

The Arab Woman as a Manager and a Leader between Challenges and Opportunities in the Public Sector in Israel.

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the various challenges and opportunities that Arab women face in public sector organizations in Israel's leadership roles as there is a gap of gender equity otherwise. The study aimed to see how the factors of family, socio-cultural, and organizational dynamics shape leadership development for Arab women as opposed to Arab men. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research included a quantitative survey of 320 Arab leaders in the public sector to examine the specific barriers and challenges that they face and 30 in-depth interviews with a convenience sample of these participants. The study discovered that Arab women leaders experience more extreme barriers due to gender stereotypes, culture of discrimination in the workplace, and familial support. The data shows that Arab women leaders on average are perceived to be less competent leaders, they put more effort into proving their credibility, and they face rigid barriers to being recognized and promoted in their leadership position. While shifts in male attitudes towards female leaders are changing, younger males seem to be more progressive than older males, there are still challenges remaining. The study suggests that to promote gender equity and support change, processes of systemic reform, awareness campaigns, mentorship opportunities, and flexible work practices are needed. Theoretically, this study makes a contribution to the understanding of gender dynamics within patriarchal and collectivist societies. The work provides practical suggestions for policies and organizational designs to foster the leadership development and representation of Arab women in public institutions in Israel.

Keywords: Arab women, public sector, leadership, gender equality, workplace discrimination, gender stereotypes, socio-cultural barriers, Israel.

1. Introduction

The study looks at public sector institutions in Israel. The focus was to understand gender equality in leadership positions for Arab female employees as opposed to their male counterparts. It seeks to discover how familial, socio-cultural, and organizational aspects are impacting workplace gender equality, particularly in leadership, for Arab female employees in the workplace. The study identifies the barriers to advancement and retention of leadership roles oftentimes encountered by and Arab female employees as well as other groups; discrimination, gendered stereotypes, workplace culture. The study also conducts a comparative analysis of how Arab men and women may perceive female leadership differently. This study can be valuable as it analyzes particularly challenging issues facing Arab women leaders in public sector and will inform/shape policies that will promote gender equality initiatives for a more just workplace.

The study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, with the first part of the study involving a quantitative component that includes a structured questionnaire

with a large number of Arab employees, both male and female, who work in leadership and management positions. In addition to the survey, the questionnaire is used to lend credence to the four hypotheses concerning gender discrimination, stereotypes, and perceptions between men and women regarding leadership. The qualitative portion of the study involves in-depth interviews with Arab female and male leaders within public sector institutions, to allow them to express their experiences and challenges in leadership positions. Using this mixed-method approach, the study provides a broader understanding of both the (quantitative) statistical trends and (as qualitative) personal thoughts, which lend credibility to and meaning from our respective survey and interviews.

The quantitative data indicates striking inequalities in leadership experiences between Arab men and women. The results suggest that family and socio-cultural expectations (including the roles of mothers' vs fathers') affect women's experiences of leadership directly through the loss of the option to lead, or indirectly through lack of a proper salary, promotion structures, or bias in leadership evaluations against

male colleagues. Gender stereotypes also account for many other workplace perceptions that shape views of women's ability to lead, suggesting women are viewed as less competent, and authoritative leaders, than their colleagues are. The data also suggest that men have a less favorable impression of female leadership than women, evidenced most prominently through male-oriented ideas about leadership as a masculine domain. More recently, younger men have a more positive attitude regarding gender equality than their older counterparts suggesting perhaps ongoing cultural change.

The qualitative results provide a deeper awareness of the experiences of Arab women within leadership roles. Many women in leadership roles expressed feeling frustrated regarding the need to consistently justify their competence in ways that their male counterparts have never experienced. Workplace culture was a significant theme, for example, many women referred to their setting as being one where the architecture of the leadership workforce was male, which inhibited their ability to continue as leaders. Numerous women shared personal narratives that supported their stories of either not receiving promotions or that of dealing with push back from male colleagues who doubted their ability to lead. Work-life balance was also a major challenge for the participants, as culturally their obligations as women generally required them to balance the demands of work above that of home. On occasion, the men in leadership roles also acknowledged gender inequality but believed that the women had equal opportunities which also identify a potential gap in effective actions and orientations regarding gender relations in the workplace.

