

# WOMEN IN OMANI SOCIETY: EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION

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**Abstract:** This research examines the females' status in Omani society in terms of empowerment, education, and community participation. It investigates the employment of females in the public and private sectors, and the extent of discrimination between males and females. Also, it determines the educational level of females in Oman and their participations in the development of the society. All these questions were answered by distributing questionnaires among universities' students. The sample sizes were 400 students from Sultan Qaboos University, Nizwa University, and *Dhofar* University. The results of this study show that females have the total freedom in educational field in terms of choosing any collage/ major they want inside the country or abroad. Married women are encouraged to pursue their studies at any educational institutions. Female principals were found somehow equal to the males. However, the huge progress that the females have in Oman does not change the old believes that the society has because the staff/ students prefer to have males as their Heads of Departments or Deans compared to females. Females hold many high positions in the ministries, but males still dominate the Omani Council. Even though females can look after themselves outside the home, males still believe women's place is the home, and husbands prefer their wives to stay at home to take care of her family. Females contribute in the political development, however; they do not share the political power as males in Oman.

**Keywords:** Empowerment; Education; Community; Females; Participation

## INTRODUCTION

In the East or in the West, women play a vital role in developing society hand in hand with men. Omani women, for instance, played this vital role in the past and still play it in the present in two different ways. In the past, women helped men in farming, collecting wood, making handicrafts and other things. On the other hand, recently women have been given their rights to study, work, run for election in Shura(consultative) council, and they run their own businesses. There is no doubt that the Omani government makes efforts to enhance women's position in the society by providing them with knowledge and experience through different institutions.

Sultan Qaboos University is one of the most important institutions which elevate and improve women's status in Oman. The percentage of female students accepted at Sultan Qaboos university increased from approximately 250 students in 1990 to 1300 students in 2007. This shows that women have been involved in the society through knowledge and experience. Also, there are many other institutions such as colleges of technology, colleges of applied science and other private colleges and universities in which there is a high rule of female enrolment.

The government has set up many associations for Omani women so that they can share their experiences, learn new things and voluntarily teach those women who are not accepted in higher education. In fact, the first Omani Women's Association was opened in 1970. There is also another institution concerned with women which is

called Women's Rehabilitation Center, which aims at improving women's status and training them to be independent in their own businesses. Another important center to mention here is Wafa Voluntary Center, which caters for special needs people and is run by Omani female volunteers.

In Oman, women are allowed to seek election in the Shura Council and to vote. They are also allowed to have prestigious positions in the government. There are two female ministers at the head of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Education.

In Oman, one can see women in all sectors: social, economic, political and educational, all of which show the importance of women in the Omani society and how people have changed their views towards women.

### Statement of the Problem

Since His Majesty Sultan Qaboos has become the ruler of the Sultanate of Oman, all aspects of life have changed, and the world has noticed the huge progress in Oman's development. However, it is very crucial to investigate where females stand in this development and examine women's role as well as their contributions to the Omani society and progress. As a matter of fact, it is essential to know the level of female students' freedom in choosing their majors or colleges, and the acceptance of Omani married women continuing their studies after marriage. In this kind of development, it is vital to explore the level of equality that exists between males and females and the leadership empowerment in the society in general and specifically in the educational setting.

### Research Question

(a) To what extent are female students free to choose their own specializations, majors and colleges in Oman? (b) To what extent are Omani married women encouraged to pursue their studies after marriage? (c) Is there any equality between males and females in terms of school leadership and community? (d) What are the males' perceptions of having females as their leaders, head of departments and deans? (e) And how do they view women generally in the Omani society?

### Research Purpose

(a) To examine the level of females freedom in choosing their area of specialization, majors and colleges in Oman. (b) To explore whether an Omani married woman is encouraged to continue her studies by her husband after marriage. (c) To investigate if women are allowed to be leaders in schools and in non academic sectors in the Omani society. (d) To study Omani males' perceptions toward female leadership in the academic arena and in the society.

### Significance of the Study

This research has shed light on Omani females' status in the past and the present. In the past, there existed inequality between men and women because men dominated in many sectors of society such as employment, education and their contribution to the society. But with the new leadership and development, women are better having chances today to participate in Oman's progress, proving themselves in the society, working and holding high positions in institutions and ministries. This research has brought into being the latest information about the female stance in the Omani society and the level of educational freedom in choosing their specializations and colleges. This research has elucidated the current status of Omani married women and their ability to continue their studies after marriage. This research has also contributed to the relevant knowledge and field, such as exploring Omani males' perceptions toward women leadership in the academic area and in the society. Besides, it has contributed statistically by conducting empirical research to measure the phenomenon.

