Women’s Economic Empowerment in the MENA Region

Ibragheeth Zina
MSc in International Economy and Business
International Development Specialization
2017

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Simai Mihály
Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Simai Mihály. His door was always open whenever I ran into a trouble spot or had a question about my research or writing. He consistently allowed this paper to be my own work, and he steered me to the right direction whenever he thought I needed it.

Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to my partner, family and friends for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. Thank you.
**Table of Figure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>The Changes in gender disparities in primary and secondary gross enrolment ratios, 1999 to 2012</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Total numbers of graduates from government universities in Egypt</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Total percent of female graduates at government universities 2014-2015 in Egypt</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Annual employment rate in Egypt in 2016</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Unemployment levels are high, especially high for women</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Labor force participation rate by sex and region, 1990–2013</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7</td>
<td>Women’s Labour Force Participation, by Sub-region, 2014</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 8</td>
<td>Labour Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Aged 15-64)</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 9</td>
<td>Syria – Unemployment rate, Female (% of Female Labour Force)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10</td>
<td>Regional demographic breakdown below is based on available data from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11</td>
<td>Unemployment Rate in Jordan</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 12</td>
<td>Unemployment Rates by Sex and Community</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 13</td>
<td>Real GDP Growth in Jordan and Lebanon</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 14</td>
<td>Share of firms with female top manager, by firm size, latest year (percentages)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 15</td>
<td>Correlations between women’s labour force participation and the rank of depression</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 16</td>
<td>Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty line (% of population) of Egypt</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 17</td>
<td>Human Development Index Value</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 18</td>
<td>Human Development Index (HDI) in Yemen</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 19</td>
<td>Tunisian GPD Growth Rate</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abbreviations

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nation
FIDH: International Federation for Human Rights
GCC: Gulf Countries Cooperation
WEF: World Economic Forum
GER: Gross Enrollment Ratio
GIZ: Gesundheits-Informations-Zentrum
GPI: Gender parity index
ILO: International Labour Organization
MENA: Middle East and North Africa
UNDP: United Nation Development Programme
UNFPA: United Nation Population Fund
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Women: United Nation Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
OHCHR: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
# Table of Contents

Abstract 1

1. Introduction 2

2. MENA Women in Literature 5

2.1 The Economy in MENA Countries 5

2.2 The Islam and Economic Reform in MENA Countries 6

2.3 The Interpretation of Islam and Women’s Rights 7

2.4 Women and the Arab Spring 8

2.5 What Does the Women’s Economic Empowerment Mean? 9

2.6 Women in Labour force in MENA Countries 12

3. Methodology 13

3.1 Questions for the targeted group of women 14

4. Women and Education 15

4.1 Case of Egypt 17

5. Women participation in the Labour Force in MENA Countries 20

5.1 Women participation in rich countries 26

5.2 Women in economic-country profile 27

5.2.1 Qatar 27

5.2.2 Syria 29

5.3 Gap of Wages 40

6. Women and Health 42

6.1 Case of Egypt 44
Abstract

Women suffer from low participation in the economy worldwide, and they suffer the most in the MENA countries. As such the uprising erupted in many MENA countries, in order to improve the economic situation of the marginalized groups including women. The research argues that the Arab spring resulted in negative effects regarding the economic rights of women including the continuation of lack of education, lack of women participation in labour force, and low level of health. To answer the research questions the analysis uses mixed methodology including quantitative datasets based on UN and INGOs reports and qualitative research based on ethnographic approach with semi-structured interviews.

Keywords: Arab Spring, Uprising, Women Economic Empowerment, Women Rights
1. Introduction

All women in the world, whether in developed or developing countries are moving in different ways to achieve women’s basic rights. They uphold different perspectives on a diverse level. In this paper the writer will discuss the empowerment of women in MENA countries from the economic perspective.

About two thirds of countries in the developing regions have achieved gender parity in primary education. In southern Asia, only 74 girls were enrolled in primary school for every 100 boys in 1990. By 2012, the enrolment ratios became the same for girls as for boys. In sub-Saharan Africa, Oceania and Western Asia, girls still face barriers to entering both primary and secondary school. Women in Northern Africa hold less than one in five paid jobs in the non-agricultural sector. The proportion of women in paid employment outside the agriculture sector has increased from 35 per cent in 1990 to 41 per cent in 2015. In 46 countries, women now hold more than 30 per cent of seats in national parliaments in at least one chamber (UNPD, 2011).

The Arab women are usually victims and they lack of participation in all different aspects of life. They are suffering from the violence of the society, and in meantime the government regulations allow such violence to continue. The Arab women are also suffering from the violence of their families.

The percentage of women in the Arab World who work in non-agricultural jobs is extremely low. It is less than 20 percent, and it is the lowest amongst the developing regions, and of course their salaries are less than men (UN Women, 2016). Added to that, the highest percentage of unemployment rate is in the Arab region among developing countries, and the highest unemployment rate among groups in the Arab region is among females.

In the Arab region usually the women lack of freedom of choice, and if they have some freedom they have to choose either to be independent and to build their life career, or to live their life like any married woman and take care of the husband and children. It is such an expensive cost or price they have to take of their natural feelings to be a mother and a wife and to establish a family, or to build a career. Basically if a woman wants to travel and study abroad her home country and spend for example 10 years to finish high school, masters and PhD, and then she comes back, she has to face the masculine community, which usually refuses her for such reasons as age, qualification and her strong and educated personality.
The conservative societies usually forbid women to enrol in high school and university, and if the societies allow so, they usually determine which subject the women are allowed to study or work, such as the social science.

It goes without saying that who owns the money also owns the power, and who also has a power becomes the decision maker. In conservative society where it is forbidden for women to work, the man is breadwinner, the man holds full responsibility of his family, so he is the decision maker and nothing can happen without his acceptance, but the relationship is different between the daughter and father, wife and husband, the first one is parental relationship, the second relationship is a partner relationship and it should be horizontal relationship.

The relationship is a vertical relation in parental style, on part who is the sender and the other is the respondent. This is the combination of the Arab society the patriarchal system dominates the social, cultural, economic and political relations dominated by tribal, sectarian and local affiliations. Patriarchal society is a kind of traditional society dominated by patterns of values, behaviors and distinct forms of organization. It is characterized by a distinct quality structure that takes various forms, including the structure of the Arab patriarchal society, which is more patriarchal than other societies and more traditional and more besieged of the personality and culture of the individual. There is a consolidation of traditional social values and traditions and the marginalization of women and the attraction of their personality. Because of a qualitative nature, tribal values and tribalism affects the structure of culture, society and personality.

Women are the most harmed group in this patriarchal society, as they move from their parents' home to the husband's home. The relationship takes a participatory pattern rather than subordinate pattern, where the women follow their husband and where women do not have financial independence even if they work and have a steady income. It is also important about having the ability for women to make decisions to spend the money and not just to work.

The financial dependence limits people's freedoms regardless of sex, thus women are a special case where violence is practiced against them in ways and for different reasons that may be defined by society and justified by customs, traditions and religion. The first step in overcoming women's difficulties and liberating women from violence is by securing financial independence.
Perhaps financial security gives women a point of strength by reducing their dependence on the husbands or fathers, and helping them to make their own decisions.

At the same time, good education in all its stages is the necessary way for women to access decent work and adequate income. Women without education cannot compete in higher positions with high salaries. They will be stuck in low paid and very tired work, such as working in the agricultural sector, which needs long time and effort, and mostly it is unpaid work, where they work in the families’ property and are considered by the families as part of the duties of the marriage. Women also work in sewing factories, cleaning houses and sales in the shops. All of these jobs violate the rights set out in labor laws such as health insurance, official leave and social security.

Women must help themselves or each other to get their rights. Certainly if they are in the decision-making positions in conservative societies they can support each other, in order to change the system in favor of women or to be fair to women. The women must work hard and diligently in their academic and practical lives to achieve the goal to occupy positions, in all aspects of political, economic and social life.

The development that the countries in the MENA region need, in order to catch up with the developed countries, cannot be achieved without the participation of women. Their empowerment and support is part of the progress of society and development, especially the economic development, which requires all skilled and talented workers not only the capital, because capital needs employing human capital to operate, and these women make up half of their communities and they need to participate in the development process.
2. MENA Women in Literature

2.1 The Economy in MENA Countries

Alan Richards and others argue that the economy of the Middle East is driven by little rain, much oil and an increasing population growth and a youth bulge. The region is, helpfully, not treated as a homogenous economic block but economic sub-groups and their prospects are identified according to the structure of their economies. For example, Iraq, Iran, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia are grouped together as the "oil industrializers"; Israel, Jordan, Tunisia, and Syria with little oil as the "watchmakers"; Turkey, Egypt, and Morocco as the NICs (newly industrializing countries); Libya, Kuwait, Oman, the UAE, Bahrain, and Qatar with abundant oil and little else including people as the "coupon clippers" and Sudan and Yemen as the agro-poor. After a review of the changing demographics in the region and the implications for health, education, and the labour market the section on the economy and structural transformation concludes with an analysis of the water and food security, one of the greatest challenges facing the region (Cammett-Diwan-Richards-Waterbury, 2015).

The uprising, or the Arab Spring, presents large peaceful protest movements that began in some Arab countries during late 2010 and early 2011. The movement was influenced by the Tunisian revolution, which started from the burning of Mohamed Bouazizi himself and succeeded in ousting former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The movement continued on January 25 revolution that succeeded in overthrowing former President Mohamed Hosni Mubarak and then the February 17 Libyan revolution by killing Muammar Gaddafi and overthrowing his regime. The Yemeni revolution forced Ali Abdullah Saleh to step down. The protest movements have reached all parts of the Arab world, the largest of which is the civil war in Syria.

The uprising shocked the Arab economy on different levels, where tourism took a strike, capital flight accelerated, export decline and the investment collapsed in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen. As a result of the uprising in general the economic growth declined and the unemployment rate is increasing. The main economic challenges in the region include keeping economic stabilization and reducing expenditures, raise revenues, and there should be more focus on the public service on health, education and social protection (Cammett et al., 2015).