The study suggests that to achieve gender equity in leadership roles will require systemic changes at all levels-from the policies in the workplace, barriers in culture, and structure in institutions. Workplaces need to critically assess own policies in relation to mentorship, leadership training, and promotion relative to Arab women in leadership roles. However, changing the mindset of men entrenched in gender-based stereotypes cannot happen without addressing the awareness of workplace discrimination through awareness raising campaigns. Flexible work arrangements can mitigate the competing demands of work and

family and help women negotiate leadership opportunities and simultaneously sustain their career identity. Future research should follow-up to determine the longer-term outcomes of these responses or solutions relative to workplace policies and whether or not changing cultural norms can impact Arab women leaders in leadership opportunities and their career trajectories. Finally, engaging men as allies in gender equity and inviting their participation in such efforts may help produce meaningful outcomes benefitting women when taking action to advance themselves in leadership roles at public sector institutions.

2. Literature Review

Leadership development is one of the central themes in the modern business environment. Organizations are more interested than ever in building leadership skill sets in their employees. Nevertheless, those organizations also face challenges in achieving these aims (Okolie et al., 2021). One of the most notable challenges that have been experienced in the microenvironment for several decades now is gender and equality. The increasing awareness of workplace equality and the reduction of gender discrimination has pushed organizations to focus on these areas while increasing their effectiveness and efficiency, by improving workplace culture (Croitoru et al., 2022). Workplace gender equality is an important concern across true and false cultures worldwide, particularly in locations where culture, society, and workplace policies determine men and women's career experiences (Son Hing et al., 2023). In Israel, Arab women experience unique challenges to reach leadership, management, or government roles, particularly in the public sector. Family expectations, cultural tradition and workplace practices often create barriers that can impede Arab women's advancement in comparison to Arab men (Arar, 2019).

2.1 Gender Equality

Significant social dialogue has occurred concerning gender equality in the second decade of the 21st century. The popularization of the United Nations' campaign "HeForShe" and the "MeToo" movement in 2014 and 2017, respectively, are two landmark events that represent exceptionally high levels of public engagement in this area. The United Nations campaign initiated a global solidarity movement,

Saint, to encourage men to become allies for gender equality (Gill & Toms, 2019). By contrast, the "MeToo" movement raised the issue of women's sexual harassment instead. All these issues centre around the concept of gender equality and how it exists in both professional and personal contexts. Gender equality, defined by the United Nations is referred to as, "the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men in employment." (Shilpa & Krishna, 2020). Gender equality in the workplace means women will be afforded the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as given to men. Gender equality implies taking into account an employee's interests and needs (meaning men and women) to respect workplace diversity (Coron, 2015).

2.2 Gendered Stereotyping

The issue of gender equality has emerged as a result of gender stereotypes that exist within societies. Most commonly, women's role is that of a homemaker in societies. The biases and stereotypes of society affect women's career advancement (Moorthy et al, 2022). Stereotypes negatively affect women's success overall and in turn have led to the glass ceiling and gender wage gap. The glass ceiling is an invisible barrier that women cannot cross in their work. Glass ceilings can hurt not only women but other minorities as well. If there are no or minimal opportunities for growth, and women do not "rise" in their organisation (Babic & Hansez, 2021).

The glass ceiling is viewed as a by-product of gender stereotyping in society which illustrates societies perception of how gender should act and behave. Gender stereotyping relates to aspects that distinguish between men and women (Sever, 2016). The privilege of being a man compared to being a woman can be considered a privilege in societies. The glass ceiling implies that even with all of the necessary capability, women still need to be rejected compared to men, as they are stereotyped as being less capable in comparison to men (Graves, 2018). The gender pay gap is another element that comes from gendered stereotyping and describes the difference in wages of a man when compared to a woman undertaking the same duties in the workplace. However, reports in recent decades have identified some improvements in this area related to

the gender pay gap, indicating that the average pay gap for full-time and part-time employees have reduced. While the reduced gap for men and women does not suggest the issue of the universal gender pay gap has been entirely resolved, the issue is prevalent where men and women are paid differently to carry out similar forms of tasks requiring similar levels of skills and value (Auspurg et al., 2017).

