"Frankly speaking, I have seen women becoming directors of the hospital and such, but I think there is always a perception that women are unable to fulfil those positions. I feel that they see women as incapable of being like men. Women often feel hesitant about things unlike men."

This quote suggests the prevailing belief that women are incapable of fulfilling high-level positions. Despite witnessing women in director roles, Malak believes there is a pervasive perception that women cannot meet the same standards as men. The statement, "they see women as incapable of being like men," reflects a gender stereotype implying that women are hesitant and lack the qualities traditionally associated with effective management.

Additionally, Malak suggests that women may internalize these stereotypes and feel inadequate when considering positions of high responsibility. She explains:

“Sometimes, it comes from a woman herself. She might refuse high positions like hospital manager because she feels a tremendous responsibility she cannot handle like a man. Men never seem to be afraid of holding significant responsibilities, perhaps due to their personality traits of being less hesitant and afraid, especially in positions that require strictness and firmness.”

These quotes highlight the notion that women may perceive themselves as lacking the necessary qualities for managerial roles, particularly those that demand strictness and firmness. It reinforces the belief that men are naturally better equipped to handle significant responsibilities without fear or hesitation.

Although Malak, as a woman, seeks to reach a senior role, she still believes that men are stronger than women therefore they are better and stronger managers:

“Because I do not know, may be the nature of men is like this. I feel that their personalities are stronger. They don’t fear like women – women hesitate, they think about things, they think about the consequences, and they think about the details as well. This is a part of the formation of every female, they think about details.”

“Because woman is precise once and too precise sometimes. A woman cannot do anything before thinking about it for 1000 times and is too precise at work, unlike men.”

Malak's beliefs and perceptions regarding management reflect signs of internalized sexism. She adheres to traditional gender stereotypes by associating assertiveness and dominance with masculinity, viewing these traits as necessary for effective leadership. Moreover, she holds biases against women managers, perceiving them as hesitant, cautious, weak, and more emotionally driven in their decision-making processes. Her statement: *“For men everything is too easy, and anyone can do anything, but a woman would do all the work herself and is more responsible, women don't delegate work like men,”* reveals her internalized acceptance of societal gender norms and the devaluation of women's capabilities in managerial roles.

Malak described her experiences with female colleagues in the mid-level position as *'tiring'*. She strongly felt that the lack of support and encouragement from her female co-workers was a major challenge she faced throughout her leadership journey. She expressed her belief that her female colleagues *'did not help [her] in that position'*, and their negative comments were *'discouraging'* and created a *'negative atmosphere'*, which caused her to doubt herself.

In her own words, Malak explained how her female colleague criticized her for simply doing her duties, stating,

"I used to tell them that I am not doing a super thing, I am just doing my job, and I do not, but you guys are not doing the documentation because we have more than one form. This is what I meant when I said a negative atmosphere; I wanted to improve myself."

She also described feeling like an *"due to the way her female colleagues perceived her as different, which she found 'weird'.* Malak felt estranged from her peers, and her perception of their view of her as *'different'* or *'weird'* could potentially be a source of concern that such sentiments might impede her professional aspirations.

Malak acknowledged that her initial management experience was *'not a good one'* and she did not enjoy it. As a result, she made the decision to leave the position and transfer to another hospital. She explained her reason for applying for the transfer, stating:

"I couldn't – I could not develop myself; I could not improve the efficiency of people I have under me, every time I see them."

Malak provided a portrayal of the obstacles she encountered from her ex-partner as she advanced in her professional life. Her experience is emblematic of the external personal challenges that can impinge upon a woman's professional world.

"In terms of my ex-partner, no-no-no, I mean, I separated from him before the job. ... I suffered with him for a while to get things well, but you know these kinds of people, they are hard to deal with. So, I got separated. I mean, on the contrary, he was not supportive, when I got the job the first one who tried creating hurdles was him.....The first person who fought me and tried to stop my livelihood. He tried to cut off my job."

Malak's narrative begins with the end of her marriage, which preceded her new job. She acknowledges the difficulties in dealing with her ex-partner and the lack of support, which did not end with their separation but continued into her professional life. Her ex-partner's attempts to hinder her career represent a profound personal challenge and indicate a broader issue of unsupportive environments that some women may face as they climb the professional ladder.

"He spoke to people and asked them to cut off my job but thank God. I mean, God's will is above anyone's will.... Tried by making it slow – slowing down the procedures of the job. He said that my degree is fake, like this. I don't know what he provided as evidence but thank God."

Malak recounts the active measures taken by her ex-partner to sabotage her professional standing, including falsely alleging that her degree was counterfeit. This level of antagonism goes beyond a lack of support, illustrating a deliberate attempt to undermine her professional credibility and impede her career progress.

"They see and are sure, praise be to God, and the university knows me, and they said, 'This is one of our best students.' Nothing happened, my Lord, praise be to you."

Malak's statements shine a light on the nuanced challenges that women in managerial positions face within the context of Saudi Arabian culture, particularly when it comes to communication norms and expectations.

"Married women's communication with males is not that much, sometimes she feels embarrassed. For example, if the hospital manager wants something he can't call a woman any time not if the manager is a man, he would call him anytime, but if she were a woman, he would feel a little embarrassed to call her at any time thinking that she might have a house and a husband which might cause her problems. Maybe because I see some of my colleagues who have a problem like this, their husbands say you are out of work hours now, they should not call you now."

Here, Malak stated that there is a perceived risk of embarrassment or impropriety in male superiors contacting female subordinates outside of typical work hours, a concern that may not exist in male-to-male professional interactions. This hesitation can stem from a cultural understanding that respects the privacy of the home and the presence of a spouse.

"Of course, these girls hold high positions and are bound to answer calls sometimes, maybe that is why women refuse high positions especially those that have too many contacts in order to save their married life or their homes."

Malak also suggests that the demands of high positions, which often include the necessity to be on call, can conflict with cultural expectations placed on women regarding their roles in the home. This may lead some women to decline opportunities for advancement to preserve their marriage life, indicating a cultural pressure that values their role.

Malak perceived her role as single mother of three children was another biggest challenge she encountered. She argues that women in top managerial positions usually struggle to manage their career and their obligations as mothers to their families. Although she aspires to be in a senior position, she thinks the senior role will be a source of 'exhaustion and pressure' as she has custody of three children, she said *"I don't think I can apply for a senior position now...I have another life at*

home and with your children since you need to give them time too". From this extract, Malak appeared hesitant as a single mother. It would be difficult for her to strike a balance between motherhood and holding a senior position if she had a senior position. Due to motherhood, she is unable to rise to higher positions and fulfil work obligations.

Mind Map: Personal Experiential Themes from Sara's Analysis

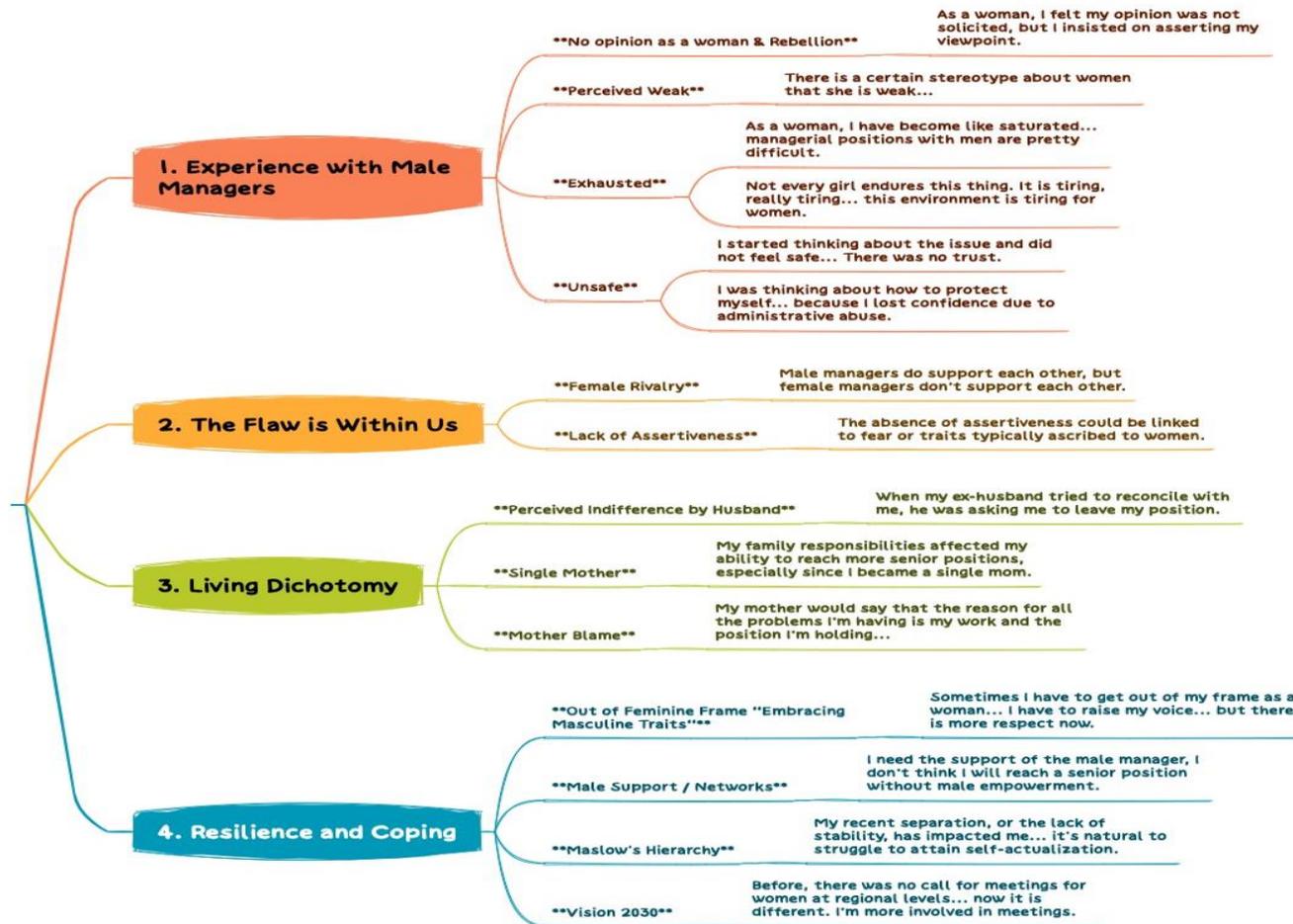


Figure 15: Personal Experiential Themes from Malak's Analysis

7.3.5 Dina (*vortex*)

- **Participants Profile**

I conducted my fifth interview with Dina, who was recruited via snowballing techniques. Dina is a twenty-nine-year-old professional, who is educated to master's level in Hospital Management and Administration. She moved between two positions in the mid-level management as a nurse manager in hospitals and health centre.

- **Interview pattern**

During the interview, I noticed Dina spoke on behalf of all women and employed plural pronouns and expressions such as "we" and "all of us". She appeared to be an advocate for women in mid-level positions. She was open to sharing her experience, and I could draw out her experiences, beliefs, and attitudes. She also addressed the obstacles she encountered and continues to face in her pursuit of reaching a top managerial position. But, as the discussion progressed, Dina's linguistic pattern changed significantly to include hesitations, pauses, repetitions, and harsh tones of voice. She seemed uncomfortable at times and avoided some questions related to her family support during her management journey. Dina was aware of this, however, and the following excerpt shows her interpretation of why she was reluctant to talk about certain topics, including the fact that she might have been forced to relive certain painful memories:

Me: Thank you for your participation. Would you like to add something before we finish the interview?

Dina: No, the interview was interesting, but I would like to thank you for asking questions and for your patience. I may feel anxious and panic at some stories, because I do not like even remembering them, you know, old things. I would rather make them a thing of the past. I have moved on, but I think this interview inspired me to progress. I have faced challenges, and I am still going through things that require strength, so thank you and may God bless you.

Mostly, the interview was very interesting for me as well, because Dina constantly reflected on and questioned what she was saying. As we progressed with the interview, I observed Dina's mannerisms changing to be more comfortable, expressing herself more openly, while I attempted to interpret her words. The interview lasted ninety-eight minutes. A figure of the personal experiential themes that emerged from Dina's interview is detailed below in ' Figure 16'.

- **Introduction to Dina's Experience**

Dina perceived her journey as a "vortex" and shared her experience of accessing mid-level managerial positions, detailing her journey and the opportunities she seized. Indeed, on four occasions, Dina mentioned "vortex". During the interview, Dina describes her pathway towards management in the healthcare sector as "vortex". I noticed that Dina prefers to use the metaphor of "vortex" to describe her experience, and, in those instances, she might be referring to her management journey as a whole, including the different challenges and events she encountered along the way. Her aspiration to reach a management position led her to apply for and request a more senior position from top management at her workplace:

"I remember one day when I requested from our senior management a management role that was occupied by an unqualified man. I said that I am better qualified than him, but they questioned how a young woman can hold such a senior position and said in a meaning 'get out! Not on my life.'"

Dina described her feelings after she has been refused her direct request:

"I was unable at that time to deal with myself; I mean, I entered into a vortex of anger, a vortex of sadness, a vortex of chatter. I mean, I was so shocked I started talking to myself."

Therefore, she indicates that she utilized education to escape this "vortex"

"I couldn't, I mean, I took my studies as a way to raise my level of education, because it was a way to get out of this vortex. So after I got out and finished my degree, I found everything changed after the Vision 2030 program. All my female colleagues were looking up to me; they said that I am strong and asked how I got out from the vortex, even though I cannot tell you if I actually got out of it. I still face intense challenges. However, I can say things are better compared to the past."

Dina's response suggests that she viewed education as a means to escape the challenges she faced in the past and to counterbalance gender discrimination. However, her initial attempts did not fully liberate her from those challenges. As a result, Dina mentioned her "second attempt to reach a senior role." She recalls being the youngest nurse manager at the hospital during that time and expressing a strong desire to hold a senior position, based on her qualifications and merit. However, she often encountered comments from senior managers questioning her suitability for a managerial role due to her youthful appearance. Through this experience, Dina came to realize that the lack of support and

empowerment from management in advancing to a senior position was not attributed to her age, but rather to gender discrimination. *"I don't think that my age is the reason..."*

Consequently, Dina felt compelled to exert additional effort and take on extra responsibilities to prove her capabilities in the nursing sector. This demanding process was both exhausting and stressful. In addition to this, Dina seeks to prove herself because she believes that young women can be managers, as she mentioned *"I would like to prove that women can be manager and not follower, and I want to prove that I am able to be a manager."*

Dina felt that she perceived as a weak woman and unable to hold from managerial position.

Dina adds: *"I can see their eyes saying, 'You are weak, I mean, you are a woman. You are already dreaming,'"* and clarifies that *"male managers' perception of women's primary role is to be a mother and a wife"*. She pointed out the controlling behaviour exhibited by a male manager towards women under his supervision:

"Our male manager, I mean, he thinks that he is responsible for controlling every woman who works under his management or under the scope of his work, so he always mentions that women should not go out, and he has a belief that women can never be in managerial roles."

Dina raised a valid question regarding the disproportionate representation of male nurses in senior managerial positions despite a higher percentage of women in the nursing profession:

"I mean, even though women have made up a large majority of the nursing profession compared to men. If you check, the percentage of women in the nursing profession is higher than the percentage of male nurses. It is like that – I mean, uh, this is possible. I am not too sure, but to a certain extent, that is, in the region where I am, I see that the university has more females than males, but it is still the males who are the managers!"

Dina also captured how that she felt that male manager perceived her She stated:

"From the start nursing is a predominately feminine profession, and most of the nurse population in Saudi Arabia are women, so you will find a male nurse as a manager of a pack of women...And this is what I see, and I feel that I am not one to accept that and how they perceive us. This was the beginning of the trouble with them because I am overqualified. I am capable; I can help and support. This is what I have always thought about. They believe that because your gender is male, you can see yourself as more eligible to lead a flock of women even though you have less qualifications."

Dina described the sensation of being under the control or authority of her direct manager.

"..We were repressed; for example, we were not allowed to go to the hospital or grocery store, and if you did that, you found someone observing you."

This statement captures an experience of repression from male, illustrating specific instances of restriction.

Dina utilized direct and clear language to tell the facts of each story, while euphemisms and metaphors are employed to describe her responses to certain situations. The latter particularly appears when she uses the following expression: *"a male manager leads a pack of women"*. Her choice of words reinforces the suggestion of women's marginalisation, which is also underpinned by Dina's discontent. Dina portrays how male senior managers perceive female mid-level managers as a *"pack"*. Her words in the passage above suggest that she is living in the wild, and the group of women are (*like*) sheep guided by a male (*wolf*), and they all behave in the same way, or they all behave as they are told and cannot/will not act independently. Dina criticises the male managers who uphold such ideas:

"There are motives – I mean personal motives, and some of them [male managers] have strong ego. This is based on my experience with not only one or two managers, but many of them have strong ego [Dina laughs]."

Dina mentioned that her passion for improving the quality of care and improving patients' experience in the hospital has driven her to hold a managerial role in the hospital:

"The first thing is that I have the knowledge that, I mean, we work in the health sector, and the health sector focuses on patient care, so the first thought that comes to me is improving the quality of care and improving patient experience. Unfortunately, most of men managers hold positions because of material privileges. I mean, we have a manager who has higher financial privileges. However, my idea was to firstly improve things, and as I say, I must deliver a high quality of care well, not just sit on a chair and consider myself a manager who has the money, and that's it."

While Dina revealed that her manager's accomplishments are only a result of exploiting her efforts, and she strongly asserts that her manager would be nothing without her double workload:

"One of my female friends pointed out, 'This is exploitation. they are standing on our backs to reach, and she added 'Be aware and refuse to accept it.' Her words opened my eyes, and I approached my manager, requesting some assistance rather than shouldering his entire workload. In response, he became angry, took it personally, and treated me harshly. This is one of the things he used as a bargaining chip: 'I will not support you unless you accept the delegated work.' I mean, he believes that he shouldn't have to work because he is a man."

And

"I remember one of my former managers who would come to us and say, 'I will become a manager, and I'll let you be the deputy.' I questioned him, asking, 'What do you mean?' He replied, 'I want the position. I want the money because I am getting married, and I'm facing difficult circumstances"

Thus, Dina firmly declared that women play a significant role in supporting the success of male managers, highlighting the invaluable contributions they make behind the scenes.

Dina described the feeling of being lost in management due to lack of mentorship from senior management made her path to management more difficult. She believed that providing mentorship opportunities was highly beneficial for her, because she could learn from more experienced managers while also building their own self-confidence, as described below:

"Being lost in management.... all the senior managers were directing me and escaping. It meant that there was no management; they see the position as prestige and privileges, not a duty or a commitment."

Dina also added that she had been denied access to educational and training courses related to career progression, and states that most of the educational courses were only offered to male nurses. She stated that:

"I have been denied access to the leadership and management course by the male nursing manager. He used to choose certain I mean male nurses."

Emotional intelligence plays a significant role in women's progression to senior roles, as noticed by Dina. She believed that emotional intelligence is the key to creating women sustainability, especially in the managerial position. As she emphasizes:

"I think emotional intelligence is the thing that creates sustainability, especially in work."

She recognized the essential role that emotional intelligence is in fostering long-term success and maintaining positive relationships within the work environment, as she stated:

"I believe that some women lack emotional intelligence, which is the biggest problem. I believe that emotional intelligence is higher in men than in women. They are better at convincing others. Women may be skilled at work, but they may lack persuasion skills. This is the issue I observe."

Thus, Dina takes a proactive approach to developing her emotional intelligence. She mentions, "I have been reading about emotional intelligence lately to understand how I can improve my relationships and advance professionally." Despite admitting a lack of familiarity with the concept, she shows a willingness to educate herself and acquire the knowledge needed to navigate challenges effectively. This proactive attitude signifies her commitment to personal growth and acquiring the skills necessary for success. Dina believes that acquiring these skills would help her adapt to difficult situations at work and ensure the sustainability of women's representation in senior positions in nursing. Dina's perspective reflects a deep understanding and acknowledgment of the significance of emotional intelligence. As she expresses, "the certificate is not everything; emotional intelligence is important too." She recognized that qualifications and expertise alone may not guarantee success in her career advancement. She believes that emotional intelligence, such as emotional awareness and relationship management, plays a crucial role in her interactions and achievements.

A notable aspect of Dina's perspective is her emphasis psychological resilience. She states:

"I try to adopt psychological resilience and I try not to let anything affect me mentally or emotionally. I strive to maintain a positive mindset, even when facing mistakes or challenges."

This reflects her understanding of physiological resilience's role in self-regulation and the ability to handle difficult situations effectively. By focusing on self-management and resilience, she aims to navigate challenges without being emotionally overwhelmed.

Dina's responses suggest that family intervention, and the lack of family support affected her career progression in terms of securing a position. When I ask her whether she received enough support from her family, and especially her parents, during her management journey, Dina quickly intervenes to quash the development of the conversation by saying:

"Why have you asked me this question? [In a harsh tone]".

Her behaviour conveys a vulnerable relationship with her parents. Nevertheless, at a different point in the conversation, Dina unexpectedly shows an incongruity by revealing the impact of family-related matters on her management progression. She states that her family's intervention in her decision-making became a barrier:

"There are definitely obstacles in the first place, even within a family environment. I challenged my family environment, my family and the culture as a whole – all of these are challenges, I mean these are among the challenges that I face. I mean, how do you lead, I mean as a woman, and this was not common at that time. After a while, these psychological challenges constituted a motivation to achieve more success."

From the extract above, Dina's words suggests that the culture and norms toward women had a significant impact on her family's decision and her career progression to a senior position.

Dina emphasized that seeking to balance multiple roles is one of the issues facing women during their career progression compared to their male counterparts. She believed that women working in management positions while managing their homes, children, and spouses can limit their ability to pursue senior roles. Dina mentioned how, in her opinion that:

"Women usually fail to achieve a good balance between work and family roles."

From her viewpoint, she thinks that *"Women can never set boundaries between work and family obligations,"* and this *"allows the work to creep into their personal lives and affect their mental health."* Dina illustrated this by the experience of one of her female colleagues:

"Women struggle with achieving work-family balance. I remember one of my friends who was affected by this: I visited her, and she was working at home and talking about work. Her daughter said, Mother, stop talking about work-work-work', and I totally agree with her daughter; her life became work, but she must know that work is work, and home is home."

Dina's observations capture the challenges women face in balancing their managerial position and family responsibilities. The quote illustrates how the boundaries between work and personal life can become blurred, leading to an imbalance that impacts their family's obligations and managerial role.

Dina subsequently reflected that despite the recent socio-economic reforms, resistance to change is still considered a serious barrier against her career progression:

"Now, I mean, after the application of the new program called Vision 2030, these things have changed, but there are still cultural barriers. Despite the efforts of the Saudi government, I

notice male managers in senior roles still resist change. A while ago, I even encountered someone who told me: 'You will not become my manager' – he meant that a woman could not be his boss. He did not even say 'You will never be my boss', no, he said 'You are dreaming.'

Dina highlighted the existence of certain beliefs held by some of her female colleagues that contribute to male dominance in managerial roles and the underrepresentation of women in senior positions.

According to Dina:

"Some of my female colleagues used to say, 'it is normal for him [a male manager] to hold this position, better than a woman.' They have a belief that a man is better. They believed in this idea, and I remember a situation before I completed my studies: there was one of my female colleagues who insisted that women are not supposed to hold managerial positions."

Dina's observations suggest the presence of internalized sexism among these colleagues, wherein they have adopted societal beliefs and biases that favour men over women in managerial roles. This internalized sexism may inadvertently perpetuate gender inequalities and limit women's progress in their careers. Also, the quote above suggests that the existence of such beliefs can create significant barriers for women seeking to advance in their careers. It implies that the internalized sexism undermines women's confidence, self-belief, and aspirations for managerial roles. It reinforces societal gender norms and stereotypes, hindering women from reaching their full potential.

At the end of the interview, I asked Dina whether she found her overall work experience to be more on the positive or negative side. She concludes that:

"There are challenges, I mean, I can't say 100% positive or negative. There are barriers, and I do not deserve facing these barriers and saying I deserve this position and proving women can do it. I deserve an easier [experience]. It is not worth fighting for a position, which is for serving patients, the community, and my country and raising the efficiency [of Nursing]. I am still trying to find a good work environment that values women and gives us emotional support, because I believe that my personality is more emotional, and I cannot do work with passion without receiving love. Anyway, nursing is giving."

Personal Experiential Themes from Dina's Analysis

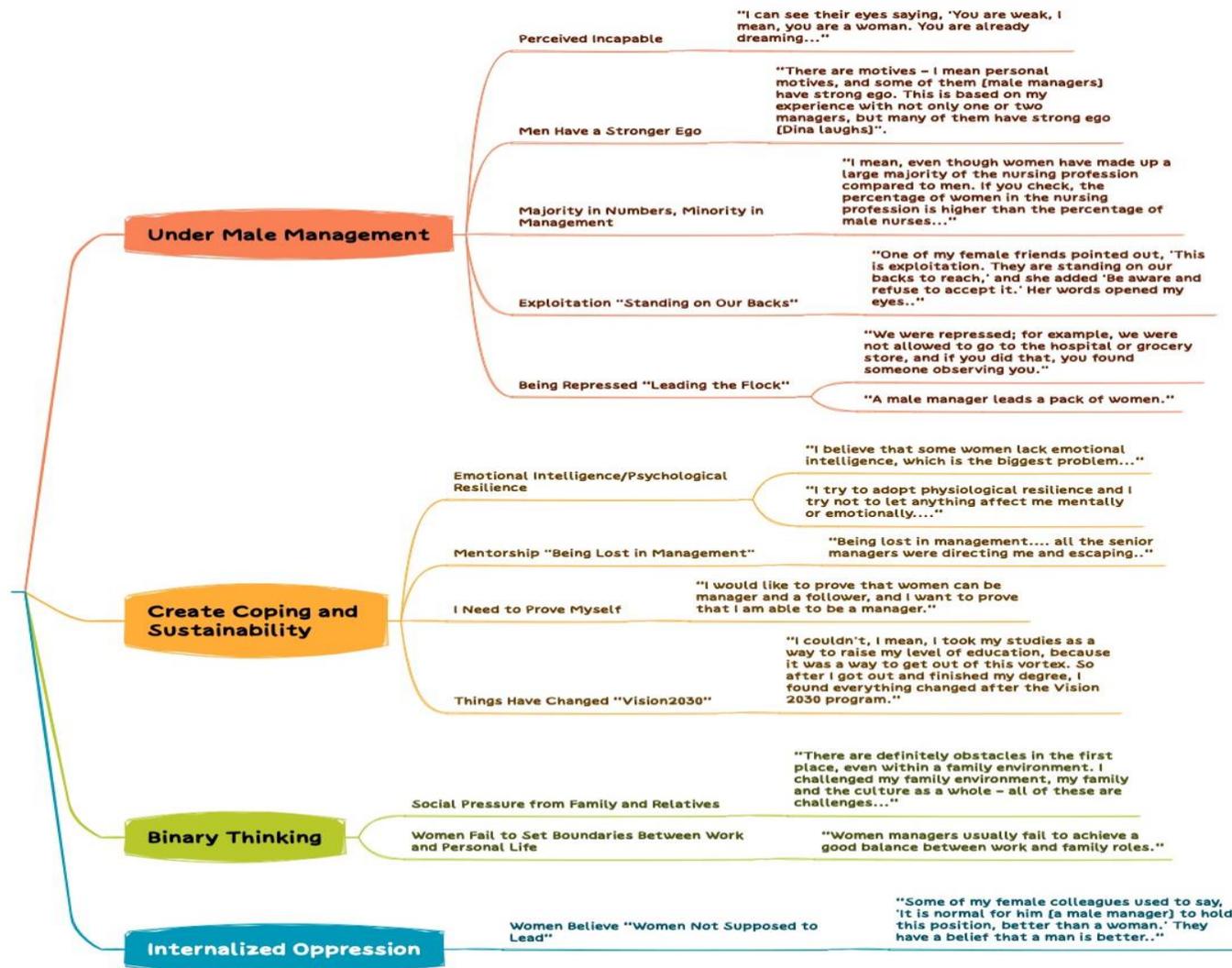


Figure 16: Personal Experiential Themes from Dina's Analysis

7.3.6 Leen (Explosion)

- **Participant's Profile**

My last interview was with Leen, who I also recruited through snowballing techniques. Leen, a thirty-five-year-old woman who is divorced and has one child, has been a nurse manager for over thirteen years.