### Limitations of the Study

This study has some limitations in terms of sample size where the research has mainly focussed on females. Also, it focuses on female students at universities and excluding other colleges. Thus, only a few students participated in this study and the sample size drawn from the population was very small. Besides, it is part of the limitation not to select other Omani private universities for the time and effort required. Perhaps this research could recommend for further research to include all the universities to have more significant findings and results.

Some of the limitations of the study include the sampling procedure where this research tends to use a convenient sampling procedure since it is very hard to get all students at once and apply random sampling for students having different class schedules. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized upon the population and students in other universities and colleges.

### METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

A questionnaire was distributed among university students in the Sultanate of Oman. The sample consisted of 400 students from Sultan Qaboos University, Nizwa University, and Dhofar University. This paper focused on data received from the students and were analyzed based on their perception.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Women's Status in Arab Countries*

Sameena (2003) mentioned in her article "*Challenging Inequality: Obstacles and*

*Opportunities Towards Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa*", that women in the Arab World have made enormous progress in the educational field, and various majors have been opened for them. Today, women have registered the highest university enrollment compared to men, and their numbers are increasing year by year. Moreover, in the Arab world in general and Gulf countries in particular there is visible progress as women are joining new specializations related to science and engineering, and they are going abroad on scholarships. Women are allowed to choose their majors or subjects and to study inside the country or abroad.

In the Sultanate of Oman, female students are studying in all specializations at universities and the number of female students is increasing. In 1990 the percentage of female students in Oman's higher education was 46.6%, and it increased to 49.5% in 2009. Nowadays, female students are found in engineering and science areas, fields which used to be men's.

In relation to gender equality, Sanja (2005) stated in his article *"Recent Gains and New Opportunities for Women's Rights in the Gulf Arab States"* that although the government has opened new specializations for female students, gender inequality was still somehow found in education where women have to score higher grades than men in order to study the same major in engineering or science. The article mentions an example of this phenomenon which occurs in Oman and Kuwait where female students have to obtain a 3.3 GPA to be accepted in the engineering department, while male students need only a 2.8 GPA. But it was reported that higher educational institutions contain almost two-thirds of female students which is considered as a huge gap between men and women. In providing solutions, university policy-makers try to decrease the number of female students in certain academic fields, such as engineering, to balance the equation.

Nemat and Wassef (1999) explain in their book *Unfulfilled Promises: Women's Right in Egypt*, which addresses development and progress, that despite this development and the huge progress made in education, the highest rate of illiteracy was found amongst women in Egypt. Thus, the percentage of illiterate females today is 62%, while males constitute only 38%, and experts argue that this phenomenon is due to the fact that families do not allow their daughters to go to school because their low economic status, and they believe that there is no real investment in girls' education. Therefore, if a family has a good income, it prefers to educate the boy instead of the girl.

Also, Nemat and Wassef indicate in the same book about Egyptian women and work that Arab countries in general have the lowest percentage of female employment because tradition states that men are responsible for income and women take care of the family, but some women who are very rich or very poor work in the public sphere. In the present day, things have changed positively and women are given chances to prove their existence. Now, women in Egypt play important roles socially, politically and economically to develop the country.

Looking at women's rights in Saudi Arabia, *Al-Hayat*, a London magazine, states that previously women did not have an identity card, but they were recorded in the cards of their guardians, but recently, the Saudi government has allowed women to possess their own identity cards. In terms of political leadership, there is a significant change as 24 women undertook Parliamentary positions and participated in the political and future plans. Unfortunately, in the present time, the numbers were reduced suddenly and the positions did not last forever. The Parliament Chairman Sheik Muhammad bin Ibrahim bin Jabeir has categorically opposed women's involvement in parliament by saying: "Appointing women as parliament members is out of the question. Nobody even thinks about it, because the issues the parliament deals with are public matters under the responsibility of men."

#### ***Omani Women Before and After 1970s***

It is stated in one of the Ministry of Social Affairs' letters "Social Institutions and their Roles in Supporting Omani Women," (1993) the roles of Omani women before 1970 were very simple. Omani women devised a pattern of their life and their roles in the community from customs and traditions inherited from their ancestors. Their roles were summarized in the managing of the house and its internal affairs, nurturing and caring for their children and preparing them to be good citizens, cooperating and participating in the conduct of their husband's life.

Al'Mahrooqi R. commented in her book *Omani Women, Today and Past*, (2010), that women in before 1970 suffered a lot before the Renaissance, despite their effective contribution to the family and society; men did not appreciate those efforts and roles till His Majesty Sultan Qaboos came to power and acknowledged women's effective roles in developing Oman.

However, R.Kiddie stated in *Women in the Middle East Past and Present*, (2007) that since 1970, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos ruled the Sultanate of Oman, he has promised his citizens development, progress and prosperity, and he has been applying a

great deal of modern programs which help people to cope with the world. The status of Omani women has seen a huge progress, in the academic year 2000 - 2001 the number of boys and girls was equal in primary schools, and women accounted for 54% of the number of students admitted to Sultan Qaboos University in 2002. Omani women work in many areas including administration, politics, and media. A large proportion of women are working in government and private sectors, and women are treated equally with men. Women are given their freedom and many rights, such as the right to own property, the right to education, work, and the right to vote and participate politically.