In recent decades, the trend toward gender equality in the workplace has gained increased prominence, highlighted by statistics about female labour market participation that reflects the extent of women's employment, earlier than at any time ever recorded. Employment rates between parents have narrowed significantly, in particular between mothers and child-free individuals, towards the end of the century (European Commission, 2024). Emerging evidence from research indicates that a growing number of women chose to pursue a job and there is growing participation of mothers engaging in economic activity in countries (Avolio & Di Laura, 2017). Previously working mothers were either overwhelmingly closed to busy schedules or uncomfortable with full-time commitments; that trend continues. However, we see more mothers working full-time and becoming participants in the workplace (Rose, 2017). Therefore, the present study suggests that women have taken their careers to the next level by taking a more active role in the workplace (Arar & Abramovitz, 2013). We also see, more commitment to a career, and in turn women are able to communicate their potential to meet the expectations that will provide them with equal opportunities for career advancement.

2.3 Arab Community in Israel

As at the end of the year 2020, the population of Israel was approximately 9,289,760 people, of which 21.1% were Arabs, which equals approximately 1,957,270 people. This population also includes approximately 362,000 Arab East Jerusalemite residents who possess "permanent-resident" status, and do not have full citizenship. Thus, the number of Arab citizens at that time, would be around 1,595,300 people, representing around 17.2% of the total population. Arab citizens can be divided into five major areas of residence: (1) the North, (2) the Triangle, (3) the Negev, (4) mixed cities, and (5) Jerusalem Corridor (including West

Jerusalem). Additionally, there is another group of Arab citizens, who reside in various towns throughout the country and mostly within larger cities, predominantly with a Jewish majority population. The vast majority of Arab citizens of Israel are Muslims (82.9%), with the remaining divided between Druze (9.2%) and Christians (7.9%) (Haj Yahia et al., 2021).

The traditional Arab society in Israel is going through a process of "selective modernization," based on its daily interactions with Jewish Israeli society. In this process of modernization, an ethnic minority identified as a "traditional society" is adopting and integrating some of the values from the majority population while still maintaining some of the values and norms from their own society (Kheir, 2025). Some balance is being created between the outside cultural influences and traditions from the inside; in practice, this means a balance between old and new. For instance, over the years the characteristics of the Arab population have improved, including education for the Arab population, and a better rate for women working setting aside differences in birth rates. In evidence, even when patterns of Arab population details change, they are still distinguishable and separate from the general Israeli society (Haj Yahia et al., 2021). Somewhere in the middle of adopting modern values implementing some, or in the opposite stand, is one trend. For instance, some incorporated more tradition, religious devotion and suspended or changed behalf to modern values unrecognized to some Jewish in Israel (Striedl, 2022).

Prior to industrialization, collective culture characterized western avocational models of living in pre-industrial western societies. At that time, people were not separated from their family, or their tribe, which were the principal institutions that would address their needs. Industrialization, economic development, and the liberal- democratic ideology which prevailed in the western world replaced much responsibility for individual needs, and welfare with state authorities (Radulovic & Stojchevska, 2024). This change initiated some values of individualism de-emphasizing the mutual dependence of individuals to their family unit in relationships as articulated above. The Values of Individualism now emphasize placing individual goals above group goals; belonging to many groups

at the same time, with each member not strongly bonded to any other member; and establishing exchange relations focused on rational calculations, emotional distancing, cost-benefit considerations, and behavior based on a commitment and belief in fairness (Nigm-Ekhtilat, et al., 2018).

2.4 The Woman in the Labor Market in Israel:

To understand gender equality in the workplace, the overall culture of a country can play an important role. In Israel, gender equality in workplaces is an important part of overall legal frameworks. The percentage of women in Israel's labor market increased significantly, rising from 26% in the early 1960s to about 50% by the late 1990s and reaching 59.8% in 2017–2018. The number of women in management positions also grew, tripling from the early 1980s to the early 2000s. By 2018, one-third of all managers were women (ICBS, 2019).

Currently, 64% of Jewish women and only 23% of Arab women participated in the Israeli workforce. Most women work in teaching, secretarial and caregiving jobs. Only 14% of Arab women work in a PTM (professional, technological, or managerial) position. Working women typically have an average of 14.2 years of education. Married women allocate an estimated 43 hours a week working outside the home, a further 33 hours to care for their children, and an additional 7 hours caring for elderly family members (Drach-Zahavy & Somech, 2017).