- **Interview Pattern**

She describes herself as a "*workaholic*" person. Recently, she has been in the process of resignation from her current position because she felt that she "*needs a break*". As for her level of education, she has previously obtained the equivalent of a bachelor's degree and is now a master's student. The interview with Leen was the shortest, lasting only fifty-five-minutes.

Leen mentioned that she had volunteered to participate in the interviews because she felt responsible for sharing her stories. However, in the first interview, Leen felt considerably uncomfortable and appeared cautious and not eager to provide more information about her experience in the first interview. This was clear from her responses, lack of interaction, straying off-topic, and brief, and superficial answers. Leen appeared uncomfortable and anxious, and this was clear from the long pauses in her answers and her request not to mention her name: "*please do not mention my name in your research.*" I reassured her that she will be given a different name to protect her identity, to prevent being recognised by their peers and preserve anonymity. After a long probing and prompting to elaborate with more information, the time of the interview had run its course. Therefore, it was a struggle to draw out Leen's experiences, beliefs, and attitudes in the first interview.

During the second interview, Leen's attitude felt more open to discussing different aspects of her experience as a nurse, and she shared several stories with me. I believe that this change in Leen's attitude was due to the long interval between the two interviews (conducted two months apart). In two interviews, Leen spoke about personal, emotional, and sensitive issues, although, as previously mentioned, she shared less information in the first interview. For example, she abstained from revealing her marital status and kept saying that she was "*not married*". At the same time, in the second interview, she mentions that she is separated from her husband and has one child. Although the themes that emerged from Leen's interview were not as broad in scope as those from other participants, several significant personal experiential themes emerged from the second interview, as shown in Figure 17.

- **Introduction to Leen's Experience**

Leen's experience, symbolized by the metaphor of an explosion, portrays her journey to management as one marked by dramatic shifts, intense challenges, and profound emotional pressure. Leen perceived her experience in management as deeply intertwined with her innate inclination towards nurturing and support, as she articulates, *"I want to be the mother of all and a reference for all."* This sentiment reflects her commitment to providing guidance and understanding to her team members. She sees herself as possessing a profound understanding of their needs and concerns, as she expresses, *"I know how to contain them; I know what they want and what their concerns are."* These understanding fuels her dedication to supporting their growth and achievement, as she affirms, *"I know how I can help them so that they can improve and achieve."* Through these insights, it's evident that Leen's perception of her experience is shaped by her role as a caring and supportive manager, driven by her desire to facilitate the success and well-being of her team.

Leen's perception of management as a *"big responsibility"* indicated her understanding of the significance and impact of managerial roles. However, she believes that this perception can be a barrier to obtain and maintain managerial positions.

Leen's motivation to stay in a managerial position stem from her inclination towards being a caring and supportive figure. She expresses a desire to be *"the mother of all" and a reference for all"*. Leen possesses a deep understanding of her team members' needs, concerns, and goals, enabling her to provide the necessary support to help them improve and succeed.as she stated,

"I know how to contain them; I know what they want and what their concerns are; I know how I can help them so that they can improve and achieve".

Leen is driven by her aspiration to create a healthy work environment for staff nurses. Also, Leen possesses a strong desire:

"To change and create a healthy environment for staff nurses such as flexible schedules and improving staff competence."

She aims to implement changes such as flexible schedules and enhancing staff competence, indicating her commitment to nurturing and supporting the well-being and growth of her team members.

Leen emphasized that management isn't about conforming to a specific mould; rather, it's about embracing one's values and strengths. She describes her experience as a female manager, her response, marked by a noticeable discomfort revealed through her tone and a prolonged pause, underscores her conviction that management transcends gender constructs:

“My experience, thankfully, is positive. I mean, I don't see any distinction. I don't consider myself from this angle. I dislike associating gender with managerial roles. I've become a manager who surpasses both male and female managers. The point is to not differentiate but to start accomplishing – that's what I'm trying to convey. Don't draw lines between women and men; we're all part of one team, all human. The gender of my colleagues has never been a factor for me.”

Leen's commentary hints at a belief that management capacity is independent of gender, with an emphasis on viewing management as an authenticity rather than a gendered one. She regards herself as a manager without the qualifiers of male or female, stressing that management is inherently human. Her stance offers a nuanced view, suggesting that effective management is rooted in individual ability and collective effort, not gender.

She reflected the challenges she faces in her pursuit of career growth due to the lack of professional development courses and limited availability of workshops and opportunities in her city. She mentions:

“By God... but I expect this. I mean, you know we have limited things. I mean, in this city, things I mean, many things are limited. I mean, it is not expanding like other regions such as Riyadh and Jeddah, so there are not as many opportunities here.”

She emphasized the importance of attending training courses and workshops in building her professional reputation, stating:

“Another thing, I expect the most important thing to be your degree. Of course... now, what if you go to workshops or you attend many courses, or for example, you volunteer a lot – This is how it happens – you become one of the people who shine their name. You become more known.”

One of the obstacles that Leen faces is the need to balance between her experience and obtaining a high level of education. She argued that her work experience alone is not sufficient to reach senior-level positions. She mentions,

“Among the obstacles [to career progression] is that one day they care about experience more than certificates, but suddenly, they are looking for your certificates and courses more than experience. How do I combine the two things?”

Furthermore, Leen expressed frustration with her constrained schedule and limited time for professional development. She explains:

“I mean, for example, we are working all the time. There is no time to volunteer and attend more courses and workshops. This is because my schedule is pressured, and I can barely take my annual leave... So, this means that I cannot participate in voluntary work or attend workshops. It becomes difficult.”

Leen started the second interview by reflecting on her experiences with management and identifying some barriers against her progression to senior roles. She admitted that the retention and prolonged position circulation in a managerial position reduced her chances to reach a more senior level and made her *“I am stuck in the same position for nine years”*. She states that her direct manager stayed in the same position for a long time, and because he did not want to leave the position and had a problem with top management managers.

During the second interview, Leen’s transcripts show a few inconsistencies in her responses in comparison to her first interview, although these changes may only indicate that she took some time to reflect further on her work experience between the two interviews. In the second interview, Leen admits that gender discrimination serves to limit women’s aspirations to reach senior positions at work. She felt that male domination overshadows and devalues women’s contributions at senior-level roles. She states that women are only allowed to hold minor and unimportant positions in mid-level management:

“Most [senior] positions are held by men. I mean, women can only get promoted to unimportant level in primary healthcare. They are done with that. They ask you count your blessings: at least you can take the weekend off.”

And similarly:

“All the important positions are only held by men, and there is not a woman among them in these positions. I mean, meanwhile in Riyadh and Al-Qassim, women are empowered and supported. All in my colleges in Jeddah, there is a lot of [women’s] empowerment. While here, it is impossible for women to be in a strong, important place. I haven't seen this happen for the last fourteen years”

Furthermore, Leen argues:

"I believe that it is gender discrimination, no more, no less. I mean, they do not want to look at your qualifications, they do not want women to hold senior managerial positions, and they do not see that women are as highly qualified as men."

"...they do not want to apply Vision 2030 strategy – they are actually making it slower."

From the above, Leen maintained that although the government seeks to empower women through its new strategies, like Vision 2030, men in managerial positions still resist change and the proposed reforms, which makes her career progression slower.

Experience sheds light on the presence of gender biases and prejudices within the workplace. Despite her professional achievements and friendly demeanour, she becomes a victim of unexpected betrayal and unfounded complaints from a female colleague she considers a peer and supporter.

Leen expressed her surprise and disbelief at being betrayed by a female colleague, stating:

"Unexpected thoughts, things that you wouldn't expect, like someone from the female staff, someone you see as your colleague, supporting you and then going to complain about you, turning against you."

This unexpected turn of events suggests the female rivalry present in the workplace, where even women may perpetuate their underrepresentation and act against each other.

Leen reflected that the senior managers are exerting immense pressure and intentionally creating a hostile environment in order to make her hate her position. As a result, she has made the decision to resign from her position two months ago and is currently awaiting their decision. She expresses her strong preference to return as a staff nurse, emphasizing the overwhelming nature of the pressures she has experienced, stating:

"By God, I hated the place. I resigned from the position two months ago, and I am waiting for their decision. I prefer to return as a staff nurse again. I mean, these pressures are too much; I mean, I will explode."

In the quoted passage, Leen repeatedly uses the word "*explode*" to convey the overwhelming impact of the intense pressure she faces at work. She believes that the excessive pressure in her work environment has hindered her ability to pursue senior-level roles.

Leen expressed her frustration with various work issues such as shortages and lack of solutions, as well as the lack of support from senior management. She states:

"Senior management does not want to support us, and they put a lot of pressure on me because they want me to hate my position."

Leen also mentioned the struggles she and her direct manager, the nursing director in middle management, face in terms of receiving support and recognition from senior managers. They have been subjected to bullying and intense pressure, with the senior manager's objective being to force their direct manager to resign, as she stated:

"My direct manager who is nursing director, in middle management, and I struggled with lack of support and recognition from our senior managers. We received terrible bullying and pressure because the senior manager wants our direct manager to resign."

Leen acknowledged that limited connections have had a detrimental effect on her advancement, emphasizing that personal connections often outweigh qualifications. Leen's belief is rooted in her own experiences, where she has witnessed the prioritization of connections over merit in the past, particularly prior to the implementation of the 2030 vision. She highlights the undeniable nature of this issue, implying that it has been a significant obstacle in her professional journey.

Although Leen's experience in mid-level management has ended up with her resignation from her current position, she is considerably concerned about her fate, starting over, and "*going back to zero point*". Leen hopes that she can reach a senior position at work after she finishes her master's degree without resorting to nepotism:

"I expect my qualifications and experience to be enough to reach a senior position. I will reach it by my efforts without using help."

Personal Experiential Themes from Leen's Analysis

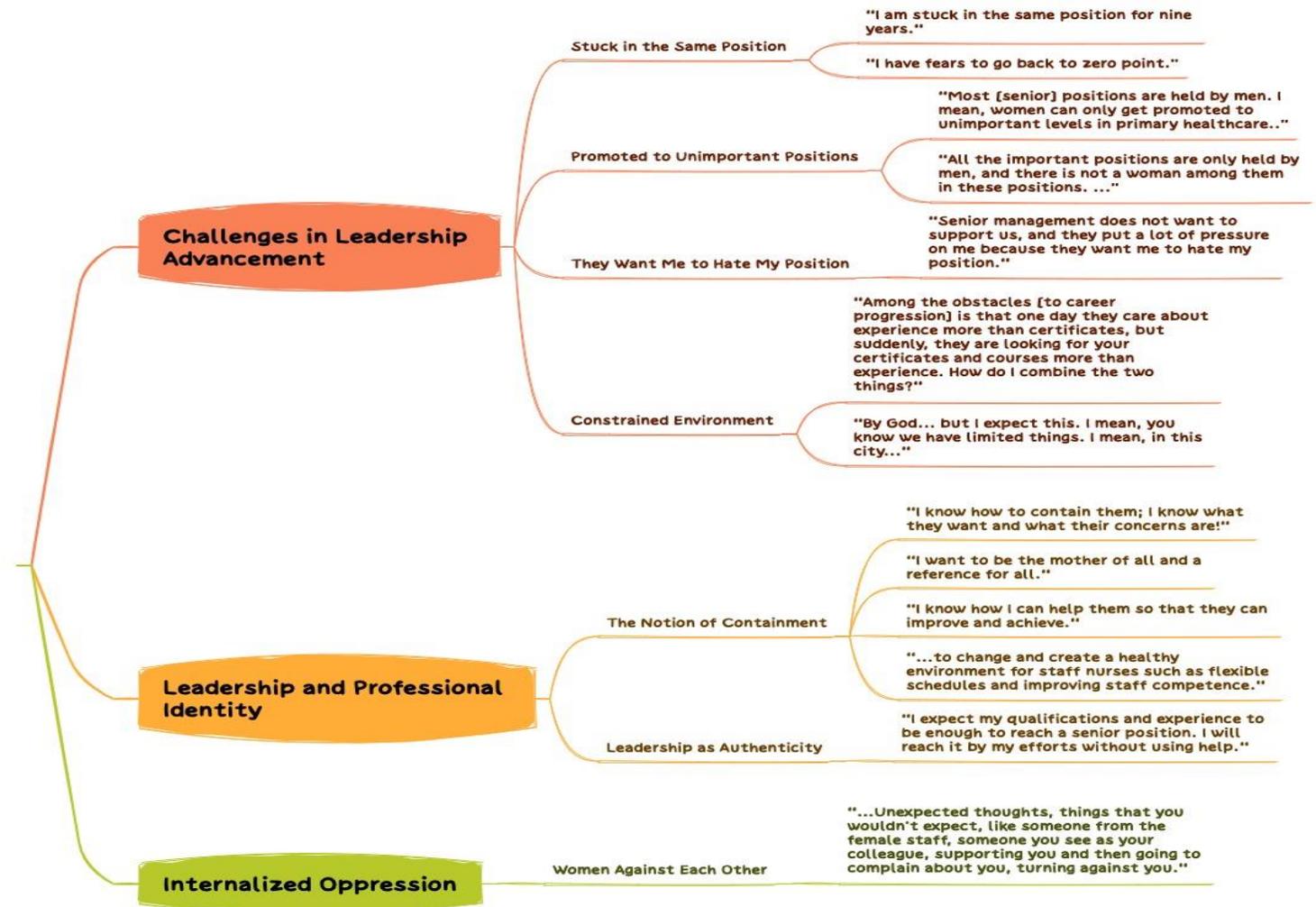


Figure 17: Personal Experiential Themes from Leen's Analysis

Chapter 8: Women’s shared Experiences

“As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”
— (Williamson, [n.d])

8.1 Introduction

Following the presenting of the women idiographic experiences in the previous chapter, this chapter explore into the shared experiences of six mid-level women nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. It highlights the experiential themes and subthemes that emerged from all participants' experiences to provide insight into what was shared and what was different across the female nurse managers experiences. These shared experiential themes resonate within each woman's interview and are systematically presented in the table below (Table 8). The table showcases these experiential themes and their sub-themes, providing a whole understanding of the group's experiences. Each participant's distinct insights are marked by (√), while themes common to all six participants are highlighted in pink colour.



Figure18: Visualisation of themes

Participant							
Group Experiential themes	Subthemes	Sara	Fatima	Noura	Malak	Dina	Leen
It's a man's world	Being judged less capable:	√	√	√	√	√	√
	Being Invisible	√	√	√		√	
	Vulnerability and Insecurity						
	• Alienation Strategy		√	√			√
	• Atmospheric challenge	√	√				
	• Protective Needs	√	√	√			
To fit into a man's world	Forced to Abandon My Feminine Frame	√	√				
	Endless Proof			√	√	√	√
	Readiness: "I am not ready yet"				√	√	
	Networking / Wasta	√		√	√	√	
	Silence: Women don't speak Up	√	√			√	
Perpetuating the cycle of oppression	Women do not support each other		√	√	√	√	
	Derogating Each Other			√	√	√	
The Dual Burden	Marital Status	√		√	√		
	Motherhood	√			√	√	√
	Family Intervention	√		√		√	
Strategies and enablers to empowerment	Women role model		√	√			
	Qualification to Balance Discrimination			√			√
	Emotional Intelligence					√	
	Vision 2030	√	√	√	√	√	√

Table 8: Group experiential themes.

8.2 Introduction to Group Experiential Theme 1: It's a Man's World

The main group experiential theme covered the complex and challenging experiences of women navigating an environment dominated by men. It encapsulates the challenges and inequities women encounter in such environments. Within the overarching narrative of "It's a Man's World", the experiences of female managers in male-dominated environments are divided into distinct yet interconnected sub-themes. First, Being Judged Less Capable: "I Can See This in Their Eyes":

Participants shared their experiences of being perceived as unfit for senior positions in professional settings due to their gender. The sub-theme Being Invisible: 'No Opinion as a Woman, I Should Obey Only' captures the participants' marginalisation within decision-making processes, revealing how they often perceive themselves as sidelined in discussions and decision-making as women. Next, the sub-themes of Vulnerability and Insecurity in the Workplace highlighted some practices employed by senior male managers to create a difficult environment for female nurse managers.

- Alienation Strategy: "They Want Us to Hate Place. This highlights the intentional isolation tactics that are employed in the workplace. These strategies seem designed to create an unwelcoming or even hostile work environment for female nurse managers, perhaps to deter their presence or hinder their advancement in managerial roles.
- The Difficult and Tiring Environment underscores the demanding nature of the environment in which these managers operate. This dimension suggests that the workplace is mentally and emotionally draining women in a male-dominated environment.
- Protective Needs: "I Need Protection" emphasises the significant vulnerability of female nurse managers, manifesting as position insecurity among other challenges.

8.2.1 Being Judged Less Capable: 'I Can See This in Their Eyes'

This subtheme emerged from the experiences of Sara, Fatima, Noura, Malak, Dina and Leen. All Participants frequently shared their experiences of being perceived as incapable in professional settings. Despite their actual abilities and competencies, these women encounter challenges that stem from a societal perception that undermines their professional capabilities based on their gender.

Sara expressed that the stereotype that deems women inherently weak, excluded them from managerial roles. She articulates that:

"There is a certain stereotype about women that she is weak...They still see women as ineligible of holding managerial roles, and as weak and never strong..."(Sara)

Fatima revealed a perceived consensus within her professional environment that women are not suitable for managerial roles. This perception is entrenched in the stereotype that women are inherently weaker and driven by emotion, which makes them unfit for management:

"They still see women as ineligible of holding managerial positions, and as weak and never strong. They have this thought that woman is driven by her feelings and emotions for which she should not be in managerial positions." (Fatima)

Noura's experience highlights the impact of such incidents on professional self-perception. She was constantly criticized and questioned her capabilities in managerial roles.

"If we put a bottle of water on a table, he would say why did you put it there and – why and would say you don't deserve to be department heads, and you don't know how to become manager." (Noura)

Malak discussed the stereotypes challenging women's adequacy in senior roles, affecting their self-perception and advancement opportunities:

"Frankly speaking, I have seen women becoming directors of the hospital and such, but I think there is always a perception that women are unable to fulfil those positions."(Malak)

Dina highlighted the stereotypical mindset of senior management regarding women, particularly in nursing, emphasizing traditional roles over professional capabilities:

"I can see their eyes saying, 'You are weak, I mean, you are a woman. You are already dreaming... male managers' perception of women's primary role is to be a mother and a wife.'"(Dina)

Leen indicated that there is a perception among males that women, including herself, are weak managers.

"...they believe that we are I weak managers" (Leen)

This statement suggests a stereotypical view where female managers are seen as inherently less capable.

The experiences shared by the participants illustrate the societal perceptions that undermine women's professional capabilities, which in turn impacts their self-perception and opportunities for advancement. This sub-theme establishes a critical context for the feelings of invisibility expressed in the next section, where participants further explore the consequences of being ignored and underestimated in their roles.

8.2.2 Being Invisible *“No opinion as a woman, I should obey only”*

This subtheme is merged from the account of Sara, Fatima, Noura, and Dina, whose stories converge on the theme of invisibility in their professional roles. For Sara, the workplace emerged as an environment where her opinions were side-lined. She articulates:

“... In the beginning, it seemed as if I was prohibited from dissenting; my role was to comply without question. As a woman, I felt my opinion was not solicited... ”I suffered from what we call it centralization in management ” (Sara)

Fatima's experience further encapsulates the struggle for authority:

*“I was uncomfortable; they failed to empower me or allow me to utilize my authority,”
(Fatima)*

Noura's and Dina's accounts add that where the monopolization of authority by male counterparts leaves little room for female managers to emerge.

Noura's assertion:

“They still seek to monopolize authority... They don't want women to be in power; they want us to be subordinate” (Noura)

Dina added an example of male authority over female managers in her workplace:

“Our male manager seems to believe his role is to supervise and control every woman who works under him or within his professional sphere.” (Dina)

When asked her to explain what his manager's motivations are, she reflected:

“There are underlying motives—personal motives at play, and it is my experience that many male managers possess inflated egos [laughter].” (Dina)

The participants' accounts of invisibility highlight their struggle for authority and recognition in the workplace. This sense of invisibility is compounded by the judgments discussed in the previous sub-theme, showing how gender biases not only undermine women's perceived capabilities but also silence their voices. The sub-theme of vulnerability and insecurity develops from this feeling of invisibility, as participants describe the emotional toll of navigating such unwelcoming environments.

8.2.3 Vulnerability and Insecurity

This sub-theme reflects the participants' feelings of vulnerability and insecurity in their professional roles, as a result of the exclusion, judgment, and invisibility they faced. It shows how these experiences collectively contribute to a sense of emotional and professional instability.

8.2.3.1 Alienation Strategy “*They Want Us to Hate the Place*”

The participants highlighted a deliberate pattern of exclusion and unwelcoming behaviours in the workplace. Fatima reveals a punishing approach towards women in managerial roles, describing ongoing troubles aimed at making her despise her position as a form of “*taming*”:

I told you I am still under the punishment of accepting the position, I mean they're still making trouble for me, they still doing things till today... The purpose was to make me hate the position and refuse to hold any position in future since I am nearly graduating with Master degree, so it's a kind of taming me (sarcastic laughter) ... it is a punishment so next time I would not accept any position, and the other thing is that they want me to transfer to another place because.....(Fatima)

Noura articulated a deliberate effort by her manager to create an uninviting atmosphere, stating:

"He wants us to hate the place; he was there to make us hate the place." (Noura)

Here we have this problem until now, they believe in this and if a woman holds that position, they will antagonize her and it is true, maybe you don't know but there is a female hospital manager who is antagonized by men for how she holds that position and how she gives orders. Too many male employees had transferred for that reason; how can we accept a woman to rule us." (Noura)

This sentiment is echoed by Leen, she speaks of the immense pressure from senior-level management, which influenced her decision to leave her managerial role in search of a less stressful position.

"The environment became so unfavourable that I decided to step down from my managerial role, awaiting a decision. The stress became too much to manage" (Leen)

Leen also notes the pressure that seems aimed at making her position undesirable:

"... the pressure applied seems designed to make the role unattractive." (Leen)

The Alienation Strategy illustrates how deliberate exclusion and hostility in the workplace not only undermine women's professional stability but also intensify their sense of vulnerability and insecurity.

8.2.3.2 Difficult and Tiring Environment: "Not every girl endures".

Sara and Fatima expressed their weariness and difficulties in dealing with male managers in the workplace through various statements. Sara discussed the challenges of dealing with a male-dominated environment, stating:

"Dealing with a man was difficult and tiring for me as a woman... really tough." (Sara)

"Every woman is facing difficulties here and none has taken the complete comfort in work".
(Sara)

Fatima shared her experience of women in management overall as difficult, she stated:

"... But there are still obstacles for women. When we see the experience of men and women, we come to know that the experience of women is very difficult." (Fatima)

"..it was not easy; it was difficult. It would have been easy if there was a better environment, easy if it was in major cities. It was difficult because their thinking is still that the community's habits and norms come first." (Fatima)

The 'Difficult and Tiring Environment' extends the sense of vulnerability by showing how the difficulties of working in a male-dominated environment contribute to emotional exhaustion. These daily challenges compound feelings of insecurity, further reinforcing the participants' sense of professional instability.

8.2.3. Protective Needs: "I Need Protection"

Sara, Fatima and Noura explored the emotional toll that gendered workplace dynamics can take. The fear of unjust administrative actions, the unpredictability of professional advancement, and the perceived need for self-protection all point to an environment where women are left feeling exposed and unsure.

Sara shared feeling of being vulnerable and Insecure after a collision with her manager:

“After that, I started thinking about the issue and did not feel safe at that time. I started to think and stop for a while to rest because I was not comfortable. There was no trust and trust are very important between the employee and his boss. I did not feel safe until...” (Sara)

Fatima, on the other hand, expressed a resolution to protect herself from the harm that could arise from the challenges she faces. She imagines a world where women have special protections against unjust removal from their positions. She envisions an authority dedicated to defending women's rights in the workplace, suggesting that such a body would create a deterrent against discriminatory practices.

“...wish that there is an Authority that protects women whenever she is harmed psychologically or any manager harms her or any kind of oppression that she faces, a proper authority that supports you no matter if you are a Health sector employee or an employee anywhere, an Authority that supports woman.” (Fatima)

Noura also expressed the emotional and psychological instability experienced by her in hostile work environments.

“I see work everywhere, it's normal to work, but when you're in a place where people are all hostile to you, it's hard. I was afraid I'd come back and find them to be hostile to me like they used to be in the previous department, looking for me like, they want to find a slip, anything wrong to get back to me and hostile me.” (Noura)

“..I was afraid that they might antagonize me” (Noura)

The participants' experiences reveal the emotional toll of male-dominated workplaces, highlighting women's vulnerabilities and insecurity. These subthemes connect to the theme of 'It's a Man's World', showing how these practices only apply to women in male-dominated environments.

8.3 Introduction to Group Experiential Theme 2: To fit into a man's world

The experiential theme explores how women adapt to male-dominated professional environments through several sub-themes. Women often feel pressured to "abandon their feminine traits" and adopt more masculine behaviours to fit in and be respected within existing management norms. This need to continually prove their competence leads to a subtheme of "Endless Proof: 'I have to prove myself'," resulting in constant scrutiny and validation-seeking, which can be exhausting and demoralising. Another subtheme, "Readiness: 'I am not ready yet'," highlights how many women experience self-doubt and feel unprepared for senior roles despite being qualified, delaying their pursuit of senior roles. The "need for male allies and reliance on vitamin W" is crucial, as these supporters help advocate for women and break down professional barriers. Additionally, the

subtheme of "Silence: Women don't speak up" reflects how women often refrain from sharing their opinions and ideas due to fear of judgment or a perceived need to conform, limiting their contributions and reinforcing gender disparities in management. Together, these themes illustrate the multifaceted challenges women face in striving for recognition and authority in male-dominated spaces.

8.3.1 Forced to Abandon My Feminine Frame

This sub-theme arose from the narratives of Sara and Fatima each of whom contemplated the pressing necessity to transform or conceal aspects of their identity in order to conform and be regarded as credible managers. It encapsulates the predicament of women who feel compelled to adjust or temporarily disregard their gendered identity to align with the prevailing expectations in their professional milieu. The opinions expressed by the participants indicate a belief that adopting traditionally masculine characteristics, such as assertiveness or a tough demeanour, is essential to be perceived with legitimacy and seriousness. Some women believe that adjust women managers' behaviour to align with male-dominated management expectations, while others like Leen maintain their authenticity and reject the notion that effective management must embody masculine traits.

Sara shared a poignant example of this shift, recounting a moment of assertiveness where she felt forced to raise her voice and abruptly leave a meeting to assert her presence and command respect similar to her male colleagues. She stated:

"Because from my point of view, leadership is a masculine trait, and if a girl wants to be a manager she must have some masculine qualities, she has to master these games or embody these traits." (Sara)

Fatima, too, expressed a similar sentiment, noting times when she felt she had:

"I have to behave like them [male manager] ...sometimes I need to be harsh as them "
(Fatima)

This sub-theme illustrates the internal conflict women experience between conforming to masculine norms and maintaining their authenticity. It sets the stage for the following sub-theme, "Endless Proof," which further examines the pressures women face to demonstrate their capabilities in response to these gendered expectations.

8.3.2 Endless Proof

This sub-theme emerged from the accounts of Noura, Malak, Dina and Leen.

It reflects on the narratives where participants conveyed the necessity of consistently demonstrating their abilities, often to a greater extent than their male counterparts, to gain recognition and to be taken seriously to reach senior roles.

Noura described her desire in prove herself and seek recognition in order to reach senior level:

"But no thank God I am proving myself and continuing I mean now I feel that I am from a challenge to challenge every time the manager comes, I challenge myself whenever nursing director came, I challenge myself." (Noura)

Malak shared her experience of feeling compelled to exceed normal performance standards simply to be acknowledged. She expressed:

"I felt that along my journey, I was required to perform at higher levels than men to be taken seriously for candidacy for higher positions." (Malak)

Dina's ambition extends beyond personal advancement to challenging entrenched stereotypes about female management. She stated:

"My success won't come easy': I must work harder than everyone else around me" (Dina)

"...I work hardly...they are standing on our backs" (Leen)

This assertion suggests a desire not only to ascend to senior positions but also to redefine perceptions of women's capabilities in such positions.