According to the new research wrote by Hafez Ganem in 2015, he describes the uprising as Arab Spring but no flowers. He argues that economic issues were at the heart of the Arab
Spring, the limited economic opportunities and increasing inequality were key drivers of the Arab Spring. Economic exclusion was an important driver for the Arab Spring revolts. Although the Arab economies grew at decent rates in the decade preceding the revolution, large group of people were not part of this growth and did not benefit from it, the youth is a large excluded group. The old social contract whereby government provided free education, guaranteed public sector jobs, and subsidized housing and consumer goods has imploded, governments now are no longer able to provide jobs to all graduates or to subsidize housing and consumer goods, the benefit from economic growth, get married and raise a family, youth need to find decent jobs in the private sector that allow them to pay full prices for housing and consumer goods. To solve the youth problem the key issue is the education. Smallholder farmers are another excluded group, whole regions in the Arab world are excluded from the benefits of growth, and those regions are nearly all rural and highly dependent on agriculture (Ghanem, 2016).

All of these factors which pushed the people to lead the uprising and ask the governments to take the responsibility and achieve a decent life for everyone, including women especially that the women represent high percentage of the Arab population apart of the middle class and youth. Women were suffering from the same situation such as the high employment rate, so any result after or during Arab uprising affected the women’s life from the negative or positive perspective, but the question whether the revolutionaries achieved what they want or not is still not answered inclusively yet.

2.2 The Islam and Economic Reform in MENA Countries

The Islamic movement did not appear in the uprising as separate and the Islamic movement and the Islamists did not lead and take the initiative in the demonstrations as main actors. The Islamic movement played an indirect role, whereby Islamists were not dominant actors in Tunisia and Egypt in the beginning of the uprising, rather by the time they occupied a political position in the government.

During the 1990s the Islamic movement followed new mechanisms to contribute to the defection of the middle classes from authoritarian bargains. The Islamic movement became more moderate in the ideology and less theoretical and it tried to promote more against the government’s policy under the headlines of the corruption and lack of social justice. These two main factors had produced the failing feeling between the middle class and youth. The
Islamic movement effected and helped feeding the societies to become more critical against authoritarian regimes. So more than 20 years of this implantation led by the Islamic movement and its penetration between the middle classes was like fuelling fire and pushing indirectly to the eruption of a revolution against governments (Cammett et al., 2015).

However when the Islamic movement took the ownership of the power in Tunisia and Egypt, the same people who criticized the previous regimes and promised the people to set a policy which is anti-corruption, reduction of the poverty and inequality, did not fulfil those promises because nothing has changed during the period of Islamic rule in the both states of Tunisia and Egypt (Cammett et al., 2015).

2.3 The Interpretation of Islam and Women’s Rights

There is a linear relationship between the political Islamic regimes and the lack of women’s rights. When the extremist Islamic movements engage more in the political life they directly impose marginalization on all types of women’s rights according to the way they understand and implement the Islamic rules, however such imposition is more as interpretation of Islam rather than the fundamental rules of Islam.

The Muslims around the world follow all sharia rule, which is wrote by humans, “Sharia law comes from a combination of sources including the Qur’an (the Muslim holy book), the Hadith (sayings and conduct of the prophet Muhammad) and fatwas (the rulings of Islamic scholars)” (BBC, 2009). So Sharia is not pure from Al Quran, but it is an interpretation coming from fatwas which are explanations from religious scholars.

The best example on this point are the Gulf countries especially Saudi Arabia, where a recent declaration coming from the king was announced allowing the women and giving them the right to drive cars, but it is not allowed for them to work as drivers. This right will help the women to get more access to the workplace, give them more movement space if they are allowed to work as drivers, but without such thing being approved any time soon, one of the sectors will continue to be forbidden for women to enter it as labour force (Hubbard, 2017). So it is not about the Islam, when the societies do not accept women to work, especially that the Holy Prophet himself married a working woman, he was married with Khadijah, rather it is the political Islamic regime that relies on certain interpretations coming some religious scholars (UN Women, 1995).
Mitra Abdur Rashid wrote that the people think women’s liberation movement began on 20th century but the truth happened on the 7th century when the prophet Muhammad guaranteed every Muslim woman certain rights and duties, and it was written in Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet (Hadith and Sunna). The Islam addresses the equality between woman and man. Woman has equal share in every aspect, in civil rights, in education, in voting, and in economic rights which is unique because the Islam gives woman a financial security through the marital gift or through taking and keeping properties and income for their own security. (Rashid).

2.4 Women and the Arab Spring

Since the Arab women are suffering more than men from exclusion in the Arab region, they have lower labour force participation rates, higher unemployment rates, and limited access to credits, land and other assets, social and cultural norms, legal and regulatory frameworks. Such economic factors are all responsible for creating gender disparity in labour force participation in the MENA region. Gender norms are defined by the patriarchal system in the Muslim societies within the following characteristics, male dominated early marriages, son preferences, restrictive codes of behaviour for women, and the association of family honor with female virtue (Ghanem, 2016).

In order to tackle the issue of women facing wider gap and more inequality than men in Arab countries, there should be an enforcement of empowerment and capacity building from the economic perspective, in the aim to improve their conditions. In addition the cultural and legal transformation should be done on large scale in order to protect women’s rights, especially that the Arab countries are highly embedded in masculine and traditional society that prevents any improvement in women’s economic conditions.

It was clear that during the uprising the Arab women had their share. It was noticed on the media and it was documented in all of the news that women participated in the Egyptian revolution of 2011 in unprecedented numbers. They assumed roles of leadership and at sometimes women outnumbered male participants (McBroome, 2013). In Tunisia women’s shared shoulder to shoulder with men asking for the equality and dignity. According to the FIDH organization President, Souhayr Belhassen “Throughout the Tunisian revolution, women and men were equal. Women of all ages, from all backgrounds and doll walks of life participated in strikes and demonstrations” (FIDH, 2012, p.8.). The Arab women occupied
the public place in Egypt and Tunisia, in the aim to achieve the freedom and to make progress in regards to the women’s rights in the Arab region on different levels. They are conveying their dreams and demands from private to public sphere.

The women’s share of uprising and the demands presented by the women for dignity and equality was a stand made hand in hand with men. All of the Arab spring slogans were about freedoms, social justice. It was clear that there was no slogan related to the religious, and the Islamic movement, which started to appear again on the high political level, aiming to exploit the mass situation in the Arab region.

2.5 What Does the Women’s Economic Empowerment Mean?

“A process that enables women to access greater opportunities for advancing economically, and to have increased power to make and act on economic decisions that impact themselves and their families. This process is delineated through a woman’s access to resources, and the agency to act on those resources. The empowerment process often comes from individual’s own sense of self-worth, but also from the cultures, societies, and institutions that facilitate or undermine empowerment” (GIZ, 2016, p.4).

It is a long process to achieve women’s empowerment, and it is a difficult process to help women to get good opportunities and to occupy positions in labour force. Such process needs a hard work on parallel levels, such as education, health and on institutional level. Meanwhile it should be a rule of law, in order to keep a just society, freedom and equal distribution of wealth and resources.

The empowerment of women was a crucial component to a great number of declarations and platforms of action, including the 1990 World Conference on Education for All. In 1999 there was more than 960 million adults, two-thirds of whom were women and they were illiterate. In order to reduce the illiteracy rate, the correct way to do so is to promote for the highest sharing in education among males and females. The women should take all the opportunities to engage in the education process, and there is a special programme designed to eliminate the social and cultural barriers which have been discouraging and excluding women from regular education. Reducing the illiteracy rate does include only promoting the right to education, but also promoting equal opportunities in all aspects of women’s lives (UNESCO, 1990).

During the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, all the member countries and regional and international organizations agreed to develop their own...
priorities and schedules for the implementation in accordance to their needs. This agreement should include and respect the women. Women should have a special attention, and they should have a critical role in population/environment programmes, and in achieving the sustainable development. The projects should empower the women on different levels, such as establishing and strengthening preventive and curative health facilities, governments and educational authorities should foster opportunities for women in non-traditional fields and eliminate gender stereotyping in curricula, promote the goal of universal access to primary and secondary education for girl children and for women and increase the training and opportunities for women and girls in sciences and technology, support and strengthen equal employment opportunities and establish rural banking systems with a view to facilitating and increasing rural women access to credit and to agricultural input and implementations (United Nation, 1992).

In the 1993 Human Rights Conference, women’s right is mentioned under the equal status and human rights of women. The conference member countries urged on integrating women into the mainstream of United Nations system – wide activity, they also underline the importance of the integration and participation of women in the development process. The conference stresses on the importance of working towards the elimination of violence against women in public and private life, and it also urges the eradication of all forms of discrimination against women. The governments and organizations should facilitate the access of women to decision making and should pave the way for participation of women in decision making process (OHCHR, 1993).

In the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, the member countries discussed the topic of empowering women through the education, because it is one of most important means that can help the women to have the knowledge, the skills and the self-confidence, which can make them improve their political, social, economic and health status (United Nation Population Fund, 2014).

In the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the global agenda was set for gender equality in Beijing. The global agenda set strategic objective and action for promoting women in 12 critical areas, one of them was women and the economy. It included promoting and supporting women’s self-employment and the development of small enterprises, equal opportunities for women and men, assembling the banking sector to increase lending and refinancing to help the women entrepreneurs and producers in rural and urban areas. The
global agenda also set a facilitation to help women to get more access to their businesses such as good infrastructure, transport and road construction (UN Women, 2014)

Promote gender equality and empower women ranked third among the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and it is still important and it is addressed as goal 5 in the sustainable development goals, in meanwhile all of these new sustainable development goals are connected to each other. So for example the no poverty goal needs a gender equality goal, because if the empowerment of women is enforced then the women will be more productive and will be more aware to enter the labour force and to increase their incomes and so the poverty will be reduced by women’s activity. In the same time the economic growth and decent work goals are connected also with the empowerment of women, whereby more productivity from male and female in various sectors will increase the economic growth.

The development was defined and measured strictly by economic indicators, so the economic growth and income distribution are main factors to reduce the poverty and the economic empowerment is a vital aspect of gender equality and women empowerment.

Chart 01:

Compiled by the author

All of these previous declarations and conferences gave all the women the respect they need. Those declarations pour into the same pipeline aiming to empower women on all aspects of life. All the declarations agree that it is important to empower women in order to improve the society. Women are not just housekeepers they are builders and supporters of building a good society.
The empowerment is important for the women and the society, but it cannot happen without the support and respect of men.

2.6 Women in Labour force in MENA Countries:

The women participation in the labour force has an effect on the country’s GDP. Simply, the women are consumers and they are a half of society, so it is by default that they should share in the economic cycle not only as consumers but as producers. Since MENA countries go under same equation it is important to discuss the women participation in labour force in MENA countries.