### ***Female Economic and Social Status in Oman and Government Support***

Oman has made a huge progress in human development and during the period 1980-2010 the expected years of schooling increased by 7.9%, and GNI per capita also has increased by 15.619%. Thus, women have become a corner stone in Oman's development. According to Explaining HDI Value and Rank Changes in Human Development Report (2010), gender inequality is measured by empowerment and economic status. Measuring empowerment in a country is through parliamentary seats occupied by each gender, and the seats of education in secondary schools and higher education for each gender. However, the economic situation is measured by the participation rate of each gender in the market. So, the proportion of Omani women's empowerment is only 9% of parliamentary seats and their participation in the labor force is 26% compared with the men who own 80%. Table 1 elaborates what Explaining HDI Value and Rank Changes in Human Development Report indicates.

Despite the development of women and the equality, they have still suffer from the lack of full rights that will make them equal with men. Women's insignificant political role and power inequality with men has given men an opportunity for political domination.

Al' Yahiaie.S interviewed the Minister of Social Development during the ceremony of Opening of the Scientific Forum of the Omani Women (2010), thanked His Majesty Sultan Qaboos for his attention to women, through the allocation on the seventeenth of October of each year a day for Omani women, which is an acknowledgement of H.M of the importance of Omani women and their partnership in community development. Thus, every woman has to

be proud of being Omani and of the power that they have been given. When she was asked about what was still missing for Omani women, she said: "There is nothing lacking for Omani women, but every day we, as a government, feel that there is more tender offered by the government for women and further amendments in some programs and policies."

Moreover, The Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), Regional Office Abu Dhabi (2010) stated that Oman has done several of projects to raise the level of women in all field. These include: (a) The Environment Society of Oman (ESO): "Raise Omani women's awareness of environmental issues." (b) SEEB Women Association: "Strengthening Legal Awareness in Oman." And many other programs that support Omani women to contribute actively in community participation.

### ***Educational Status of Women after Marriage***

In his article "Middle Eastern Gulf States Family & Education Information Summary; Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, UAE" (2009) Luchies.M explains that the opportunities for women's education in the Gulf states have begun to increase, although not all countries have the same level of encouragement for women. Also, Omani women are supported to study abroad.

In my point of view, women's educational level has raised in all areas of knowledge, and women have the motivation to pursue their education after marriage because they have the right to do so.

Moreover, in his article "The importance of Educating Women in Islam" (2011) Mohammed Al' Yamani mentions the need for married women to be educated. As he said, the child does not learn or take from his mother more than she knows, so if she is under educated, her child will be like her; however, if she is educated person, she will transmit this knowledge to her child. From his perspective, educating women is more important because the mother is the first school and the closest teacher for a child to open his/her eyes for the wider world. It is important for women to continue their education after marriage, and they need it to raise generations. In addition, well-educated women will perform their duties and responsibilities as perfectly as they can. Islam has made women responsible for themselves, their worship, and their families. Omani women have the freedom to complete their studies after marriage, but this depends on the proportion of understanding between the woman and her husband.

**Table 1:** Participation in Power & Decision Making Positions of Omani Labor by Gender in the Government Sector in 1995

<b>Job (Position Title)</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Minister	30 (100%)	-	30 (100%)
Deputy Minister	30 (91%)	3 (9%)	33 (100%)
Senior Advisor	-	4 (100%)	4 (100%)
State Council (MajlisAldawla)	36 (90%)	4 (10%)	40(100%)
Consultative Council (MajlisALShu'ra)	78 (97%)	2 (2%)	80 (100%)
Special Grade	60 (82%)	13 (18%)	73 (100%)
Grade One	1,619 (86%)	261 (14%)	1,880 (100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,853 (87%)</b>	<b>287(13%)</b>	<b>2,140 (100%)</b>

Source: *General Directorate for Women's and Children's Affairs, 1995.*

## FINDINGS

### Demographic Data

**Table 2:** Respondents' Gender and Age

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
<b>GENDER</b>		
Male	122	28.4
Female	307	71.6
Total	429	100.0
<b>AGE</b>		
Below 20 years	120	28.0
Above 20 years	309	72.0
Total	429	100.0

