

The Rights of Women with Disabilities at Work in Islamic Countries the United Arab Emirates as an example

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Abstract

The research emphasizes the significance of advocating for the rights of women with disabilities in the workplace and their contribution toward achieving holistic economic development in all Islamic countries. It examines the discriminatory obstacles these women face in exercising their right to work equally. It also discusses international initiatives related to protecting women with disabilities and improving their integration and opportunities for economic empowerment. This research employs a descriptive-analytic methodology to gather and subsequently describe, analyze, and interpret various aspects of women with disabilities' rights at work, as well as the international efforts and UAE policies for promoting those rights. The research concludes the importance of the steps taken by the UAE government toward empowering women with disabilities in the workplace. The United Arab Emirates represents a great model for other Islamic and non-Islamic countries to follow in their dedication to advancing the rights of women with disabilities.

Keywords: *Empowering Women, Islamic Countries, The Right to Work, Women with Disabilities, And Women's Rights*

INTRODUCTION

The employment of women with disabilities is a critical issue that not only reflects society's dedication to supporting and upholding their rights but also underscores the determination of these women in the face of adversity. This issue is particularly relevant given the growing global attention to promoting employment and professional rights for women with disabilities, providing protection, and creating an environment that encourages and supports their work. National and international legislation looks forward to designing and implementing employment programs for persons with disabilities, including women, and their vocational and technical training in a way that motivates government and private employers to attract and employ them, besides adapting work systems and environments to their needs and providing equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

This research focuses on identifying the legal framework that governs the rights of women with disabilities in the workplace at both international and national levels; the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been taken as a model. This research attempts to monitor the challenges and obstacles women with disabilities encounter in the workplace. Additionally, it seeks to identify the efforts and measures taken by the UAE in terms of laws, programs, and policies to integrate these women into the labor market to transform them into productive individuals while considering their potential and capabilities.

Given the context above, the research questions revolve around three primary inquiries: What obstacles and challenges impede women with disabilities from exercising their right to work? Have Emirati initiatives succeeded in surmounting these challenges to facilitate the equitable employment of these women? Moreover, what are the available opportunities and prospects?

In conclusion, the right to work is essential for the empowerment of women with disabilities and the advancement of the economy. This research provides a brief overview of how this entitlement helps women with disabilities and highlights the challenges and obstacles they face in the workplace. Furthermore, it presents an example of successful policies and strategies implemented by the United Arab Emirates to create a conducive

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work environment for women with disabilities consistent with international law and promote sustainable economic development.

CHALLENGES TO WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AT WORK

Disability substantially affects an individual's capacity to do everyday tasks and meet social or familial obligations. Furthermore, it limits their ability to obtain fundamental entitlements such as education, employment, and marriage (Nanda, 2019). Women with disabilities encounter numerous obstacles in various aspects of their lives. They face challenges in achieving equality before the law, participating in political life, and making significant decisions that impact their lives, such as choosing their residence, selecting the persons they want to live with, and accessing healthcare services (United Nations, 2006).

Women with disabilities may face several challenges in securing jobs as a result of diminished expectations, unfavorable attitudes toward those with disabilities, and a shortage of pertinent skills stemming from exclusion from education or vocational training (Othman & Sorial, 2017). They also face job discrimination, inadequate paid leave and sick policies, and barriers to competitive integrated employment (Ditkowsky, 2023). Also, women with disabilities may feel isolated, lack confidence, and experience depression or bullying in the workplace. Furthermore, physical barriers can make it even more challenging for women with disabilities to access the workplace (United Nations, 2006). It is worth noting that work environments that are not easily accessible often hinder those women's capacity to participate in employment and easily navigate their surroundings (Othman & Sorial, 2017). Additionally, they encounter obstacles to job security, prospects for promotion, and overall employment quality (Beleza, 2003). One additional challenge pertains to the prevailing deficiency in knowledge regarding the integration of women with disabilities within the professional sphere and the inadequate provision of support for them in sustaining employment and advancing their careers (Olney & Donoso, 2019).