The Middle East and North Africa are divided in terms of economy into three categories, including the oil countries, mixed oil countries and non-oil countries. The MENA countries have different resources and different industrial sectors, therefore the participation of women in labour force should be categorized according to different sectors. The reality on the ground is that women in MENA countries largely participate in agriculture sector. Yet the women working in non-agricultural jobs are extremely low. At less than 20 percent, it is the lowest amongst developing regions, and sure their salaries are less than men.

Moghadam wrote in her article in 1999 about the determinants of female labour force participation in the Middle East and North Africa that “most women are marginalized from the formal sector productive process and are concentrated in community, social and personal services” (Moghadam, 1990, p.37.). Officially the women work in service sector, as teachers or nurses, but they did not work in sales market.

Moghadam mentioned that such distribution of female labour force is only different in both Kuwait and Qatar. Women in those two countries report fairly high activity rate (37 percent) for women aged 25-49, and these are professional women who in fact comprise the female labour force in those countries. The MENA countries with large population including Iran and Egypt do not count women in the official statistics of the labour force in the agricultural sector, which means that there are many women who work in agriculture but did not register officially as sharing their economic activity with men in agriculture (Moghadam, 1990)

Since 2000 MENA has made progress in the women situation women’s labour force participation increased from 28 to 32 percent between 2000 and 2006 (Momani, 2016).
3. Methodologies:
The research aim is to understand the effects of Arab Spring on women's economic rights in MENA countries. In order to clarify the research aim two main questions are posed:

1. How did the Arab Spring affect the women’s economic rights in MENA countries?
2. Why did the Arab Spring not bring economic prosperity and progress for women in MENA countries?

In order to answer the research questions the analysis uses mixed methodology including quantitative and qualitative research methodology, in order to explain the women’s economic situation before Arab spring happened and examine whether there is progress or backwardness after the Arab Spring with the regional and global trends. The analysis will also examine whether the Arab Spring achieved positive indicators on the economic empowerment of women in regards to the aforementioned networks in literature between education, health and women in labour force. The researcher will look for the quantitative data in the UN database and reports, World Bank database and Gulf Cooperation Council database as secondary data referred to published and unpublished materials such as materials from books, newspapers, reports and dissertations or theses and videos, all of the literature review is a part of the secondary data collection.

Meanwhile the research will use the primary data such as the semi-structured interviews within the ethnographic approach. The interviewees will have the common characteristics. Al Tahrer Square in Egypt or the women who are active in the women's movement, or women involved in the empowerment of women field as managers or consultants.

Please see below a table of the interviewees selected systematically. The small group of interviewees does not give a generalized perspective on the whole MENA countries, but at least it gives a good description on challenges and successes, and it touches upon the daily life issues that women in MENA countries face following the Arab Spring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>names</th>
<th>countries</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F.A</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>New Woman Foundation</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>PHD Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>We are Tunisian member</td>
<td>Employee</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.A</td>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>Government Office Employee</td>
<td>MA student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.Z</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Tunisian National Commission for Education Science and Culture Administrative Office/ Young Feminist</td>
<td>MA Student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.M</td>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>Yamane Foundation Employee</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.A</td>
<td>Iraq/Kurdistan</td>
<td>Organization of Social and Political Research CEO</td>
<td>Teacher PHD student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.Q</td>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>Women Activist Institute Young Feminist</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree/Third year student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.1 Questions for the targeted group of women:

1. How did the Arab Spring affect the women’s economic rights in MENA countries?
   a. How did the successive governments affect the women's rights in their policies and implementation?
   b. Did the women achieve their goals of the uprising on the grassroots and institutional levels? If yes, what kinds of goals have been achieved?
   c. What kinds of goals have been not achieved? And why?
   d. In regards to the achieved goals of women’s rights, can you describe whether these goals reached different areas, classes, sectors, and ages of women?
2. Why did the Arab Spring not bring economic prosperity or progress for women in MENA countries?

4. Women and Education:
The quality of education occupied a good space in all of the conferences which the researcher mentioned before. Education is a very important concept and it took place on the eight millennium development goals, and now it takes the 17th place in sustainable development goals. The target of the education goal by 2030 is to ensure that all of the girls and boys around the world have equity chance to enrol in the primary and secondary education, and equal access for all of the women and men to get quality education in the high schools or in universities, as well as in technical and vocational schools (UNSTATS).
There are different reasons explaining why the education is important to empower women, and how the education affects gender equality and women empowerment, basically the education is recognized as a first stage which aims to help the women to work outside the homes and outside the agriculture field. With secondary education the women can share and participate in the decision making process and the women can have access to reach more information with higher education. The good education gives the girls and women the power to bargain within their marriage, the power to choose and decide their own lifestyle. The education will give the women the access to the financial system and to the new technologies (Vladimirova & Blance, 2015).

Usually the women in the developing countries especially in rural areas are deprived by the society to enrol in the education process, the society usually allows females to be accepted for four or five years in primary education. There are several reasons to forbid the girls to integrate in the schools, such as, poverty and early marriage. Usually in the developing countries the women get married before the age of 18. Approximately one in three girls marry before 18. So directly the women lose education and slowly their health. On opposite way the countries lose a lot when the high percentage of the society becomes uneducated. These women are half of the society. Every woman is a mother, and she takes care of the new generation and the future youth. It is simple that educated mothers can teach their sons and girls, follow the structure of the good health, and give their children the true life orientation, and on the income level the educated women can work out of the agriculture sector, where
they only work as blue workers, and they can work in decent jobs and the law can protect them, so they can increase their family income (Vladimirova & Blance, 2015). In 1950 the Middle East and North Africa had the lowest level of female participation in the education but by 2010 the average years of education had increased 16 times more from 0.4 to 6.5 (Vladimirova & Blance, 2015). It is not about the numbers and percentages, it is also about the quality, it is more than the specific meaning to read and write, it is more deeply how to analyse and how to understand the text, how to learn more skills in technology and innovation, and how to think about of the box. The educational certificate is not enough to own high competitive skills in the labour market. With the high employment rate and low economic growth the requirements are more than the certificates.

The education is a powerful tool to achieve the sustainable development goals, and to make progress on all different aspects of life. The education has a value, and it is mentioned in the previous paragraph about the good step on the quantitative progress, but the quality of education in MENA region as measured by the performance of students in international evaluation is very low. In the fourth international assessment led by the international association for evaluation of educational achievement (IEA) in 2007, 15 MENA countries took place in mathematics and science evaluation and the result appeared that these students have low levels in comparison with others students from the same age (Bouhlila, 2011).

The MENA countries in terms of the division of the country budget invest less than what they should. For example in Lebanon the education expenditure in the total of government budget 7.2% to 25.7% in Morocco, also the ratio in primary education is below 30:1 in all of the countries in 2011/2012 (UNESCO, 2012). This fact affects directly in the quality of education. When there is more than 40 to 35 students in one class learning from one teacher, sitting 3 or 2 students in one desk in old building without heating on winter, and even in some schools the windows are broken and the rainy water enters the classroom. The most important point that there is separation in schools on basis of gender. It is unhealthy environment to feed the small children to grow up within separation system, and to teach the children that boys are different from the girls.

There are changes in gender disparities in primary and secondary gross enrolment ratios, 1999 to 2012. In the secondary school the ratio has changed during the 12 years, but it is still not considerably changed in the status of Palestine and Oman. There is a large change in Algeria, and also in primary education there is a clear change in Yemen (UNESCO, 2015). (See figure 1 below).
PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is an international survey aiming to evaluate the education system in different countries by testing the skills and knowledge of 15 years old students. By looking on the testing result performance gap between boys and girls in the science, mathematics and reading, there are different countries from MENA region sharing on PISA testing. Algeria took a worst position in science, mathematics, and reading from the equity perspective of the boys vs. girls, it also took a worst position on the red colour below the average. These results are the same in United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Jordan.2

4.1 Case of Egypt

The girls in 69 countries achieved higher grades than the boys in the reading test by 2015, also this result included some MENA countries. Today the women in the Arab region earn more science degrees in comparison to the percent of women in United States. The Arab women spend more effort to achieve educational degrees than men, but at the end there is

2 From “PISA 2015”, by OECD, retrieved from http://www.compareyourcountry.org/pisa/
difficulty for the women to enter the labour market. The relationship between the men and schools is different from the relationship between women and schools. Men consider schools as wasting time and the education for men in MENA countries is just a tool to build a connection between school and life (The Atlantic Daily, 2015), but the women believe in the education as a tool to build better life. From a different perspective girls have limited options for productive activities in the society; therefore they focus on the part of studying, unlike boys who have more diverse options. Girls suffer from high restrictions on movement, so the only way for them to spend their power is in the schools, but when they finish the school or university they get married early and spend their effort and time to raise the family.

In Egypt for example the numbers of women who finish the university is higher than men, but the unemployment rate is higher between the female in comparison with male. The logical way of thinking is that there should be a positive relationship between the education and the labour force, but in Egypt unfortunately the reality is reversed. The number of graduates declines after the Arab Spring in Egypt. In 2013 and 2014 the numbers fell down 135.8 thousands of students (Egypt Statistics, 2015). These shows that the upraising aimed to achieve more education for more youths, but the effects came up negative. (See Figure2 below).

Figure 2 Total numbers of graduates from government universities in Egypt

![Figure 2 Total numbers of graduates from government universities in Egypt](http://www.capmas.gov.eg/Pages/IndicatorsPage.aspx?page_id=6142&ind_id=1082)

---

Although there is decrease in the number of graduates, females still occupy the higher share of the graduates at the governmental universities. Governmental universities welcome the students from the middle class in Egypt, and 56.7% of the students there are females, which is more than the half of the total students. (See figure 3 below).

Figure 3 Total percent of female graduates at government universities 2014-2015 in Egypt

Women take the lion share on the unemployment rate even though they are more educated than men in the Egyptian society. 17.5% of total numbers of females in Egypt are integrated in the local market, while the rest of females suffer from the unemployment. This negative figure is after 5 years of the Arab Spring. The negative figure is the fruit of the uprising. That being said the analysis will move to the labour market and the women participation in labour force in MENA countries.

---

5. Women participation in the Labour Force in MENA Countries

Unemployment is one of the most serious threats to the stability and cohesion of the Arab societies. The causes of unemployment do not differ from one Arab society to another, and the causes are similar within the communities from one region to another. In this regard, the causes of unemployment can be summarized from economic, social, political perspectives. Each of these perspectives has an impact on society in terms of its contribution to the problem of unemployment.