The Israeli government has allocated resources to improve women's status in the workforce. However, the policies designed to help employees balance work and family responsibilities are only partially implemented and still fall short of meeting the needs of women specifically, as well as society as a whole (Pulignano, 2017).

Arab women in Israel face significant challenges in the labor market, but there have been improvements in education and employment. Over recent years, more Arab women have obtained higher education degrees, especially among Druze and Bedouin communities. However, employment rates remain low, with many women concentrated in the saturated education sector. For example, as can be seen in figure 1 below the employment rate of Arab women aged 25–54 rose from 21 percent in the early 2000s to 35 percent in 2016 – but it is still very low relative to Jewish women. Furthermore, the change in the

employment rate of Arab women in percentage points was similar to that of Jewish women over the

same period, so the gap between the two groups has hardly narrowed.

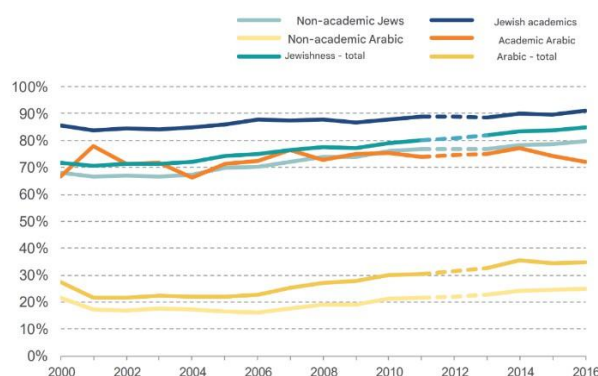


Figure 1: Employment rate among women aged 25–54, Source: (Fox & Friedman-Wilson, 2018)

Despite acquiring degrees in scientific fields during high school, few pursue careers in science, engineering, or high-tech. Barriers include social expectations, language proficiency, and limited local job opportunities. Addressing these challenges by offering career guidance and expanding accessible job options could diversify their employment and boost economic growth (Fox & Friedman-Wilson, 2018).

Regarding the wages pay in Israel, a gender perspective shows that the trends among women and men were slightly different. Among women, during those years, the gap in favor of Jewish women widened from 56% to 61%. Among men, the gap in favor of Jewish men narrowed—from 85% in 2008 to 77% in 2018. In any case, in both genders, the wage gaps in favor of the Jewish population remain very large (Haj Yahia et al., 2021).

3. Material and Methods

The primary objective of this research is to explore gender equality in the workplace of public sector institutions in Israel, primarily by examining the experiences of Arab female employees in leadership and management positions compared to those of Arab male employees. The research looks at how familial, socio-cultural, and organizational factors, in addition to workplace discrimination and gender stereotyping, influence the attainment and retention of leadership roles by Arab women. The research also aims to assess and compare the attitudes of Arab women and men towards female leaders, assessing

potential differences in perceptions or biases in attitudes related to gender.

The specific research objectives of this study act to assess the importance and influence of the various socio-cultural and institutional factors impacting workplace gender equality, to discern how discrimination and stereotyping affect the career progression of Arab women public sector leaders, and to evaluate attitudinal differences between Arab men and women in regard to women as leaders. Related research questions and hypotheses were generated specifically to test the significance of the variables identified above and their influence on the professional trajectories of Arab women in leadership roles in the public sector.

To be able to answer the research objectives, a mixed-method research design was chosen to be the best approach. Mixed-method research design combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches, thereby allowing the researcher to draw from the strengths of both. By using both the quantitative data along written qualitative data, the study attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues and challenges related to gender and equality in the workplace. The mixed-method approach also allows the researcher to be able to examine the experiences of Arab women in a leadership and management role in Israel and compare them to experiences of comparable Arab men leaders. The use of a mixed-method approach ensures that the study is able to consider several viewpoints on whether or not there is equality in the

field of study and achieve a well-rounded and robust research finding.

The intended population for this study was Arab male and female employees who hold a leadership or management role in public sector institutions in Israel. This researcher utilized convenient sampling, as it enabled participants to be targeted for the study easily. The researcher used this sampling method as convenient was very feasible, as it enabled accessibility to Arab public sector employees in leadership and management roles. The sample size included 320 participants for the quantitative survey, and 30 of the 320 participants also partook in the qualitative options of the study. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to provide quality face-to-face interaction with the researcher and the participant online as they converse in real-time. In addressing the quantitative aspect of the study, a questionnaire was constructed based on some of the implications from the literature review on the factors and influences of leaders. A pilot study was completed before commencing the formal part of the study to check reliability and accuracy. A survey was administered to participants that were interested in participating and that participated in the pilot study.