Discrimination against women with disabilities at work is often caused by gender, disability, or a combination of both (Kovačević, 2024). Thus, these women have fewer workplace rights compared to men with disabilities or women without disabilities. According to the Gender Equality Index in the European Union, only 20% of women with disabilities work full-time. In contrast, it is 29% of men with disabilities, 48% of women without disabilities, and 64% of men without disabilities. Additionally, women with disabilities also receive lower incomes and have unmet health needs. They face bias in promotion, pay, and access to training when compared to men with disabilities and women without disabilities. Gender parity and disability equality are far apart (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023). This disparity highlights the need for more support to help disabled women find and maintain employment and get social protection.

To conclude, women with disabilities encounter a range of obstacles and complexities in terms of communication and social engagement, as well as encountering negative attitudes, limited support, and environments that lack adequate accessibility. These factors collectively impede their ability to exercise their right to employment fully. However, despite various challenges and barriers, there has been widespread acknowledgment on a global scale regarding the significance of advocating for the employment rights of women with disabilities. Prioritizing the unique experiences in providing right-to-work support for women with disabilities is critical to improving employment opportunities and addressing instances of discrimination against them. Therefore, the research addresses the international efforts and the Emirati experience in facilitating and promoting the empowerment of women with disabilities at work at different legislative and executive tiers.

INTERNATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AT WORK

Furthermore, discrimination against women with disability constitutes a violation of human dignity. Therefore, this research focuses on the most significant international initiatives that address discrimination against women, particularly women with disabilities. As a result, the research discusses the rights of women with disabilities to work as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Additional Protocol. In addition to the United Nations Sustainable Development Plan.

THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the right to work includes the freedom to freely choose or accept a job and the right to equal pay for equal value. The state must safeguard against unemployment and prevent any form of bias in employment, such as based on disability or gender. It must provide vocational and technical education guidance and implement measures to create the appropriate environment that enhances productive employment opportunities. Additionally, individuals have the right to form and join labor unions to protect their interests (United Nations, 1948).

Therefore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights regards the right to work as essential for a decent life. Discrimination based on gender or disability is unacceptable. Equal working opportunities for disabled women are essential.

THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women included a set of effective policies and measures to combat discrimination based on sex in different areas, including the workplace. This has a significant contribution to empowering women and ensuring their access to work-related rights, particularly for women with disabilities.

Discrimination against women, as defined by the Convention, refers to "Any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made based on sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women," based on "equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."

Under the Convention, State Parties must implement measures to eradicate gender-based discrimination against women. This includes gender-based bias in the workplace and guarantees equal job opportunities, freedom in selecting work and its nature, entitlement to career advancement and vocational training, equitable compensation commensurate with value, social security, and healthcare safeguards. Additionally, the Convention ensures that women are provided with secure working conditions (United Nations General Assembly, 1979).

THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND ITS OPTIONAL PROTOCOL

International attention to persons with disabilities, including women, began in 1976 when the United Nations General Assembly declared 1981 to be the International Year of Persons with Disabilities. It called for developing national, regional, and international plans emphasizing equal opportunities, rehabilitation, and prevention of disabilities. However, the most significant victory came in 2008 when the United Nations approved the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This convention was a major step in providing more recognition to this group within the UN human rights protection system (Guillén et al., 2024). This Convention has established comprehensive standards aimed at safeguarding the political, civil, economic, social, and cultural rights of persons with disabilities, fostering inclusion, equality, and non-discrimination, and empowering them to overcome the obstacles and challenges they encounter due to their disability, as well as the negative attitudes and biases towards them.

The Convention promotes and protects the rights of persons with disabilities, especially women, and emphasizes international cooperation to improve their living conditions. It ensures that persons with disabilities enjoy all their rights and contribute to society's development. The Convention clearly defines "persons with disabilities" as individuals who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others due to the presence of various barriers. Moreover, the Convention affirmed that women with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence, injury, neglect, exploitation, and inappropriate treatment. Therefore, state parties must implement all necessary measures to prevent discrimination against them and ensure their full development, progress, and

empowerment. This guarantees they will have all fundamental freedoms and human rights without prejudice (United Nations, 2006).