This sub-theme highlights the relentless pressure women face to validate their competence in male-dominated environments. The demand for continuous proof of ability sets the foundation for the next sub-theme, "Readiness: 'I am not ready yet,'" which explores how this pressure can lead to feelings of self-doubt and unpreparedness, ultimately impacting women's willingness to pursue managerial roles.

8.3.3 Readiness: "I am not ready yet"

This sub-theme emerged from the accounts of Malak, Dina, and Leen.

Dina expressed her concerns clearly *"Holding a senior managerial role is a big responsibility; I need to prepare myself."* Also, Malak's experiences add depth to this subtheme.

"It was in a managerial position that I held three months before transitioning. Despite this opposition, it was not my preference, but I was eager to attempt it. I was not ready at that time." (Malak)

Women expressed challenges related to doubting their readiness for managerial positions, despite their desire to hold senior positions. The feelings of unpreparedness shared by participants highlight a barrier that affects their progression in management roles. These insights provide important context for understanding the challenges women face in male-dominated workplaces.

8.3.4 Networking "we need doses of Vitamin W"

This sub-theme arose from the experiences of Sara, Noura, Malak, and Dina, who highlighted the importance of male allies and strategic networking in achieving recognition within male-dominated environments. Participants described the need for support from male colleagues and managers, often navigating complex dynamics to secure this backing.

Sara explained the importance of male support in her career advancement:

"I need the support of the male manager; I don't think I will reach a senior position without male empowerment." (Sara)

Malak described her use of strategic self-promotion, including flattery, as a means to gain recognition:

"I'm among those people who do things without telling people that I did this and that. Yet, there are some who do something minor and ensure everyone knows about it. I do not talk; I do work, and I'm not skipping any work. Why don't you come and see the files I have?" (Malak)

Malak also noted that nepotism, or "Vitamin W," sometimes determines career progression over qualifications:

"In the past, I saw people holding positions, and they are frankly not deserving... if you take it on the basis of abilities, there are more deserving people, and they do not hold positions." (Malak)

Noura observed that regional and tribal biases often influence managerial decisions:

*"If the manager's relative is a female, he would choose her if they were from the same tribe."
(Noura)*

This sub-theme illustrates how participants navigate professional environments by leveraging alliances and connections, a strategic approach often viewed as essential for advancement in male-dominated fields.

8.3.5 Silence: Women Don't Speak Up

This sub-theme emerged from the accounts of Sara, Fatima, and Dina. The participants shared their thoughts on the reluctance of women to be assertive in managerial positions.

Sara points out the rarity of assertiveness among female managers and speculates on the reasons behind this trend:

"Few numbers of female managers do defend themselves" (Sara)

She also offers other justification, her nuanced take on possible underlying reasons for this lack of assertiveness:

"It might be fear or the nature of women. It might be ignorance as well; it can be the fear of losing the position or some other personal reasons". (Sara)

Here, she proposed that fear, nature, or ignorance might be factors contributing to women's silence, suggesting that the internal and external pressures faced by women.

Like Sara, Fatima identified fear as a key factor hindering women from speaking up:

"Women don't speak up because they are afraid to lose their position." (Fatima)

Dina reflected on the contradiction between legal empowerment and the actual behaviours of female managers:

"The government has empowered women in Saudi Arabia and all laws are in their favour, but I don't know why they are silent."(Dina)

Dina's statement highlights a dissonance between the formal, legal support for women's rights and the persistent silence among women. Her confusion points to other, possibly unexplored, factors that prevent women from leveraging the laws meant to support them.

This sub-theme expands on the previous sub-themes by highlighting how internal and external factors contribute to women's reluctance to assert themselves. The reluctance to speak up builds on the earlier discussions of networking and readiness, suggesting that the strategies women employ, and their feelings of unpreparedness may be compounded by a fear of consequences, even when legal protections are in place.

8.4. Introduction to Experiential Theme 3: Perpetuating the Cycle of Oppression

This experiential theme explores how the subtheme "Women do not support each other" and the subtheme "Derogating Each Other" contribute to the ongoing cycle of oppression among women. These subthemes illustrate how the absence of solidarity and the presence of derogatory behaviour among women perpetuates a challenging and oppressive environment. These aspects reveal an entrenched cycle where gender biases are inadvertently reinforced, affecting women's ability to progress and thrive in managerial roles.

8.4.1 Women Do not Support Each Other "*Women are Their Own Worst Enemies.*"

This sub-theme emerged from the insights of Sara, Fatima, Noura, and Leen, who described instances where a lack of support among women created obstacles to career progression.

Sara observed a disparity in support among managers, noting:

"I noticed that male managers do support each other when they are in position, but female managers are quite the opposite; they don't support each other." (Sara)

Fatima highlighted how internalized sexism can limit women's managerial advancement, describing situations where envy or misunderstanding obstructed women's paths:

"There were women who stood against other women, out of envy maybe... Some women do not accept, and cannot digest, the success of another woman while they accept the successes of a man." (Fatima)

Noura recounted her experience with passive-aggressive behaviour from a female colleague, which she perceived as rivalry:

"Because they wanted to give me the other department's head position, I was a bachelor's degree holder while she was a diploma holder." (Noura)

Leen's story adds another perspective, describing unexpected complaints and perceived betrayal from a female colleague. She expressed her dismay:

"Unexpected thoughts, things that you wouldn't expect, like someone from the female staff...going to complain about you, turning against you." (Leen)

These quotes illustrate how ingrained beliefs and attitudes can create barriers for women seeking career advancement. They suggest that internalized sexism may impact women's confidence, self-belief, and aspirations for managerial roles, reinforcing societal gender norms and stereotypes that can limit professional growth. This dynamic underscores the broader impact of internalized beliefs and behaviours, where lack of support and derogatory attitudes among women present challenges not only to individual advancement but also to fostering a more supportive environment for women in managerial positions.

8.4.2 Derogating Each Other

This sub-theme discusses how women may discourage and invalidate each other's efforts, reinforcing broader challenges in achieving solidarity. Building on the previous sub-theme, it highlights how limited support and derogatory behaviors can perpetuate negative stereotypes. For instance, Noura reflects on the negative dynamics among women, stating:

:"...women discourage each other..." (Noura)

Malak shared her struggle with a lack of support and encouragement from female colleagues, describing the atmosphere as "tiring":

"I used to tell them that I am not doing a super thing; I am just doing my job. This is what I meant when I said a negative atmosphere; I wanted to improve myself."(Malak)

Dina offered insights into the mindset among some of her female colleagues, noting:

"It is normal for him [a male manager] to hold this position, better than a woman." (Dina)

She recalled an instance where a female colleague argued against women in management:

"...women are not supposed to hold managerial positions." (Dina)

These perspectives suggest that internalized attitudes may influence the level of support women provide to one another, contributing to an environment where mutual encouragement and collective advancement are limited. This dynamic illustrates the impact of ingrained views and behaviours on workplace interactions and highlights an area for further exploration into how fostering solidarity could shape professional environments for women.

8.5 Introduction to Experiential Theme 4: The Dual Burden

This theme explores the intricate challenges faced by female nurse managers in pursuing senior positions in the healthcare system in Saudi Arabia. It delves into the lived experiences of these women, as they navigate the demanding path to management within a context that is both traditional and transitional. "The Dual Burden" captures the dual realities these women endure, balancing their professional roles with the expectations tied to their personal lives. The first sub-theme, "Marital Status", examined how marriage influences and intersects with the career advancement of female nurse managers. Participants shared insights into how marital roles and spousal support play a critical role in their professional development and pursuit of senior positions within the healthcare system. Next, the focus shifts to "Motherhood" as a challenging factor influencing career paths. This sub-theme explores how maternal responsibilities, societal expectations of maternal duties, and the perceived need to prioritise family life can hinder women's professional development and limit opportunities for advancement in managerial roles. Finally, the sub-theme "Family Intervention" uncovered the impact of familial interventions on participants' career progression. It examines the pressures from family members who hold traditional views on women's roles, and how these views can conflict with the pursuit of managerial positions, often leading to internal and external conflicts that female nurse managers must negotiate.

8.5.1 Marital Status

This sub-theme emerged from the experiences of Sara, Noura, and Malak, who shared how marriage has influenced their professional progression, especially in managerial roles. Participants described the delicate balance between their career ambitions and marital dynamics, often involving ongoing

adjustments and compromises. The concept of "The Dual Burden" aptly captures this balancing act, as it reflects the continuous effort required to manage both marriage and career aspirations.

Sara provided insight into this balance, noting how her husband's partial acceptance of her career impacted her path:

"Ummmm [thinking] as for my ex-husband there was no complete acceptance [referring to managerial positions], although he accepted the idea with some reluctance and silence."
(Sara)

Noura's experience highlighted the tension between her ex-husband's support and her professional aspirations:

"Not that much, he might not accept the idea of me being better than him and he doesn't like that...I mean, it is an instinct in humans" (Noura)

Malak recounted obstacles posed by her ex-husband as she advanced in her career, illustrating how personal challenges can impact professional growth:

"In terms of my ex-partner, no-no-no, I mean, I separated from him before the job. ... I suffered with him for a while to get things well, but you know these kinds of people, they are hard to deal with. So I got separated. I mean, on the contrary, he was not supportive, when I got the job the first one who tried creating hurdles was him....The first person who fought me and tried to stop my livelihood. He tried to cut off my job." (Malak)

Malak also noted the potential for perceived impropriety when male superiors contact female subordinates outside typical work hours, a concern she believed might not exist in male-to-male interactions. She described this as a cultural norm reflecting privacy considerations tied to marriage:

"Married women's communication with males is not that much, sometimes she feels embarrassed. For example, if the hospital manager wants something he can't call a woman any time not if the manager is a man, he would call him anytime, but if she is a woman he would feel a little embarrassed to call her at any time thinking that she might have a house and a husband which might cause her problems. Maybe because I see some of my colleagues who have a problem like this, their husbands say you are out of work hours now, they should not call you now." (Malak)

"Of course, these girls hold high positions and are bound to answer calls sometimes, maybe that is why women refuse high positions especially those that have too much contacts in order to save their married life or their homes." (Malak)

These accounts highlight how participants' marital relationships intersected with their professional responsibilities, shaping their experiences of career advancement.

8.5.2 Motherhood

Sara, Malak, and Leen articulated the challenge of balancing professional aspirations with the demands of motherhood, particularly as single mothers. Their insights reveal the complexities of navigating career advancement while fulfilling the role of a sole caregiver.

Sara's narrative also touches on the intersection of her professional aspirations with her personal life, especially as a single mother. She notes the impact of motherhood on her journey to senior position.

"My family responsibilities affected my ability to reach more senior positions, especially since I became a single mom. This is one of the things that made me stay at a middle level and not go to a more senior level." (Sara)

Like Sara, Malak identified family responsibilities as a key factor in remaining at a middle level instead of pursuing a more demanding senior role. She reflected on the balance she maintained between family and work life, noting,

"I have another life at home and with your children since you need to give them time too" (Malak)

Also, Leen explained her reservations about pursuing a senior position due to her commitments as a mother:

"I don't think I will attain a senior position because it is a big responsibility, and my child needs me." (Leen)

Leen's reflection on the potential conflict between her professional role and her duties as a mother reveals the difficult balance that single mothers often have to assault.

Although Dina is single, she views that woman often struggle to achieve a balance between their roles as mothers and their responsibilities at work. She believes that women's challenges in setting clear boundaries between their roles as mothers and their professional career advancement can have significant implications, not only for the women themselves but also for their children. Dina's belief that:

"Women usually fail to achieve a good balance between their roles as mothers and their professional roles". (Dina)

This quote suggests that many women in managerial positions may find it challenging to separate their maternal duties from their professional commitments effectively. This inability to establish boundaries can result in their responsibilities as mothers overlapping with their work responsibilities.

8.5.3 Family Intervention

Participants provided poignant accounts of family intervention, revealing its complex role in their pursuit of senior position within the healthcare system. Through their stories, Sara, Noura, and Dina illustrated the nuanced ways in which family can act as both a hindrance and a catalyst in the journey to senior roles.

Sara experienced a dichotomy of support within her family. Her father and brothers offered unwavering encouragement, contrasting sharply with her mother's negative perception of Sara's managerial position. Sara laments:

"My mother would say that the reason for all the problems I'm having is my work and the position I'm holding... My family's reaction upsets me, I wanted everyone to be proud of me." (Sara)

Noura faced opposition from her mother when she expressed a desire to further her education abroad, a step she believed necessary for advancing her career.

"I faced a great rejection [from her mother] in terms of completing my study because I wanted to improve my qualifications and get to a senior position. "I was trying to convince my mom that I want to go and complete my studies to get a position better than the one I have now, She would say every time ..My daughter you are employed and have a salary why do you want to study more."(Noura)

Dina added:

"There are definitely obstacles, even within a family environment... these are among the challenges that I face." (Dina)

These accounts illustrate how family expectations shape participants' career choices, adding layers of complexity to their professional paths. The views of family members regarding traditional roles and career ambitions influence the balance participants maintain between personal commitments

and their pursuit of senior roles, revealing the intricate interplay between cultural norms and career advancement.

8.6 Introduction to Experiential Theme 5: Strategies and Enablers to Women Empowerment

This section explores various strategies and enablers that support the empowerment of women in managerial roles. Key areas of focus include the importance of female role models, need for qualifications to balance discrimination, development of emotional intelligence, and impact of Vision 2030. These elements collectively highlight how female managers can be supported and encouraged to overcome challenges and achieve professional goals.

8.6.1 Women Role Model

This sub-theme emerged from experiences shared by Fatima and Noura. The participants suggested the necessity of female role models in senior positions, which might inspire the professional growth of aspiring female nurse managers through guidance and mentorship.

Fatima emphasized her appreciation for women in leadership, noting the ease and understanding she felt working with female managers:

"I really love to deal with a woman. Woman understands me better and it is easy to deal with them" (Fatima)

Noura highlighted the lack of guidance she experienced from women in higher positions, suggesting that more mentorships could support women's career growth:

"There was no help; no one assisted me, even though the supervisor was present. I needed women who would guide me, telling me what was right and what was wrong." (Noura)

These insights illustrate the potential impact of accessible female role models, pointing to a need for mentorship and support to encourage career advancement among women in managerial roles.

8.6.2 Qualification to Balance Discrimination

This sub-theme reflects Noura and Leen's perspectives on how educational qualifications are crucial for securing senior positions. Both participants identified education as essential for overcoming barriers to advancement, seeing it as a pathway to proving suitability for managerial roles.

Noura viewed her lack of a graduate degree as an obstacle, describing a master's degree as essential for career progression:

"I don't have a certificate. I can't hold. I mean, they want a master's degree or a doctorate degree holder, and I do not have it right now. This is the biggest obstacle." (Noura)

Leen shared a similar view, describing a graduate degree as essential for achieving senior positions:

"... graduate degree is a bridge to senior level" (Leen)

These perspectives highlight the role of qualifications in countering discrimination and enabling career advancement, as participants see further education as a means to bridge gaps in access to senior roles.

8.6.3 Emotional Intelligence

Dina emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence as a key skill for long-term success in management. She discussed her efforts to enhance her emotional intelligence, identifying it as a critical factor in navigating professional challenges:

"Emotional intelligence is key to lasting success at work... It seems to me that a lack of emotional intelligence, a strength often found more in men, is a significant issue. Women might excel in their roles but often struggle with persuasion. That's the problem I see." (Dina)

Dina's focus on personal development reflects her commitment to overcoming workplace challenges, as she aims to strengthen her managerial position and improve stability in her role.

This sub-theme underscores the perceived importance of emotional intelligence in management, as participants identify it as a valuable tool for effective communication and resilience in leadership.

8.6.4 Vision 2030 "The Reform Plan Marks a Turning Point for us".

This sub-theme emerged from the account Sara, Fatima, Noura, Dina and Leen.

All participants discussed how the country's reform plan has transformed the professional environment, offering new paths for women's career advancement, and altering conventional career paths. Each participant provides a unique perspective on the progress and challenges that remain.

The participants experience pre- and post-Vision 2030 illustrates a marked shift in professional inclusion:

"For example, before there was no call for meetings for women in meetings at regional levels...but now it is different. I'm more involved in meetings." (Sara)

"... previously society looks upon women differently, but now it is changed" (Malak)

This quote encapsulates the opening of doors for women in professional circles, signifying a step towards dismantling historical exclusions.

Fatima touches on the empowerment and challenges within her role as she mentioned:

"...we are living the 2030 vision and empowering women and giving them managerial in all its aspects. But women are still there [mid-level positions]" (Fatima)

Noura's account highlights geographical disparities in gender acceptance as she stated:

"They believe men are more eligible and deserving not women, and we have this mentality here in Hail- sorry to say-, but it is not really the same if you go to the western region like Jaddah or to Riyadh city, where there are women who are hospital managers there, but here it is not possible as they think how women can be the manager and under her men are working? How a woman is supposed to direct men I think we need times to see the new change reach the the northern cities." (Noura)

Dina's reflection on the resistance to change, despite Vision 2030, points to deeper systemic issues

"Despite the efforts of the Saudi government, I notice male managers in senior roles still resist change." (Dina)

Leen articulated the need for patience and persistence:

"We need time for Vision 2030 to be implemented in all regions...control is more by males than females." (Leen)

Her perspective highlights the gradual nature of societal change and the importance of extending the vision's reach to ensure inclusive progress.

Hence, these perspectives provide insight into the impact of Vision 2030 on women's professional lives, revealing both progress and ongoing challenges as participants adjust to new opportunities and shifts in societal expectations.

8.7 Summary

This chapter, guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), explores the experiences of women nurse managers through several key themes: "It's a man's world," "To fit into a man's world," "Perpetuating the cycle of oppression," and "The Dual burden." Each theme reveals the complex challenges women face as they navigate male-dominated environments, adapt their identities to fit norms, and deal with the pressures that perpetuate gender inequality. "It's a man's world" highlights male-centric barriers. "To fit into a man's world" shows how women modify behaviour to align with male expectations. "Perpetuating the cycle of oppression" examines how women contribute to sustaining inequities through lack of support and internalised gender norms. The dual burden captures the dual burden of balancing professional and personal expectations. "Strategies and Enablers to Empowerment" focuses on supports that help women overcome these challenges, illuminating the depth of their experiences.

Notably, the participants' use of specific language and metaphors illuminated the depth of their experiences and the emotional and psychological landscapes they navigate. The metaphorical expression of their struggles, encapsulated by phrases like "standing on our backs", participants articulated how their efforts and contributions often serve as a foundation for men's ascension to senior levels without acknowledging or advancing themselves. This intense image underscores the exploitation and undervaluation of women's work in male-dominated environments.

Additionally, the use of the metaphor "women are their own worst enemies", adds a complex layer to the narrative. This perception reveals how societal norms and internalised gender roles can lead to destructive competition and self-undermining behaviours among women, further exacerbating the challenges they face. The next chapter presents a discussion influenced by the feminist lens.

Chapter 9: Discussion Chapter

9.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to explore the lived experiences of female nurse managers in middle management at the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Health. My study utilised a phenomenological approach to delve into how female nurse managers perceive and interpret their journeys in management, seeking to uncover the deeper meanings they ascribe to their career development. Using a phenomenological approach complemented by Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al. 2009), I explored the interpretations and meanings attributed to managerial roles by mid-level nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. This analysis was conducted through a double hermeneutic method alongside Heidegger's Interpretive Phenomenology (1996), further enhanced with a feminist lens to capture the realities of these women. The objective is to understand the nuanced ways in which these female managers engage in their roles and reflect on their professional growth throughout their careers.

In IPA, researchers present data using two principal methods (Smith and Osborn 2007). The first method involves creating a distinct 'results' section that showcases the emergent thematic analysis independently of the existing literature. This is followed by a separate 'discussion' section, in which the themes are connected to existing research. The alternative approach integrates these elements into a singular 'results and discussion' section, interweaving emergent themes with a concurrent discussion of the literature (Smith and Osborn 2007). In this study, I employed the first approach outlined by Smith and Osborn (2007), which distinctly separates the results and discussion sections. Using this method ensures that the thematic analysis stands on its own, allowing readers to understand the themes that emerge from the data before seeing how they relate to broader scholarly work (Smith and Osborn 2007). This separation helped avoid confusion between participant contributions and my interpretations, thereby enhancing clarity and minimising the risk of conflating emergent themes with prior research findings.

In this chapter, themes are revisited and linked to existing literature. This approach contextualises the findings within a wider academic discourse and highlights how the study contributes new insights to the field. To prevent any overshadowing of participants' voices, the discussion carefully integrates direct quotations from participants, ensuring that their experiences remain central to the interpretation. Clear transitions and a reflexive stance are used to maintain narrative coherence and

provide transparency in the interpretive process. By separating the results and discussion, this presentation aims to provide a structured exploration of the themes, allowing for a focused and in-depth analysis that highlights participants' lived experiences while engaging the reader in a scholarly context.

The persistence of the under-representation of female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia presents various challenges, not only within their workplaces or families but also across the broader societal context. Eagly and Carli (2007) suggested that the challenges faced by women managers extend beyond the well-known metaphor of the glass ceiling. They contended that women must navigate a complex maze of daily interpersonal challenges to effectively fulfil their roles. This view posits that the obstacles to female nurse managers are not only structural, but also deeply rooted in everyday interactions within the workplace. Thus, this chapter explores the intricate ways in which Saudi women navigate professional challenges amidst the rapid sociocultural changes that occur in Saudi society. Through qualitative research using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis and a feminist perspective, my study reveals the nuanced interactions between progressive social and economic reforms and conservative cultural and religious principles that aim to maintain stability.

Despite socio-political reforms, socio-cultural aspects continue to exert a significant influence on Saudi women's lives, particularly in professional contexts (as clearly stated in experiential theme 1). The continuous underestimation and marginalisation of women can lead them to internalise these oppressive views. This internalisation often manifests in behaviours where women not only lack solidarity but also inadvertently oppress themselves (as discussed in experiential Theme 2) and each other (as discussed in experiential Theme 3), perpetuating the cycle of oppression influenced by pervasive gender norms. Additionally, these dynamics serve to privilege men, reinforce traditional gender roles, and further entrench the systemic barriers that disadvantage women professionally and personally. This phenomenon reflects deep-seated cultural beliefs that undermine women's professional and personal identities, shaping their interactions and supporting dynamics within their communities. From this analysis, five main experiential themes emerged:

- It's a man's world
- To fit into a man's world
- Perpetuating the cycle of oppression
- The Dual Burden
- Strategies and enablers to empowerment

These themes collectively underscore the significant hurdles faced by mid-level female nurse managers in the Saudi Arabian healthcare sector, highlighting the complexities of their personal and professional lives.

9.2 Feminist Theory as a Thesis Lens

In this study, I discuss four central principles that inform my theoretical understanding and closely align with the practical realities encountered during my investigation. I recognise it as not merely a theoretical construct, but a lived reality that I observed within the communities I engaged with. As I have learned, the process of empowerment extends beyond acquiring the ability to make decisions; it involves gaining power to enact change. This was evident in the strategies employed by women managers in healthcare who actively mentored and networked to overcome systemic barriers. My interactions with these managers have demonstrated the tangible effects of empowerment when individuals take control of their professional destiny. My commitment to gender equality has been challenged and strengthened through this study. Analysing policies within the Ministry of Health, I confronted the stark realities of gender discrimination that persisted at the structural level. For example, paths to senior positions vary significantly; in some hospitals, senior managers are appointed without public announcements, whereas in others, appointments are openly declared, highlighting inconsistencies in hospital policies. This experience has sharpened my understanding of feminist critiques of inequality and made me more conscious of the subtle ways inequalities are perpetuated. It has also reaffirmed my resolve to advocate for policies that advance gender equality, reflecting on how essential these are to actualise the potential of female managers.

The principle of social justice urged me to consider the broader societal impact of my research. Throughout my study, I have become increasingly aware of how societal deep-seated cultural norms shape attitudes towards female management. This awareness has led me to reflect on my own biases and assumptions, and to recognise the role of cultural beliefs in shaping the opportunities and challenges faced by female nurse managers. This has been a transformative realisation, pushing me to think about how my work might contribute to societal shifts toward greater acceptance and support of female management in healthcare.

Finally, the concept of intersectionality has profoundly influenced my approach to this research, encouraging me to look beyond singular narratives. By examining the intersecting identities of race, class, gender, and professional roles, I gained a more nuanced understanding of the complex layers

of discrimination faced by female managers. This principle has challenged me to reflect on my positionality and how my own identity intersects with that of my research participants, affecting both my approach to the research and my conclusions.

9.3 Recap of Aim and Research Questions

9.3.1 Research Aim

To examine how mid-level female nurse managers in the Saudi healthcare system understand and make sense of their experiences as they ascend senior roles.

9.3.2 Research Questions

What are the unique experiences that define the professional journey of mid-level female nurse manager in Saudi Arabia as they ascend to senior roles?

9.4 Integrating Current Research into Saudi Scholarly Perspectives

In light of the findings of this study, this section highlights the experiences of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia, linking the analysis to scholarly research. The themes are: It's a Man's World; To fit into a man's world; Perpetuating the Cycle of Oppression; The Dual Burden and Strategies and Enabling Empowerment. These themes are linked to Saudi scholars' work and the unique cultural context shaped by religious, social, cultural, and political factors, shedding light on the intersection between cultural expectations and professional aspirations.

9.4.1 It's a Man's World

"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It should not be that women are the exception." – (Ruth Bader Ginsberg 1933-1920)

This theme explored the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms on the professional experiences of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. The cultural and societal structures that favour male dominance in managerial roles create substantial barriers for women, manifesting in various forms of discrimination and marginalisation. Through the lived experiences of the participants, this section delves into three critical subthemes that highlight the challenges faced by women as they navigate their careers in a male-dominated environment: being judged as less capable, invisible, and

vulnerable and insecure in the workplace. Each subtheme underscores the systemic nature of gender bias and its resulting impact on women's professional growth and aspirations to senior level.

- **Being Judged as Less Capable**

A significant finding was that all participants shared their experiences of being perceived as incapable in professional settings among the top barriers to attaining a senior position. Despite their actual abilities and competencies, these women encountered challenges stemming from a societal perception that undermined their professional capabilities based solely on their gender. All participants shared their experience of being perceived as less capable in professional settings, identifying this perception as a significant barrier to attaining senior positions. Sara highlighted the pervasive stereotype that views women as inherently weak, articulating that:

"There is a certain stereotype about women that she is weak...They still see women as ineligible for holding managerial positions, and as weak and never strong."

It can be considered that this broad societal view that women lack the necessary capabilities to handle managerial positions significantly limits their opportunities for advancement, as supported by Hodges' (2017) findings, which corroborate that societal perceptions of Saudi women serve as significant barriers to their advancement into senior roles. A study on Saudi men's attitudes toward working women by Al-Asfour et al. (2017) highlighted the persistence of gender stereotypes and the traditional division of labour within Saudi organisations. These ingrained societal beliefs pose significant challenges to women in advancing their careers.

In addition, insights from Sara and Fatima who shared the same statement reveal a deep-seated belief among male managers that *"A people who appoint a woman to lead them will not succeed"*, illustrating how such cultural narratives foster emotional and psychological effects that undermine women's self-perception and professional identity. Sara argued that some men might support these gender stereotypes to serve their personal or social interests, reinforcing traditional power structures. She also observed women's inherent capabilities and effectiveness in managerial roles, noting a higher sense of responsibility and stability in departments led by women than in those led by men.

I believe that these findings reveal the deeply ingrained patriarchal structures that continue to shape the professional lives of Saudi women. It may be seen as the societal perception of women as less capable is not merely a reflection of individual biases, but a systemic issue rooted in cultural and

historical contexts. It might be considered that this perception serves to maintain traditional power dynamics, where men dominate managerial roles and women are relegated to subordinate positions. The experiences shared by Sara and Fatima illustrate how these stereotypes perpetuate the interests of those in power. By portraying women as inherently weak or incapable, male managers and societal structures justify the exclusion of women from managerial roles. This not only limits women's professional opportunities, but also reinforces their marginalisation and underestimation. Moreover, the emotional and psychological tolls of these stereotypes cannot be overstated. When women internalise these negative perceptions, they can erode their self-confidence and professional identity, creating a cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies. However, one might infer that the observations by participants like Sara, who noted a higher sense of responsibility and stability in women-led departments, challenged these stereotypes and highlighted the potential for women to excel in managerial roles. This reflection shows that while the societal perceptions of women as less capable are deeply rooted and systemic, they are not insurmountable.