One of the major challenges in the MENA region is the high unemployment rate among the youths which include males and females. Before the Arab Spring in 7 countries of the MENA region including Lebanon, Tunisia, Libya, Iran, Jordan, Yemen, and Egypt, the unemployment rate (Age of 15-24) among female youths has increased from 2001 to 2012 except in Tunisia.

---

In Lebanon the unemployment rate among female youths increased from 20.2% in 2001 to 21.6% in 2011. The unemployment rate also increased among male youths during the same period in Lebanon from 21.5% to 23.3%. This means that the unemployment rate of males increased on a higher percentage in comparison to females in Lebanon. In Tunisia the unemployment rate of female youths decreased from 29.20% in 2000 to 27.1% in 2011. Yet in the meantime in all of Iran, Jordan, Yemen and Egypt the female youth unemployment rate increased respectively as following 35.3% to 40.5% in Iran, 41.40% to 51.1% in Jordan, 49.1% to 51.7% in Yemen, 45.1% to 64.9% in Egypt (see figure 5 below). In general this data shows that the unemployment rate is very high among youths as a whole in MENA countries especially among females (Mottaghi, 2014).

It is important to note that in MENA countries the total population of youth is increasing dramatically, whereby it was estimated that the total number of youth was 44.6 million in 1980, thus the number increased to 88.1 million in 2010. This means that there is serious demographic challenge for MENA countries on how to decrease unemployment rate among youth while there number is increasing dramatically (Mottaghi, 2014).

Figure 5 Unemployment levels are high, especially high for women

---

This is an overview about the female unemployment rate among the youth before the Arab Spring. The analysis will go deeply in the situation of women in MENA countries through the new data after the Arab Spring.

In the entire world the women labour force participation between 1999 and 2013 decreased by 2% from 52% to 50%. The situation of women is going in reverse during a quarter of a century. Only 50% of women share in labour force. This is an indicator that there is a need to search for new methods and policies to present the gender issue or to look more deeply why the situation is not changing for better. Nothing has changed for better in the world and nothing has changed in MENA countries. The MENA countries for a quarter of a century have occupied the worst place between the world’s regions with lowest participation rate. Although there is a progress from 20% to 22% increase in female participation in labour force, MENA countries still have the biggest gender gap between males and females participation in the labour force. The gap was 56% in 1990 and it decreased to 53% in 2013(UN women, 2016). (See figure 6 below).

Figure 6 Labour force participation rate by sex and region, 1990–2013

![Figure 6 Labour force participation rate by sex and region, 1990–2013](image)

Why do MENA countries have the lowest rate of female participants in the labour force in the world? Frankly the increase of the women participants in labour force is a slow process not only in MENA countries but also in the entire world among developed and developing countries, but many regions responded faster than MENA countries within the last 25 years. So that means there are common norms and thoughts directed to women in all different

---

regions, where there are restriction for women to work, but some regions where liberated from those restrictions but not all of them.

MENA countries suffer and are controlled by different reasons, which affect and determine the women to share in the labour force. The gender norms and economic situation are very important and both of these frameworks include religion, oil regions and patriarchal norms, which will be explained in the upcoming paragraphs point by point.

As it was mentioned in the first chapter about the wrong understanding in the interpretation of Al Quran to the implementation in the real life, this wrong interpretation affects the women from a negative side. The interpretation is conveyed to the legal system in the countries, which follow fully in the constitution Al Sharia law. For example by the researchers participant observation of the religion classes in secondary school in Palestine, the teacher was lecturing the female students according to Al Hadith that if there is a good man who has good religious and moral principles, a female is better to accept marrying him. The researcher observed that the teacher did not encourage the girls to study university because the purpose to marry from a good man will have a minimal success. The teacher has a bachelor degree, but she was encouraging early marriage under the large umbrella, which is covered by the misunderstanding of the religious thoughts. In the MENA countries the age of marriage for girls is less than boys, so it is written in the law that girls should pursue raising family before the boys. In rural areas people even cheat and hide the real age of girls or change the official documents in order to make girls marry earlier than what is written in law. In countries such as Saudi Arabia and the Republic of Yemen the minimum age of marriage does not exist in the law.

The early marriage is recognized as major issue in the MENA region because it harms the women life. Early marriage causes girls to drop from schools leading to a scarcity of education among girls. Early marriage causes as well the women to pursue less to work with dignity and decent job. Meanwhile the decrease in the percent of women participation in labour force causes on the long term the mothers take the responsibility of nurturing the family and the nurturing becomes based on the traditional ideas coming from older generation with no improvement to the new generation.
With reference to a pure memory of the researcher in the age of 14, the female students attended their classmate’s wedding party. For the female students at that time in 2002 it was fine to attend a wedding party because they did not see the long term effects of their classmate’s marriage. While today the same female students realized the family judges and makes important decisions in the life of the girls which determines later the life of the girl when she becomes a women and a wife. The family simply steals the dream of the girl to study and work and to control her financials.

The laws in MENA countries differentiate between the genders the legal system differs between the countries driven by multiple resources. It is aforementioned that the religious law of Sharia, the customary law, and the heritage that descends from the colonization period under British and French mandate and the international declarations and conferences. The analysis picks some laws that play a role and determine the movement of women. For instance in many countries the women need permissions from their husbands, fathers or brothers to obtain passports. In Jordan the unmarried women over 18 do not need a permission to apply for passport but any married woman regardless of her age, she is not eligible to apply for the passport without her husband’s permission. This law makes traveling and working more difficult for women than men. The law also determines the movement of
women leading to restrictions on the progress of women participation in the labour force (World Bank, 2013).

Sometimes the law acts like a knife on both sides, the maternity law which gives women 2-3 months (it depends on each country’s national law) maternity leave with full salary and health insurance, in one side it protects the women in the private and public sector, by giving women the time to take care of their health and their new-borns health, on the other side this law discourages the private, public and non-profit sectors to employ a married or pregnant woman because they cannot work against the labour law, so the best way is to not employ women. In this way Employers keep themselves in a secure position.

S.S (personal communication, October 20, 2017) from Palestine said “I was pregnant when I went to interview in a non-profit organization, and I dressed an extra size of a dress to hide my pregnancy. I got the job and I finished my contract, and the market kicked me out for 4 years. I returned before 3 months only”.

For the pension law the mandate retirement age for women is less than men, in this case the women will work less years than men so less productivity and with short years they will slow down and limit the expected career progression (World Bank, 2013).

They do not just need a permission to travel, but in some countries they need a permission to get married and to apply for a job. That is strictly related to the society’s norms. Unfortunately the society norms are stronger than the law. The states may improve the law and follow the international trend and direct it to make respects to the human rights and achieve a progress on the gender issues, but nothing changes in the society’s norms between day and night. The change and development process need several generations to reach a safe place, to have equal generations in everything.

Until now the norms of the societies control the women from different perspectives. For instance it is not accepted for the woman to work after 7 pm or during the night and travel abroad and work in mixed environment. The culture norms dictate for do and don’t to controls women daily life, this two comprise the main structure in the patriarchal society, were the men own the power to be decision makers not only in the social life, but also in the economic and political life. In traditional societies the priority for work when there is shortage in job opportunities is for men, and also the same in the elections or in any political position. In MENA region with high unemployment rate the people need some kind of corruption, which
occurs by creating good relationships and connections with people with influence and this is called in Arabic Wasta. The relatives of a woman use such connections to help the man get a job because they believe it is necessary for a man to work for taking care of the woman.

5.1 Women Participation in Rich Countries

The economic growth is a main engine to create new jobs and keep the economic circle active. In the 1980 the female participation rate was around 30% in Greece, Ireland and Spain, and it was below the world average, but within 3 decades this rate increased approximately 15-20%. The reasons behind that are the new opportunities for women created by economic growth supported with legal and institutional frameworks (World Bank, 2013).

The gulf countries include six countries’ from MENA region, and they are Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of Bahrain, Sultanate of Oman, State of Qatar, State of Kuwait and United Arab of Emirates. The GCC sates have high economic growth. From this perceptive the GCC should have the high share of women in labour force and it is the higher from other MENA countries, but the labour women coming from different countries such as Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, and Syria are recognized as foreign labour force, so the economic growth creates jobs for non-citizen women, and almost the women work in the service sector as doctors, nurses and teachers.

There are positive indicators that the region is ready for change. The rate of female participation in the labour force in Arab countries is increasing. It is increasing in the GCC more than other MENA countries; this is backed by the high economic growth in the oil export countries. The GCC countries need the human capital to invest in multiple sectors to lead the GDP to depend on deferent sources not only oil production. The highest share for women is in Qatar and the lowest is in Saudi Arabia. In all MENA countries the lowest participation rate is in Syria, which is lowest than Saudi Arabia, but the low rate in Syria is caused by different reasons than Saudi Arabia. The effect of uprising in Syria made large number of women to become refugees in Europe and in Turkey, and also in different parts of Syria. Such effect is a normal effect in any war (World Bank, 2016). Wars cause damage to the economic cycle and cause low attractiveness to the FDI and this increases the unemployment rate with shortage of vacancies (See Figure 2 Below).

Figure 7 Women’s Labour Force Participation, by Sub-region, 2014
The women participation in economy will be reviewed in cases such as Qatar, Algeria and Tunis, which present the highest and lowest participation rate according to the last figure.

5.2 Women Participation in Economy: Country Profile

5.2.1 Case of Qatar:

Qatar population in 2016 reached approximately to 2 million 460 thousand people. More than a quarter of the population are females around 652 thousand. The female unemployment rate in 2015 was 1.9%. Qatar economy is known as the most financially secured after the gulf crisis and the oil boom between 1970 and 1980. The expectation for Qatar is to increase the government effort and to set new policy and invest more in multiple sectors and to become a major driver on economic growth and government expenditure in the non-hydrocarbon sector (UN Women, 2016a).

The state of Qatar should enjoy a low unemployment rate, because there are factors which respect women and guarantee good work environment for women, and even encourage them to work. The environment should be different from the other countries. The government and constitution should be steering the dignity of life for everyone, not only for women, and the
dignity of life to be achieved needs implementation. Therefore we can say Qatar is one of the countries which are implementing equal labour law.