The convention also states that women with disabilities have the right to work equally with others. States must prohibit discrimination based on disability concerning appointment, work, continuity of employment, career advancement, and safe and healthy working conditions. These women should have just and appropriate working conditions, including equal pay for work of equal value, protection from harassment, and a way to report grievances. They should also be able to exercise their labor and union rights. In addition, women with disabilities are entitled to assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining, and returning to work. They also have access to employment rehabilitation programs, employment services, and vocational and continuing training. They can engage in self-employment and private business or work in the public and private sectors. It is essential to provide reasonable accommodation for women with disabilities in the workplace (United Nations, 2006).

The Optional Protocol to the Convention incorporates a mechanism for receiving individual and collective complaints from victims who have experienced infringements upon their rights by a state party, as outlined in the Convention. This mechanism enables the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to request information and provide recommendations to relevant parties concerning severe or systematic violations of the Convention (The United Nations General Assembly, 2006). Undeniably, this Protocol is a crucial step in increasing access to justice for all persons with disabilities and holding violators accountable through legal prosecution.

Consequently, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol encourage support for the rights of persons with disabilities, including women, and ensure their full inclusion in their societies by promoting equal employment opportunities, work continuity, career progression, and safe working conditions.

THE AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) aims to ensure everyone is included, including one billion persons with disabilities living on our planet. It envisions a global community that upholds principles of equality and non-discrimination, including gender parity, by affirming that all states are responsible for “preserving, safeguarding, and advancing human rights, without any form of distinction based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national and social origin, property, birth, disability or other status.”

The Agenda covers many topics, including poverty, hunger, education, gender equality, health, climate change, and clean energy. It states that disability shall not be a cause or justification for the inability to benefit from development programs or realize human rights. It also explicitly refers to persons with disabilities, such as indicating that ensuring decent work for all is measured by the unemployment rate according to age, gender, and persons with disabilities (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Therefore, the Agenda stresses the importance of linking efforts to achieve sustainable development with those related to gender equality and women's empowerment. It aims to address the gaps that hinder women with disabilities from enjoying their right to work on an equal basis with other women and men without disabilities.

THE GUIDE FOR BUSINESS ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

This Guide aims to provide employers with clear instructions on upholding and promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. It assists employers in implementing specific measures and procedures that contribute to including persons with disabilities in the workplace, following international conventions and frameworks. According to the Guide, business owners are responsible for supporting and upholding the rights of persons with disabilities, including women. This involves incorporating a human rights perspective on disability within organizational policies and procedures, adopting a policy that respects their rights, investigating ongoing activities that may violate their rights as employees, workers, or shareholders, and establishing a mechanism to effectively address any detrimental impacts on their rights. Additionally, business owners must provide

appropriate measures for addressing negative impacts on the rights of persons with disabilities, such as implementing complaints systems (The United Nations Global Compact et al., 2017).

It is important to acknowledge that supporting equality and diversity in the workplace fosters a positive work environment and allows companies to leverage the potential capabilities of both current and future workforces. Companies implementing disability-inclusive strategies discover a valuable treasure trove of expertise and talent.

THE EMIRATES' EFFORTS ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES AT WORK

The Emirates' Ministry of Community Development registered 28,994 persons with various types of disabilities between 2010 and 2021, including those related to vision, hearing, physical abilities, mental health, and autism (Ministry of Community Development, 2024). Statistics indicate that women with disabilities in the Emirates constitute 25.8% of government, federal, local, and private workers (WHO MiNDbank, 2014). It is noted that official statistics do not provide results for both genders separately and do not take into account the unique gender differences in disability and work. This makes it difficult to accurately assess the impact of gender on cases of marginalization or discrimination against women with disabilities in the workplace. Therefore, it is necessary to include gender as a basic factor in statistics related to persons with disabilities, especially in light of the growing interest in supporting the right of women with disabilities to work in the Emirates.