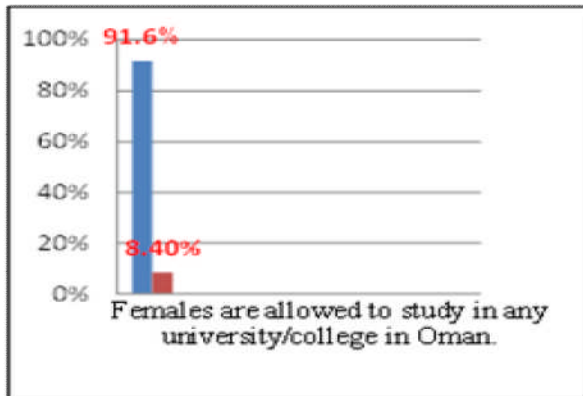
**Table 3:** Respondents' Areas of Specialization

<b>Name</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Arts	61	14.2
Engineering	18	4.2
Nursing	29	6.8
Commerce	18	4.2
Science	15	3.5
Agriculture	37	8.6
Education	37	8.6
Medicine	3	0.7
Law	2	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>100.0</b>

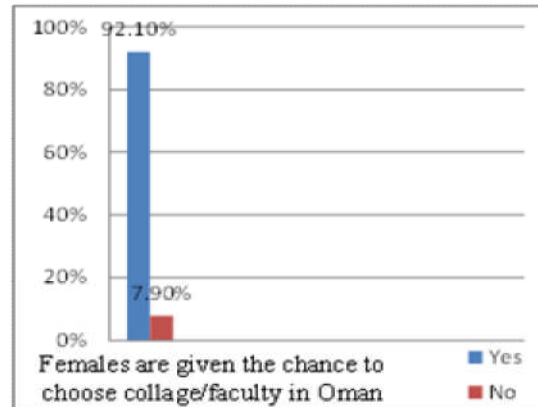
**Table 4: Respondents' Region in Oman**

	Frequency	Percent
Muscat	30	7.0
Dofar	65	15.1
AL.Dahra	32	7.5
Al-Dakhilia	115	26.8
AL.Sharqia	63	14.7
ShouthAL.Batinah	39	9.1
NourthAL.Batinah	32	7.5
AL.Burimi	7	1.6
Musandam	1	0.2
AL.Woosta	7	1.6
NIZWA	36	8.4
Alemarat	2	0.5
Total	429	100.0