The Article 93 in the national law of state of Qatar states that women shall be paid the same wage as men, if they do the same duties and jobs. This article targets the public sector. For the private sector the women have opportunities to work and to train same as men. In addition the law protects women, especially in the private sector, for insistence it is not allowed for the owner or the manager to cut service for women employees if the get married, meanwhile women have the right of maternity vacation 50 days after one year work (UN Women, 2016a).

The Qatari women are more open in comparison to Saudi women, for example they can travel alone without a man relative, they have space of movement and travel, so they travel abroad to study and get a high education. It is going to increase with the government policy improving and investing in the education through creating twinning programs and cooperation between the foreign universities and the local universities. More educated women increase the labour women supported with fair labour law and high economic growth.

The Qatari government separates the work place between men and women, but at least they support women to work. So the private sector started to establish the new infrastructure or the company with mixed environment, the participation of women increased from the 1990 until 2014. It was less than all of the developing countries but in 2006 Qatari women followed and met the other women in developing countries. The gap was decreased from 20% to zero within 17 years (see figure 8 below). In 2015, the women in public sector formed 89.9% and 84% from male (UN Women, 2016a). That is logical because men work more in private sectors as business men in exploration of petroleum, constructing sector, mining and trade, also the society does not accept the women in agriculture and fishing sectors. The Qatari women enjoy total different economic situation than the women that work in Egypt in countryside, where they are either not registered in the formal statistics or they work in unpaid jobs.

The private sector in Qatar began to realize that it needs to reach all different types of customers in the aim to increase the revenue, and a part of these customers are women. So the private sector put new strategies to reach women, and these strategies imply employing larger portion of women in order to respond to women customers’ needs. So the companies need women in new jobs like sales and marketing, and they started to encourage women to study
these fields and to apply for jobs. A life case study about that in Qatar happened with Vodafone in telecommunication industry, in 2015 Vodafone launched a program called Al Johara to provide women an opportunity to learn entrepreneurial skills (UN Women, 2016b).

Such strategies take long time to catch up with the developed countries and such strategies take a lot of efforts and money from the governments, public sectors, private sectors to reach to the point where women are employed in all different jobs and Qatar is still working to achieve better results on HDI and SDG until 2030.

Figure 8 Labour Force Participation Rate, Female (% of Female Population Aged 15-64)\(^8\)

![Graph showing Labour Force Participation Rate over years for Qatar and all developing countries.](image)

Source: International Labour Organization (ILO) 2016

### 5.2.2 Case of Syria

The complicated situation in the region between 2000 and 2011, caused the private sector to expand, and the government started to decrease and sometimes freeze the subsidies. The Syrian citizens were under oppression. The price of fuel added was increasing, and therefore the smugglers were selling the fuel with more expensive process than the neighbouring countries. The economic situation in Syria stayed regular and stable until the uprising. The Arab spring effected the economic cycle and changed it to a freezing economy. More than 80% of the population live in poverty now (UN Women, 2016a).

In Syria the ingoing conflict, which started on March, 2011, and still it is unclear how and when this conflict will finish. The main losers in this conflict are women and children. In flagrant breach of the international human rights and humanitarian law, the women suffer the most from the violence of all kinds such as psychological violence, physical violence and social violence. The conflict has also created the largest crisis that reached to the border countries, and the crisis also shook Europe. More than 2.8 million Syrian refugees moved from Syria to Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Kurdistan, and Egypt, half of them are women and girls (HRW, 2014).

Syrian women inside Syria and outside are suffering from the violence, so we will look separately to the Syrian women because there are women who live in the refugee camps out of Syria, women who live in the refugee camps inside Syria and the Syrian who are living under the Al-Assad regime, which is included statically in Syrian government statistics.

Syrian women in Syria in 2016 formed half of the society population around 9 million. The country has suffered one of the worst economic crises in the world with real GDP growth 2014/2015 was -16%. With this reverse of growth the female unemployment rate in 2014 was 28.2%. In this decreasing economic growth the unemployment rate should be high and increasing by the time and affecting both of male and female, but in case of Syria the unemployment rate is high from the nineties until 2014, it was low in women participation before the uprising and after the uprising and it still increases in dramatic way (UN Women, 2016a).

Figure 9 Syria – Unemployment rate, Female (% of Female Labour Force)\textsuperscript{9}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure9.png}
\caption{Syria – Unemployment rate, Female (% of Female Labour Force)}
\end{figure}

\textit{Source:} International Labour Organization 2016

That result of low women participation is contradictory with a labour law in Syria, the Syrian constitution guarantees an equal legal position between women and men, but it is not allowed for women to work at nightshifts or undertake immoral jobs according to society norms. Female employees are entitled to special benefits after the first six months of employment including fully paid maternity leave is represented 120 days for the first child and 75 days for second child, and 75 days for third child, and the mother women have a right to take a 30 minutes paid break within 24 months, also it is allowed for women who work in the companies up to 15 employees to apply for unpaid one year to take care of their child, and the women have a right to return for same jobs. In addition, from the company side if they employ more than 100 women, and there are mothers with 25 children less than 5 years old, the company should open facilities for the children such as a care centre (UN Women, 2016a).

The labour law in the status should encourage the women to work and enter the labour market, but it seems that different factors affected women to enter the market also in the law. The Personal Status Law allows marriage for women at the age of 17, and 18 for men, and sometimes the judges accept for women to marry on the age of 15, which means from class and school to marriage life (UN Women, 2016a).

Also the society norms have the same major roles to decrease or forbid the girls to attend the schools on countryside or in Bedouin families. In other families women are offered to study in schools, while forbid them to participate in the labour market. The immorality is a wide word and the definitions of the immoral jobs determined by the family in close range and the society large scale. The society can judge sales jobs as immoral jobs in the countryside or even in city centre, or a secretary position on lawyer's office sometimes is also considered as immoral job.

The women were sharing in agriculture sector before the crisis and they were contributing around 59% of the agriculture labour force so the agriculture production produced by women hand. According to the FAO estimated the women were producing more than 50% from the food production, and the women activity distributed in four agriculture sub sectors, which are crop production, livestock production, food process and household and family maintenance. Women are usually responsible for the most time-consuming and labour-intensive tasks of crop and livestock production: sowing, application of fertilizers, weeding, harvesting, cleaning, sorting, sorting and packaging. With all this effort exerted by women in agricultural work, but women are underestimated in several ways, such as considering the work of women
as unpaid work, so there is no social security for these women that guarantees a decent life in the future, or to exclude women from the official data (CARE, 2016).

But with the climate change and drought in the Middle East, especially in Syria, as well as the war that led to losses in agricultural land and human lives, women lost their jobs in the agricultural sector and lost their homes and land and turned them into migrants and refugees inside and outside Syria. From self-sufficiency and agricultural work to the transition to humanitarian aid provided by international organizations and supporting governments and living in camps.

For the ILO, there is a significant loss of employment in agriculture, mostly for women, in the years preceding the crisis. At the same time, employment in urban areas, especially in industry, services and tourism, was insufficient to accommodate all young people entering the labour market. This is in addition to an increase in urban labour force due to rural-urban migration. As a result, women were largely excluded from the urban labour market (mainly informal) because of strong competition from men (CARE, 2016).

**Case of Syria during the War**

Women's participation in economic life in light of the Syrian crisis does not seem easy, but neither is it weak. The past five years have shown the capabilities of Syrian women and their association with the needs of the society. After the loss of the family's breadwinner, some women were forced to work, something unusual for some Syrian families before the crisis intensified. However, the deterioration of the family's financial situation made the rest of the family reluctantly agree that their daughters and sisters would go out to find work that would help increasing price of the Syrian pound was a fait accompli imposed on them, prompting women to seek work, allowing the family to increase income, which has lost its purchasing power significantly (Levant Research Institute, 2016).

However, as in the last years of the war, some companies and institutions started prefer to employ women rather than men, because of compulsory "service" imposed on males and the consequent travel or military enrolment, leaving many job vacancies. Employment of young women became the reason for ensuring stability. In the same context, we find that private companies deliberately give lower salary to girls in some cases, taking advantage of the need to pay women to work, and lack of awareness of the level of monthly salary they can get.
One of the professions that have become most prevalent among girls and women in Syria is the work-dependent professions, in an attempt to reconcile responsibilities within the home and the burdens outside. These occupations are time-consuming, some of which are manual, such as sewing, wool knitting, traditional jewellery, home cooking, to sell some types of light goods, providing these occupations acceptable income for women, even female university students, and the role of social networking sites again, through the pages, "Facebook," for example, the promotion of goods and products to reach a large segment of consumers. In addition to the "bazaars" which are opened monthly, and these bazaars provide a good opportunity for women to display their products in front of a large number of visitors.

Some Syrian women are forced to work in cleaning houses for a low wage, or to clean up cafes and restaurants with a wage of 300 pounds per hour. In addition, Syrian women roam government offices in Syria to clean bureaucrats’ offices and earn 100 Syrian pounds from each employee who allows them to clean and rearrange their offices. Recently, women are employed in government offices for money around 18,000 Syrian pounds, with the possibility of increasing both promotion and seniority, or as a staff member of public health centres, clinics and hospitals (Zaman Alwsl, 2016).

The companies operating in Syria replaced women with men only for need and to compensate for the shortage of men, perhaps not believing in their abilities to work. However, the shortage of male workers in the war led the women to work under harsh conditions and low wages sometime below the minimum wage, and without social security. The hard conditions force women to work, especially that some of them have lost their husbands the breadwinners of the house, brothers or fathers.

**Refugee women**

The situation of displacement and asylum created many of the problems faced by women. Such situation created a state of physical and psychological violence against women, where women suffer from violence in their own land and from the males in the society. Thus when they left their country together with the same men surrounded by the same society with the same customs and traditions, the change of geography did not necessarily change the custom and the masculine society surrounding the women, and perhaps the asylum situation increases the masculine tendency towards women.
In recognition of the refugee organization, 48% of registered asylum cases are from females. The last update on 5 November 2017 was 5,344,184, with half of them being children of different ages. This figure includes 2 million Syrians in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, and 3 million registered by the government of Turkey, as well as more than 30,000 Syrian refugees registered in North Africa. (See figure 10 below)

Figure 10 Regional demographic breakdown below is based on available data from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. The ages of the various refugee women living in refugee camps registered only for those living in the camps. These percentages do not represent all those who came, because there are refugees on the journey of asylum, moving between countries or cities according to the specific situation of each individual.