- **Being Invisible**

Being invisible is a critical subtheme, as discussed in the findings, that explores the oppressive situation of women who were systematically disempowered by male managers. This phenomenon reveals persistent gender inequality and patriarchal control in various professional settings. Participants, such as Noura, assert, "*They still seek to monopolise authority... They don't want women to be in power; they want us to be subordinate.*" Dina added a vivid example of male dominance over female managers in her workplace: "*Our male manager seems to believe his role is to supervise and control every woman who works under him or within his professional sphere.*" Similarly, Alghamdi (2020) observed that the principal challenge faced by Saudi women managers in their professional lives is a pervasive sense of powerlessness and a lack of authority to make decisions even on critical matters.

Women faced restricted opportunities for involvement in strategic decision-making due to centralised decision-making processes. This is evident from the results, as illustrated by Sara's comment: "*I suffered from what we call centralization in management.*" Abalkhail (2017) and Almaliki et al. (2024) highlight that women experience limited opportunities for participation in strategic decision-making, primarily because of centralised decision-making processes and the restricted authority granted to women managers. This sense of powerlessness is further illustrated by the experiences of Sara, Fatima, Noura, and Dina, whose stories converge on the theme of invisibility in their professional roles. This cultural attitude, which seeks to render women invisible

within professional and social hierarchies, is arguably a deliberate attempt to stereotype women as being incapable of achieving or performing at the same level as men. Such a stereotype serves to perpetuate the cycle of disempowerment and marginalisation, reinforcing patriarchal norms that limit women's opportunities and professional growth. By monopolising authority and maintaining a tight grip on power, male managers not only undermine women's potential, but also entrench the erroneous belief that management and competence are inherently male attributes. Noura and Dina's experiences illustrate how these powers operate in everyday workplace environments. The overt supervision and control exercised by male managers are not merely about maintaining professional standards, but are indicative of a deeper, systemic issue: the unwillingness to accept women as equals. This reflects a broader societal problem in which women systematically denied the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities, thereby perpetuating the myth of female incompetence.

- **Vulnerability and Insecurity in the Workplace**

The findings of this study reveal that female nurse managers often experience vulnerability and insecurity because of the various practices employed by male managers to create an unwelcoming environment. These feelings manifest through three interconnected themes: Alienation Strategy, Emotional Exhaustion, and the Need for Protection. Together, these themes illustrate the systemic barriers and cultural dynamics that undermine women's professional experience and aspirations. Some participants described deliberate exclusion and unwelcoming behaviours that seemed strategically designed to discourage women from pursuing or continuing their managerial roles. Fatima spoke about her ongoing challenges as a form of punishment:

"I told you I am still under the punishment of accepting the position, they're still making trouble for me... The purpose was to make me hate the position and refuse to hold any position in the future."

These findings align with those of Aldossari and Chaudhry (2024), who highlighted the use of exclusionary tactics to maintain gendered power dynamics. Their studies show that such strategies are employed to reinforce traditional gender roles and discourage women from seeking managerial positions. This study revealed that women in managerial roles experience persistent stress at work, leading to significant emotional fatigue and burnout. Sara shared her struggles, noting:

"Dealing with a man was difficult and tiring for me as a woman... really tough. Every woman is facing difficulties here, and none has taken complete comfort in work."

This aligns with the findings of studies on workplace burnout, particularly among women in male-dominated environments. Al-Saggaf (2016) and Akbar et al. (2023) indicate that the additional emotional labor and stress faced by women in managerial roles contribute significantly to burnout.

Another significant theme was the need for protection, revealing how fear of unfair administrative actions and the perceived need for self-protection created an environment of vulnerability and insecurity for women. Fatima voiced a strong call for structural measures to shield women:

"It's my hope that an established authority could protect women whenever they suffer psychological harm or face any form of managerial or systemic oppression, supporting women across all sectors."

This experience illustrates the constant pressure and anxiety stemming from working in antagonistic environments. Sobaih and Abu Elnasr (2024) highlighted the necessity of protective measures in the workplace to ensure a safe and supportive environment for women. Effective policies and support systems are crucial for addressing the psychological and emotional toll of gendered workplace dynamics.

The strategies of alienation, emotional exhaustion, and the need for protection are the direct consequences of deeply ingrained sociocultural practices. These norms are embedded in the organizational structures and daily experiences of women in managerial roles, emphasizing the significant barriers women face in their professional advancement. It can be argued that these strategies reflect a broader societal attempt to sustain male dominance in professional settings. Hostile work environments aim to undermine women's confidence and deter them from aspiring to assume managerial roles. This structural oppression is culturally sanctioned and self-perpetuating, revealing the deep-seated patriarchal values that shape the professional dynamics in Saudi Arabia. The persistent emotional exhaustion reported by women underscores the impact of navigating male-dominated environments and of traditional gender norms. This systemic burden is a manifestation of patriarchal structures that prioritise male-centric practices and undermine women's professional wellbeing. The need for protection highlights the profound impact of hostile work environments on women's emotional and psychological wellbeing. This indicates broader structural inequalities that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and hostility. These interconnected themes illustrate the significant influence of sociocultural norms on Saudi women's professional lives. Despite socio-political reforms, these deeply ingrained practices continue to perpetuate workplace gender inequality.

9.4.2 Women Shaping Themselves to Fit Men's World

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." — (Eleanor Roosevelt 1884-1962)

Building on the previous experiential theme, this section discusses how cultural pressures lead women to internalise oppressive views and exert self-pressure, impacting their professional lives and aspirations in managerial positions. The constant underestimation and marginalisation that women face forces them to "abandon their feminine traits" to fit the male-dominated management model. This assertion is supported by the participants' narratives, where many described altering their behaviour and presentation to align with male management expectations. For example, some participants frequently stated that adopting a more aggressive approach was necessary to gain respect. Additionally, women often feel the need to continually prove their worth, as expressed in the subtheme "Endless Proof: 'I have to prove myself'" and the over-preparedness in the subtheme "Readiness: 'I am not ready yet.'" This constant need for validation creates a cycle of self-pressure and doubt, compounded by fear of failure. Despite their qualifications, women hesitate to take on senior roles because of their fear of making mistakes. This internalisation manifests in behaviours in which women inadvertently perpetuate their own marginalisation by conforming to these norms. "The need for male allies and reliance on vitamin W" highlights additional hurdles women face. As Malak mentioned, "In the past, I saw people holding positions, and they are frankly not deserving, and this was through *Wasta* (Vitamin W [indicating favoritism])." Networking and gaining male endorsements have become crucial for career advancement, yet these practices perpetuate dependency on male approval. Finally, women's unintentional silence as a form of internalised oppression is demonstrated by a lack of assertiveness.

- **Forced to Abandon My Feminine Frame**

Building on the previous subthemes, it is evident that the continuous underestimation and marginalisation of Saudi women in professional contexts often leads women to internalise these views, believing that they are not fit for managerial positions unless they adopt masculine traits. This study revealed significant findings regarding gender identity and management, suggesting that female managers feel compelled to adopt masculine traits to secure their positions and advance their careers in male-dominated professional environments. For instance, Fatima highlighted the necessity to mimic harsh behaviours typically associated with male managers, saying, "*I have to behave like them [male managers] ... sometimes I need to be harsh as them.*" Similarly, Sara views managerial roles as inherently masculine, describing it as a game that she must master: "*If a girl*

wants to be a manager she must have some masculine qualities, she has to master these games or embody these traits."

In Saudi Arabia, where women encounter obstacles in managerial roles due to societal norms and gender expectations, adopting masculine traits can be seen as a strategic approach. Studies focusing on women in managerial roles in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector demonstrate how institutional practices and stereotypical attitudes influence behaviours, creating challenges for women in managerial positions (Akbar et al., 2023). Cultural norms significantly shape the understanding of managerial role in Saudi Arabia, often favouring masculine traits and characteristics. Consequently, those who define management primarily in terms of specific traits might believe that anyone can become a manager, provided that they possess these masculine qualities regardless of their gender (Alotaibi et al., 2017). Adopting masculine traits to lead, particularly for women in Saudi Arabia, involves navigating societal expectations and stereotypes. Research indicates a traditional association between leadership and masculine traits, with studies showing that qualities, such as assertiveness and competence, are highly valued as defining characteristics of managers, particularly men (Alotaibi et al. 2017). This suggests that to be perceived as effective managers, women may benefit from displaying detectable masculine traits associated with high status.

These findings underscore the enduring impact of sociocultural norms on Saudi women in a professional setting. It could be seen that women internalise societal views that question their fitness for managerial roles. The continuous underestimation and marginalisation experienced by women contribute to this internalisation, leading them to conform to masculine leadership norms to be taken seriously. This internalised oppression manifests in behaviours where women may unknowingly perpetuate stereotypes and hinder their advancement. The narratives of the participants vividly illustrate how societal expectations push women to adopt masculine traits for credibility and career advancement in male-dominated environments. By conforming to these norms, it could be argued that women inadvertently reinforce the notion that femininity is incompatible with managerial roles, thereby perpetuating marginalisation.

- **Endless Proof**

Women in this study continually find themselves having to prove their worth in achieving recognition and advancement comparable to that of their male counterparts. This need stems from

a confluence of systemic, organizational, and cultural dynamics that contribute to a workplace environment biased toward women's professional progression.

Noura believed she had to prove herself due to this bias, explaining, "*They believe that only those from Hail should hold positions; if you're not from here, you're not seen as deserving.*" This highlights the prejudice she faced, and the extra effort required to enhance her image and skills to be recognised and promoted. Her continual need to prove her capabilities, as she states: '*I am proving myself and continuing it. I feel that I am from a challenge to challenge every time the manager comes,*' exemplifying the perpetual effort required by women to validate their competence in professional settings. Dina expressed, '*My success will not come easy: I must work harder than everyone else around me*', which serves as a powerful testament to the additional efforts women must often exert to challenge and change entrenched gender norms. Similarly, Malak's experience mirrors that women are required to demonstrate higher competence than men to be viewed as equally skilled.

In the realm of higher education in Saudi Arabia, female professionals often must demonstrate exceptional dedication and competence to progress into managerial positions. Almutairi (2020) examined the relationship between self-efficacy and organizational commitment among university faculty members in Saudi Arabia. This study emphasises the vital importance of self-efficacy in managerial roles, suggesting that significant levels of confidence and commitment are necessary for women managers to succeed in their roles.

It could be seen that this phenomenon reflects entrenched systemic biases and cultural norms that place a disproportionate burden on women to achieve higher standards than their male counterparts for equal recognition. Women often find themselves navigating through institutional barriers that demand exceptional performance merely to be considered on par with their male colleagues. The narratives captured in this theme highlight a troubling consequence: Women's continual efforts to prove themselves inadvertently reinforce oppressive gender norms. By perpetuating the belief that women must consistently outperform men to be perceived as equally capable, this dynamic reinforces the marginalisation of feminine leadership styles. This reinforces the misconception that effective leadership is synonymous with masculine traits, thereby restricting opportunities for women to lead authentically and with diversity.

- **Readiness: “I am not ready yet”**

Many women in this study, currently serving as mid-level managers in the healthcare sector, expressed strong interest in advancing to top managerial roles. However, they revealed hesitation about stepping into such positions, primarily because of feelings of unpreparedness. Dina expressed her concerns clearly: *“I need to prepare myself.”* Malak’s experiences add depth to this subtheme.

“It was in a managerial position that I held three months before transitioning. Despite this opposition, it was not my preference, but I was eager to attempt it. I was not ready at that time.”

Her initial negative experiences further compounded Malak's reluctance to seek senior positions. This aligns with the findings of Sobaih and Abu Elnasr (2024), who examine barriers that Saudi women face in achieving top managerial roles in the tourism sector. Their research points to a critical lack of self-confidence as a substantial impediment influenced by inadequate training, education, motivational support, and prevailing social norms. Importantly, they emphasised that self-confidence is crucial for overcoming stereotypes and seizing better job opportunities. The continuous hesitance of women creates an environment in which they internalise these oppressive views, leading to self-doubt and hesitation to pursue higher roles. This societal blueprint not only undermines women’s confidence but also reinforces the notion that they need to be excessively prepared to justify their presence in senior positions, unlike their male counterparts who might ascend with relative ease, which was discussed in the subtheme "endless proof". It could be argued that the readiness they refer to is not their readiness but rather a lack of sociocultural readiness to accept female managers. Dina's statement, *“I need to prepare myself”*, and Malak's admission, *“I was not ready at that time”*, highlight a broader societal hesitance to fully embrace women in managerial roles. This hesitance stems from a cultural blueprint that has historically viewed managerial positions through a masculine perspective. The excessive caution women exhibit reflects a society not yet ready to accept them as managers, manifesting broader cultural and systemic barriers that women face, which might contribute to women’s under-representation.

- **Networking “we need doses of Vitamin W”**

The findings of my study revealed that one significant reason for the underrepresentation of women managers in top management is 'Wasta'. *Wasta* encompasses a social network of interpersonal relationships deeply embedded in familial and kinship connections, impacting both the personal and professional spheres. This practice often undermines meritocratic principles, favouring those with strong connections to truly qualified candidates (Abalkhail and Allan, 2016).

Malak critiques nepotism, colloquially referred to as "Vitamin W," stating: *"If the manager's relative is a female, he would choose her if they were from the same tribe."* Noura further elaborates on the preferential treatment based on regional and tribal affiliations: "I swear by God, women from the same region and tribe receive better treatment than those not from here. She adds:

*"I held a position for six months, which was quite long since I was not from the north. My family name ends with ** which clearly indicates that I'm not from this region for which I received criticism, that a girl not from the north can hold a position... They believe that only those from Hail should hold positions; if you're not from here, you're not seen as deserving of such responsibilities."*

This illustrates the deeply entrenched regional and tribal biases women face in their professional journeys.

Noura, a Black Saudi woman, openly declared her ethnic background, illustrating how the intersection of race and gender significantly influenced her opportunities to attain senior positions. Her narrative exposed the negative social construction of being a Black Saudi female manager. She stated,

"I am brown, not white... but it's something normal; I did not feel that it was. In terms of colour, I did not suffer from colour, but I suffered from racism because of the tribe. The only thing I suffer is tribal prejudice and racism. How did you come, and how did a person who was not from the Hail region be appointed in such a high position? I still am asked this question until today."

In the Saudi context, "tribe" refers to extended familial or kinship groups that play a significant role in social and professional networks (Nieva, 2015). Sara highlights the necessity of male endorsement for career advancement, saying, *"I need the support of the male manager, I don't think I will reach a senior position without male empowerment."*

Abalkhail and Allan (2016) clarified that workplace social networks in the Arab Gulf Region often incorporate family ties, in contrast to Western networks, which typically remain professional. In the Western context, this phenomenon, often referred to as an 'Old Boys' Club' or network, illustrates that significant work-related interactions and relationships among men frequently take place outside the office and during regular working hours (Oakley 2000; Tonge 2008). Their findings also revealed that *'wasta'* can facilitate women's career advancement if they have access to the right networks. Additionally, Hodges (2017) found that career advancement for women is frequently not based on personal qualifications, but on relations and family networks. This finding suggests that class and status are as significant as gender in determining women's access to senior positions.

Interestingly, despite recognising *wasta* as an unfair practice, Saudi women see them as a powerful tool for career advancement and goal achievement, especially in higher education institutions. According to a study by Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq (2016), nearly 60% of Saudi female respondents deemed *wasta* unfair, yet 56% considered it advantageous for attaining senior roles in traditionally male-dominated fields. Additionally, 54% perceived *wasta* as a fair networking strategy that aided women's progress. Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq (2016) explained this apparent contradiction using cognitive dissonance theory, which posits that dissonance arises when one's actions contradict their values and attitudes but can be rationalized if the actions yield rewards. The findings of my study align with Hodges (2017), who emphasised that only some women can attain managerial roles in Saudi Arabia due to their network and family status, indirectly highlighting the significant influence of family in securing senior positions.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 aims to empower women, increase their participation in the public sphere, and establish regulations to combat unethical practices such as *wasta* by instituting anti-corruption measures. As part of these efforts, the formation of the Supreme Anti-Corruption Committee in 2017, as part of these efforts, highlights the state's commitment to tackling corruption at its highest levels (Vision 2030 2017). However, Malak highlighted the persistence of the informal practices that undermined these policies.

It could be said that the persistence of these practices reflects a form of structural oppression that is both culturally sanctioned and self-perpetuating. Women like Malak, Noura, and Sara internalise these societal expectations, leading them to believe that their professional success is contingent upon male approval and familial connections rather than their own merits. This internalization manifests in behaviours where women inadvertently perpetuate their own marginalization by conforming to these norms. For instance, Sara's reliance on male support highlights how informal power structures intersect with gender dynamics, creating an environment in which women's professional advancement is heavily dependent on their ability to navigate these networks. Additionally, Noura's experience as a Black Saudi woman underscores the compounded challenges posed by the intersecting identities of race, gender, and regional affiliation. The societal narrative that only those from certain tribes or regions deserve senior positions exacerbates these challenges, further entrenching the systemic barriers women must overcome. This reliance on informal networks underscores the challenges that women face in establishing themselves as legitimate managers in a system that undervalues their qualifications and contributions.

- **Silence: Women Don't Speak Up**

The findings of this study reveal a significant barrier to women's progression to senior positions: a lack of assertiveness among female managers. Sara highlights the rarity of assertiveness among female managers, stating, *"Few numbers of female managers do defend themselves."* She speculates that this might be due to fear, societal expectations, or ignorance, explaining, *"It might be fear or the nature of women. It might be ignorance as well; it can be the fear of losing the position or some other personal reasons."* Fatima echoes this sentiment, emphasizing that fear of losing their positions prevents women from asserting themselves: *"Women don't speak up because they are afraid to lose their position."* Dina underscores a contradiction between the legal empowerment of women in Saudi Arabia and the persistent silence among female managers, noting, *"The government has empowered women in Saudi Arabia and all laws are in their favor, but I don't know why they are silent."*

In the context of Saudi Arabia, Aldossari and Chaudhry (2024) found similar patterns of behaviour among female managers, where cultural and societal expectations often lead to a lack of assertiveness. Their study highlights that, despite the progress in legal reforms empowering women, traditional gender norms continue to influence women's professional conduct. This reluctance often stems from a woman's fear of being held responsible. This silence, rooted in fear, highlights the power dynamics in a patriarchal culture, where women might feel compelled to remain silent rather than seek justice for themselves. However, I would argue that the lack of assertiveness among women in managerial roles is not solely due to fear of losing their positions but is deeply rooted in the sociocultural context in which they have grown up and lived. Women in Saudi Arabia have been socialised in a society that traditionally values male voices more highly and places less emphasis on women's perspectives. These women have been born into a society in which such dynamics are the norm, so they have never experienced anything different and see this silence as normal. This long-standing cultural framework has led women to internalise the belief that they should be silent and not assert themselves, even when legally empowered to do so. I would also contend that the internalisation of these societal views is a reflection of deeply ingrained cultural norms. These norms have conditioned women to accept their silence as natural and necessary to maintain social harmony. This internalisation manifests in behaviours in which women inadvertently reinforce the barriers that limit their professional and personal growth.

9.4.3 Perpetuating the cycle of oppression

"There is a special place in hell for women who don't help other women." (Madeleine Albright 1937-2022)

When sexism is deeply rooted in a culture such as Saudi Arabia, it embeds itself into everyday interactions and behaviours. This theme explores how internalised sexism is expressed and perpetuated, not just within individuals, as discussed in experiential theme two, but specifically between women.

- **Women Do not Support Each Other "Women are Their Own Worst Enemies."**

This study highlighted the significant barriers posed by women not supporting each other, often fuelled by competition and rivalry. Sara observes a gender disparity in support among managers, stating, *"I noticed that male managers do support each other when they are in position, but female managers are quite the opposite; they don't support each other."* Fatima highlights the challenges posed by women working against one another, attributing it to internalised sexism and envy, *"There were women who stood against other women, out of envy maybe...Some women do not accept, and cannot digest, the success of another woman while they accept the successes of a man."* Noura recounts facing passive-aggressive behaviour from a female head nurse, interpreting it as rivalry, *"Because they wanted to give me the other department's head position, I was a bachelor's degree holder while she was a diploma holder."* Leen's story adds another dimension, showcasing unexpected betrayal and complaints from a female colleague. She expresses her dismay, *"Unexpected thoughts, things that you wouldn't expect, like someone from the female staff...going to complain about you, turning against you."* Almansour and Kempner (2015) support these findings, indicating that internalised sexism and gender norms significantly impact women's interactions in professional settings. Their study suggests that women often internalise patriarchal values, leading to behaviours that undermine other women in the workplace. This internalisation results in a lack of solidarity and mutual support, perpetuating a cycle of discouragement and invalidation.

Internalised oppression among women in managerial roles is not just a consequence of personal animosities, but a reflection of the broader socio-cultural context of Saudi Arabia. Women have been socialised in a society that has historically devalued their contributions and prioritised male dominance, leading them to internalise these oppressive views. This internalisation results in behaviours in which women undermine each other, perpetuating a cycle of discouragement and rivalry. Competition among women often arises from perceived scarcity of opportunities and resources. This competition can manifest in various ways, such as malicious gossip, social exclusion, and attempts to lower one another's status to enhance one's own (Eckert 1990; Guendouzi 2001;

Goodwin 2002; Underwood 2003; Wiseman 2002). These behaviours are not merely personal failings but are deeply rooted in societal structures that promote and sustain gender inequality. Additionally, women tend to compare themselves with others within their ingroups more readily than those in relatively privileged outgroups. This tendency results in heightened resentment and competition from those who are only slightly more advantaged (Crosby 1976; Walker and Smith 2002). Internalised sexism thus divides women, preventing them from pooling their efforts against the true sources of inequity: sexism perpetrated by men and reinforced by societal power structures (Michie 1992).

In challenging participants' perspectives, it could be argued that the central issue is the scarcity of positions available to women, which forces them to compare themselves more intensely to men. Malak observed, "*They give the limited positions and some of the unimportant positions*", highlighting how this scarcity compels women to focus on these few available roles, leading to heightened competition and envy among them. This intense competition among women for limited roles results in negative dynamics such as invalidation and derogation. Consequently, women observing these conflicts might avoid pursuing senior positions, perceiving them as a "*headache*" and a "*big responsibility*", as Malak noted. This constant portrayal of senior roles as burdensome can lead to diminished aspirations to attain these positions. Furthermore, the scrutiny and criticism that women face in managerial roles can deter them. Noura illustrated this by stating, "*If we put a bottle of water on a table, he would say why did you put it there and – why and would say you don't deserve to be department heads, and you don't know how to become a manager.*" Such experiences contribute to a culture of fear and reluctance among women to assume managerial roles, knowing that they will remain under constant surveillance and criticism.

- **Derogating Each Other**

The findings of this study revealed a significant barrier to women's progression in managerial roles: derogation among female colleagues. The participants' experiences highlight how women, instead of supporting each other, often discourage and invalidate each other's efforts, reinforcing the broader sociocultural pressures that undermine women managers. Noura reflects on the negative dynamics among women, stating, "*...women discourage each other....*" Also, Malak describes her struggle with a lack of support and encouragement from female colleagues as "tiring." She shares, "*I used to tell them that I am not doing a super thing; I am just doing my job. This is what I meant when I said a negative atmosphere; I wanted to improve myself.*"

Researchers have found that language plays a crucial role in this process by invalidating women's thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and feelings. This systematic invalidation leads women to doubt their capabilities and to remain silent. After repeated exposure to such messages, women internalise this oppression, doubt their capabilities, and remain silent (Jost and Banaji, 1994; Jost et al., 2004). This dynamic highlights how ingrained cultural norms hinder women's solidarity and support for one another. It might be argued that the primary issue is not about personal conflicts but the sociocultural context that fosters internalised sexism among women in managerial roles. In Saudi Arabia, women have been socialised to accept and perpetuate patriarchal values, often devaluing their contributions and prioritising male dominance. This internalisation of oppressive views leads to behaviours where women discourage and invalidate each other, rather than offering mutual support. For instance, Fatima highlighted that *she "...speaks out of the worst experience on earth and...I don't want even my enemy to go through it..."* Her reflection that she had a difficult experience that she would not want any woman to go through, not even her enemies, reveals a complex layer in this issue. I could see from an angle that women might discourage each other not out of malice, but out of a protective instinct. Having endured significant hardship, they might subconsciously aim to protect others from similar fates by discouraging them from pursuing challenging roles.

9.4.4 The Dual Burden

"Women will have achieved true equality when men share with them the responsibility of bringing up the next generation." – (Ginsburg, 1993, p. 123)

Achieving a balance between personal and professional lives is a multifaceted challenge, particularly for mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia, where family dynamics deeply influence career trajectories. Despite progressive reforms aimed at enhancing women's roles in Saudi Arabia, entrenched cultural norms continue to impose significant burdens on working women, frequently obstructing their advancement to senior positions. This section explores three experiential subthemes that significantly impact this balance: marriage, motherhood, and family intervention. This crucially affects this balance, highlighting the intersection of professional aspirations and personal commitments within the unique Saudi context.

- **Marital Status**

The findings of this study demonstrated that marital status significantly influenced mid-level female nurse managers, particularly in balancing professional responsibilities with domestic duties. All six participants were unmarried, with three separated or divorced and three single, highlighting the

tension between holding a managerial role and maintaining marital life. This underscores the difficulty of reconciling the dual responsibilities of career and marriage in the context of Saudi Arabia, where cultural and societal norms profoundly impact women's aspirations and experiences. Sara provides a candid glimpse into this balance, noting:

"My ex-husband made me feel that my focus was more on my work, and I am an indifferent wife even though he knew that it was important for me, and no matter how hard I work, I'm made to feel as if it's wrong to focus on my work."

Additionally, Noura's experience introduces anticipatory concerns about future spousal support:

"I'm just engaged, it is too early but honestly, I see him encouraging me since the first day we got engaged and till now. But I don't know after the marriage if he does that."

In Saudi culture, women are traditionally expected to focus on childbearing, supporting their husbands, cooking, housekeeping, and caring for their elderly parents (Al-Buleihi 2016). Historically, since women were largely barred from working, domestic duties did not conflict with career goals or add to stress. Although Saudi women have successfully navigated workplace challenges, little progress has been made in obtaining Saudi men to share their household duties. Typically, married Saudi men allow their wives to work provided they do not disrupt their domestic responsibilities. Men generally view home management as a woman's duty, so women are expected to independently manage both their careers and home lives (Al-Buleihi 2016). Consequently, many women who agree to this compromise now face significant stress.

Despite significant strides made with Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia, which has liberalised many legal restrictions concerning women's employment and education, the subtleties of personal relationships, particularly the dynamics of marital and family support, continue to play a pivotal role in shaping women's professional lives (Alhajri 2020). The legal emancipation from needing male guardians' permission for professional pursuits contrasts with the cultural expectation that women still seek approval from their husbands or fathers. This dichotomy points to an ongoing conflict between progressive legal reforms, entrenched marital dynamics, and family intervention, illustrating that legal changes alone are insufficient to overcome the barriers imposed by societal expectations and traditional marital roles (Alghamdi 2014). Conversely, it could be argued that the main challenge for these women is not personal conflict but societal expectations and cultural norms impacting their professional and domestic roles. In other words, the primary challenge for these women is not marriage itself but the internalisation of societal views that women cannot balance managerial positions and domestic roles. Although the experiences of participants such as Sara,

Noura, and Malak highlighted marriage as a barrier, evidence suggests that these internalised views, rather than marital status, create significant barriers to women ambitions to senior position. For instance, Sara's partial support from her Husband led her to feel that her focus on work made her an indifferent wife. Noura's concerns, despite being engaged and not yet married, reveal a deeper issue: she worries not about her future in a managerial position but about the internalised belief that she might not succeed in a managerial role if she gets married.

For instance, Sara, Malak, and Leen, who are divorced women and mid-level managers with full custody of their children, exemplify the added burdens that women face. Despite their divorce and doubled responsibilities, these women continued to pursue and hold senior-level positions. This situation underscores the overwhelming nature of their roles, as they manage professional responsibilities alongside significant domestic duties without adequate societal support. Unmarried women like Noura and Dina have negative perceptions about marriage and its impact on their professional lives rooted in internalised societal views. They anticipate the challenges and pressures that married women face, leading to hesitation and self-doubt regarding their ability to balance both roles effectively. Thus, the core issue is the internalisation of societal views, which leads to self-doubt and hesitation among women to pursue managerial roles.