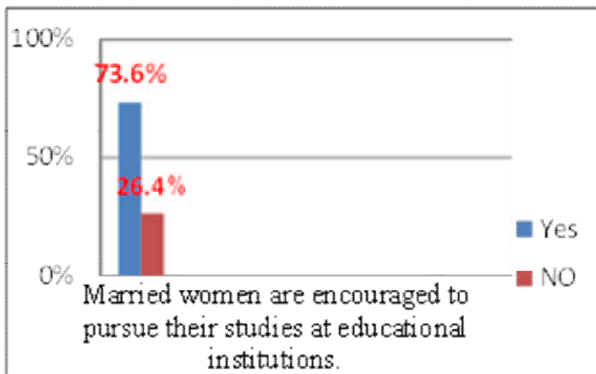
**Females' Education**



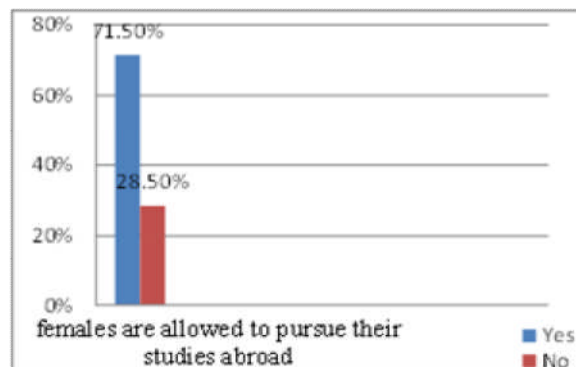
**Graph 1**



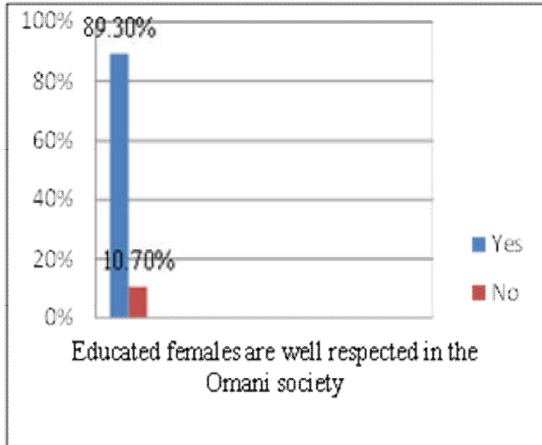
**Graph 2**



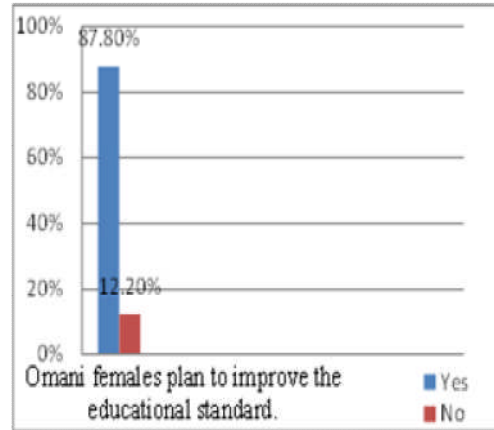
**Graph 3**



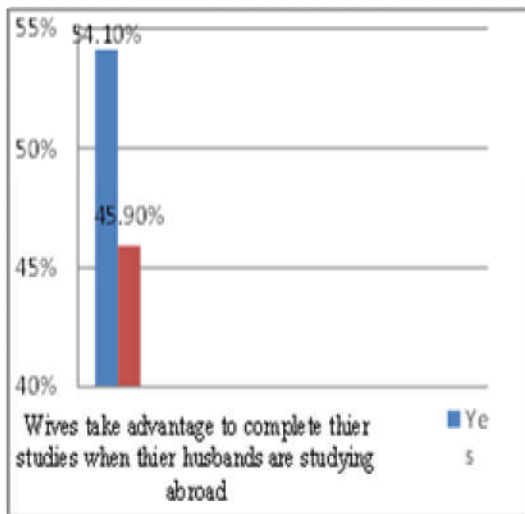
**Graph 4**



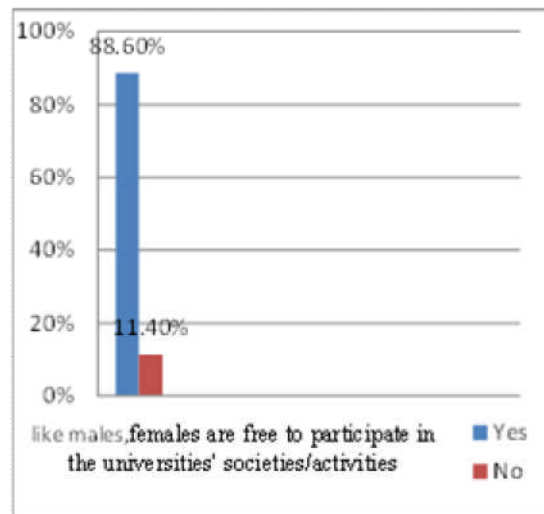
Graph 5



Graph 6



Graph 7



Graph 8

Table 2 shows the respondents' gender and age. In terms of gender, 71.6% (n=307) of the respondents were females, while only 28.4% (n=122) were males. The table 1 shows that in terms of age the majority or 72% (n=309) were above 20 years of age, while only 28% were below 20 years of age.

Table 3 shows that 14.2% (n=61) of the respondents were from the college of Arts, 8.6% (n=37) were both from the college of Agriculture and Education, and 6.8% (n=29) were from the college of Nursing. 4.2% (n=18) were from the college of Commerce, 3.5% (n=15) were from the college of Sciences, and 0.7% (n=3) from the college of Medicine while 0.5% (n=2) were from the college of Law.

For the respondents' regions, table 3 shows that 26.8% (n=115) of the respondents from Al-Dakhilia, 15.1% (n=65) from Dofar, 14.7% (n=63) from Al Sharqia, 9.1% (n=39) from ShouthAL.Batinah, 8.4% (n=36) from Nizwa, 7.5% (n=32) from both Al Dhahra and NourthAL.Batinah, 1.6% (n=7) from both AL.Burimi and Al Woosta, .5% (n=2) from Alemarat, while 0.2% (n=1) were from Musandam. Graph 1 shows that 1, 91.6% of the respondents said "Yes" to the question whether female students have total freedom to specialize in any major, while only 8.4% said "No". Thus, females are completely free to study in any university/college, and they are given the chance to choose the faculty of their own.

Graph 2 shows that in Omani women have the freedom to specialize in any area they want, as 92.10% of the participants said "Yes". Females are free to specialize in any major, but only 7.90% said "No", and this could be due to the family in which they live

Graph 3 shows that 73.6% of the respondents said that married women are free to continue their studies because they received the encouragement from their families in general and the approval of their husbands in particular to pursue their education, while 26.4% said "No"

Graph 4 shows that women seemed to be allowed to pursue their studies abroad, with 71.50% saying "Yes" and 28.50% saying "No". This indicates the type of independent and educational support given to Omani women.

According to Graph 5, 89.30% of the respondents said "Yes" to the question whether educated Omani women are respected in the society, because the society knows the importance of having educated people in the community which helps in improving and developing the country, while only 10.70% said "No".

In graph 6, the respondents confirmed that Omani women are working hard to develop the educational level, as 87.8% of them said "Yes".

In graph 7, women seize the opportunity of their presence abroad with their husbands to complete their studies, as 54.10% of respondents agree and 45.9% said "No".