Perhaps the priorities vary in the asylum phase starting with the search for safety for food and medicine. Perhaps the work comes at a later stage of achieving the basic needs, because it was difficult to enter the labour market. It is also difficult to work officially in the asylum countries. Moving from environment and natural state requires time to start a new professional life from scratch. Thus it is more difficult in regards the cases for those who come from a war state and a developing country at the same time.

The causes and consequences of this crisis will affect women in their short and long term. Perhaps the causes and consequences are beyond the stage depending on the conditions of asylum in host countries and the rapid integration of refugees into host communities.

**The Case of Syrians in Jordan**

We will look at the situation of Syrian women in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan due to their relative migration to a similar environment and a neighboring country of their original country of Syria, where the society of the East deals in the same way or is similar in

---

masculine style with a similar pattern, but from a positive perspective they move to a community that speaks a common language that facilitates communication and integration.

In Jordan there is over than 650,000 women, children and men. 80 percent of them are living outside of the camps, and more than 130,000 are staying in two camps. Those camps are specially created for the Syrian refugees, and they are Za’atari and Azraq. 93% of the refugees are living under the poverty line (UNHCR, 2017).

There are certainly unregistered refugees. There are also special cases, including the displaced Palestinians of 1948 who came to Syria. During the war, three generations lived as refugees and returned from Syria to Jordan. Some of them do not carry a Syrian document, but they came from Syria.

In an observation by the researcher through frequent visits to Jordan, the researcher met with a Palestinian family who came from Syria. They said that their parents came to Syria in 1967, therefore they do not have official travel Syrian documents, and when they came to Jordan for a second time as refugees they held temporary passports. They do not enjoy any civil or political rights with these passports, and they do not receive any kind of assistance as they come from Syria and are not entitled to stay in a camp.

The UNRWA estimated thePRS in 2014 as 20,000 registered refugees. The UNRWA provides them the relief and social protection (UNRWA).

In fact, Jordan was considered the safest country in the Middle East, which led to an increase in the number of refugees from neighboring countries such as Iraq pre-Syria. Year by year, unemployment rates increased with the increase in supply in the market. The increase in labor supply makes people accept to work with low wages and without social security.

For the Syrians in general, and for women in particular, it is difficult to occupy a job market and they suffer from high rates of unemployment because of real recession, which is increasing significantly after 2014.
Very few women have the ability to enter the labor market, but the conditions and nature of work are harsh and inappropriate, such as "non-payment of wages or dismissal from work after several days without charge. In some cases women suffer from sexual harassment, whether verbal or physical, by the employer, and this is considered to be labor requirement for many Syrians, especially young women.

Unemployment is higher among women than among men in all the societies. In the Jordanian society, the unemployment rate among women is more than double that of men. Among Syrian women, the unemployment rate is approximately around 80 per cent for all of refugees who live outside the camp and in the Za'tari camp. For Syrian refugee women outside the camp, current unemployment is three times higher than when the conflict began in March 2011. The rate of women in Za'tari camp is twice that of today compared to March 2011.

---

The Syrians are faced with many challenges to find employment opportunities, despite the existence of a cooperation agreement on Jordanian-Syrian employment, which was signed in 2001 between the two governments. However, the Jordanian constitution gives the right to work for Jordanian citizens. The Syrians have the right to work in jobs or positions that Jordanians are not competing for it. Syrians, like other foreigners in Jordan, should apply for a formal work permit from the government to have a legal cover to work, but in practice it is not easy to get a work permit, while it takes a long process, and it needs both time and money. When a work permit is obtained for a period not exceeding more than one year, the holder of the permit is linked to the employer, where he is not entitled to move from work to another work, totally they recognise non-independent employee (European Commission, 2016).

The situation is different for those who live in the camps where they are not entitled to work permits, in addition to the special security restrictions to obtain official documents. This difficulty in working drives the Syrian citizens to leave the camps without official permission and to work illegally in the black market. There are many reasons for pushing refugees to work in the black market and one of the most important reasons despite the fact that they have a work permit, it is related to the minimum wage. The Labour Law recognizes the minimum wage of 150 Jordanian Dinars for the Syrian, which is less 40 JD than the minimum wage for Jordanians. This difference in the minimum wage caused the operation of the Syrians and the increase in the rate of unemployment among Jordanian citizens, especially as employers employ people with qualifications and holders of certificates from the Syrians in jobs that do not need skills (European Commission, 2016).

---

As a result, Jordanian policies and bureaucratic process and the high cost of obtaining work permits increased the percentage of refugees who are working in the black market. For women, they found themselves doing different jobs, such as cleaning houses, saleswomen in clothing shops and accessories, salons, sewing and secretary. In all of these jobs the women are working for long hours and low wages. Women work in such jobs for a long time and late hours, working in conditions that are not included in the labour law. For example, there is no health insurance or social security, the wage is less than the minimum wages, and also women are not entitled to annual leave. Moreover, the employer is entitled to expel them at any time, without reasons and without compensation.

There is another case concerning the refugees themselves, where parents accept the marriage of their daughters of different ages, because of their poor financial conditions or on the beliefs that it is better to marry them to a man who bears their full responsibility in such harsh circumstances. The early marriages deprive girls from completing their studies or accessing the labour market.

This is part of the results of the Arab Spring on the region. A rise in unemployment rates and a decline in the economy as the Arab Spring spread to the Arab countries. The Syrian crisis affected Lebanon as it did to Jordan, so the refugees live in similar conditions or worse. Lebanon as is evident in the figure, according to World Bank data, since the Syrian crisis started, Lebanon has registered a growth rate of 1.8% of GDP between 2011-2014 (growth was 9.2% on average in 2007-2010), in Jordan the GDP recorded an average 2.8% real growth in 2011-2014 (as compared to an average of 5.8% in 2007-2010),(Errighi&Griess, 2016).

Even this result is not just because of the Syrian war, but the war plays a big role in the economic growth in the both countries, so the women also suffer in Lebanon as they do in Jordan, or maybe worst.
The Syrian refugees in Lebanon constitute a large number compared to its size and population. Both Lebanon and Syria suffer from the consequences of the poor economy and the lack of regulation of the labour market. The increasing in the number of Syrian workers, who are working in low wages, helps in the increase of the randomization and expansion in the informal sector. This chaos leads to deterioration in working conditions and wage rates. Syrian refugee women are particularly vulnerable to unemployment, more than two-thirds of women seeking employment in Lebanon were unable to find a job, the proportion of female workers out of total Syrian refugees is 20 per cent, and their wages are about 40 per cent lower than that of their male counterparts (ILO, 2013). A Syrian woman accepts not only a little salary but accepts to work in hard work, especially in agricultural field.

Again, it is not just one of the challenges women face in the labour market, where Syrian refugees are subjected to violence from violence of another type which is gender - sexual exploitation. Syrian women suffer from poverty in Lebanon, and their presence in such circumstances gave Lebanese men opportunities to offer them money for sex or harass them. This situation increases the fears of women to engage in the labour market, which reduces their participation in the labour market, even if it is in the black market.

---

5.3 Gap of Wages

Men are paid more than women's salaries, whether in developed countries, emerging countries or even in poor countries. The concept of "wage equality between women and men" may seem to be a new concept, but in 1919 the ILO adopted its declaration as a cornerstone of social justice. The organization has issued multiple declarations to equalize opportunities and eliminate discrimination. However, 1951 saw Convention No. 100, the first wage equality agreement adopted after the Second World War after women began to occupy several positions during the war (ILO, 1951). The agreement was approved by most Arab member states except Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar. Convention No. 111 (1958) "prohibits any distinction, exclusion or preference on grounds of sex" and has been approved by more than 90% of the member states of the Organization (ILO, 1958).

There is a clear difference between agreements and treaties and implementation on the ground, where it is difficult to believe, and even sadly, that today and after years of struggle, women still receive less than men. The Arab region is characterized by a gender gap (in terms of the exercise of the same function). According to the global salary index 2013, women in Mauritania receive 43% of men's salary and 56% in Saudi Arabia (a statistic conducted by the General Statistics and Information Centre in the Saudi Kingdom revealed that women receive only 20% less than men). In Lebanon women receive 61% of men’s salaries, in Yemen 65%, in Kuwait 66%, in Jordan 68%, and in Bahrain 69%. In the UAE, women account for 74% of men's salary, compared to 77% in Egypt and Qatar, and 79% in Oman (Rassef, 2014).

This distinction between the wages of men and women has different causes, such as the role women play in the family. Although the past few decades have seen a dramatic change in the way of life for both men and women, women are still seen as the sole responsibility for the care of children within the family, because the state does not provide free child care - something that will give women the opportunity to work - childcare and the job of women, just like reducing government care for older people and the disabled on the grounds that they can be cared for within the family by women of course.

It is interesting to know that hiring a person to do the unpaid work done by women in the family from shopping, cooking, cleaning and caring for children and agricultural work in the rural areas will cost a lot, so it is very useful for the system to make women do this work for free, and for the women to do all the tasks they are responsible for, they have to work part-time and get less than men.
The prevailing culture in eastern societies is that men are responsible for women in all aspects and financial stability of the family. This gives a reason for employers to increase the salaries of men; the employers also take advantage of the fact that women have the right to paid maternity leave, thus giving them less pay than men.

Biological differences are one of the reasons why many researches have shown that corporate life is less generous for women, either financially or in terms of senior positions. Employers often underestimate women's potential and abilities, and assume that it is difficult for them to deal with leadership positions or work long hours without fatigue, and women are forced by the general perception that men are more capable of holding senior positions and hard labour than to do much more to reach the same, but they discovered that even after they arrive, some continue to question their "right" to take up those positions (Alarab, 2017).

Women in the Arab region are less fortunate in their work in higher managerial positions in companies, due to different reasons, such as early retirement, which limits women's access to higher positions in their jobs, and the traditional pattern of thinking that women cannot hold high administrative positions, which eventually leads to the denial of high salaries.

Figure 14 Share of firms with female top manager, by firm size, latest year (percentages)\textsuperscript{14}

In general, the most pressing area for women's equality is participation and economic opportunity. Closing this gap will require another 175 years in the Middle East and North Africa. In contrast, African countries will need only 60 years to fill this gap. It is a very small number for a region that for a short time was living in wars and famines (WEF, 2017).

The dilemma of gender-based income discrimination remains faced by women all over the world, demanding their different economic rights from one state to another, demanding equal wages on the basis of work and qualifications.