4. The Study Results

4.1 The Qualitative Results:

This study explores the experiences of Arab female employees in leadership and management positions in public sector institutions in Israel, focusing on the challenges they face compared to their male counterparts. The findings are grouped into key themes that highlight different aspects of their journeys.

Theme 1: Gender Inequality in the Public Sector Institutions

Gender inequality in the workplace remains a significant issue, as women are still not fully accepted in decision-making roles and leadership positions. This is largely due to social and religious beliefs that view women as less capable and primarily responsible for household duties. Many organizations assume that women lack independence, have limited time for work, and are unwilling to step outside their comfort zones, leading to a preference for male leaders. These stereotypes make it harder for women to advance in their careers, forcing them to work harder than men

to prove themselves. Participants in the study shared that women are often seen as less logical or realistic, and their leadership abilities are questioned. In Arab society, gender roles are strongly reinforced, restricting women's independence and limiting their opportunities for professional growth.

Theme 2: Factors in the Woman's Leadership Journey

The results of the research establish that family, socio-cultural, and organizational contexts, impact on the leadership journey of Arab women employed in public sector institutions in Israel. The role of parental support, primarily from mothers and on some occasions, from fathers, proves to be a strong enabler of leadership, by fostering leadership aspirations and building confidence from an early age. Fathers may be a key influencer as motivators, whilst mothers provided psychological support and heap encouragement, despite not being formally educated. As noted in the findings, it allows some men to maintain conservative norms of behavior around gender roles - particularly for women after they marry. Socio-cultural norms, including conservative norms and religious expectations, provide constraints on the pipeline to leadership, by casting women in a position of incapacity for making decisions, and as lacking leadership aptitudes. An additional barrier rests in the reproductive role of women warrants recognition, considering there are limited female role models and a predominant lack of knowledge about gender equality in Arab society. For example, in the workplace, Arab women frequently face discrimination, doubting from colleagues, and challenges to their authority from male-run bureaucracies, only to have legitimate action undermined. Nevertheless, a gradual transition in attitudes - largely attributable in workplaces to increased access to formal education - is allowing more Arab women to struggle against societal norms and expectations to defeat stereotypes either in their pursuit of leadership positions or to advance the agenda of gender equality in the workplace.

4.2 The Quantitative Results and Hypotheses Testing:

Null Hypothesis (H1₀): *There is no significant difference between Arab women and men in the public sector in Israel regarding the impact of familial, socio-cultural, and organizational factors.*

Alternative Hypothesis (H1₁): *Arab women in the*

public sector in Israel are significantly more affected by familial, socio-cultural, and organizational factors than men.

In order to test the first hypothesis a number of

statistical tests were conducted. First, descriptive statistics, the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) are presented for each factor (familial, socio-cultural, organizational, and gender equality) separately for men and women (Table 1)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Factors Affecting Men and Women in the Workplace

	<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Familial factors	3.19	0.39	4.88	2.12
2. Socio-cultural factors	1.24	0.41	6.1	1.74
3. Organizational factors	1.93	0.42	5.75	1.40