- **Motherhood**

In this study, the women discussed the intricate intersection between professional aspirations in terms of attaining senior positions and the demands of motherhood. Particularly, for single mothers, these dual roles significantly impact their career trajectories and personal lives. The complexities and challenges faced in balancing these responsibilities were revealed through Sara, Malak, Leen, and Dina's narratives. Sara, a single mother, articulated the profound impact of her family responsibilities on her professional life. She reveals the tension between her career aspirations and role as a sole caregiver: *"My family responsibilities affected my ability to reach more senior positions, especially since I became a single mom."* Echoing Sara's sentiments, Malak highlights the duality of her life and the choices she makes in favour of her children. Her reflection underscores the constant negotiation between professional and personal responsibilities: *"I have another life at home and with your children since you need to give them time too."* Leen adds depth to this theme by expressing her reservations about taking on senior positions due to the significant responsibilities they entail, coupled with her commitment to her child: *"I don't think I will attain a senior position because it is a big responsibility, and my child needs me."*

Among studies in Saudi Arabia, Al-Asfour et al. (2017) shed light on the challenges and barriers faced by Saudi women in career advancement. This study identifies societal and organizational structural and attitudinal barriers that hinder the progress of Saudi women in paid employment. These barriers likely affect working mothers in Saudi Arabia and influence their career advancement and professional growth opportunities. This study highlights significant societal and organizational structural and attitudinal barriers that impede the advancement of Saudi women in the workforce (Al-Asfour et al. 2017). Consequently, female workers may be compelled to adjust their careers, such as reducing their working hours or changing their career paths (Al Ghamdi 2014).

Although the experiences of the participants highlighted motherhood as a barrier, the evidence suggests that these internalised views, rather than parental status, create significant barriers to women's managerial roles. It is also important to consider the emotional dimensions that influence women's professional choice. The hesitancy of women to attain managerial roles may well partly be attributed to feelings of guilt resulting from societal pressure that requires mothers to meet social expectations.

- **Family Intervention**

Family intervention significantly influenced the participants' choices and advancement to the senior level. This finding emerged from the experiences of Sara, Noura, and Dina, thereby exposing the tension between family expectations and professional ambitions. The participants provided poignant accounts of family intervention, revealing its complex role in the pursuit of senior positions in the healthcare system. Through their stories, Sara, Noura, and Dina illustrate the nuanced ways in which families can act as both a hindrance and a catalyst in the journey to senior roles.

Sara experienced a dichotomy of support within her family. Her father and brothers offered unwavering encouragement in sharp contrast to her mother's negative perception of Sara's managerial role. Sara laments:

"My mother would say that the reason for all the problems I'm having is my work and the position I'm holding... My family's reaction [female relative's] upsets me, I wanted everyone to be proud of me."

This disparity in familial support highlights the emotional toll that conflicting family opinions can have on their professional aspirations.

Noura faced opposition from her mother when she expressed a desire to further her education abroad; a step she believed was necessary to advance her career.

"I faced great rejection [from my mother] in terms of completing my study because I wanted to improve my qualifications and attain a senior position. I was trying to convince my mother that I want to complete my studies to get a position better than the one I have now. She would say every time, 'My daughter, you are employed and have a salary, why do you want to study more?'"

Her mother's repeated questioning underscores a protective yet obstructive stance, creating emotional and practical hurdles for Noura's aspirations.

Additionally, Dina admitted, *"There are definitely obstacles, even within a family environment... these are among the challenges that I face."* Her narrative revealed the cultural and familial pressures that impeded her progress, arguing that family intervention had a significant impact on her decisions and advancement to a senior position.

Women in Saudi Arabia encounter various challenges and barriers to their career development, such as cultural expectations and societal norms that prioritise family responsibilities over professional pursuits (Abalkhail 2017; Alboliteeh et al. 2017). From a young age, females in Saudi Arabia are culturally encouraged to prioritise caring for their families, which can impact their career decisions (Abalkhail 2017). Additionally, societal stereotypes in Saudi Arabia suggest that women may face criticism from family and friends if they choose non-traditional careers (Dukhaykh and Bilimoria 2021). According to Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq (2016), Saudi society traditionally held a negative view of mixed-gender environments. This societal attitude poses significant barriers to women working in such settings, impacting their professional progress and family dynamics. Dukhaykh and Bilimoria (2021) noted that their study's findings might be explained by fundamental attribution error, where women in non-traditional careers attribute their persistence to personal qualities rather than external workplace factors. However, this study highlights the critical role of family support, particularly from fathers. This support is essential for fostering personal attributes and strategies that help Saudi women maintain their careers in non-traditional fields.

It can be said that family intervention, particularly from female relatives, play a dual role in shaping women's career trajectories in Saudi Arabia. The narratives of Sara, Noura, and Dina reveal that while familial support can empower women to pursue managerial roles, it can also hinder their progress through protective, yet obstructive attitudes. This duality reflects the broader cultural context in which traditional gender roles and societal expectations continue to shape professional opportunities for women. The internalisation of societal norms by female family members, such as mothers, often leads to discouragement rather than support. This internalisation manifests in

behaviours where women inadvertently reinforce patriarchal values by prioritising social views over professional ambitions. Addressing these root causes requires a cultural shift that challenges societal norms and encourages family support for women's career aspirations, enabling them to aspire to professional and personal roles.

9.4.5 Strategies and Enablers to Women Empowerment

“We women just made our own way” — (Howel, 2023)

Under this experiential theme, I outlined subthemes reflecting the beliefs of mid-level women who perceived certain strategies and enablers help women reaching senior positions. However, it is important to note that some of the proposed solutions seem unrealistic.

- **Women Role Models**

Ensuring that mid-level women have access to female role models in managerial positions is a strategic solution identified by participants to counter challenges and promote gender diversity within organisations. The visibility of these role models is crucial for enhancing women's representation in managerial roles, particularly for mid-level female managers, who face substantial barriers in environments marked by persistent gender bias.

Noura's account highlights a significant gap in guidance and support from senior women, which she views as an impediment to their professional development. She articulates, *"I needed women who would guide me, telling me what was right and what was wrong"*, underscoring the essential role that accessible mentors play in nurturing the career trajectories of emerging managers. This lack of accessible guidance and mentorship represents a substantial impediment to professional development and the success of managerial positions.

Fatima's reflections further illuminate the personal impact and value of female managers, expressing a deep appreciation for their presence and the significant contributions they make. She stated, *"I really love to deal with a woman. Women understand me better, and it is easy to deal with them,"* highlighting the comfort and effectiveness that female managers bring to the professional environment. The findings from this study echo those of Hodges (2017), highlighting the significant scarcity of role models and mentors, as discussed by the participants in relation to their professional relationships.

Research offers a nuanced view on the impact of role models, indicating that while high-level role models, whose success may seem unattainable, can negatively influence younger women's self-perceptions and aspirations, mid-level role models do not have this effect (Bozkur and Cig 2022). This suggests that relatable and accessible role models are more effective in fostering positive self-perceptions and encouraging ambitions toward senior positions among women.

The personal experiences of the participants highlighted the importance of female role models in fostering a supportive and empowering environment for women in managerial positions. These narratives highlight the need for a cultural shift within organisations to value and promote diverse leadership styles. It can be stated that the importance of female role models cannot be overstated. Their presence challenges patriarchal norms, which have historically limited women's professional advancement. By promoting women to visible managerial positions, organisations can dismantle stereotypes that confine women to subordinate roles.

- **Qualification to Balance Discrimination**

My study highlights the critical role of education in career advancement of mid-level female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. Noura perceives attaining higher degrees to be essential for progression to top management positions. This perception underscores the structural barriers and educational requirements impeding women's career advancement. Noura articulated the necessity of higher qualifications for career progression, stating, *'Obtaining a master's or doctoral degree is essential for me to move into top management. Without these qualifications, I face significant barriers.'* She perceived higher education as a means of overcoming these obstacles and advancing her career. She added, *"If I get my master's, I could even sue them for not promoting me based on educational requirements."*

Scholarly research supports Noura's view that higher education is often a prerequisite for managerial roles, particularly in male-dominated fields. Furthermore, a study by Al-Hussain and Al-Marzooq (2016) found that educational attainment significantly influences women's career advancement in Saudi Arabia, highlighting the systemic barriers faced by women in accessing managerial roles. Noura's experiences illustrate the dual role of education as both an enabler and barrier. While higher qualifications provide women with the credentials that need to be considered for top management positions, they also reflect the systemic inequities that require women to "prove" their capabilities through additional qualifications. This requirement underscores the broader societal

expectation that women must work harder to attain the same positions as their male counterparts do.

- **Emotional Intelligence**

My study revealed the essential role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the success of female managers. Dina emphasised the necessity of embracing EI, particularly in enhancing persuasion and emotional management skills. Dina highlighted the significance of EI for female managers: *“Emotional intelligence, often a strength in men, is key to lasting success at work. Women excel but struggle with persuasion, which is a significant issue”*. Her recognition of the importance of EI underscores her commitment to personal growth toward senior roles. She acknowledges the challenges women face, especially in persuasion and emotional management, and emphasises the need for improved EI skills to effectively address these challenges. Saha et al. (2023) argue that it is essential for female nursing managers to be aware of and manage their emotions. They often face unique workplace challenges, such as gender-based discrimination and pay inequality, which makes it crucial to manage stress and maintain emotional health. Similarly, a recent study in Saudi Arabia by Almadani and Alamri (2024) underscored the critical role of EI for Saudi female nursing managers, highlighting its importance in navigating workplace challenges and maintaining emotional well-being. It could be said that Dina’s emphasis on the necessity of emotional intelligence for female managers is a testament to her awareness of the unique challenges women face in their managerial position. Emotional Intelligence not only facilitates effective leadership by improving persuasion and emotional management skills but also empowers women to understand the consequences of internalised oppressed views toward themselves and each other.

- **Vision 2030 “The Reform Plan Marks a Turning Point for Us”.**

As detailed in Chapter 2, Vision 2030 is a strategic initiative by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia aimed at diversifying the economy and fostering various social and economic reforms. Central to these reforms is the enhancement of women's roles across key sectors, such as healthcare, education, and leadership, recognising Saudi women as pivotal to the nation's progress (Vision 2030 2016). Although social changes in Saudi Arabia might appear modest to outsiders, they represent a significant shift in Saudi standards. Recent history has provided numerous instances of changes and reversals, such as the strong opposition to girls' education in the 1950s and women’s driving (Saleh and Malibari 2021).

Participants in this study unanimously noted that Vision 2030 markedly improved the professional landscape of women by implementing policies designed to empower them. These changes have

facilitated increased female participation in the workforce, provided greater managerial opportunities, and led to a significant shift towards greater professional inclusion. For instance, Sara observed a notable change in her involvement and representation in work meetings, stating, *'Before there was no call for meetings for women in meetings at regional levels...but now it is different. I'm more involved in meetings.'* This shift highlights a move away from historical exclusion and towards integrating women into managerial roles that were previously inaccessible to them.

However, the advancements brought about by Vision 2030 are challenging. Many participants reported pervasive resistance to these changes among men, manifesting in both subtle rejection of women's new roles and overt opposition to their increased visibility and authority in the workplace. Fatima pointed out the dual nature of these changes, recognizing both the empowerment they bring and the enduring societal challenges: *"...we are living the 2030 vision and empowering women and giving them managerial roles in all its aspects. But women are still there [mid-level positions]"*. Similarly, Dina highlighted ongoing systemic issues that impede the full integration of women in managerial roles: *"Despite the efforts of the Saudi government, I notice male managers in senior roles still resist change."*

Participants such as Fatima and Noura highlighted significant regional disparities in the impact of Vision 2030 on empowering women within Saudi Arabia, illustrating the complex interplay of localised cultural differences and the uneven implementation of national policies aimed at promoting gender equality. While progressive attitudes toward women in managerial role are more prevalent in major urban areas, such as Jeddah and Riyadh, conservative views continue to dominate in more traditional and tribal cities, such as Hail. Fatima's experiences during her volunteering work in the Hajj season in the Western region underscore these observations, where she noted a significant presence of women in senior roles and general respect for women in mid-level positions—a stark contrast to the conservative communities such as Hail City. This variation suggests that the visibility and acceptance of women in managerial roles can vary widely depending on the local context.

According to Hakem (2017), understanding the resistance to these reforms requires an examination of the historical, cultural, and religious dynamics of Saudi society. The Kingdom's strategy to fully integrate women into the workforce confronts deeply ingrained societal norms and perceptions, which pose significant barriers to this transformative vision. The regional variation in the acceptance and empowerment of women aligns with the scholarly findings of Dahlan (2023), who discusses the

impact of regional differences on women's roles in Saudi society. In 2010, Kelly and Breslin noted that in urban areas, which are more exposed to global business practices and cultures, there is a tendency to adopt more progressive attitudes towards women's managerial roles than in conservative areas.

Moreover, in societies influenced by patriarchal and tribal structures, discussing and advancing women's rights are particularly challenging. Abu Hanieh (2008) noted that these societal frameworks make it difficult to recognize women's potential contributions beyond domestic roles. This resistance is fuelled by a deep-seated fear of altering the traditional roles of women as wives and mothers, resulting in minimal participation of women in the labour market outside their homes. It could be said that resistance to women working in managerial roles is often more about patriarchal structures that seek to maintain control over women's mobility and visibility. According to researchers, such as Madawi Al-Rasheed (2013), these barriers, while formidable, are not insurmountable. Societal norms are undergoing a slow yet evident transformation as economic and educational opportunities for women grow under Vision 2030. Initial resistance may temper over time as the community gradually adapts to new norms, facilitated by increased awareness and education about the economic and social benefits of gender inclusivity.

9.5 Summary

Despite socio-political reforms, sociocultural aspects continue to exert a significant influence on Saudi women's lives, particularly in professional contexts. The continuous underestimation and marginalisation of women can lead them to internalise these oppressive views. This internalisation often manifests in behaviours where women not only lack solidarity, but also inadvertently oppress themselves and each other, perpetuating the cycle of oppression influenced by pervasive gender norms. Additionally, these dynamics serve to privilege men, reinforce traditional gender roles, and further entrench the systemic barriers that disadvantage women professionally and personally. This phenomenon reflects deep-seated cultural beliefs that undermine women's professional and personal identities, shaping their interactions and supporting dynamics within their communities. It can be argued that the most significant barrier preventing women from attaining high-level positions, as revealed in this study, is the internalisation of oppressive societal views. Although it is undeniable that women face substantial pressure and encounter negative practices designed to dissuade them from managerial roles, they have internalised the belief that they are inherently oppressed and unable to achieve high positions without resorting to alternative methods. These

methods often include leveraging connections or adopting traditionally masculine traits. While leveraging connections or adopting traditionally masculine traits might help some women reach senior levels, it could be argued that these methods can produce a "Queen Bee" phenomenon. The "Queen Bee" phenomenon describes a situation where women in senior positions within male-dominated environments do not support other women and may even hinder their advancement. Research shows that women who achieve high positions through male-dominated networks often exhibit this behaviour, distancing themselves from junior women and reinforcing existing gender biases. This concept was initially detailed in studies by Kanter (1977) and Staines et al. (1974). Women in such environments may feel pressured to conform to the prevailing male culture to succeed, which can lead to distancing from other women to avoid being perceived as showing favouritism due to gender. This behaviour is recognised as Queen Bee Syndrome, where women in managerial positions are seen as critical of female subordinates and often unsupportive of their advancement (Ellemers et al. 2004; Derks et al. 2011). Conversely, research also indicates that women who reach senior positions through their efforts are more likely to assist other women. These women often value mentorship and support in overcoming gender barriers and actively work to promote gender diversity in managerial roles (Ely 1994; Mavin 2008).

Dina's insight into the importance of resilience and emotional intelligence as a solution highlights a crucial aspect of overcoming these barriers. I concur with her perspective that fostering these attributes is essential for breaking through the glass ceiling. It is evident that societal transformation cannot occur in isolation; it necessitates a concurrent evolution within women themselves. Government initiatives, such as Vision 2030, are commendable but insufficient on their own. Women's empowerment must progress in tandem with societal reform.

Leen offers a perspective that challenges prevailing gender norms by advocating for leadership qualities that transcend traditional masculine or feminine traits. Her stance is clear in her statement: *"Don't draw lines between women and men; we're all part of one team, all human."* This approach suggests that effective managers is rooted in individual abilities and the collective effort of a team, rather than the gender of its members. I believe that this suggestion is effective and could help women foster their dependency and uniqueness rather than adopt masculine traits. Fatima and Leen emphasise success based on their own merits rather than relying on male networking. They agree that job performance should be the key determinant in career advancement and that the most qualified individual should obtain the position.

Kolb (2009) supports Leen's perspective, arguing for a shift in organisational culture and practices to acknowledge and value diverse leadership styles. This approach not only enhances inclusivity but also allows individuals to lead authentically without conforming to restrictive gender norms. Kumra and Vinnicombe (2008) and Sealy (2010) discuss that, despite the emphasis on merit, the most qualified candidate is not always selected for top management positions. If merit were truly the only criterion, the gender balance in top management would be more equitable. This suggests that reliance on merit alone may delay women's progression to senior positions because of existing biases and systemic barriers.

Relying solely on societal change and adopting a victim mentality is counterproductive. It is often said that women are their own worst enemies, and this extends to the internal conflicts they face. Passive anticipation for change without proactive efforts is an ineffective strategy.

Some proposed solutions, like the need for female role models, seem impractical under the current mindset. How can role models emerge if women themselves do not challenge and change their perspectives? Additionally, suggestions like Noura's advocacy for higher degrees face scrutiny. Most participants, including Sara, Fatima, and Dina, who hold master's degrees, believe that obtaining a degree does not necessarily equate to qualification for high-level positions. This indicates that higher qualifications alone are not sufficient to overcome the entrenched barriers. While Vision 2030 has made significant strides in empowering women, the pervasive societal and internal barriers persist. Moreover, the role of emotional intelligence and psychological resilience emerges as a more immediate and practical solution. Developing these skills can help women confront societal resistance and penetrate the glass ceiling. Emotional intelligence, in particular, is essential for managing the complex dynamics of professional environments and overcoming the inherent biases and opposition that women face. Sacrifices from some women to endure these strategies can pave the way for others to reach senior positions, creating a ripple effect of empowerment and change. In conclusion, the journey toward gender equality in managerial roles necessitates a dual approach. Leen's advocacy for management beyond gender stereotypes represents a progressive shift in understanding management effectiveness. This perspective aligns with feminist theories that emphasise the need to dismantle patriarchal structures and promote a more inclusive approach to management. By focusing on individual abilities and collective team efforts, this approach challenges traditional gender norms and fosters a more equitable professional environment. While societal reforms are vital, the onus is equally on women to cultivate resilience, challenge internalised oppression, and actively pursue their aspirations. Only then can meaningful and lasting change be realised, working alongside the government's Vision 2030 efforts.

Chapter 10 – Conclusion

10.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the significant aspects resulting from the thesis' completion. It begins with a review of the study's rationale and a summary of the main research findings in relation to the study's aims and objectives. This is followed by the implications of this study, The knowledge contribution of the study, along with the study's limitations and recommendations for future research, will be reviewed.

10.2 Summary of Main Findings

This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis study explored the experiences of six female nurse managers revealed that sociocultural factors in Saudi Arabia continue to significantly influence women's professional lives despite socio-political reforms. One key finding is that the internalisation of oppressive societal views by women is a major barrier to their advancement in managerial roles. Women often adopt coping strategies such as leveraging connections or adopting traditionally masculine traits, which can lead to the "Queen Bee" phenomenon, where women in senior positions do not support other women. The participants highlighted the importance of resilience and emotional intelligence in overcoming these barriers. It was noted that true societal transformation requires concurrent evolution within the women themselves, alongside government initiatives such as Vision 2030. Effective leadership should transcend traditional gender norms, focusing on individual abilities and teamwork.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis enabled the detailed exploration of the female nurse managers' lived experiences in attaining senior level. Interpretation of the data revealed that higher qualifications are valued, they are not sufficient on their own to overcome entrenched barriers. Emotional intelligence and psychological resilience were identified as practical solutions for managing professional challenges and overcoming bias. In summary, this research underscores the need for a dual approach: societal reforms and proactive efforts by women to cultivate resilience and challenge internalised oppression, thereby achieving meaningful and lasting changes.

10.3 Knowledge Contribution

The most significant contribution of my study is its revelation of the status disparity between clinical nursing and management roles in Saudi Arabia's healthcare system. It highlights how management roles are perceived as more prestigious than clinical nursing, which adversely impacts the professional identity, job satisfaction, and career progression of female nurse managers.

My research also exposes how cultural perceptions of nursing as a lower-status profession further diminish the self-worth and job satisfaction of female nurses. Many women internalize these negative societal views, leading to a deep sense of undervaluation and a desire to leave nursing practice altogether. The societal stigma attached to nursing, often viewed as a last-resort profession, compounds these challenges, causing some women to seek career transitions as a means to escape the associated negative perceptions. Furthermore, the study identifies significant barriers to career advancement for these women, including insufficient professional development opportunities, and a workplace culture that undervalues clinical roles. Addressing these issues is crucial for achieving Vision 2030's goals, which aim to transform the healthcare sector and enhance workforce conditions.

Also, my thesis offers significant contributions both methodologically and in terms of the subject matter. Employing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the research method enhances the limited existing body of IPA studies focused on female nurse managers. This approach may inspire future researchers to recognize and consider the benefits of using IPA in similar contexts. The findings provide valuable insights into research on female managers in healthcare, specifically focusing on the lived experiences of female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. This study explores how these women navigate their professional roles in a male-dominated environment, integrating cultural, social, and organizational contexts to illuminate their experiences. While recent research has begun to examine female managers in sectors such as education and the private sector in Saudi Arabia, particularly post-Vision 2030, there remains a notable gap in studies specifically targeting the experiences of women in healthcare managerial positions, especially mid-level nurse managers. The lack of prior research highlights the originality and importance of this study.

My study stands out for several reasons. This is the first study in Saudi Arabia to examine the lived experiences of mid-level female nurse managers who have remained in their positions for many years. This study offers new insights into the challenges and circumstances faced by these women,

emphasising their dedication and the reasons they continue in their managerial roles even amidst the changes brought by Vision 2030. By using IPA, this study allows for a deep exploration of the personal and nuanced experiences of these women. This method provided greater flexibility and depth of analysis compared to other methodologies, offering a detailed personal account of their lived experiences as managers.

This research reveals that organizational structures, cultural norms, and social dynamics play crucial roles in shaping women's perceptions and views about management growth. Understanding these elements is vital to understanding how they experience and perform their roles in a culturally complex, patriarchal context. This study revealed deep and invisible reasons for women's delay in attaining senior levels, highlighting that it is not only sociocultural aspects but also internal factors. The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that women internalise oppressive views that impede their progress. While waiting for cultural change, women must change their perceptions of themselves. My findings also show that sociocultural aspects often lead women to internalise oppressive views unintentionally, perpetuating their under-representation in senior positions. They manage to discreetly balance their professional identities with their traditional roles.

It is also provided an opportunity for these women managers to share their stories and revisit their experiences and challenges in managerial roles. While the research focused on mid-level managers, the insights broadly contribute to understanding the integration of women in managerial roles across different sectors.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates significant improvements in the situation and rights of Saudi women in managerial roles owing to recent societal changes, suggesting a shift toward greater gender equality in management within Saudi Arabia. The research indicates that reforms have not only enhanced opportunities for women in management but have also started changing public and institutional perceptions of female managers. Despite some internal challenges that women may inadvertently create for themselves, there is optimism for ongoing improvement in women's situations, indicating promising developments for the future, with progress being a matter of time.

10.4 Limitations of the Study

Recruiting participants was particularly challenging because of the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, which are often considered private in Saudi society. This cultural sensitivity may have limited the ability to recruit more women for this study. Originally, the interviews were intended to

be conducted face-to-face, allowing for immersion in the participants' work environments. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, virtually all interviews were conducted. While this approach reduced distractions and facilitated quicker data collection, it also limited personal interaction, which could have enriched the depth of the discussions.

Data were collected from participants in one geographical area of Saudi Arabia, specifically from three main hospitals in the Hail region. This regional focus limits the generalisability of the findings to other areas, where cultural and tribal differences might influence nurse managers' experiences. Furthermore, as a novice researcher, my inexperience, especially in coding concepts, categories, and themes, may have affected the analysis. Although efforts to maintain objectivity, such as using a reflexive journal to separate personal preconceptions from data, have been implemented, the potential for assumption remains.

Additionally, mid-level female nurse managers' experiences and perceptions are subject to change over time and are influenced by ongoing personal development and evolving social and organizational contexts. This is particularly relevant given Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, as most participants' management experience occurred before these initiatives were implemented. Consequently, the findings of this study represent a snapshot in time and may not fully encapsulate the long-term dynamics or future impacts of Vision 2030 within this field.

Moreover, the interpretation of participant responses might have been influenced by linguistic and cultural nuances that could have affected the depth and accuracy of the data analysis. This is particularly important when considering the cross-cultural context of research. In accordance with the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, this thesis reflects on my interpretation of how participants made sense of their experiences. It is important to acknowledge that other researchers might interpret the same data differently, highlighting the subjective nature of the IPA. Another limitation is the limited research on the experiences of female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. This scarcity of localised studies has posed challenges in finding relevant research that could justify the need for the current study. The lack of detailed investigations into how Saudi Arabia's sociocultural norms and Vision 2030 reforms affect middle-aged female nurses in management roles in healthcare further underscores the significance and urgency of this research.

In conclusion, these limitations highlight the need for future research to expand the participant pool geographically and demographically, explore alternative methods that might mitigate the effects of

virtual data collection, and include longitudinal studies to track changes over time, owing to initiatives such as Vision 2030. Additionally, further studies could employ mixed methods to complement qualitative findings with quantitative data, providing a more comprehensive view of the issues at hand.

10.5 Recommendations for Education

To effectively prepare undergraduate nurses in Saudi Arabia for the challenges identified in this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Integrate training on cultural sensitivity and gender-aware practices into nursing curricula. This will help students navigate societal dynamics and improve their self-image, contributing to greater job satisfaction.
- Conduct workshops and practical training sessions that focus on developing emotional intelligence and resilience. Empowering students in these areas will enable them to manage societal pressures and advocate effectively for their profession.
- Establish mentorship programmes that connect nursing students with experienced female nurse managers. These relationships will provide valuable insights into career pathways and reinforce the importance of clinical roles within the healthcare system.
- Incorporate components on health policy and advocacy into nursing education. A comprehensive understanding of the healthcare landscape will empower students to influence reforms that enhance the status of nursing in Saudi Arabia.
- Actively promote nursing through campaigns, seminars, and community outreach to enhance the profession's image and attract individuals to pursue nursing as a valued career choice. Emphasising that the nursing profession is equally important as managerial roles can boost students' confidence and job satisfaction, ultimately leading to optimal patient care and improved quality of care in line with the goals of Vision 2030.

These recommendations aim to equip undergraduate nurses with the skills and confidence needed to navigate their careers effectively, recognising the importance of nursing alongside managerial positions within the healthcare sector.

10.6 Future Research Directions

The limitations of this study highlight several important avenues for future research that could enrich our understanding of female nurse managers in Saudi Arabia. First, future studies should include participants from a wider range of geographical locations and demographic backgrounds. Expanding the participant pool to include nurse managers from various regions within Saudi Arabia could provide insights into how regional cultural differences impact managerial experience. This would also enhance the generalisability of the findings and allow for a more nuanced understanding of the diverse challenges and strategies faced by female nurse managers.

Additionally, exploring alternative research methods can help mitigate some of the limitations of virtual data collection. For instance, future studies could integrate face-to-face interviews where feasible, or utilise emerging technologies that facilitate more interactive and engaging remote interviews. This approach would help deepen engagement with participants and potentially reveal richer and more detailed data.