6. Women and Health

Biological differences and sexual differences have a major impact on human health. This means that women have a different share of diseases than men, but for both sexes the healthy life and body, provide a longer life and more productivity. In one sentence we can say: the perfect mind is in a healthy body.

In patriarchal and conservative societies, discrimination affects women in different ways and one of them is healthy pattern. Perhaps it is a curious question of how the discrimination is affecting the healthy lives of women.

The patriarchal society forms the extended families to become tribes. They consider that a big family is a source of strength and power. In addition, these families in the rural areas depend on agriculture as an income source, so they need labours, where farmers depend on human capital for their inability to provide modern technological devices. Another point that the patriarchal society believes in is the preservation of the family chain in the presence of males who carry the family name from generation to other generation.

This structure and the requirements of the patriarchal society impose a situation of pressure on women to prevent them from carrying out birth control or stop childbearing. This pressure situation does not stem only from men, but women exert pressure on women as a form of violence issued by the mother or mother in low. This negatively affects the health of women. In practice pregnancy and childbirth affect women physically and psychologically, and in some cases may lead to death. In addition it is difficult for the society in the rural areas to accept and allow for women to go to the health centre where the medical staffs are men, where women are deprived from this point of health care.

Poverty is a major factor affecting the quality and accessibility of medical services. Simply the rich people can enjoy five-star medical services in private hospitals at their own expense, meanwhile the poor people have the capacity to receive medical services in government hospitals, and they may need a long-term waiting up to months to reach the doctor checking,
and because women are the poorest and least engaged in the labour market are the least fortunate in accessing to quality health care.

As mentioned previously, the harsh working conditions for women, particularly in the black market or the agricultural sector, do not provide women with health insurance or guarantee a safe working conditions, which puts the lives of women at greater risk. At the same time, women are not able to cover the costs of health care and the states do not guarantee health care for these categories and there must be no social security.

The government’s spending on the health sector in the MENA countries as an average on 2013 was around 8% from the government’s national budgets. This is compared with 17% in OCED countries. This deficit in government spending will increase the burden on citizens, and increase the cost of treatment because private hospitals will fill the deficit in government services (El Swais, 2015).

Women in the Middle East and North Africa suffer from depression. The women in the Middle East ranked first in the world in terms of rates of women suffering from depression, and women aged 15-49 years are most affected by depression (El Swais, 2015).

Perhaps depression is a natural result of the suffering women in the region, the size of the various pressures resulting from the social, political and economic situation affects women negatively, while social norms restrict women's choices and restrict their decisions. In addition to the Arab revolutions that were victims of women and children, has affected people. A lot of cases of asylum or loss of death or the arrests of one of their family members are effects of the instability in the Arab World after the revolution.

In economic terms, the participation of women in the labour market must have an impact on the psychological state of women. In a World Bank study 2013 demonstrated that there is correlation between women's participation in the labour force and rates of depression. The participation in the labour force is defined as the proportion of women of working age who are working or looking for work. The graph below shows the prevalence of the relationship between the two variables, there is a strong positive correlation indicating that with increased participation in the workforce, the rate of depression tends to decline, on average, an increase of 10 percentage points in participation is associated with a decrease in the incidence of depression by about a full percentage point (Freund, 2013).
From a different point of view, it is possible that this rise in depression rates among women in MENA countries is due to the exit from the labour market or is a reason to move away from the labour market, but the result is one, women who suffer from depression at the same time they suffer from unemployment.

Figure 15 correlations between women’s labour force participation and the rank of depression\textsuperscript{15}

![Image of correlations between risk rank of female depression and labor force participation.]

\textit{Source: IHME and WDI}

### 6.1 Case of Egypt

Nutrition is the foundation of health and nutrition. Improving nutrition means strengthening the immunity of people of all ages, reducing their morbidity and improving their health. It is certain that poverty deprives people of access to healthy nutrition, such as deprivation of health care. In Egypt, for example, the number of poor people is increasing day by day, the majority of who are women. According to World Bank estimates for 2015, the number of the poor in Egypt reached 27 million (World Bank Data, 2016) (see graph below), we can conclude that a quarter of the population, including a large number of women, cannot live a healthy lifestyle. Half of all women are obese and 20 percent are men, putting Egypt among

the top 20 countries in the world in the prevalence of obesity among women. Obesity is closely associated with chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. In fact, heart disease is the leading cause of death and disability in the Arab world while hypertension is the second leading cause (Semliali, 2013).

Figure 16 Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of population) of Egypt¹⁶

Basically the poverty leads to malnutrition and the spread of communicable diseases, high mortality rates among children in general and new-borns in particular, and also exposes people to fatigue and frustration.

The health dimension is presented according to the life expectancy of persons at birth, as calculated in the Human Development Index.

Health is an important component of human development. Improvements in health and nutrition, such as education, may be the cause or effect of economic growth. The development of human resources by improving the health of the working population in particular and the population in general through good public health programs is important for increasing the productivity of the individual and thus the increase in income, and improve health also increases the effectiveness of the labour force by addressing vulnerability and weakness and inability and reduce child mortality, all of which lead to the expansion of the human resources base. In addition, health care is seen as a right to every human being, and therefore a need of basic human needs.

Health problems resulting from health and environmental conditions, which include: poor housing, lack of drinking water or poor quality, sewage and solid waste, pollution and occupational hazards, talk about healthy life is not only free from diseases, but all the above, the MENA suffering from all of the above with different levels.

Human development levels have improved throughout the world, but slowed down in 2010, including the Arab region, which may have slowed down for several reasons, one of them is the Arab Spring (UNDP,2016)

Figure 17 Human Development Index Value
6.2 Case of Yemen

There is a clear impact of the war on women. The focus is on women and gender, because women's circumstances are different economically and socially from men's conditions. Thus, in most cases of war, women and children, although not directly involved in the fighting, suffer from social change in terms of death, injury, rape, abduction, sexual assault, family disintegration, displacement and loss of property. They suffer from fear, mental disorders, sense of hopelessness and live as displaced persons in situations where basic needs and services are lacking. The most vulnerable segment of the population is women and children. Women are generally responsible for the care of children and the elderly as well as for war because of the death of their children and their husbands and relatives.

It is certain that wars do not respect all international conventions that call for the respect of civilians and not to involve them in wars, but Yemen has reached a stage that required the Security Council to raise the alarm of the massacre of the people of the country (United Nation Security Council, 2017).

Yemen was a worse place for women. The women suffering from different issue such as lack of political and civil rights, lack of education, but with the Arab Spring in Yemen they are suffering from a famine. There is no food security, and this famine will cause the appearance of different diseases in long and short term.

In such case like Yemen it is difficult to discuss the women in labour force, who they can be productive person in war and famine in the same time. In failed state where there is no basic needs for humans. According to the HDI ranking Yemen occupied apposition between the low human development countries which is ranking 168, with human development index value 0.482 in 2015, worse than previous years. It is getting worse year by year (Human development Report, 2016).
Figure 18 Human Development Index (HDI) in Yemen

7. Spring with no Flowers for Women

The Arab Spring has had more negative effects than positive ones. All the reports issued by international and human rights organizations, especially in Syria and Yemen, indicate the deterioration of the situation and the deteriorating situation of women, but in this section we will present the situation of women from the point of view of women not only through reports and ratios and figures, but from the point of view of some activists in the region.

This section uses the ethnographic approach by collecting qualitative data through semi-structured interviews distributed to women from different MENA countries. The interviewed women are activists and employees at local institutions, so they enjoy a level of participation in labour force. However since they are a part of their society, they are also affected by the Arab Spring, and they are the best who can reflect upon the perspectives of women in MENA countries after the Arab Spring.

It is well known in the Arab world that Tunisia is one of the Arab countries where women enjoy greater freedom than other MENA countries. This may be clear from the general views of any tourist or visitor to the region. It was one of the most on prominent headlines and what was discussed on social media pages. When President Esssebsi announced on the occasion of the National Women's Day in 2017, it was necessary to conduct legal reviews that would

equal the inheritance of men and women and allow them to marry non-Muslims, which was supported by the House of Fatwas in Tunisia, but this is still more than an announcement and has not come into force.

A.Z (personal communication, November 15, 2017) from Tunisia said: “Tunisian women's situation is a bit different from what the west might assume. The revolution in Tunisia in my knowledge hasn't really changed much economically, as Tunisian women already have equal pay for the same job since the 50's/60's. However, the situation for rural women is different as they have access to the lesser paying jobs and tasks than their male counterparts.

The revolution only raised certain questions in relation to inheritance for example, as there has been a project of law to establish equality in inheritance between male and female, which caused a scandal in conservative circles as it is against Islamic law.”

Nearly six years after the revolution that overthrew former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia has been able to complete the political transition and has gone a long way in achieving democracy, but it still needs a lot to enable the Tunisian economy to recover and achieve acceptable growth rates in the face of continuing terrorist threats, worsening fiscal deficits, rising public sector spending on government jobs, lower investment spending on development projects. This instability is obvious in the Tunisian GDP growth rate, This slowdown in the growth of the Tunisian economy is affecting labour mobility in the first place, and the lack of employment reduces the opportunity of women in the labour market.
L.A (personal communication, November 10, 2017) said “Women are affected by the economic situation of the country, the cost of living and the decline in purchasing power of the citizen, where Tunisia suffers from economic crisis, which are affecting women because they are part of society. After the revolution, women like men suffer from difficult conditions in the economic level, especially rural women because they work in the field of agriculture but the level of pay is very low, but the man if he worked in the field of agriculture the wage is higher than women”.

This was not the view of the activists’ women in Tunisia only, but also in Egypt.

F.A (personal communication, November 05, 2017) from Egypt said: “After 6 years from the Arab Spring I can say that it is disappointing how Egyptian women were purposefully marginalized after their great role in the January 25th Revolution. In the latest official statistics we can see that women in Egypt are literally half the population but they still face daily challenges due to gender norms in society. These norms are rooted in culture, religion, and family structure and affect the way women are able to participate in their economy and public sphere.

Women have been affected by the major economic changes that have taken place in Egyptian society over the last 5 years, but unfortunately they have been negative changes due to the decline in economic growth rates, increasing unemployment rates, increasing inflation and devaluation”.