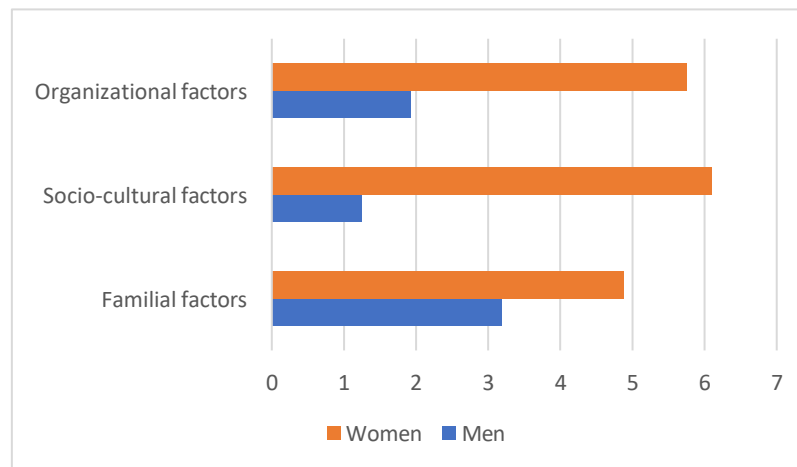


Figure 2: Factors Affecting Men and Women in the Workplace

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 provide preliminary support for Hypothesis 1, suggesting a significant impact of familial, socio-cultural, and organizational factors on Arab women in the public sector in Israel compared to men. Women reported substantially higher mean scores across all three factors—familial (M = 4.88, SD = 2.12), socio-cultural (M = 6.10, SD = 1.74), and organizational (M = 5.75, SD = 1.40)—compared to men, whose scores were notably lower and more consistent—familial (M

= 3.19, SD = 0.39), socio-cultural (M = 1.24, SD = 0.41), and organizational (M = 1.93, SD = 0.42). These results indicate that women perceive these factors as having a much greater influence on their professional experiences, supporting the hypothesis that such influences disproportionately affect Arab women in the public sector.

Second, Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to measure the strength and direction of relationships between the factors. The results were presented in the table below.

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation for Factors Affecting Men and Women

	1	2	3	4
	-	.34	.21	.57**
	.34	-	.48**	.65**
	.21	.48**	-	.53**
	.57**	.65**	.53**	-

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

The correlation results in Table 2 reinforce Hypothesis 1 by showing that familial, socio-cultural, and organizational factors are positively

associated with perceptions of gender equality, with all correlations reaching statistical significance at the p < .01 level. Socio-cultural factors

demonstrated the strongest correlation with gender equality ($r = .65$), followed by familial ($r = .57$) and organizational factors ($r =$

.53), indicating that these contextual influences significantly shape experiences of gender equality in the workplace. Moreover, the significant intercorrelations among these factors suggest they are interrelated dimensions contributing to broader systemic influences on gender dynamics. These findings support the hypothesis.

Null Hypothesis (H2₀): *There is no significant difference between men and women in the perceived impact of gender discrimination in the*

public sector in Israel.

Alternative Hypothesis (H2₁): *Women report a significantly stronger impact of gender discrimination than men in the public sector in Israel.*

In order to test the second hypothesis, Independent Samples t-test was conducted., Independent Samples t-test is used to compare the means of two independent groups (in this case, males and females) to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between their scores on workplace discrimination.

Table 3: Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences in the Perceived Impact of Gender Discrimination

	N= 320	M	SD
Men	182	2.10	0.55
Women	138	4.90	1.45

Test Statistics	t	df	p-value	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval
Welch's t-test	-20.18	237.4	< .001	-2.80	[-3.07, -2.53]

The results of the Independent Samples t-test reveal a statistically significant difference in the perceived impact of gender discrimination between men and women in the public sector in Israel. Women reported significantly higher levels of perceived gender discrimination ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.45$) compared to men ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 0.55$), with a Welch's t-test value of $t(237.4) = -20.18$, $p < .001$. The large mean difference of -2.80 and the narrow 95% confidence interval [-3.07, -2.53] further confirm the robustness of this finding.

Null Hypothesis (H3₀): *There is no significant correlation between men and women in the impact of gender stereotypes in the public sector in Israel.*

Alternative Hypothesis (H3₁): *Gender stereotypes have a significantly stronger impact on women than on men in the public sector in Israel.*

A Mann–Whitney U test was conducted to assess whether the perceived impact of gender stereotypes differs between men and women in the public sector in Israel.

Table 4: Mann–Whitney U Test Table

NPar Tests Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	25th Percentile	Median	75th Percentile
score	320	3.10	0.75	1.40	4.80	2.60	3.10	3.70
gender	320	1.43	0.50	1	2	1.00	1.00	2.00

Mann–Whitney Test Ranks

GENDER	N	MEAN RANK	SUM OF RANKS
MEN	182	138.12	25,144.00
WOMEN	138	196.57	27,131.00
TOTAL	320		

<i>Test Statistics^a</i>	<i>score</i>
<i>Mann–Whitney U</i>	8712.000
<i>Wilcoxon W</i>	25,144.000
<i>Z</i>	-5.91
<i>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.000