Moreover, conducting longitudinal research would be particularly valuable in tracking how the experiences and perceptions of female nurse managers evolve over time, especially in light of the ongoing social and organizational changes driven by initiatives such as Vision 2030. Longitudinal studies would provide a dynamic view of shifts in managerial practices, challenges, and opportunities, offering insights into the long-term impacts of these initiatives. Incorporating mixed-methods research could also significantly enhance the depth of analysis. By complementing qualitative findings with quantitative data, future research could more effectively measure trends, compare different groups of managers, and validate the qualitative insights. This approach would allow for a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand, such as the impact of specific policies on women's managerial roles and the effectiveness of support structures and development programs for female managers.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to conduct focused studies to examine the impact of specific interventions designed to support female managers. This could include mentorship programs,

leadership training tailored to the unique needs of women, and policy changes aimed at promoting gender equality in managerial roles. In conclusion, these directions address the gaps and limitations identified in the current study and pave the way for a more thorough exploration of the complex landscape of female management in health care. Such research contributes significantly to the development of targeted strategies to support and empower female managers in the region.

References

- Aabed, K., Almutairi, A., Al-shwair, A., Al-otaibi, A., Alhazzani, A., Al-shbi, A., Al-moegelth, H., Al-assaf, L. and Al-omri, S. 2021. Diversity and distribution of thermophiles and thermo-tolerant bacteria in the soil samples obtained from different regions in Saudi Arabia. *Biosci Biotech Res Asia*, 18(1). Available from: <https://bit.ly/3aTB0Gf>
- Abalkhail, J.M. 2020. Women managing women: Hierarchical relationships and career impact. *The Career Development International* 25(4), pp. 389–413. doi: 10.1108/CDI-01-2019-0020.
- Abalkhail, J.M. and Allan, B. 2015. Women's career advancement: Mentoring and networking in Saudi Arabia and the UK. *Human Resource Development International* 18(2), pp. 153–168. doi:10.1080/13678868.2015.1026548.
- Abalkhail, J.M. and Allan, B. 2016. "Wasta" and women's careers in the Arab Gulf States. *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 31, pp. 162-180. doi:10.1108/GM-02-2015-0006.
- Abualrub, R., and Alghamdi, M. 2012. The impact of leadership styles on nurses' satisfaction and intention to stay among Saudi nurses. *Journal of Nursing Management* 20(5), pp. 668–678. doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2834.2011.01320.
- Abdullah Dahlan, D. 2023. Current state of female leadership in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia. *Cogent Business & Management*, 10(3). doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2023.2276990
- Al Abdulkarim, M.K. 2018. *Labour demand, firm survival and productivity in dual labour markets: The case of the Nitaqat policy in Saudi Arabia*. PhD Thesis, King's College London.
- Akbar, H., Al-Dajani, H., Ayub, N., and Adeinat, I. 2023. Women's leadership gamut in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector. *Gender, Work and Organization* 30(5), pp. 1649-1675.
- Al-Ahmadi, H. 2011. Challenges facing women leaders in Saudi Arabia. *Human Resource Development International* 14(2), pp. 149-166. doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2011.558311.
- Alanzi, A.A. 2020. Exploring the legal system in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Innovation* 11(2). Available at: https://ijicc.net/images/vol11iss2/11207_Alanzi_2020_E_R.pdf
- Al-Asfour, A., Tlaiss, H.A., Khan, S.A., and Rajasekar, J. 2017. Saudi women's work challenges and barriers to career advancement. *Career Development International* 22(2), pp. 184-199. doi.org/10.1108/cdi-11-2016-0200.
- Albejaidi, F. and Nair, K. 2019. Building the health workforce: Saudi Arabia's challenges in achieving Vision 2030. *International Journal of Health Planning and Management* 34, pp. e1405–e1416. doi: 10.1002/hpm.2861.
- Alboliteeh, M., Magarey, J., and Wiechula, R. 2017. The profile of the Saudi nursing workforce: A cross-sectional study. *Nursing Research and Practice*. 2017, pp.1-9. doi: 10.1155/2017/1710686.
- Al-Dabbagh, M. 2008. *The context for intergroup leadership among women's groups in Saudi Arabia. In Crossing the divide: Intergroup leadership in a world of difference*. Boston, Massachusetts, USA: Harvard Business School Publishing Corporation.

Al-Dossary, R. 2022. Leadership style, work engagement, and organizational commitment among nurses in Saudi Arabian hospitals. *Journal of Healthcare Leadership* 14, pp. 71-81. doi: 10.2147/JHL.S365526

Aldossari, M. and Chaudhry, S. 2024. Gendered precarity in Saudi Arabia: Examining the state policies and patriarchal culture in the labour market. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 31(6), 2698–2716. doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13119.

Alghamdi, A. K. H., and Alsaadi, R. K., Alwadey, A. A., and Najdi, E. A. 2022. Saudi Arabia's vision 2030's compatibility with women and children's contributions to national development. *Journal of Baltic Science Education* 53 (2), pp. 193-214. doi: 10.1007/s10780-021-09451-3.

Alghamdi, N. 2020. *The challenges and opportunities faced by Saudi Arabian women leaders in education during a period of rapid change in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia*. PhD Thesis, Western Sydney University.

Alghamdi, R., Albloushi, M., Alzahrani, E., Aldawsari, A., and Alyousef, S. 2019. Nursing education challenges from Saudi nurse educators' and leaders' perspectives: A qualitative descriptive study. *International Journal of Nursing Education Scholarship* 16(1). doi: 10.1515/ijnes-2018-0027. PMID: 30798324.

Al-Hanawi, M. K., Khan, S. A., and Al-Borie, H. M. 2019. Healthcare human resource development in Saudi Arabia: emerging challenges and opportunities—a critical review. *Public Health Reviews*, 40, pp. 1-16. doi.org/10.1186/s40985-019-0112-4.

Alhajri, W. (2020). *Women's perspectives on social change in Saudi Arabia*. PhD Thesis, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

Alharbi, A., Rasmussen, P., and Magarey, J. 2021. Clinical nurse managers' leadership practices in Saudi Arabian hospitals: a descriptive cross-sectional study. *Journal of Nursing Management* 29(6), pp. 1454-1464. doi.org/10.1111/jonm.13302.

Alharbi, R. 2015. Guardianship law in Saudi Arabia and its effects on women's rights. *Research Gate Publication*. doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.29270.96326.

Al-Hussain, F. and Al-Marzooq, A. 2016. The political economy of wasta: Use and abuse of social capital networking. In: M.A. Ramady, ed. *The political economy of wasta: Use and abuse of social capital networking*. Springer International Publishing, pp. 23-45.

Alhussein, E. 2014 'Triangle of change: the situation of women in Saudi Arabia. NOREF Expert Analysis. Available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/181922/ef4fe5e44ede4d362d60a6804ed40437.pdf>.

Alkuraya, F.S. (2014). Genetics and genomic medicine in Saudi Arabia. *Molecular Genetics and Genomic Medicine* 2, pp. 369-378. doi: 10.1002/mgg3.97.

Almathami, R., Khoo-Lattimore, C., and Yang, E.C.L. 2022. Exploring the challenges for women working in the event and festival sector in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Tourism Recreation Research* 47(1), pp. 47-61. doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2020.1821329.

Almdani, N., and Alamri, M. 2024. Emotional intelligence among female nursing leaders in a transformational era. *Journal of Nursing Management*, pp 8. 2024. doi.org/10.1155/2024/9973339.

Almalki, M. J., FitzGerald, G., and Clark, M. 2011. The nursing profession in Saudi Arabia: an overview. *International Nursing Review* 58(3), pp. 304-311. doi: 10.1111/j.1466-7657.2011.00890.

Almalki, O.S., Fathelrahman, A.I., Alfayez, O.M., Bawazeer, G.A., and Asiri, Y.A. 2024. Current situation and barriers to women's leadership in healthcare education in Saudi Arabia: A cross-sectional study. *Saudi Pharmaceutical Journal*, 32(5), p. 102000. doi: 10.1016/j.jsps.2024.102000.

Alnufaie, H. and Beghum, S. 2021. Emerging pattern of women empowerment in Saudi Arabia. *Research Review International Journal of Multidisciplinary*, 6(5), pp. 21-25. doi:10.31305/rrijm.2021.v06.i05.002.

Alomair, M.O. (2015) 'Female leadership capacity and effectiveness: A critical analysis of the literature on higher education in Saudi Arabia', *International Journal of Higher Education*, 4, pp. 81-93. doi:10.5430/ijhe.v4n4p81.

Alotaibi, B., Cutting, J. and Morgan, J. 2017. Women leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Social Sciences* 11(2), pp. 72-86. doi: 10.20472/SS.2019.8.2.002.

Alothaimeen, M. 2005. Sharh Riyadhhu assaleheen. *Dar Alwatan*. Volume 6.

Al-Rabeeah, A. 2003. The history of health care in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with emphasis on pediatric surgery. *Saudi Medical Journal*, 24, S9-10. Available at: <https://europepmc.org/article/med/12778232>.

Alshahrani, B. N. S. 2018. *Male guardianship over women under Islamic Shariah, Saudi Arabia's domestic law, and international human rights Law*. Doctoral dissertation, Brunel University London.

Alsubaie, A., and Jones, J. (2017). An Overview of the Current State of Women's Leadership in Higher Education in Saudi Arabia and a Proposal for Future Research Directions. *Administrative Sciences*, 7, 36. doi.org/10.3390/admsci7040036

Alsubhi, A., Hoque, K., and Razak, A. Z. A. 2018. Workplace barriers and leadership conflicts experienced by the women in higher education in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Learning and Development*, 8(2), pp. 1-17. doi:10.5296/ijld.v8i2.13007.

Alyami, R. H. 2016. Saudi women's education and work opportunities: Equity matters. University of Reading. Available at: http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/59581/3/19000042_%20Alyami_s2.pdf.

Al Yousuf, M., Akerele, T.M. and Al Mazrou, Y.Y. 2002. Organization of the Saudi health system. *Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal*, 8 (4-5), 645-653. Available at <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/119213>

Alfarran, A., Pyke, J. and Stanton, P. 2018. Institutional barriers to women's employment in Saudi Arabia. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. *An International Journal*, 37(7), pp. 713-727. doi:10.1108/EDI-08-2017-0159.

American Hospital Association. 2014. *National Health Care Governance Survey Report*. Retrieved from <https://trustees.aha.org/2014-national-health-care-governance-survey-report>.

Annells, M. 1996a. Hermeneutic phenomenology: Philosophical perspectives and current use in nursing research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 23(4), pp. 705-713. doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1996.tb00041.x

Annells, M. 1996b. Grounded theory method: Philosophical perspectives, paradigm of inquiry, and postmodernism. *Qualitative Health Research*, 6(3), pp. 379-393. doi.org/10.1177/104973239600600306.

Bacharach, S.B. 1989. Organizational theories: Some criteria for evaluation. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), pp. 496-515. doi.org/10.5465/amr.1989.4308374.

Barr, J., and Dowding, L. 2019. *Leadership in health care*. Sage Publications Limited.

Bass, B. M. 1990. *Bass & Stogdill's handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications* (3rd ed.) New York: Free Press.

Beasley, C. 1999. *What is feminism? An introduction to feminist theory*. London: SAGE Publications.

Bennis, W. 2007. The challenges of leadership in the modern world: Introduction to the special issue. *American Psychologist*, 62(1), 2–5. doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.2.

Bergmann, N., Scheele, A., and Sorger, C. 2018. Variations of the same? A sectoral analysis of the gender pay gap in Germany and Austria. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26(5), pp. 668–687. doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12299.

Bismark, M., et al. (2015) 'Reasons and remedies for under-representation of women in medical leadership roles: A qualitative study from Australia', *BMJ Open*, 5(11).

Bismark, M., Morris, J., Thomas, L., Loh, E., Phelps, G. and Dickinson, H., 2015. Reasons and remedies for under-representation of women in medical leadership roles: a qualitative study from Australia. *BMJ open*, 5(11), pp. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2015-009384.

Borkowski, N. (2015). Organization changes and transformation. In *Handbook of Healthcare Management* (p. 286).

Borkowski, N., 2015. *Organization change and transformation*. Handbook of Healthcare Management. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bradbury-Jones, C., Sambrook, S. and Irvine, F., 2009. The phenomenological focus group: an oxymoron?. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 65(3), pp.663-671. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2648.2008.04922.

Bryman, A., and Bell, E. 2003. *Business research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burton, D., and Bartlett, S. 2009. *Key issues for education researchers*. London: SAGE Publications.

Butler, J. 1990. *Performative acts and gender constitution: Performing Feminisms*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University.

- Butler, J. 1999. *Gender is burning: Questions of appropriation and subversion*. New York: Routledge.
- Cai, W., Lysova, E., Khapova, S., and Bossink, B. 2019. Does entrepreneurial leadership foster creativity among employees and teams? The mediating role of creative efficacy beliefs. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 34(2), pp. 203–217. doi.org/10.1007/s10869-018-9536-y.
- Cavan, S. 1977. *Investigative social research: Individual and team field research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Chesky, N. 2013. Beyond epistemology and axiology: Locating an emerging philosophy of mathematics education. *Analytic Teaching and Philosophical Praxis*, 34(1), pp. 16-24. Available at: <https://philpapers.org/rec/CHEBEA-2>.
- Chobanuk, J., and James, K. 2015. Leadership Special Interest Group: What is Leadership? *Canadian Oncology Nursing Journal*, 25(1), pp. 114-117.
- Charrad, M.M. 2011. Gender in the Middle East: Islam, state, agency. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37, pp. 417-437. doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.012809.102554
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. 2007. *Research methods in education*, 6th ed. London: Routledge.
- Collins, C.S., and Stockton, C.M. 2018. The central role of theory in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), pp. doi 1609406918797475.
- Creswell, J. 2012. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. London: Sage.
- Crist, J., and Tanner, C. 2003. Interpretation analysis methods in hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology. *Nursing Research*, 52(3), pp. 202-205. doi: 10.1097/00006199-200305000-00011.
- Crotty, M. 1996. *Phenomenology and nursing research*. South Melbourne: Churchill Livingstone.
- Crotty, M. 1998. *The Foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage Publications.
- Crotty, M. 2003. *The Foundations of social research: Meaning and perspectives in the research process*, 3rd ed. London: Sage Publications.
- Cummings, G., Macgregor, T., Davey, M., Lee, H., Wong, C., Lo, E., Muise, M., and Stafford, E. 2010. Leadership styles and outcome patterns for the nursing workforce and work environment: A systematic review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 47(3), pp. 363–385. doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2009.08.006.
- de Beauvoir, S. 1972. *The Second Sex*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Derks, B., Ellemers, N., van Laar, C., and de Groot, K. 2011. Do sexist organizational cultures create the Queen Bee?. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 50(3), pp. 519-535. doi.org/10.1348/014466610X525280.

- Dhatt, R., Theobald, S., Buzuzi, S., Ros, B., Vong, S., Muraya, K., and Jackson, C. 2017. The role of women's leadership and gender equity in leadership and health system strengthening. *Global Health, Epidemiology and Genomics*, 2 E8 pp. doi:10.1017/ghg.2016.22.
- Downs, J.A., Reif, L.K., Hokororo, A., and Fitzgerald, D.W. 2014. Increasing women in leadership in global health. *Academic Medicine*, 89(8), pp.1103-7. doi: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000000369.
- Dukhaykh, S., and Bilimoria, D. 2021. The factors influencing Saudi Arabian women's persistence in nontraditional work careers. *The Career Development International*, 26(5), pp. 720–746. doi.org/10.1108/CDI-04-2020-0089.
- Dwyer, S., Richard, O.C., and Chadwick, K. 2003. Gender diversity in management and firm performance: The influence of growth orientation and organizational culture. *Journal of Business Research*, 56(12), pp. 1009-1019.
- Encyclopedia Britannica. [n.d]. *Map of Saudi Arabia*. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Saudi-Arabia>.
- El-Bakr, F., 2022. Empowering Saudi women under vision 2030: Opportunities and challenges. *International Journal of Childhood and Women's Studies*, 2(4), pp.1-12. doi: 10.21608/IJCWS.2022.270720.
- Elliott, J. 2005. *Using narrative in social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. London: Sage.
- Elliott, C. and Stead, V. (2008). Learning from leading women's experience: Towards a sociological understanding. *Leadership*, 4(2), pp. 159 – 180. doi: 10.1177/1742715008089636.
- Ely, R.J. 1994. The effects of organizational demographics and social identity on relationships among professional women. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 39(2), pp. 203-238.
- Ellemers, N., Rink, F., Derks, B. and Ryan, M.K., 2012. Women in high places: When and why promoting women into top positions can harm them individually or as a group (and how to prevent this). *Research in organizational behaviour*, 32, pp.163-187. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13132-021-00841-7>
- El-Sanabary, N. (1993). Middle East and North Africa. In *Women's education in developing countries: Barriers, benefits, and policies*, pp. 136-74.
- El-Sanabary N. 1993. *Middle East and North Africa. In Women's Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits and Policies*, ed. EM King, MA Hill. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press
- Embassies of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Washington DC. 2019. *Saudi Arabia's Reforms and Programs to Empower Women: Legal Progress for Women*. Available at: <https://www.saudiembassy.net/sites/default/files/Factsheet%20on%20Progress%20for%20Women%20in%20Saudi%20Arabia.pdf> (Accessed: 11 November 2023).
- Ensor, J. 2019. *Saudi Arabia to "ease" male guardianship law restricting women's travel*. *The telegraph*. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/07/11/saudi-arabia-ease-male-guardianship-law-restricting-womens-travel/> (Accessed: October 2023).

Fairlie, R.W., and Robb, A.M. 2007. Families, Human Capital, and Small Business: Evidence from the Characteristics of Business Owners Survey. *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, 60(2), pp. 225-226. doi:10.1177/001979390706000204.

Ferro, F. (2019) Object-oriented ontology's view of relations: A phenomenological critique. *Open Philosophy*, 2(1), pp. 566-581. doi: 10.1515/opphil-2019-0040.

Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F. and Davidson, L., 2002. Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian & New Zealand journal of psychiatry*, 36(6), pp.717-732. doi: doi.org/10.1046/j.1440-1614.2002.01100.x

Gallagher, E.B. 2002. *Modernization and health reform in Saudi Arabia*. London: Auburn House, pp. 181-197.

General Authority for Statistics. 2017. *GaStat: An Increase in the percentage of employed Saudis*. Available at: <https://www.stats.gov.sa> (Accessed 14 November 2023).

General Authority for Statistics. 2021. *General Information about The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. Available at: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/page/259> (Accessed 31 October 2023).

General Authority for Statistics. 2022. *Saudi census 2022*. Available at: <https://portal.saudicensus.sa/portal> (Accessed 30 October 2023).

General Authority for Statistics. 2023. *GASTAT Issues Saudi Women's report 2022*. Available at: <https://www.stats.gov.sa/en/news/472> (Accessed 21 November 2023).

Gabarret, I., and d'Andria, A. 2021. Improving gender equality through entrepreneurship: The role of women-dedicated business incubators. *Journal of the International Council for Small Business*, 2(2), pp. 79-89.

Giorgi, A. 1997. The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 28(2), pp. 235-260.

Giddens, A. 2001. *Sociology*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Grossman, S., and Valiga, T. 2012. *The new leadership challenge: Creating the future of nursing* (4th ed.). Philadelphia: FA Davis Company.

Guizzardi, G. 2005. *Ontological Foundations for Structural Conceptual Models*. Enschede: Universiteit Twente.

Hakem, L. 2017. The challenges Saudi women face at work. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies*. 7(1), pp. 155-169. doi.org/10.5296/ijhrs.v7i1.10697

Hamdan, A. 2005. Women and education in Saudi Arabia: Challenges and achievements. *International Education Journal*, 6(1), pp. 42-64. Available at: <https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=1373160>.

Heidegger, M. 1947,1993. *Basic Writings*. London: Routledge.

- Heidegger, M. 1996. *Being and time: A translation of sein und zeit*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Hodges, J. 2017. Cracking the walls of leadership: women in Saudi Arabia. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 34-46. doi:10.1108/GM-11-2015-0106
- Holloway, I., and Wheeler, S. 2010. *Qualitative Research in Nursing and Healthcare*, 3rd ed. Wiley-Blackwell: United Kingdom.
- Howell, E. 2023. Women in leadership: Embracing femininity: Oil Spill response. Available at: <https://www.oilspillresponse.com/knowledge-hub/industry/women-in-leadership---embracing-femininity/> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).
- Human Rights Watch. 2016. Women and Saudi Arabia's male guardianship. Retrieved from https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/saudiarabia0716web.pdf.
- Husserl, E. 1936, 1970. *The Crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology*. IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Husserl, E. 1900,1970. *Logical Investigations*. New York, NY: Humanities Press.
- Hvidt, M. 2018. The new role of women in the new Saudi Arabian economy . *Center for Mellemøststudier*. Available at: <file:///C:/Users/dw/Downloads/Hvidt%20article%20April%202018.pdf> (Accessed: October 2023).
- Kafle, N.P. 2011. Hermeneutic phenomenological research method simplified', *Bodhi: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 5(1), pp. 181-200. doi.org/10.3126/bodhi.v5i1.8053.
- Kattan, M., De Pablos Heredero, C., Montes Botella, J.L., and Margalina, V.M. 2016. Factors of Successful Women Leadership in Saudi Arabia', *Asian Social Science*, 12(5), pp. 1-94. doi:10.5539/ass.v12n5p94
- Kelly, S. and Breslin, J. 2010. *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa: progress amid resistance*. Lanham: Rowman: Littlefield Publishers.
- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. 2021. Health Sector Transformation Program: *Delivery Plan, Riyadh*. Available at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/media/0wop2tds/hstp_eng.pdf (Accessed: 18 November 2023).
- Kivunja, C., and Kuyini, A.B. 2017. Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(5), pp. 26-41. doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n5p26.
- Kristiansen, M., Westernen, K.I., Obstfelder, A., and Lotherington, A.T. 2016. Coping with increased managerial tasks: tensions and dilemmas in nursing leadership. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 21(7), pp. 492-502. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987116668940> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).
- Kuhn, T.S. 1962. *The structure of scientific revolutions*, 1st ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lacroix, S. 2011. *Awakening islam: The politics of religious dissent in contemporary Saudi Arabia*. Harvard: University press.

LaPierre, T.A., and Zimmerman, M.K. 2012. Career advancement and gender equity in healthcare management. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 27(2), pp. 100–118. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17542411211214158>.

Labrague, L.J., Sabei, S.A., AbuAlRub, R., Burney, I.A., and Al-Rawajfah, O.M. 2021. Authentic leadership, nurse-assessed adverse patient events and quality of care: the mediating role of nurses' safety actions. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 29(7), pp. 2152-2162. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jonm.13356> (Accessed: 1 July 2024).

Langdrige, D. 2008. Phenomenology and critical social psychology: Directions and debates in theory and research. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2, pp. 1126-1142. doi: 10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00114.x.

Lather, P. 1986. Research as praxis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 56(3), pp. 257-277. doi: 10.17763/haer.56.3.bj2h231877069482.

Lehman, G., 2011. Interpretativism, postmodernism and the natural environment. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 37(7), pp.795-821. doi:10.1177/0191453711410031

Le Renard, A. 2014. *A Society of Young Women: Opportunities of Place, Power, and Reform in Saudi Arabia*. Stanford University Press.

Lincoln, Y.S., and Guba, E.G. 1985. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Littlewood, J., and Yousuf, S. 2000. Primary health care in Saudi Arabia: Applying global aspects of health for all, locally. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 32(3), pp. 675-681. doi: 10.1046/j.1365-2648.2000.01527.x

Lopez, K., and Willis, D. 2004. Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(5), pp. 726-735. doi: 10.1177/1049732304263638.

Mansuri, F.A., Al-Zalabani, A.H., Zalat, M.M., and Qabshawi, R.I.2015. Road safety and road traffic accidents in Saudi Arabia: A systematic review of existing evidence. *Saudi Medical Journal*, 36(4), pp. 418-24. doi: 10.15537/smj.2015.4.10003. PMID: 25828277; PMCID: PMC4404474.

Marinakou, E. 2014. The glass ceiling effect and women in management in the Middle East: Myth or reality. *Middle East Journal of Business*. Available at: <https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=3404822>

Meijer, R., 2010. Reform in Saudi Arabia: The gender-segregation debate. *Middle East Policy*, 17(4), pp.80-100. doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2010.00464.x

Ministry of Health [MOH]. 2017. *Annual Statistical Book*. Riyadh. Ministry of Health. Available at: <https://www.moh.gov.sa/en/Ministry/Statistics/book/Documents/ANNUAL-STATISTICAL-BOOK-1438H.pdf> (Accessed: 27 September 2018).

Ministry of Health [MOH]. 2018 Statistical Yearbook 2017. Riyadh: Ministry of Health Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Available at: <https://www.moh.gov.sa/en/Ministry/vro/Documents/Healthcare-Transformation-Strategy.pdf> (Accessed: 18 November 2023).

Ministry of Health [MOH].2020. *Health sector transformation strategy*. Ministry of Health. Riyadh. Available at: <https://www.moh.gov.sa/en/Ministry/vro/Documents/Healthcare-Transformation-Strategy.pdf> (Accessed: 18 November 2023).

Moshashai, D., Leber, A., and Savage, J.D. 2020. Saudi Arabia plans for its economic future: Vision 2030, the National Transformation Plan and Saudi fiscal reform. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 47, pp. 381-401. doi.org/10.1080/13530194.2018.1500269

Mufti, M.H. 2000. *Healthcare development strategies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*. New York: Springer Science & Business Media.

Mobaraki, A.E.H. and Söderfeldt, B. 2010. Gender inequity in Saudi Arabia and its role in public health. *East Mediterranean Health Journal*, 16(1), pp. 113-118. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20214168>.

Nahshal, M.M. 2020. *Saudi Vision 2030: The harbinger of a seismic culture shift for Saudi women* [eBook version]. Riyadh: Vision 2030. Available at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/media/rc0b5oy1/saudi_vision203.pdf [Accessed: 1 November 2023].

Nieva, F.O. 2015. Social women entrepreneurship in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research*, 5(1) pp. doi.org/10.1186/s40497-015-0028-5.

Northouse, P.G. 2010. *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Nurunnabi, M. 2017. Transformation from an Oil-based Economy to a Knowledge-based Economy in Saudi Arabia: The direction of Saudi Vision 2030. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 8, pp. 536-564.

O'Neil, D.A., Hopkins, M.M., and Bilimoria, D. 2008. Women's careers at the start of the 21st century: Patterns and paradoxes. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 4, pp. 727-743. doi: 10.1007/s10551-007-9465-6.

Okuda, N. 2017. Vision 2030 plan and to reduce the country's dependence on oil. Vision 2030: Creating strategic partnership with Japan. *The Japan Times*, 15 March, p. 3.

Oppenheim, M. 2019. Saudi Arabia women's rights reforms less extensive than they appear campaigners warn, *The Independent*, 11 August.

Quamar, M.M. 2016. Municipal Elections in Saudi Arabia, 2015. *Journal of Middle Eastern Politics*, 12(3), pp. 45-59. doi: 10.1177/2347798916664623

Ramady, M.A. 2016. *The Political Economy of Wasta: Use and Abuse of Social Capital Networking*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Rizvi, L.J., and Hussain, Z.I. 2021. Empowering woman through legal reforms-evidence from Saudi Arabian context. *International Journal of Law and Management*, 63(2), pp. 123-134. doi:10.1108/IJLMA-03-2021-0068.

Salam, A.A., Elsegaey, I., Khraif, R., and Al-Mutairi, A. 2014. Population distribution and household conditions in Saudi Arabia: Reflections from the 2010 census. *Springer Plus*, 3(1) pp. doi.org/10.1186/2193-1801-3-530.

Saleh, W. and Malibari, A., 2021. Saudi women and Vision 2030: Bridging the gap?. *Behavioral sciences*, 11(10), pp. 132 doi: 10.3390/bs11100132

Saudi Vision 2030. 2016. *Saudi Vision 2030*. Available at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/media/rc0b5oy1/saudi_vision203.pdf (Accessed: 10 October 2023).

Sobaih, A.E.E. and Abu Elnasr, A.E. 2024. Challenges to cracking the glass ceiling among Saudi women in the tourism industry. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 5(1), pp. 203-224. doi 10.3390/tourhosp5010014.

Stanley, D. 2006. Recognizing and defining clinical nurse leaders. *British Journal of Nursing*, 15(2), pp. 108-111. doi: 10.12968/bjon.2006.15.2.20373. PMID: 16493288.