---

There was also a negative impact on the rights of women to gain political changes in the region and the transfer of power between different parties carrying ideologies and trying to topple the citizen from the position of authoritarian. Mainly the Arab revolutions brought Islamist parties that marginalized women more than before the Arab Spring. F.A (personal communication, November 05, 2017) from Egypt said: “The 2012 Parliament, the first Egyptian parliament after the January revolution, came to the point where everyone was frustrated, as women found more marginalization and suffered the same crisis they had suffered for decades under the regime that existed before the January Revolution. The Parliament 2015, 87 women members of parliament, 73 of whom were elected.”

On the same point S.A (personal communication, October 29, 2017) from Kurdistan/Iraq said: “Successive governments adversely affected the status and rights of women and deepened the gap between them and their attempts and aspirations to enjoy their human rights, because they could not adopt constructive policies and development in a real way that enables women to access opportunities and participate actively in public life and advancement. Its painful and miserable reality in terms of fighting poverty and illiteracy, and access to decision-making centres and leadership centres that enable them to develop laws and adopt policies that raise them to the level of ambition and defined as a citizen of the first degree. The Arab Spring revolutions have been strongly involved in women's liberation from the misery and sterile policies that have stood in the face of all women's aspirations to achieve equality and social justice, but alternative governments, represented by Islamic parties that try by all means and under the multiple names of women in the Arab world to the era Camels and Bedouin and trying to pull the rug from under its feet and put the obstacles of jurisprudence and religious groups and lobbying within the political system in the name of religion to limit their rights.”

H.Q (personal communication, November 16, 2017) from Palestine said: “the successive governments did not play a significant role in empowering and improving the women's rights in societies, but they ignore them as they have no existence at all. Even if they plan for a project which aims to help women and support them, they may not accomplish it as it is supposed to be. In my opinion the spots must be much more focused on women's issues in societies and not only words written on papers”.

I.S (personal communication, November 10, 2017) comments with the same view “The main objectives of Arab Spring were to call for freedom, justice, and equality in addition to
strengthening the responsibility and accountability of governments in social and economic development and increase the jobs opportunities. However, the Arab Spring has diverse effects on the women’s economic rights. During the first period of Arab spring, a lot of recommendations were announced to highlight the economic rights of women such as enhance their role in politics, leadership management, and labour market. Later we can recognize that the women’s economic rights are negatively affected, especially in Syria which is ranked as the largest economic loser in Arab world due to negative effects of the Arab Spring on its economic growth.”

The objectives of the Arab Spring for women were similar in the whole region, the results were also similar and the difference was in the degree of violence between countries. Women did not achieve what they demanded at the political or economic level, none of the reports or statistics made significant progress in the status of women, at the same time, none of the women from their different positions and countries mentioned if there are goals achieved throwing the uprising, A.Z (personal communication, November15, 2017) from Tunisia confirms the same point of view, “I personally don't perceive a difference between pre revolution and post revolution eras.”

Meanwhile K.M (personal communication, November 16, 2017) from Yemen mentioned on the same objective “I believe that no goal has been achieved with regard to women because the Arab Spring has deviated from its inception. The political parties have transformed the goals of the youthful revolution into a demand for the involvement of young men and women in political action to demand the exclusion of the ruling party”.

In terms of the goals that women wanted to achieve and did not, Egyptian lady F.A (personal communication, November 05, 2017) includes four targets “Access to decision-making positions, access to judicial positions, equal payments with men and elimination of violence against women”, she also mentioned why these goals were not achieved, her answer was “because there is no law till now allowed the women to take their rights in the Egyptian society.”

From the same perspective the women in Iraq did not achieve the goals, as S.A (personal communication, October 29, 2017) mentioned “because the value system in the Arab societies has not been influenced by the policies and laws legislated because they were originally not supportive of women's issues as these countries circumvent international treaties and invoke that they are contrary to the system of values and religious in the community that the ruling
systems rely on the power of religious authority. It is not possible to issue laws that conflict with religion or adopt policies that separate religion from the state or build a civil state. Therefore, women continue to suffer from the class system in society and because these countries are the basis of their laws, the basis of sex, religion, race and sect, and these policies have made women's problems more profound and the challenges facing them are greater in going out to work or participating actively in public life.”

Syrian opinion by I.S (personal communication, November 10, 2017) was “the right of education is not promoted, that we can conclude the illiteracy rate has increased among women. Furthermore, women have been excluded from many vital positions in politics and economy to leave the men to implement these roles and the women’s rights vary from region to other depending on the party that control that region. So the rural areas are affected negatively more than the other regions in Syria. Furthermore, the young women are strongly affected than others in Syria.”

Many people have seen that the Arab Spring was supposed to be described as an Arab autumn instead of spring. It does not achieve or made any progress in the Arab countries and it did not provide any benefits to the Arab people as a whole. From economic perspective A.Z (personal communication, November15, 2017) describes the Tunisian situation like this “I don't think the Arab Spring brought economic prosperity to any member of society in Tunisia, be it male or female. The repercussions of the political and economic instability after the revolution are still felt to this day. For women, particularly, with the social stigma, it might be extremely hard to achieve economic prosperity in an area that is weakened by the west's economic restrictions from the exterior and the terrorist threat from the interior.”

In addition, S.A (personal communication, October 29, 2017) from Iraq added more factors related to why Arab Spring did not bring economic prosperity or progress for women in MENA countries. Her opinion “Due to the administrative, political and financial corruption and the failure to adopt policies that promote women and all their failure to external factors without addressing the failure of their policies and the amendment of their laws and the implementation of all international laws and conventions on human rights and fight against discrimination against marginalized groups, especially women and the development of strategies The national that fights poverty and ignorance in women and did not provide opportunities that enable women and help them in access to small and large enterprises.”
F.A (personal communication, November 05, 2017 from Egypt) said “the Arab Spring did not bring economic prosperity or progress for women in MENA countries, because women are the most marginalized group within society, and the more society suffers from economic problems and rise of Islamic movements and increase their influence on the Egyptian street, the more it affects women than men. After the Arab Spring, there were major economic and political changes that had a negative impact on the whole society and for sure on women. I can really say that women could not get out of the Arab Spring with any real gains.”

The facts and economic indicators, as well as the views of active women, both run the compass that the Arab Spring directly affected and led to the decline of women's rights, especially the economic rights in the Middle East and North Africa.

8. Conclusion

In the end, this Arab Spring was an experience that overthrew political dictatorships, but unfortunately it did not bring better regimes, because violence breeds violence, and if generations are brought up under dictatorial regimes, political conversion will not be easy for them to have the experience and power of the old generations which carry same approach and praise dictatorship ideology.

Through the analysis on different aspects of women economic rights in different countries and regions, women appeared to be the losers of the Arab Spring. They did not witness an increase in all of the level of education, the rate of women participation in labour force, and the level of health. In addition through the semi-structured interviews distributed to women in different MENA countries, it appeared that all women have negative perspectives and perceive Arab Spring as disastrous to their demands for economic rights.

The Arab Spring could have been an opportunity for a clear development for women in all fields, but the Arab Spring was the reason for the delay of this development and for the contribution to their classification in a bad position among the countries of the world.

The Arab Spring was the cause of the civil war in Yemen and Syria, the wars in which women and their children were victims. The rights of Syrians were severely affected by a civil war that is continuing until now. Their suffering has increased, and the widows are replacing the
role of men in supporting their children. In addition, many fear the influence of Islamist militants who have taken control of some parts of the country.

The Arab Spring may have had a good chance, but the deviation of the revolution has deprived women of this opportunity, because the decline of the economy mainly affects the economic development of women and will certainly prevent the achievement of sustainable development goals of 2030, because the decline and chaos in the Arab world what we produce and what the Arab Spring will produce will be followed by achieving development goals.

Empowering women does not require Arab revolutions that have only generated violence. Empowerment needs a radical change in the pattern of thinking of patriarchal society inherited generation after generation, perhaps changing this paradigm needs a decade, needs a generation that grows from its young age to equality and participatory life. At the same time women need equal constitutions to women and men to ensure the implementation of the laws.

The MENA community needs skilled people and innovators to re-energize the economy in a contemporary way. In light of the scarcity of resources in the region, women's economic empowerment and investment in empowerment will benefit society and increase GNP. Women's income in the productive world and their economic contribution to the society, as well as their participation in the labour market is part of the equation of growth and stability. Improved opportunities for women can contribute to the expansion of economic development in developing economies, for example by raising enrolment rates for girls.

It is very important to hire women and achieve balance in society, because the maximal and optimal utilization of human resources is one of the objectives of states in building their economy. If all are aware of the importance of the human element in production, development and development, since the society is a winged bird (women and men), development depends on the development, integration and contribution of both sexes in their plans and programs. The negligence of one of them certainly means a waste of human resources, or at least lack of optimization.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women are central factors in the development plan because achieving gender equality has a logical and economically logical advantage and helps to advance to other development goals, including education, nutrition and reducing child mortality.
Therefore, the Arab countries will not be able to achieve the development goals without enforcing economic empowerment of women especially by increasing their level of education, their participation in labour force and their level of health. Therefore, empowerment should be real, aimed at the long term. Women are the producers of society. They are the focus of one way or another in society, enabling the axis to produce better results on other levels. On the relationship with the environment and the proper use of resources or energy, or another example of empowering women reduces poverty, peace and prevention of war provides security for women, it is a circle through which development goals are intertwined and affect each other.

The Arab Spring has not achieved its goals for women and the situation is worse. There must be interventions by governments to support women’s economic activity and give them new opportunities for work and education, and to protect women from the ignorance of society through law.

Changing the laws and regulations needs to be made in a short procedural time, but changing or developing custom and tradition for the benefit of women takes a long time and requires great effort from women themselves. Women need full faith in their ability and continuous work to obtain financial independence, and that their unpaid work at this stage in the home is very important because they can raise a future generation believes in equality and works to achieve them.

Progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women requires a human rights-based approach and requires support for the women's movement for progress. Empowerment requires action of multiple dimensions - sexual, reproductive, economic, political and legal. However, Millennium Development Goal 3 depicts the empowerment of women as reducing educational disparities. Therefore, the goal of empowering women, by neglecting other rights and not recognizing the multiple, interrelated and indivisible rights of women, is distorted and creates only "isolated silos for development".
References


• Hamdi, Yamenia. (2017, August 27). متى يتساوى راتب المرأة بالرجل. (When is a woman's salary equal to that of a man?). Alarab newspaper. Retrieved From: http://www.alarab.co.uk/article/%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A1/117538/%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%89-%D9%8A%D8%AA%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%89-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA%D8%A8-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%84