^a. Grouping Variable: gender (1 = Men, 2 = Women)

The results of the Mann–Whitney U test confirmed the hypothesis that gender stereotypes have a significantly stronger impact on women than on men in the public sector in Israel. The test revealed a statistically significant difference in the mean ranks between the two groups, with women (Mean Rank = 196.57) reporting a higher perceived impact of gender stereotypes than men (Mean Rank = 138.12). The U value was 8712.000, and the associated Z score was -5.91, with a p-value of .000 ($p < .001$), indicating that the difference is highly significant. These findings support the alternative hypothesis (H31) and lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis

(H3₀), confirming that women in the public sector experience a stronger impact of gender stereotypes compared to their male counterparts.

Null Hypothesis (H4₀): *There is no significant difference between men and women in their attitudes toward Arab women's leadership competence.*

Alternative Hypothesis (H4₁): *Women have significantly more positive attitudes than men toward Arab women's leadership competence.*

In order to test the fourth hypothesis an Independent Samples T-Test was used.

Table 5: *Independent Samples T-Test Results for Attitudes Toward Arab Women's Competence in Leadership*

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t (value)</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>
Capability to Handle Organizational Challenges	Male	182	2.58	0.67	-6.89	180	0.000**
	Female	138	3.14	0.74		136	
Strategic Decision-Making Abilities	Male	182	2.75	0.63	-7.01	180	0.000**
	Female	138	3.29	0.68		136	
Innovation and Creativity in Leadership	Male	182	2.62	0.61	-6.55	180	0.000**
	Female	138	3.18	0.67		136	
Trustworthiness in High-Rank Positions	Male	182	2.91	0.59	-6.87	180	0.000**
	Female	138	3.41	0.63		136	
Visionary Thinking and Planning Skills	Male	182	2.67	0.66	-6.78	180	0.000**
	Female	138	3.21	0.70		136	
Overall Competence in Leadership	Male	182	2.71	0.60	-7.45	180	0.000
	Female	138	3.33	0.64		136	

Note: $p < .01$ (**), indicating statistical significance.

The results of the Independent Samples T-Test show statistically significant differences between male and female respondents across all six indicators related to the competence of Arab women in leadership roles. Female respondents consistently rated Arab women's leadership abilities higher than male respondents, particularly in innovation, trustworthiness, and strategic decision-making. The overall competence score further supports this

conclusion, with women scoring significantly higher ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.64$) than men ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.60$), and a highly significant t-value of -

7.45 ($p = 0.000$). This consistent pattern across indicators confirms the alternative hypothesis (H5₁) that women and men differ significantly in their attitudes, with women demonstrating more favorable views toward Arab women in leadership.

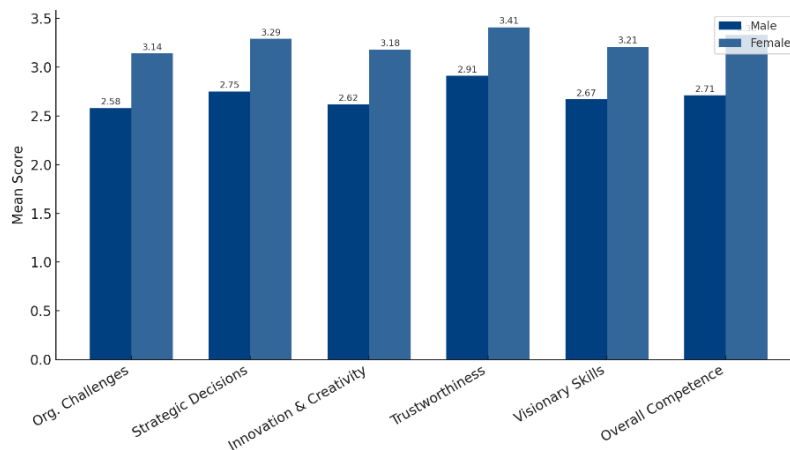


Figure 3: Attitudes Toward Arab Women's Competence in Leadership

5. Discussion

The first hypothesis (H1) of the study affirmed that family, social culture and organization were significant determinants of Arab women's opportunities for advancement and leadership in the Israeli public sector. The quantitative data revealed strong correlations, particularly between social culture and gender equality perceptions ($r = .67^{**}$) and family support and career advancement ($r = .52^{**}$).