Graph 8 promotes girls' freedom in participation in universities' activities, and they have the same opportunities as men. The ratio reached 88.6% of those who agreed that females are free to participate in the universities' societies as males, and that they innovate beyond the border; however, 11.4% said "No"

### **Equality between men and women in terms of Leadership and community**

In graph 9, the study indicates that the number of male teachers is not higher than the number of female because only 24.9% agreed that male teachers are more than female in schools, while the majority, 75.1%, said "No".

Graph 10 shows that 55.4% of the respondents disagree those male principals constitute the majority, while 44.6% said "Yes", and this shows that the number of female principals is almost equals the number of male principals.

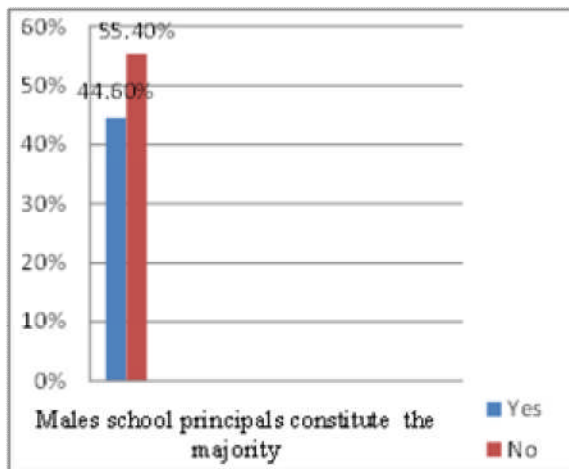
In terms of equality between males and females at the level of leadership in sectors, graph 11 shows the progress of women's empowerment because they are teaching in universities, and their number is higher than that of male lecturers, as 71.9% of the participants agreed that there are more Female lecturers than male in universities, and only 28.1% said "No" as shown in graph 11.

According to graph 12, the faculties do not want to have women as their heads of departments.

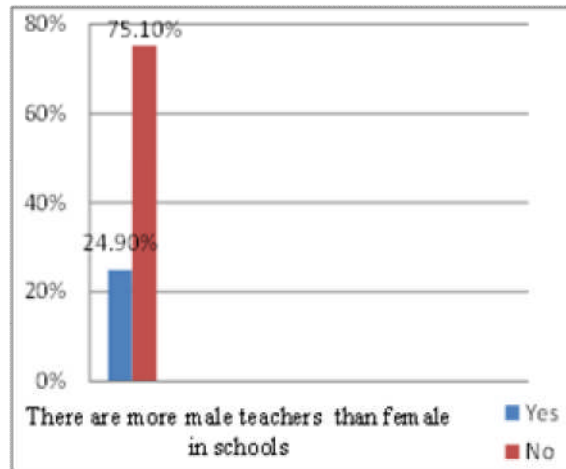
Additionally, the findings reveal that staff/students prefer to have males as their deans compared to females, with 73% saying "Yes" and 27 saying "No" Graph 13 shows that the majority of vice chancellors in Oman's universities/colleges are not females as the results reveal that 86.7% said "No", and the rest, 13.3%, said "Yes".

Graph 14 shows that 59.70% of the participants disagree that females do not hold high positions in the ministries although Oman has two female ministers, the one of Higher Education, and the one of Education, and the Head of Handicrafts Institution is a female, while 40.30% agreed