The United Arab Emirates government is committed to empowering persons with disabilities, particularly women, by providing customized services that cater to their unique needs. These services include healthcare, education, vocational training, employment, accessibility, social protection, family empowerment, public life, culture, and sports. The ultimate goal is to ensure they have an equal opportunity to participate fully in society. Moreover, it supports the employment of persons with disabilities in both public and private sectors (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2016).

The government of the United Arab Emirates is making significant strides in empowering women with disabilities in the workplace. The government's comprehensive plans include issuing laws and regulations, providing reasonable accommodations to meet their needs, and providing access to rehabilitation and job opportunities. These procedures ensure disabled women can enjoy their rights without discrimination.

The research will explore this topic in more detail in the following discussion.

LEGISLATION AND POLICIES RELATED TO EMPOWERING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

The UAE Constitution emphasizes the principle of equality and non-discrimination among all citizens, regardless of their gender. Lawmakers in the UAE have always considered the needs of women, including those with disabilities, when developing laws and regulations, ensuring they have access to fundamental rights and freedoms, such as personal liberty, freedom of movement, education, work, and healthcare. It is worth mentioning that the UAE has been ranked seventh globally and first in the region in the Gender Equality Index (United Nations, 2024).

The government of the United Arab Emirates is committed to upholding the principle of equality and actively implements it in its work-related policies and practices. For example, Article 30 of Federal Law No. 8 stipulates that if a woman performs a job similar to that of a man, she must receive equal pay (Emirates Federal Government, 1980). The government also actively promotes the inclusion of women with disabilities in the workforce. Efforts have been made to give women with disabilities equal opportunities at work by offering reasonable accommodations to help them become effective contributors to society, rely on themselves, and achieve independence. Moreover, in the framework of working to enable disabled women to obtain their full right to work, the competent authorities raise employers' awareness among the public and private employment sectors of the benefits of hiring persons with disabilities and increase employment opportunities by incentivizing companies to employ them (WHO MiNDbank, 2014).

The United Arab Emirates has implemented legislation and laws to safeguard the rights of persons with disabilities, including women, in the workplace. These laws aim to create an inclusive and accessible work

environment for women with disabilities, giving them equal opportunities to thrive and succeed without discrimination or hindrance. The government agencies must provide equal employment opportunities to persons with disabilities. This includes ensuring they are not discriminated against during the hiring process or while occupying public positions. Disability should not be considered an obstacle to nomination or selection for work. However, when assessing the competency of persons with disabilities for employment, their disability should be considered. The law also includes rules to protect persons with disabilities, including women, from discrimination in government and private sectors, including determining working hours, vacations, and bonuses (Emirates Federal Government, 2006). Moreover, these bodies must allocate 2% of their vacancies to persons with disabilities (Emirate of Abu Dhabi, 2006). Also, employers must provide employees with disabilities with all appropriate means to perform their duties while equipping their workplaces to suit their unique needs (Emirate of Dubai, 2006).

The Emirates law supports the employment of persons with disabilities, including women. It prioritizes citizens with disabilities who have the qualifications to occupy public positions in the federal government. It also provides them with the necessary tools and equipment to perform their duties in an environment accommodating their unique needs. The law demonstrates the government's commitment to promoting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and ensuring equal opportunities in the workforce (Emirates Federal Government, 2008). Moreover, government agencies support safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities; these agencies are prevented from terminating their employment on the grounds of disability, except in cases where they have reached retirement age or have a medical inability to perform their job. The private sector is also encouraged to adopt comprehensive employment strategies similar to those of the public sector (Jones, 2019).