Stogdill, R.M. 1974. *Handbook of Leadership: A survey of theory and research*. New York: Free Press.

Syed, J., Ali, F., and Hennekam, S. 2018. Gender equality in employment in Saudi Arabia: a relational perspective. *Career Development International*, 23, pp. 163-177. doi:10.1108/CDI-07-2017-0126.

The Constitution of Saudi Arabia.1992. [Online], Amendments of 2013. Available at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/sau127539e.pdf> [Accessed 30 October 2023].

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.1992. *The Constitution of Saudi Arabia* [eBook version]. Place. Available at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/sau127539e.pdf> [Accessed: 30 October 2023].

The Embassy of The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Washington DC, [n.d]. *About Saudi Arabia*. Available at: <https://www.saudiembassy.net/culture-art> [Accessed 31 October 2023].

The World Bank. 2022. *Saudi Arabia*. Available at: <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/saudi-arabia/#:~:text=In%20Saudi%20Arabia%2C%20the%20labor,males%20is%2080%25%20for%202022> [Accessed 21 November 2023].

Topal, A. 2019. Economic reforms and women's empowerment in Saudi Arabia', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 76, p. 102253. doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2019.102253.

Tumulty, G. 2001. Professional development of nursing in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(3), pp. 285-290. doi: 10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00285.x. PMID: 11552557.

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division. 2013. *World Population Ageing 2013*. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WorldPopulationAgeing2013.pdf> [Accessed: October 2023].

United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division. 2004. *World Population by 2300*. New York: United Nations. Available at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/files/documents/2020/Jan/un_2004_world_population_prospects-2004_revision_volume-iii.pdf [Accessed: October 2023].

Vroom, V. H., and Jago, A. G. 2007. The role of the situation in leadership. *American Psychologist*, 62(1), 17–24. doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.1.17

Van Vugt, M., Hogan, R., and Kaiser, R. B. 2008. Leadership, followership, and evolution: Some lessons from the past. *American Psychologist*, 63(3), 182–196. doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.63.3.182

Varshney, D. 2019. The Strides of the Saudi Female Workforce: Overcoming Constraints and Contradictions in Transition. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 20, pp. 359-372. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol20/iss2/24>.

Vidyasagar, G., and Rea, D.M. 2004. Saudi women doctors: gender and careers within Wahhabic Islam and a 'westernised' work culture'. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 27(3)pp. doi:[10.1016/j.wsif.2004.06.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2004.06.008)

Wilson, R., Al-Salamah, A., Malik, M., and Al-Rajhi, A. 2003. *Economic development in Saudi Arabia*. London: Routledge.

World Economic Forum. 2023. *Global Gender Gap Report 2023*. 15 November 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023>.

World Health Organization. 2000. *The World Health Report 2000: Health Systems: Improving Performance*. Available at: <https://lnkfwd.com/u/MCLmobIG> (Accessed: 12 November 2021).

World Health Organization. 2020. *State of the World's Nursing 2020: Investing in Education, Jobs and Leadership*. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/331677/9789240003279-eng.pdf?sequence=1>.

Yukl, G., Gordon, A., and Taber, T. 2002. A hierarchical taxonomy of leadership behaviour: Integrating a half century of behaviour research. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 9(1), pp. 15-32. doi.org/10.1177/107179190200900102.

Appendix A: Legal Framework of Women Pre- and Post-Vision 2030

This appendix details the progression of the legal framework affecting women's rights in Saudi Arabia, delineating the changes before and after the implementation of Vision 2030 (Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Washington DC, 2019).



SAUDI ARABIA'S REFORMS AND PROGRAMS TO EMPOWER WOMEN

August 2019

Legal Progress for Women

Under the guidance of His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has reviewed civil and labor laws and regulations that affect the ability of women to travel, work and participate in Saudi society.

Vision 2030 recognizes that a successful, modern nation must encourage and empower all members of society, including women. To that end, women's rights have grown and expanded under the current leadership, and Saudi women are more engaged than ever in society, government and business.

New Legal Amendments

The most recent developments for women under Saudi law came in August 2019 when the Council of Ministers introduced several amendments to civil and labor laws that expand women's rights and address issues of travel, employment and finance.

Below are the legal advancements for women as of August 2019:

- On equal footing with men, women over the age of 21 may obtain a passport and travel abroad without the permission of a male relative.
- Women can now travel outside of the country without a male guardian.
- Women may register as a "head of household," and identified as such on family ID Cards and papers, which gives them the right to legally act on their children's behalf.
- Women may register the births of their children.
- Women received increased protection from employment discrimination.
- Women's retirement age is the same as men's retirement age (60 years of age).
- The closest female relatives, who are at least 18 years of age, can report cases of death.
 - Previously, the responsibility lied on the closest male relative, among others.

- Women may claim their own place of residency.
 - Previously, the place of residency for a woman is where her husband/legal guardian resides.
- Women may not be fired for pregnancy.
 - Previously, women could be fired for exceptions to the law. Those exceptions have been removed.
- Women have equal authority to register cases of marriage and divorce.
 - Previously, the responsibility lied primarily on men.

LEGAL PROGRESS: BEFORE AND AFTER
Amendments to travel documents rules

Article Number	Article before amendment	Article after amendment
Article 2	1- Saudis are entitled to obtain passports. 2- The Minister of Interior has the authority to issue, on temporary basis when needed, a passport or travel document to any non-Saudi for the purpose of travelling abroad and returning to the Kingdom. The executive regulations determine when to issue and withdraw such documents, <i>and to add the wife and children to any of them.</i>	1- A passport shall be issued to <i>any</i> Saudi citizen who applies for it, as determined by the executive regulations. 2- The Minister of Interior has the authority to issue, when needed, a temporary passport or travel document to any non-Saudi for the purpose of travelling abroad and returning to the Kingdom. The executive regulations determines when to issue and withdraw such documents.
Article 3	Passports may include the Saudi wife, non-married daughters, and the minors of its carrier, as determined by the executive regulations.	Cancelled. [<i>Women may now apply for and receive passports independently.</i>]
Article 4	A separate passport shall be issued to those who are under guardianship, as determined by the executive regulations.	Passports and travel documents shall be issued for those who are under custody, and minors whose guardians have deceased, as determined by the executive regulations.



Article 30	The place of residency of a married woman is where her husband resides, if they are still married, and the place of residency of a minor is where its father or guardian resides.	The place of residency for a minor is where its father or guardian resides. [The place of residency of a woman is where <i>she</i> resides.]
Article 33	<p>Persons who are entrusted to report new births are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The father of the newly born, if he is present at the time of birth, or if he is present during the period of reporting. The closest male relatives of the newly born, who are 17 years or older, and living in the same residence with the mother. The closest male relatives of the newly born, who are 17 years or older, and not living in the same residence with the mother. The mayor of the locality or the tribe leader. The administrative ruler in the village or district. Any person or persons whose authority is determined by the executive regulations. <p>The responsibility of reporting is according to the above sequence, and relieves each group from responsibility when a group preceding it is present.</p>	<p>Those responsible to report about new births are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> The medical facilities that are electronically linked to the Directorate of Civil Affairs, as determined by the executive regulations. <i>The mother or father of the newly born.</i> The closest relatives of the newly born who are 18 years or older. The administrative ruler in the village or district. The mayor of the neighborhood, the tribe leader or the certified identifier. Any person or persons whose authority is determined by the executive regulations. <p>The responsibility of reporting is according to the above sequence, and relieves each group from responsibility when a group preceding it is present.</p>
Article 47	The responsibility of reporting about cases of marriage, divorce, remarriage falls upon the husband. Nonetheless, the wife, or parent, or a relative of either the husband or wife take on the responsibility of reporting.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The husband or wife</i> may report cases of marriage, divorce or remarriage, and either parent or relative may take on the responsibility of reporting. The responsibility of reporting stated in the above paragraph is nullified when the Civil Affairs Directorate is electronically linked to the court in charge.
Article 50	The husband must report to the Directorate of Civil Affairs within 60 days after the marriage to obtain a family ID card.	<i>The husband or wife</i> may request obtaining family records from the Civil Affairs Directorate, and the responsibility falls upon the husband if he did not request issuance within 60 days after the date of marriage.



<p>Article 53</p>	<p>Persons entrusted to report cases of death are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ancestors, descendants, spouse of the deceased, or any of their male relatives 17 years or older who live with them in the same residence. b. The closest male relatives to the deceased, who is 17 years or older who do not live with them if they witnessed the death or knew about it. c. Directors of hospitals, nursing facilities, shelters, hotels, schools, prisons, barracks, health quarantines or any other place, including Hajj pilgrims, or those in similar positions in regards to Hajj and visitors who are registered with them. d. The doctor or medical officer who is required to confirm the death. e. The mayor of the locality or the tribe leader. f. The administrative ruler in the village or district. <p>The responsibility of reporting is according to the above sequence, and relieves each group from responsibility when a group preceding it is present.</p>	<p>Those entrusted to report cases of death are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The medical facilities that are electronically linked to the Directorate of Civil Affairs, according to executive regulations. b. <i>The closest male or female relative of the deceased spouse or any of his/her relatives, who are 18 years or older.</i> g. Directors of shelters, tourist facilities, schools, prisons, health centers or any other facility, including Hajj pilgrims, or those in similar positions in regards to Hajj and visitors who are registered with them. h. The health practitioner responsible for confirming the death. i. The administrative ruler in the province or district. j. The mayor of the locality, the tribe leader or the certified identifier. k. Any person or persons whose authority to report is determined by the executive regulations. <p>The responsibility of reporting is according to the above sequence, and relieves each group from responsibility when a group preceding it is present.</p>
<p>Article 91</p>	<p>The head of the household in regards to enforcing these rules is considered:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>The husband in regards to the wife.</i> b. The father in regards to his minor sons, and his unmarried daughters. c. The mother in regards to her minor children, and her unmarried daughters <i>after the death of their father.</i> d. The relative in regards to his relatives who live with him, whom he provides for or nurtures, even if not legally required to provide for them after the loss of the head of their household, if they were not registered in the Central Civil Registry. 	<p>The head of the household in regards to enforcing these rules is the father or mother of minor children.</p>

Amendments to Labor Law

Article Number	Article before amendment	Article after amendment
Definitions	A laborer: any person who works for an employer and under his management and supervision for a wage.	A laborer: <i>any person, male or female</i> , who works for an employer and under their management and supervision for a wage.
Article 3	Work is a citizen's right, and others are not entitled to it, unless conditions specified in this law are met. All citizens have equal rights to work.	Work is a citizen's right, and others are not entitled to it, unless conditions specified in this law are met. All citizens have equal rights to work without discrimination based on gender, disability, age or any other form of discrimination, whether during work or hiring process, or when the position is advertised.
Article 74	The employee reaches the retirement age, which is 60 years for males and 55 years for female, unless the two parties agree on continuation of employment beyond this age. Retirement age may be reduced in cases of early retirement, as stipulated by work regulations. If the work contract is limited by a specific period, and it extends beyond the retirement age, the contract shall end by its expiration date.	The employee reaches the retirement age, <i>which is 60 years for males and females</i> , as stipulated by the rules and regulations of the social insurance law, unless the two parties agree on continuation of employment beyond this age.
Article 155	The employer may not terminate, or issue a notice of termination, for a female worker while on maternity leave.	The employer may not terminate, or issue a notice of termination, for a female worker <i>during pregnancy or maternity leave</i> . This includes any period of medical complications associated with either. The illness should be verified by an authentic medical report, provided that her absence does not exceed 180 days a year, whether it's consecutive or separate for a period of time.

Older Legal Developments

In the past several years, women have experienced incredible progress, and witnessed a dramatic expansion of their legal rights under the leadership of His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and HRH Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Below are the changes to Saudi law that have been enacted in recent years:

Culture and Family

- In June 2018, Saudi women officially earned the right to obtain drivers licenses and drive.
- The first driving school for women opened at Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University in March 2018.
- Since early 2018, women can attend concerts, sporting events and other public gatherings.
- The Council of Ministers approved an Anti-Harassment Law in May 2018 to create a more cohesive society and protect women against abuse and harassment.
- In March 2018, women received the right to receive custody of children in divorce settlements, and the ruling that enforced their return to ex-spouses has been abolished.

Work and Finance

- Since February 2018, Saudi women can hold positions in the military, passport controls, public prosecution office.
- Creditors and banks cannot discriminate credit access based on gender.
- In August 2018, women entrepreneurs became able to open a business without needing consent of a male guardian.
- Ministerial Decision 2370/1 stated in August 2010 that it is not permissible to discriminate in wages between male and female employees for work of equal value.



Facts & Figures

- Saudi women make up **more than half of nearly 5 million students** currently enrolled in Saudi schools and universities.
- Approximately 48,000 women entered the workforce in Q2 2018, an **8.8% increase** over the same period of the previous year. The highest female employment rate in the Kingdom's history.
- King Salman's royal decree granted **more than 6 million women** the right to drive.
- Focus on sports for Saudi women has skyrocketed, with the integration of football stadiums in the Kingdom and the introduction of physical education classes for girls in public schools.
- Women make up **22% of the Saudi workforce**, and the Crown Prince aims to increase that figure to **30% by 2030**.
- **20% of Shura council members are women.**
 - Women have held positions in the Shura council since 2013, and could vote and run in municipal elections since 2015.

Appendix B: Ethical approval from Cardiff university



School of
Healthcare Sciences
Ysgol y Gwyddorau
Gofal Iechyd

Cardiff University



Interim Head of School and Dean

Prifysgol Caerdydd



28 October 2020

Salma Al Shammari
Cardiff University
School of Healthcare Sciences

Dear Salma

Research project title: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Lived Experiences of Mid-Level Female Nurse Leader in Attaining High-Level Leadership Positions in Saudi Arabia

SREC reference: [REDACTED]

The School Of Healthcare Sciences Research Ethics Committee reviewed the above application via its proportionate review process.

Ethical Opinion

The Committee:

a favourable ethical opinion of the above application on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation.

Additional approvals

This letter provides an ethical opinion only. You must not start your research project until all appropriate approvals are in place.

Amendments

Any substantial amendments to documents previously reviewed by the Committee must be submitted to the Committee via [REDACTED] for consideration and cannot be implemented until the Committee has confirmed it is satisfied with the proposed amendments. You are permitted to implement non-substantial amendments to the documents previously reviewed by the Committee but you must provide a copy of any updated documents to the Committee via [REDACTED] for its records.

Monitoring requirements

The Committee must be informed of any unexpected ethical issues or unexpected adverse events that arise during the research project.



Registered Charity No. 1136855
Elusen Gofrestredig Rhif. 1136855

The Committee must be informed when your research project has ended. This notification should be made to [REDACTED] within three months of research project completion.

Complaints/Appeals

If you are dissatisfied with the decision made by the Committee, please contact the School's Research Ethics Officer, [REDACTED] in the first instance to discuss your complaint. If this discussion does not resolve the issue, you are entitled to refer the matter to the Head of School for further consideration. The Head of School may refer the matter to the Open Research Integrity and Ethics Committee (ORIEC), where this is appropriate. Please be advised that ORIEC will not normally interfere with a decision of the Committee and is concerned only with the general principles of natural justice, reasonableness and fairness of the decision.

Please use the Committee reference number on all future correspondence.

The Committee reminds you that it is your responsibility to conduct your research project to the highest ethical standards and to keep all ethical issues arising from your research project under regular review.

You are expected to comply with Cardiff University's policies, procedures and guidance at all times, including, but not limited to, its [Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research involving Human Participants, Human Material or Human Data](#) and our [Research Integrity and Governance Code of Practice](#).

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Cc [REDACTED]



Invitation Letter

My name is Salma Alshammari. I am a PhD student at School of Healthcare Sciences, Cardiff University. I am currently working on my doctoral studies. My research focuses on exploring the stories of Saudi women nurse leaders about their experiences in accessing high-level leadership positions within the healthcare sector in Saudi Arabia. The title of my study is: “An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Lived Experiences of Mid-Level Female Nurse leaders in accessing high-level Leadership Positions in Saudi hospitals.”

You are being asked to participate in my research because your participation by sharing your experience will be important to adding to the limited literature available about Saudi women nurse leaders’ experience to attain high-level leadership positions within the healthcare sector. Through exploring your journey in rising to high leadership positions, the study will recognize the challenges faced by mid-level women nurse leaders, and how they have responded to these challenges.

Before you decide whether to take part, we would like you to spend five minutes reading this to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this research without any obligation to take part, if you need further information, please send an email [\[REDACTED\]](#)

Yours sincerely

Salma Alshammari

مقدمه تعريفيه عن البحث

العنوان: التجارب الحية للممرضات القياديات في (المستوى المتوسط) حول عدم المساواة بين الجنسين في أدوار القيادة الإدارية رفيعة المستوى في مستشفيات المملكة العربية السعودية.

عزيزتي الأنسة/السيدة

اسمي سلمى الشمري. أنا طالبة دكتوراه في كلية علوم الرعاية الصحية، جامعة كارديف. أنا أعمل حاليًا على دراسات الدكتوراه. يركز بحثي على استكشاف قصص القائدات الممرضات السعوديات حول تجاربهن في الوصول إلى مناصب قيادية رفيعة المستوى في قطاع الرعاية الصحية في المملكة العربية السعودية. عنوان دراستي هو: "التجارب الحية للممرضات القياديات في (المستوى المتوسط) حول عدم المساواة بين الجنسين في أدوار القيادة الإدارية رفيعة المستوى في مستشفيات المملكة العربية السعودية".

يطلب منك المشاركة في بحثي لأن مشاركتك من خلال مشاركة تجربتك ستكون مهمة للإضافة إلى الأدبيات المحدودة المتاحة حول تجربة قيادات الممرضات السعوديات للوصول إلى مناصب قيادية رفيعة المستوى في قطاع الرعاية الصحية. من خلال استكشاف رحلتك في الوصول إلى مناصب قيادية عالية، ستكتشف الدراسة على التحديات التي تواجهها القائدات الممرضات من المستوى المتوسط ، وكيف استجابت لهذه التحديات.

نيل أن تقرر ما إذا كنت ستشارك، نود أن تقضي خمس دقائق في قراءة هذا لفهم سبب إجراء البحث وما الذي سيضمنه بالنسبة لك. إذا كنت ترغب في مناقشة أي جانب من جوانب هذا البحث دون أي التزام بالمشاركة، إذا كنت بحاجة إلى مزيد من المعلومات، فيرجى الاتصال بي على

نفضلوا بقبول فائق الاحترام
سلمى الشمري



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE: Female Nurse Leaders' Perception and Experiences about Gender Inequality in high-level Management Leadership Roles in Saudi Arabian Hospitals

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being undertaken and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others, if you wish.

1. What is the purpose of this research project?

The purpose of this research project is gather the experiences of female nurses in management roles regarding leadership and decision making. Studies indicated that there is a lack of nurses' inclusion in the decision-making process about health services and this leads to weaknesses in the nursing clinical leadership. My research aim is to provide an understanding of what it is like being a nurse at mid and high level and the challenges and barriers that are experienced. The research objective is that this shall provide solutions to gender barriers and create more equal opportunities for higher-level leadership among female nurses in KSA. Overall, this study is purposed to raise awareness of policymakers, healthcare workers, and the general population about the importance of gender diversity in healthcare, critical issues faced by female nurse leaders, and suggest ways to empower them.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study because you are a Saudi female, working in the mid-level female nurse leaders as a nurse director/ nurse supervisor/ head nurse in [REDACTED] environment, and qualified with a bachelor's degree or above. We would like to ask you about your personal experiences to develop a better understanding of the current lived experiences of nurse leaders in Saudi Arabia, for which there is a remarkable lack of research. This study hopes to achieve that understanding. Please be aware that any medical related information has not been passed on or will at any point be necessary for taking part.

It is also key to note that participation is entirely voluntary and whether you choose to contribute or not it have no effect on your career or your responsibilities and duties and in which you provide.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, we will discuss the research project with you [and ask you to sign a consent form]. If you decide not to take part, you do not have to explain your reasons and it will not affect your legal rights. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate in the research project at any time, without giving a reason, even after signing the consent form.

4. What will taking part involve?

If you decide to take part in this study, I will contact you to arrange a virtual meeting via Zoom platform in a convenient time and date in your off days for a one to one online interview to take place. I will send meeting invitations utilising the Cardiff University email system and controlling the Zoom waiting room and passcode settings, intrusions into these private interview calls can be avoided. The interview will audio or video recorded, depend on your choice with your permission, and I will ask you questions, which focus on various challenges and difficulties of mid-level female nurse leaders and how you believe we can enhance the gender role adaptation and diversity within the healthcare settings in Saudi Arabia. You will be able to talk in-depth about what you think is relevant and important. The interview should take around 60-90 minutes in multiple and different times, including pauses, and you can take a break at any point during it. Interviews may include sensitive questions, and you will only be expected to share your experiences, which you feel comfortable speaking about.

5. Will I be paid for taking part?

No, you should understand that any data you give will be as a gift and you will not benefit financially in the future should this research project lead to understand the lived experience of the mid-level nurse leaders in rising to the higher-level managerial roles and provides recommendations, which may have the potential to enhance the gender role adaptation, and diversity within the healthcare system in Saudi Arabia.

6. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are no direct gains for those people participating in the project, but your contribution will help us understand thoughts, feelings, and experiences mid-level female nurse leaders in terms of attaining to high-level leadership positions.

7. What are the possible risks of taking part?

The level of risk associated with partaking in this study is very minimal especially given that this study doesn't cause any physical harm, but rather it requires verbal discussions to be

held. However, talking about your career progression' experiences in attaining high level leadership positions could be a sensitive topic for you to expose. You may feel uncomfortable after the interview about disclosing data related to personal experiences. You should understand that the study aim is to increase the knowledge not judging or criticising. Multidisciplinary team a [REDACTED] will be realized of the study procedure to provide psychological, and social support to you. If you do, at any time, feel distressed taking about your experiences, I will evaluate the situation and stay with you until you feel emotionally stable by representing care and empathy and providing you enough time to express your feelings. You can skip any question, manage the interview pathway, or end the interview without giving any explanation. You will be updated of any newly discovered risks or benefits during the data collection process.

8. Will my taking part in this research project be kept confidential?

Yes, I will follow the ethical and legal practice guidance of Cardiff University and all your information will be handled in confidence. You will not be identified and instead, you will be provided alternative names to maintain your identities and strictly confidential. Information will be only shared with my supervisors, and an external translator, who will translate the transcript from Arabic to the English language. All manual files, recordings, and information will be by the researcher until transcribed and verified the data and then all files and recordings will be destroyed. I will use my own laptop computer to keep recordings, transcripts, and participants' documents. This laptop will be protected by a password and only known by the researcher.

9. What will happen to my Personal Data?

After 3 months the research team will anonymise all the personal data it has collected from, or about, you in connection with this research project, with the exception of your consent form Your consent form will be retained for 10 years and can only be accessed by members of the research team and, where necessary, by members of the University's governance and audit teams or by regulatory authorities. Anonymised information will be kept for a minimum of 15 years on the University secure server but may be published in support of the research project and/or retained indefinitely, where it is likely to have continuing value for research purposes.

If you wish me to destroy any previous interview material collected, please email me to this effect and I will do so.

10. What happens to the data at the end of the research project?

All records and data containing personal and sensitive information will be kept protected against unauthorized or unlawful access, accidental loss, and damage in order to comply with the (Data Protection Act, 2018). All manual files and recordings will be locked in a secure cabinet, and access to this information will be only to the student researcher and the academic supervisors until transcribed and verified the data and then all files and recordings will be destroyed. The data will be securely stored in an encrypted area on the laptop stored (Data Protection Act, 2018). According to Cardiff University guidelines, electronic data and

documents will be securely stored for only 15 years at Cardiff University and then it will be destroyed.

11. What will happen to the results of the research project?

It is my intention to publish the results of this research project in academic journals and present findings at conferences. You will not be identified in any report, publication, or presentation. If you would like, a summary of the results can be sent to you after completion of the study. It is our intention to publish the results of this research project in academic journals and present findings at the conference.

12. What if there is a problem?

I do not expect any problem to come to you from taking part in this study. However, if you are not happy about any aspect of the study, please feel free to contact me on the details below. If you wish to complain or have grounds for concerns about any aspect of the manner in which you have been approached or treated during the course of this research, please contact [REDACTED]. If your complaint is not managed to your satisfaction, [REDACTED].

13. Who is organising and funding this research project?

The research is sponsored by Cardiff University. The study will be carried out by the main researcher Salma Alshammari as part of her PhD studies [REDACTED].

14. Who has reviewed this research project?

This research project has been reviewed and given a favourable opinion by the School Research Ethics Committee, Cardiff University and King Salman Specialist Hospital King Khaled Hospital and Hail General Hospital in Hail city, Saudi Arabia to protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity.

15. Further information and contact details

Should you have any questions relating to this research project, you may contact us during normal working hours:

Salma Alshammari

E-mail address [REDACTED]

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project. If you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and a signed consent form to keep for your records.

معلومات للمشاركة في البحث

العنوان: التجارب الحية للممرضات القياديات في (المستوى المتوسط) حول عدم المساواة بين الجنسين في أدوار القيادة الإدارية رفيعة المستوى في مستشفيات المملكة العربية السعودية.

عزيزتي الأنسة/السيدة

أنت مدعوة للمشاركة في مشروع بحثي قبل أن تقرر ما إذا كنتي ستشاركون أم لا، من المهم بالنسبة لك أن تعلمين سبب إجراء هذا البحث وما الذي سيتضمنه لذا يرجى تخصيص بعض الوقت لقراءة المعلومات التالية بعناية ومناقشتها مع الآخرين، إذا كنت ترغبين في ذلك.

١/ ما هو الغرض من هذا المشروع البحثي؟

الغرض من هذا المشروع البحثي هو الاطلاع على خبرات الممرضات القياديات في الأدوار الإدارية (في المستوى المتوسط) فيما يتعلق بالقيادة واتخاذ القرار.

أشارت الدراسات إلى وجود نقص في إشراك الممرضات القياديات إلى المستوى الأعلى في عملية اتخاذ القرار بشأن الخدمات الصحية وهذا يؤدي إلى ضعف في القيادة الإكلينيكية التمريضية وهدف هذا البحث هو تقديم مفهوم ما يعنيه كونك ممرضة في (المستوى المتوسط) واكتشاف التحديات والعقبات التي تواجهها.

يهدف البحث إلى توفير حلول للحد من الحواجز بين الجنسين وخلق المزيد من الفرص المتكافئة للقيادة في المستوى الأعلى للممرضات في المملكة العربية السعودية. بشكل عام، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى زيادة وعي صانعي القرار والعاملين في مجال الرعاية الصحية وعامة المجتمع حول أهمية التنوع بين الجنسين في الأدوار القيادية العليا الرعاية الصحية، والقضايا الحرجة التي تواجه قيادات التمريض النسائي، واقتراح طرق لتمكينهن لذا تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى فهم وإضائه معلومات جديدة على الأبحاث السابقة عن نظرة الممرضات القيادات ظل تأثير ثقافة وتقاليد المجتمع السعودي .

٢/ لماذا تمت دعوتي للمشاركة؟

لقد تمت دعوتك للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة لأنك امرأة سعودية، تعمل كممرضة قيادية في المستوى المتوسط (مديرة تمريض / مشرف تمريض / رئيسة قسم تمريض، تعمل في

مؤهله بدرجة البكالوريوس أو أعلى من ذلك.

نود أن نسألك عن تجاربك الشخصية لتكوين فهم أفضل عن التجارب الحالية لقيادة التمريض النسائي في المستوى المتوسط في المملكة العربية السعودية، والتي يوجد بها نقص ملحوظ في البحوث والأدبيات لذا تأمل هذه الدراسة في تحقيق هذا الفهم ونود أن نخبرك أنه لن يتم تسريب أي معلومات تخص مشاركتك في البحث من المهم أيضاً ملاحظة أن المشاركة تطوعية تماماً وما إذا كنت تختار المساهمة أم لا، فلن يكون لها أي تأثير على حياتك المهنية أو مسؤولياتك وواجباتك المستقبلية.