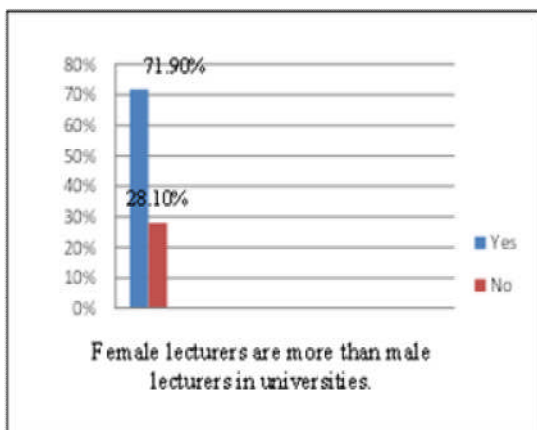




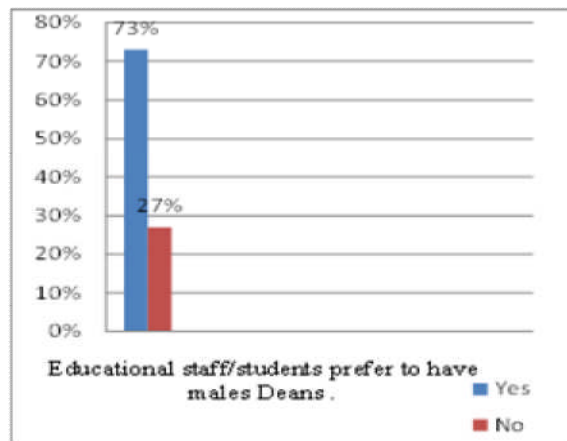
Graph 9



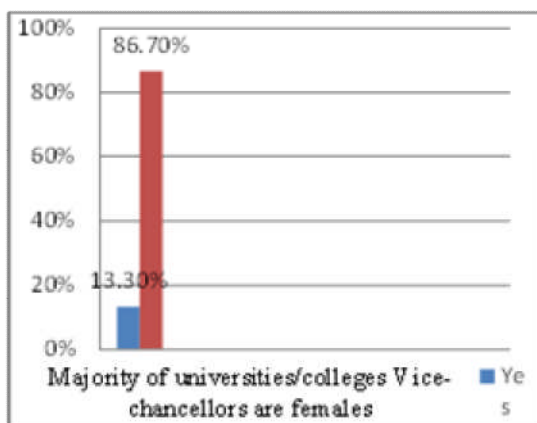
Graph 10



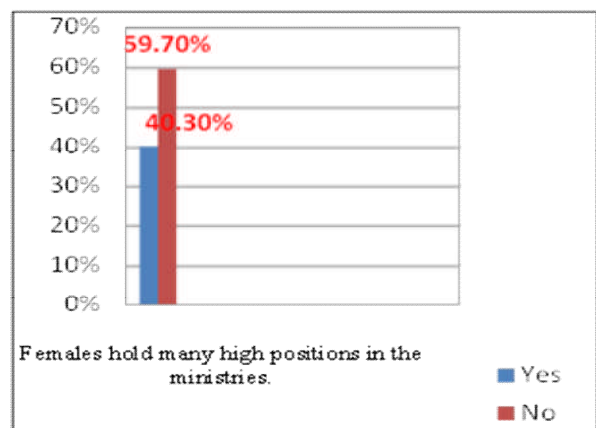
Graph 11



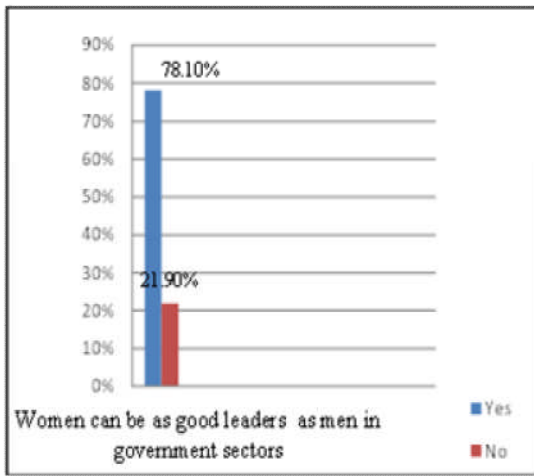
Graph 12



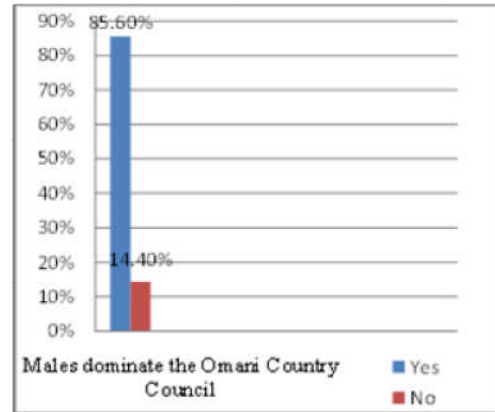
Graph 13



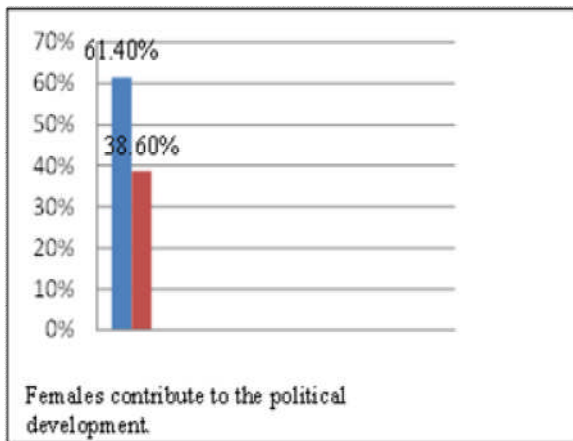
Graph 14