INITIATIVES TO EMPOWERING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

The ministries in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have implemented various initiatives to empower and integrate persons with disabilities. One of these initiatives is the Ministry of Community Development issuing a manual to help employers hire persons with disabilities, facilitate their access to job vacancies, conduct interviews, provide career growth opportunities, and ensure stability in work environments (Ministry of Community Development, 2019). In addition to facilitating the inclusion of disabled individuals into society by offering a range of advantages to those who possess the "Atheer" card. These benefits encompass priority housing, comprehensive health insurance, vehicle fee exemptions, and free parking (UAE Government, n.d.).

Another initiative is the "Work is Life" Project introduced by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The initiative offers training to persons with disabilities who receive social security benefits to empower them to seek independent sources of income rather than solely relying on social benefits. Additionally, the initiative aims to assist them in becoming self-sufficient and improving their quality of life (WHO MiNDbank, 2014).

The government has also launched an online platform to enhance employment opportunities for those with disabilities. The platform aims to motivate disabled persons to register and demonstrate their abilities and skills. In addition, it encourages federal, local, and private institutions to display the job opportunities available to them (Ministry of Community Development, n.d.).

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Policies that empower women with disabilities should consider the need to make necessary adjustments to the work environment to suit their needs. Reasonable accommodations relate to providing appropriate procedures for female employees with disabilities to ensure they can perform their jobs effectively (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2016). This may include physically modifying the workplace and working schedules or providing assistive technologies to meet their needs. To support the full involvement of women with disabilities and facilitate their full participation in the workplace, it is imperative to ensure accessible facilities, transportation, and communications technologies (Emirate of Dubai, 2022).

REHABILITATION AND JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

Women with disabilities encounter numerous barriers and difficulties when it comes to finding employment and joining the workforce. Therefore, internships and career development programs can provide these women with valuable opportunities to enhance their skills and secure paid jobs (Winston, 2018).

The UAE government provides support programs and opportunities for persons with disabilities, including women, to improve their quality of life, recover, and obtain job opportunities that enhance their self-sufficiency and independence. The UAE has established federal government centers for rehabilitating persons with disabilities in various emirates. These centers offer educational, training, rehabilitation, and employment programs that prepare them to join multiple labor market sectors (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, n.d.). One such initiative is the Mashaghel Project, which aims to provide rehabilitation and individual training plans for persons with disabilities to enable them to start their businesses based on their capabilities and training needs. The Project ensures that the financial returns from their businesses positively impact the lives of persons with disabilities by providing economic, social, and psychological benefits. The Project's curriculum includes hydroponic and bracelet workshops, behavioral training, marketing and public speaking skills, financial transactions, and cooperative skills (UAE, 2022).

To summarize the information presented previously, the United Arab Emirates' dedication to ensuring equal rights for women with disabilities in the field of work is commendable.

CONCLUSION

The research indicates that women with disabilities face a multitude of barriers that hinder their capacity to access fair and equal work opportunities compared to men with disabilities or women in general. Addressing these difficulties is crucial to improving and empowering women.

The research examines the role of the United Arab Emirates in safeguarding the workplace rights of women with disabilities. The research shows that UAE laws, policies, and initiatives promote employment and protect disabled women's rights. The UAE has fulfilled its international obligations by enabling disabled women to defend their rights through equality and non-discrimination and encouraging their inclusion as powerful workers.

The research strongly calls for adopting the UAE model used in protecting the rights of women with disabilities in the workplace and supporting their entitlements. Moreover, national programs related to their protection must be developed to challenge stereotypes and facilitate their inclusion as equal participants in all work sectors. Furthermore, it is necessary to increase community awareness and provide educational programs and workshops to promote and support the integration of women with disabilities into the workforce. It is essential to create concrete corporate social responsibility endeavors to encourage inclusivity, awareness, and embrace of women with disabilities within work environments. The research also suggests implementing effective methods to address instances of mistreatment or bias experienced by women with disabilities in the workplace. In addition, it recommends establishing dedicated hotlines to facilitate reporting such violations and to promote a safe and inclusive work environment for them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors thank Abu Dhabi University for its academic and financial support in conducting this research and publishing it in a reputable journal. They also extend special appreciation to reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions on earlier manuscript drafts.

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