٣/ هل يجب علي المشاركة؟

لا، مشاركتك في هذا المشروع البحثي تطوعية تماماً والأمر متروك لك لتقرير ما إذا كنت ستشارك أم لا. إذا قررت المشاركة، فسناقش مشروع البحث معك [ونطلب منك التوقيع على نموذج موافقة]. إذا قررت عدم المشاركة، فلا يتعين عليك شرح أسبابك ولن يؤثر ذلك على حقوقك القانونية. لك مطلق الحرية في سحب موافقتك على المشاركة في مشروع البحث في أي وقت، دون إبداء أسباب، حتى بعد التوقيع على استمارة الموافقة.

٤ / ماذا ستشمل المشاركة؟

إذا قررت المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، فسأصل بك لترتيب اجتماع افتراضي عبر منصة Zoom في وقت وتاريخ مناسبين في أيام إجازتك لإجراء مقابلة فردية عبر الإنترنت. سأرسل دعوات للاجتماعات باستخدام نظام البريد الإلكتروني بجامعة كارديف والتحكم في غرفة انتظار Zoom. ويمكن تجنب التدخلات في مكالمات المقابلات الخاصة هذه. سيتم تسجيل المقابلة بالصوت أو الفيديو، وتعتمد على اختيارك بإذن منك، وسأطرح عليك أسئلة، والتي تركز على التحديات والصعوبات المختلفة للقائدات الممرضات من المستوى المتوسط وكيف تعتقد أنه يمكننا تعزيز تكيف دور الجنسين والتنوع ضمن إعدادات الرعاية الصحية في المملكة العربية السعودية. ستكون قادراً على التحدث بعمق حول ما تعتقد أنه وثيق الصلة ومهم. يجب أن تستغرق المقابلة حوالي 60-90 دقيقة في أوقات متعددة ومختلفة، بما في ذلك فترات التوقف المؤقت، ويمكنك أخذ قسط من الراحة في أي وقت أثناء ذلك. قد تتضمن المقابلات أسئلة حساسة، ولا يُتوقع منك سوى مشاركة تجاربك التي تشعر بالراحة عند التحدث عنها.

٥ / هل سأدفع مقابل المشاركة؟

لا، ويجب أن تعلم أن أي بيانات تقدمها ستكون بمثابة هبة ولن تستفيد مالياً في المستقبل إذا أدى هذا المشروع البحثي إلى فهم عميق لتجربة الممرضات القياديات من المستوى المتوسط في الارتقاء إلى الأدوار الإدارية عالية المستوى ويقدم هذا البحث توصيات، قد يكون لها القدرة على تعزيز التكيف مع دور النوع الاجتماعي، والتنوع داخل نظام الرعاية الصحية في المملكة العربية السعودية.

٦ / ما هي الفوائد المحتملة للمشاركة؟

لا توجد مكاسب مباشرة للأشخاص المشاركين في المشروع، ولكن مساهمتك ستساعدنا على فهم الأفكار والمشاعر والخبرات القيادية في التمريض من المستوى المتوسط من حيث الوصول إلى مناصب قيادية رفيعة المستوى.

٧ / ما هي المخاطر المحتملة للمشاركة؟

إن مستوى المخاطر المرتبطة بالمشاركة في هذه الدراسة ضئيل للغاية خاصة بالنظر إلى أن هذه الدراسة لا تسبب أي ضرر جسدي، ولكنها تتطلب إجراء مناقشات لفظية. ومع ذلك، فإن الحديث عن خبرات و تقدمك الوظيفي للوصول إلى مناصب قيادية رفيعة المستوى قد يكون موضوعاً حساساً لك. قد تشعر بعدم الارتياح بعد المقابلة حول الكشف عن البيانات المتعلقة بالتجارب الشخصية. يجب أن تفهم أن هدف الدراسة هو زيادة المعرفة وليس الحكم أو النقد. سيتولى إجراءات الدراسة لتوفير الدعم النفسي والاجتماعي لك. إذا فريق متعدد التخصصات في شعرت، في أي وقت، بالضيق في التعامل مع تجاربك، فسوف أقوم بتقييم الموقف والبقاء معك حتى تشعر بالاستقرار العاطفي من خلال تمثيل الرعاية والتعاطف وإعطائك الوقت الكافي للتعبير عن مشاعرك. يمكنك تخطي أي سؤال أو إدارة مسار المقابلة أو إنهاء المقابلة دون إعطاء أي تفسير. سيتم إطلاعك على أي مخاطر أو فوائد تم اكتشافها حديثاً أثناء عملية جمع البيانات.

٨ / هل ستبقى مشاركتي في هذا المشروع البحثي سرية؟

نعم، جميع المعلومات التي شاركتي بها ستعامل بسرية تامة. جميع معلوماتك الشخصية مثل اسمك سوف تكون سرية ومجهولة للآخرين في عملية تخزين المعلومات وتحليلها و لن تتم مشاركة المعلومات إلا مع المشرفين على، ومترجم خارجي يترجم النص من العربية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية بعد تسجيل المقابلات صوتياً سأقوم على الفور بتخزينها بحاسوبي الشخصي وحمايتها بكلمة سر، جامعه كارديف سوف توثق المعلومات ثم تتلفها بعد مرور ٥ سنة من تخزين المعلومات.

٩ / ماذا سيحدث لبياناتي الشخصية؟

بعد 3 أشهر، سيقوم فريق البحث بإخفاء هويتك وجميع البيانات الشخصية التي تم جمعها فيما يتعلق بهذا المشروع البحثي، باستثناء نموذج موافقتك، سيتم الاحتفاظ بنموذج موافقتك لمدة 10 سنوات ولا يمكن الوصول إليها إلا عن طريق أعضاء فريق البحث، وعند الضرورة، من قبل أعضاء فرق الحوكمة والتدقيق بالجامعة أو من قبل السلطات التنظيمية. سيتم الاحتفاظ بالمعلومات لمدة لا تقل عن 15 عامًا على خادم الجامعة الآمن ولكن قد يتم نشرها لدعم مشروع البحث و / أو الاحتفاظ بها إلى أجل غير مسمى، حيث من المحتمل أن يكون لها قيمة مستمرة إذا كنت ترغب في إتلاف أي مواد مقابلة سابقة تم جمعها، يرجى إرسال بريد إلكتروني إليّ بهذا. لأغراض البحث المعنى وسأفعل ذلك.

١٠ / ماذا سيحدث للبيانات في نهاية المشروع البحثي؟

ستبقى جميع السجلات والبيانات التي تحتوي على معلوماتك شخصية محمية ضد الوصول و غير مسموح لأي شخص الاطلاع عليها وأمثالاً لقانون حماية البيانات سيتم قفل جميع الملفات والتسجيلات اليدوية في خزانة آمنة ، وسيكون الوصول إلى هذه المعلومات فقط من [REDACTED] يتم نسخ البيانات والتحقق منها ثم يتم إتلاف جميع الملفات والتسجيلات. سيتم تخزين البيانات بشكل آمن في منطقتي مشفرة على الكمبيوتر المحمول ووفقاً لإرشادات جامعة كارديف، سيتم تخزين البيانات والوثائق الإلكترونية بشكل آمن لمدة 15 عامًا فقط في جامعة كارديف ثم يتم إتلافها

١١ / ماذا سيحدث لنتائج مشروع البحث؟

أعتزم على نشر نتائج هذا المشروع البحثي في المجالات الأكاديمية وتقديم النتائج في المؤتمرات و لن يتم الوصول على اسمك في أي تقرير أو منشور أو عرض تقديمي. إذا كنت ترغب في ذلك، يمكن إرسال ملخص النتائج إليك بعد الانتهاء من الدراسة. نعتزم نشر نتائج هذا المشروع البحثي في المجالات الأكاديمية وتقديم النتائج في المؤتمر

١٢ / ماذا لو كانت هناك مشكلة؟

لا أتوقع أن تلحق بك أي مشكلة من المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. ومع ذلك، إذا لم تكن راضيًا عن أي جانب من جوانب الدراسة، فلا تتردد في الاتصال بي بشأن التفاصيل أدناه. إذا كنت ترغب في تقديم شكوى أو لديك قلق بشأن أي جانب من [REDACTED]

، إذا لم تتم معالجة شكاواك بشكل مرضيك، فيرجى

[W](#)

١٣ / من هو داعم الدراسة؟

الدراسة برعاية الملحقية الثقافية السعودية في بريطانيا و إيرلندا تحت مظلة وزارة التعليم العالي

١٤ / من راجع ووافق على الدراسة؟

هذه الدراسة قد تمت مراجعتها والموافقة عليها من قبل لجنة اخلاقيات البحث العلمي في كلية العلوم الصحية في جامعه كارديف لحماية حقوق المشاركة في البحث [REDACTED] العربية السعودية.



إذا كان لديك أي استفسار بشأن الدراسة فلا تتردد في الاتصال بي

اسم الباحثة: سلمى الشمري

إيميل:



في الختام أتقدم بوافر الشكر والامتنان لمساهمته الكريمة في الدراسة سائلين المولى عز وجل أن يجعله في ميزان حسناتكم ويوفقنا وأياكم لما فيه الخير لشعبنا وامتنا.

مساهمته في هذه الدراسة محل العرفان والتقدير، شكراً جزيلاً

Appendix F: Consent Form Video and Voice (In English and Arabic)



Appendix 4

Participant ID no:
*Do not include box for
anonymised samples*

CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: Female Nurse Leaders’ Perception and Experiences about Gender Inequality in high-level Management Leadership Roles in Saudi Arabian Hospitals

SREC reference and committee: [Insert SREC reference and committee or other relevant reference numbers]

Name of Chief/Principal Investigator: Salma Alshammari

**Please
initial box**

I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated version (.....) for the above research project.	
I confirm that I have understood the information sheet dated..... version (.....) for the above research project and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that these have been answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any adverse consequences (e.g. to medical care or legal rights, if relevant). [IF RELEVANT] I understand that if I withdraw, information about me that has already been obtained may be kept by Cardiff University.	
I understand that data collected during the research project may be looked at by individuals from Cardiff University or from regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in the research project. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.	
I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be held in accordance with all applicable data protection legislation and in strict confidence, unless disclosure is required by law or professional obligation.	
I understand who access to personal information will have provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the research project. I confirm that data from the study can be used in the final report and other academic publications.	
I understand that after the research project, anonymised data may be use of verbatim quotes in publications and conference presentations made publicly available via a data repository and may be used for purposes not related to this research project. I understand that it will not be possible to identify me from this data that is seen and used by other	

Version xx

[DATE]



Participant ID no:
*Do not include box for
 anonymised samples*

CONSENT FORM

Title of research project: THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF MID-LEVEL WOMEN NURSE MANAGERS IN THE
 MINISTRY OF HEALTH IN SAUDI ARABIA PRE- AND POST-PROMULGATION OF VISION 2030:
 "AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS"

SREC reference and committee: [Insert SREC reference and committee or other relevant reference numbers]

Name of Chief/Principal Investigator: Salma Alshammari

**Please
 initial box**

I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated version (.....) for the above research project.	
I confirm that I have understood the information sheet dated..... version (.....) for the above research project and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions and that these have been answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without any adverse consequences (e.g. to medical care or legal rights, if relevant). [IF RELEVANT] I understand that if I withdraw, information about me that has already been obtained may be kept by Cardiff University.	
I understand that data collected during the research project may be looked at by individuals from Cardiff University or from regulatory authorities, where it is relevant to my taking part in the research project. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my data.	
I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that such information will be held in accordance with all applicable data protection legislation and in strict confidence, unless disclosure is required by law or professional obligation.	
I understand who access to personal information will have provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the research project. I confirm that data from the study can be used in the final report and other academic publications.	
I understand that after the research project, anonymised data may be use of verbatim quotes in publications and conference presentations made publicly available via a data repository and may be used for purposes not related to this research project. I understand that it will not be possible to identify me from this data that is seen and used by other	

نموذج إقرار (الموافقة الخطي)

عنوان البحث: التجارب الحية للممرضات القياديات في (المستوى المتوسط) حول عدم المساواة بين الجنسين في أدوار القيادة الإدارية رفيعة المستوى في مستشفيات المملكة العربية السعودية.

اسم الباحثة: سلمى الشمري

أقر بأنني قرأت وفهمت ملف معلومات المشاركة في البحث أعلاه.
أقر بأنني قرأت وفهمت ملف معلومات المشاركة في البحث أعلاه وقد تسنى لي استيعاب المعلومات وطرح الأسئلة التي تم الرد عليها بشكل مرضي.
أقر بأنني أفهم أن مشاركتي هي طوعيه ولي الحق في الانسحاب عن المشاركة في أي وقت بدون إعطاء مبررات، أقر أنه إذا انسحبت، فقد تحتفظ جامعة كارديف بالمعلومات الخاصة بي والتي تم الحصول عليها خلال المقابلات.
أقر بأن المعلومات المعطاة خلال الدراسة سوف تُخزن في جامعه كارديف من قبل موظف لجنة تحكيم الأبحاث وبذلك أمتنهم الموافقة بالاطلاع على معلوماتي المقدمة للبحث.
أوافق على معالجة معلوماتي الشخصية للأغراض الموضحة لي. وأقر أنه سيتم الاحتفاظ بهذه المعلومات وفقاً لجميع تشريعات حماية البيانات المعمول بها وفي سرية تامة، ما لم يكن الإفصاح مطلوباً بموجب القانون أو الالتزام المهني.
أنا أعلم من سوف يطلع على معلوماتي الشخصية، وكيف سيتم تخزين البيانات وماذا سيحدث للبيانات في نهاية مشروع البحث. أقر أنه يمكن استخدام بيانات الدراسة في التقرير النهائي والمنشورات الأكاديمية الأخرى.
أقر بأن أي اقتباسات من المقابلة سوف تستخدم بسرية تامة بدون ذكر أسماء في أوراق بحثية للنشر ولكن أستطيع منع استخدام أي جزء من المقابلة الشخصية في أي وقت قبل نشر البحث وأيضاً أنا على علم من أنه لن يكون من الممكن تحديد هويتي من خلال هذه البيانات..
أقر على إجراء مقابلة شخصية مع الباحثة وتسجيلها صوتياً وأيضاً كيف سوف تستخدم البيانات.
أقر بأن أي اقتباسات من المقابلة سوف تستخدم بسرية تامة بدون ذكر أسماء في أوراق بحثية للنشر.
أقر أنني فهمت كيف سيتم كتابة نتائج البحث وطريقه نشره.
أقر بالمشاركة في البحث المبين أسمه أعلاه.

تصريح المشاركة:

أنا أوافق على إقرار المشاركة في البحث

اسم المشاركة:

التاريخ:

التوقيع:

نموذج إقرار (الموافقة الخطي)

عنوان البحث: التجارب الحية للممرضات القياديات في (المستوى المتوسط) حول عدم المساواة بين الجنسين في أدوار القيادة الإدارية رفيعة المستوى في مستشفيات المملكة العربية السعودية.

اسم الباحثة: سلمى الشمري

أقر بأنني قرأت وفهمت ملف معلومات المشاركة في البحث أعلاه.
أقر بأنني قرأت وفهمت ملف معلومات المشاركة في البحث أعلاه وقد تسنى لي استيعاب المعلومات وطرح الأسئلة التي تم الرد عليها بشكل مرضي.
أقر بأنني أفهم إن مشاركتي هي طوعي ولي الحق في الانسحاب عن المشاركة في أي وقت بدون إعطاء مبررات، أقر أنه إذا انسحبت، فقد تحتفظ جامعة كارديف بالمعلومات الخاصة بي والتي تم الحصول عليها خلال المقابلات.
أقر بأن المعلومات المعطاة خلال الدراسة سوف تُخزن في جامعه كارديف من قبل موظف لجنة تحكيم الأبحاث وبذلك أمنحهم الموافقة بالإطلاع على معلوماتي المقدمة للبحث.
أوافق على معالجة معلوماتي الشخصية للأغراض الموضحة لي. وأقر أنه سيتم الاحتفاظ بهذه المعلومات وفقاً لجميع تشريعات حماية البيانات المعمول بها وفي سرية تامة، ما لم يكن الإفصاح مطلوباً بموجب القانون أو الالتزام المهني.
أنا أعلم من سوف يطلع على معلوماتي الشخصية، وكيف سيتم تخزين البيانات وماذا سيحدث للبيانات في نهاية مشروع البحث. أقر أنه يمكن استخدام بيانات الدراسة في التقرير النهائي والمنشورات الأكاديمية الأخرى.
أقر أن أي اقتباسات من المقابلة سوف تستخدم بسرية تامة بدون ذكر أسماء في أوراق بحثية للنشر ولكن أستطيع منع استخدام أي جزء من المقابلة الشخصية في أي وقت قبل نشر البحث وأيضاً أنا على علم من انه لن يكون من الممكن تحديد هويتي من خلال هذه البيانات.
أقر على إجراء مقابلة شخصية مع الباحثة وتسجيلها صوتياً وأيضاً كيف سوف تستخدم البيانات.
أقر أن أي اقتباسات من المقابلة سوف تستخدم بسرية تامة بدون ذكر أسماء في أوراق بحثية للنشر.
أقر أنني فهمت كيف سيتم كتابة نتائج البحث وطريقه نشره.
أقر بالمشاركة في البحث المبين أسمه أعلاه.

تصريح المشاركة:

أنا أوافق على إقرار المشاركة في البحث

إسم المشاركة:

التاريخ:

التوقيع:

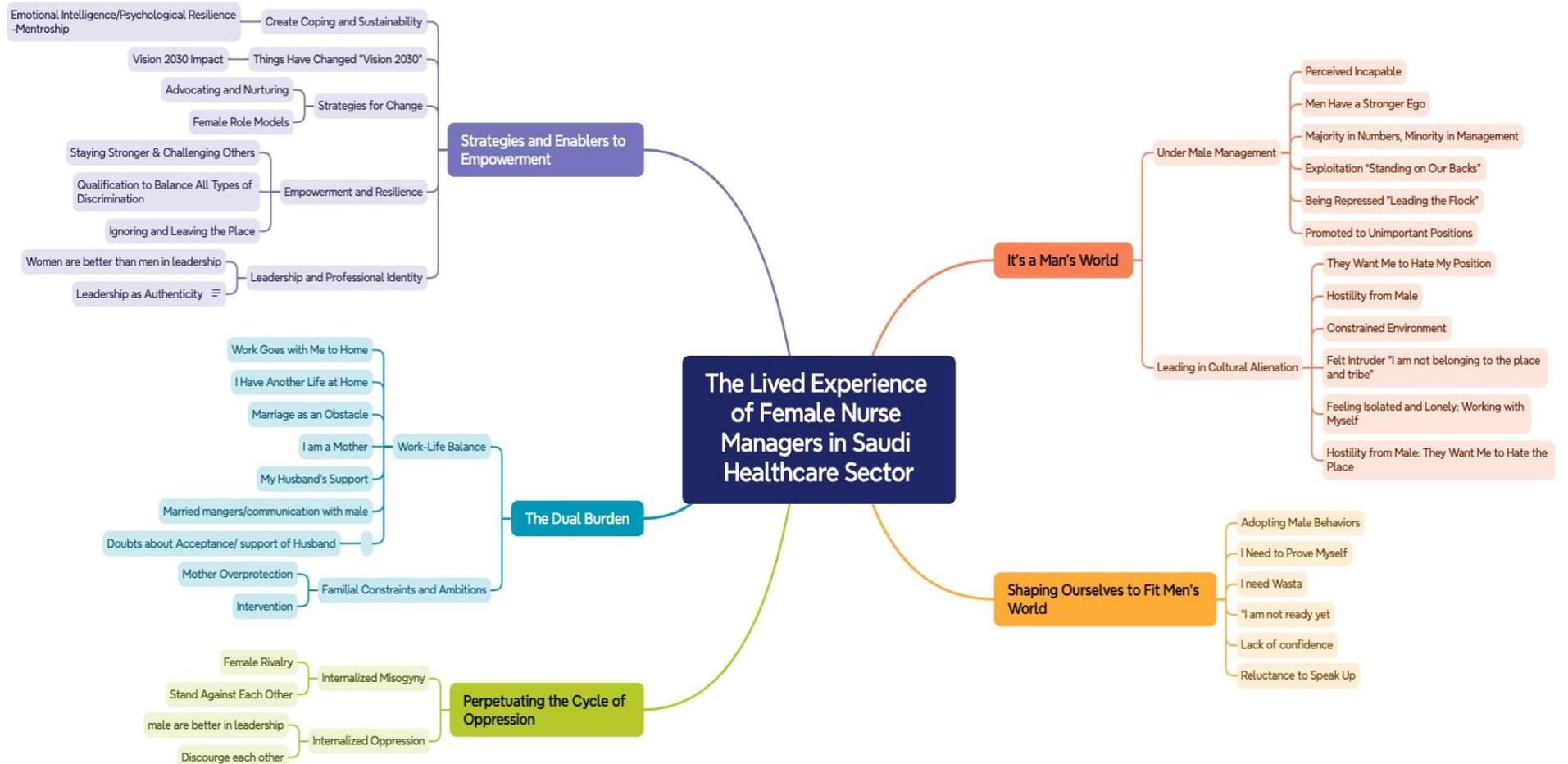
Appendix G: Exploratory Comments and Emergent Themes
(Sample for One participant)

Exploratory Comments and Emergent Themes

Exploratory Comments Code: Black= Descriptive Comments, Blue= Linguistic Comments and Red= Conceptual Comments

Initial Theme	Line	Original Transcript	Exploratory comments
Managerial Appointment Process	1	I: hello!	
	2	P: Welcome...!	
	3	I: How are you?	
	4	P: Praise be to God how are you?	
	5	I: Praise be to God. Do you have any questions regarding the <u>research</u> ?	
	6	before we start? P: No, I don't have any questions.	
	7	I: I will take about an hour of your time according to our agreement, but	
	8	if you want to stop <u>this</u> interview for any reason, or if you feel that you are	
	9	upset or uncomfortable, we can stop it.	
	10	P: Ok	
	11	I: <u>First of all</u> , I would like to ask, when did you actually start thinking	
	12	about applying for a leadership position?	
	13	P: Hm I didn't really think of that... Glory be to God, it came gradually	
	14	when I started, and when I felt that I was ready to be assigned for that post	
	15	and avail the opportunity, I accepted it...	
	Work Pressure	16	<u>I</u> You mentioned that you gradually progressed, but from which aspect? do
17		you mean career progression or promotion? Or you mean after getting a	
18		degree? and <u>did</u> you apply for that post, or they nominated you?	
19		P: No, they chose me, and when the opportunity came and I accepted it, I	
20		found myself in it. So, after that, um, when I tried the leadership position, I	-Work improving, and progressing-hesitant (silences)
21		loved the job.	irritated, speak in a high tone, Less desire to disclosure
22		I: What sorts of thoughts were on your mind at that time?	about-Maybe because of emotional baggage?
23		P: Change and influence; and how can I be influential, to change, improve	- I felt that I was ready- qualified?
24		and develop...and these are all the ideas that came to my mind when I saw	Avail the opportunity- passionate?
25		things going wrong in the workplace and whenever I observe the problems.	
We need change in management	26	How to change things and how to improve them.	
	27	I: How?	- Chose me, opportunity came-qualified?
	28	P To make things better and to be um, more influential and to develop the	- found myself self- esteem?
	29	work environment, so that I feel more comfortable... more comfortable.	-loved the job- Self- improvement?
Sustainability in improve	30	I: Ok, can you tell me about that more? How?	
	31	<u>P</u> : Um, for example, there is work pressure that is caused by some	- Intention for observing, solving any potential issues in
	32	mistakes!!! we want to change something, for example, at the level of	the workplace?
	33	patient care, at the level of workers, and even at the level of administration	- Change-correct
	34	... I felt that there was no for example, a leader is assigned in any position	-Influential, idol
	35	for a period; um but he never changes anything, never improves anything,	-'Massive'- repetition, giving synonyms, and insists on
	36	never creates other leaders. But I told myself no, I have to make that	changing e.g., improve, ideas, influence, wrong,
37	change myself and I don't want that change to be done by me only; <u>I</u>	problem-overriding impression	
Meaning of a good	38	um... want that change to be continuous. I want something	-Demand for change, unpleased with the workplace. Do
	39	deeper...something that has an extended effect. Something continuous. I	we anticipate that the workplace is catastrophic that
	40	work on that change and another one who might come after me will	much? No mention of it. Due to accountability?

Appendix H: Experiential Themes across participants



Appendix I: Reflective Journal

Day (X)

Researcher Name: Salma Alshammari

Research Title: The Lived Experiences of Women Nurse Managers in the Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia pre- and post-promulgation of vision 2030: “an interpretative phenomenological analysis”

Location: Online :(Zoom)

Participant’s Pseudonym: [Participant's Pseudonym]

Participants’ Information	Observation	My note / Reflection

1-What were the key issues or themes that stood out to you during this interaction?

2-Summarize the information you got (or failed to get) on each of the target questions.

3-What new or unresolved target questions do you have for the next interaction?



CASP Checklist:
For Qualitative Research

Reviewer Name:	
Paper Title:	
Author:	
Web Link:	
Appraisal Date:	

During critical appraisal, never make assumptions about what the researchers have done. If it is not possible to tell, use the “Can’t tell” response box. If you can’t tell, at best it means the researchers have not been explicit or transparent, but at worst it could mean the researchers have not undertaken a particular task or process. Once you’ve finished the critical appraisal, if there are a large number of “Can’t tell” responses, consider whether the findings of the study are trustworthy and interpret the results with caution.

Section A Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes No Can't Tell

CONSIDER:

- *what was the goal of the research?*
- *why was it thought important?*
- *its relevance*

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes No Can't Tell

CONSIDER:

- *If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants*
- *Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal?*

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes No Can't Tell

CONSIDER:

- *if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g., have they discussed how they decided which method to use)*

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes No Can't Tell

CONSIDER:

- *If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected*

- *If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study*
- *If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)*

5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes No Can't Tell

CONSIDER:

- *If the setting for the data collection was justified*
- *If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)*
- *If the researcher has justified the methods chosen*
- *If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)*
- *If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why*
- *If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)*
- *If the researcher has discussed saturation of data*

6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes No Can't Tell

CONSIDER:

- *If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location*
- *How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design*

Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes No Can't Tell

<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained</i> • <i>If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)</i> • <i>If approval has been sought from the ethics committee</i> 	
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell
<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process</i> • <i>If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data</i> • <i>Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process</i> • <i>If sufficient data are presented to support the findings</i> • <i>To what extent contradictory data are taken into account</i> • <i>Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation</i> 	
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell
<p>CONSIDER:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If the findings are explicit</i> • <i>If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments</i> • <i>If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)</i> • <i>If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question</i> 	
Section C: Will the results help locally?	
10. How valuable is the research?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Can't Tell

CONSIDER:

- *If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g., do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature*
- *If they identify new areas where research is necessary*
- *If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used*

APPRAISAL SUMMARY: *List key points from your critical appraisal that need to be considered when assessing the validity of the results and their usefulness in decision-making.*

Positive/Methodologically sound	Negative/Relatively poor methodology	Unknowns

Appendix K: the Critical Appraisal Checklist for Cross-Sectional Study



Critical Appraisal of a Cross-Sectional Study (Survey)

Appraisal questions	Yes	Can't tell	No
1. <i>Did the study address a clearly focused question / issue?</i>			
2. <i>Is the research method (study design) appropriate for answering the research question?</i>			
3. <i>Is the method of selection of the subjects (employees, teams, divisions, organizations) clearly described?</i>			
4. <i>Could the way the sample was obtained introduce (selection) bias?</i>			
5. <i>Was the sample of subjects representative with regard to the population to which the findings will be referred?</i>			
6. <i>Was the sample size based on pre-study considerations of statistical power?</i>			
7. <i>Was a satisfactory response rate achieved?</i>			
8. <i>Are the measurements (questionnaires) likely to be valid and reliable?</i>			
9. <i>Was the statistical significance assessed?</i>			
10. <i>Are confidence intervals given for the main results?</i>			
11. <i>Could there be confounding factors that haven't been accounted for?</i>			
12. <i>Can the results be applied to your organization?</i>			

Adapted from Crombie, *The Pocket Guide to Critical Appraisal*; the critical appraisal approach used by the Oxford Centre for Evidence Medicine, checklists of the Dutch Cochrane Centre, BMJ editor's checklists and the checklists of the EPPI Centre.

Cite as: Center for Evidence Based Management (July, 2014), Critical Appraisal Checklist for Cross-Sectional Study. Retrieved (month, day, year) from <https://www.cebma.org>