These findings were very consistent with the literature. Arar and Abramovitz (2013) noted the impact traditional family expectations had on limiting Arab women's career advancement; similar to the findings of the current study, they noted parental attitudes (especially fathers' support) as key factors for women's aspirations to be leaders. In collectivist societies such as in Arab society, Afiouni (2014) found that the family is the strongest determinant of women's professional choices. In addition, Brue (2018) also found a strong account of external support for women's leadership; for example, mentoring and encouragement from their partners.

The same type of influence was apparent regarding an organization's culture.

That is, Arab women reported entering a system that was biased towards male promotion, developed under male-led organizational structures, and required Arab women to work harder than men to receive the same results. These findings support Cohen-Almagor and Maroshek-Klarman (2022), who noted the intersectional double discrimination Arab women face as both women and as Arabs in Israel, particularly within public institutions.

Hypothesis two (H2) was supported regarding the impact of discrimination. Arab women had much higher experiences of workplace discrimination than men ($M = 27.15$ vs. $M = 15.65$), with a highly significant t-test ($p < 0.001$). Qualitative interviews showed overlapping themes of exclusion from decision-making, undervaluation, and having to perform twice the amount of work to show that they could do a job.

This work supports what Abu-Kaf et al. (2023) observed that Arab women were notably concentrated in low-level working position with virtually no opportunity for growth. At the global level, studies in Saudi Arabia (Alzeiby, 2021) and Egypt raised similar issues about the continued institutional and societal opposition to women's leadership and the not just Arab, but global implications.

Hypothesis three (H3) confirmed that gender stereotypes are a significant barrier to Arab women's leadership journeys ($r = .63^{**}$). The interviews portrayed the deep-seated belief that assertiveness and authority were inherent in male leadership styles as women felt compelled to demonstrate their capability by consistently outperforming male contemporaries.

Study's findings closely related to Eagly and Karau's (2002) Role Congruity Theory indicating that when women engage in behavior that contravenes feminine norms (i.e., acting in accordance with male leadership styles), it is seen as incongruent to their gender and they are therefore deemed less suitable leaders. Also, Tabassum and Nayak (2021) found men were more likely than women to still view

management as a formal male domain despite expanding gender policies. In the Arab-Israeli context, Arar (2019) further elaborated traditional paradigms of women as domestic caretakers rather than authority figures and while domestic caretakers are important, it reinforced the conclusion of this study.

Hypothesis four (H4) revealed statistically significant variation based on gender in respondents' perception of Arab women's leadership abilities. Across all components of competence (strategic thinking, trust, creativity, and capability), female respondents generally scored women's competence more favorably than men, establishing a gender gap in perception.

This reflected international findings that men tend to hold a more traditional view of leadership. For example, it is well-documented by Berkery and others (2013) and Morgenroth and others (2021), that the "Think Manager - Think Male" stereotype remains salient, thus leadership traits are viewed as male characteristics. Within Israel, Alzeiby (2021) similarly found that Arab men viewed female leaders as less perceived capable, despite evidence to the contrary. This study further demonstrates that educated Arab males in leadership roles increasingly show resistance to female authority.

6. Conclusion

This research provides a thorough understanding of the complex challenges and systemic barriers Arab women experience in pursuing and keeping positions of leadership in Israel's public sectors. By combining quantitative data with rich qualitative data, we found evidence to suggest that familial, socio-cultural, and organizational aspects of Arab women's lives have a much stronger effect than their male counterparts, on their day-to-day professional experiences, aspirations, and advancement. The research reaffirms a continuing disadvantage to women by entrenched gender stereotypes, discrimination and cultural norms in an environment with continued educational gains and significant institutional reforms. The research did identify some emerging positive developments, for example, the changing attitudes of younger men and of supportive familial elements in the Arab community suggest that change can happen. However, there remain gaps, particularly in cases of how equality policies

are adapted to the reality of daily work life, and also changes according to the perceptions of some male colleagues. More research should be undertaken, both to identify the follow-up issues to the changes arising from interventions, examples being gender-sensitive leadership, flexible working conditions and male allyship. To achieve socio-political gender equity in leadership requires a multifaceted approach of cultural change within institutions and investments of public engagement and change in community engagement, enabling Arab women to lead publicly.

7. References

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