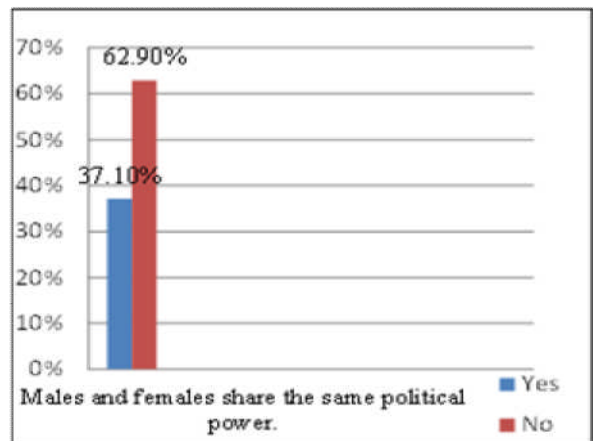
Graph 15



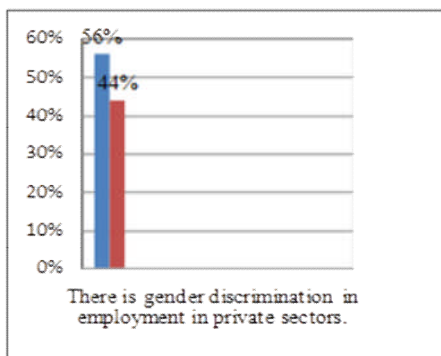
Graph 16



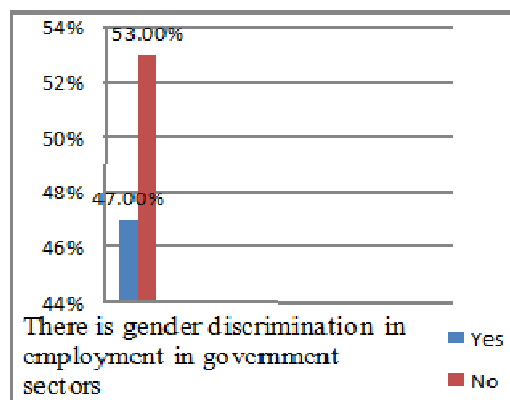
Graph 17



Graph 18



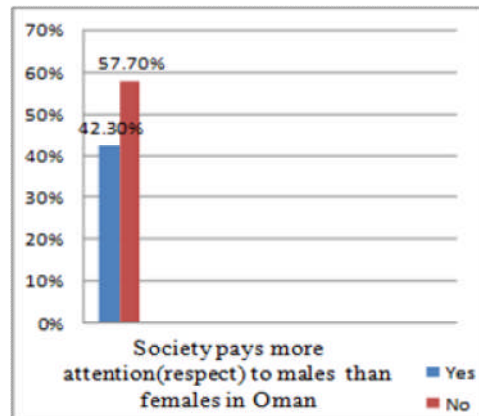
Graph 19



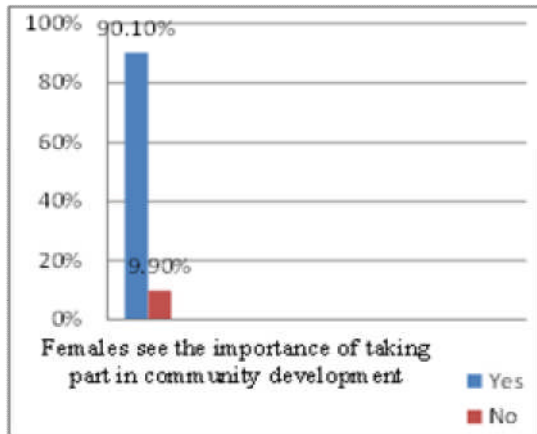
Graph 20



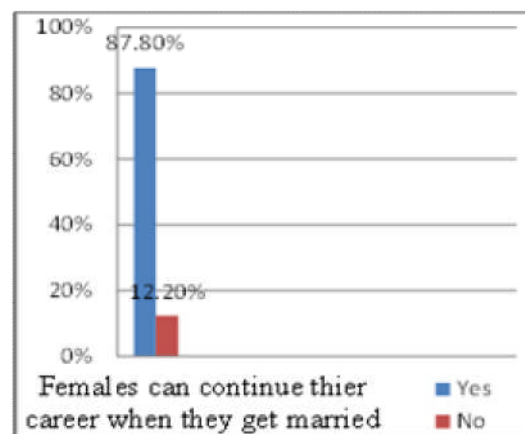
Graph 21



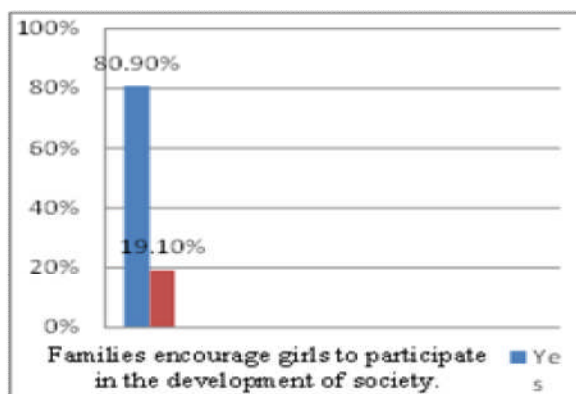
Graph 22



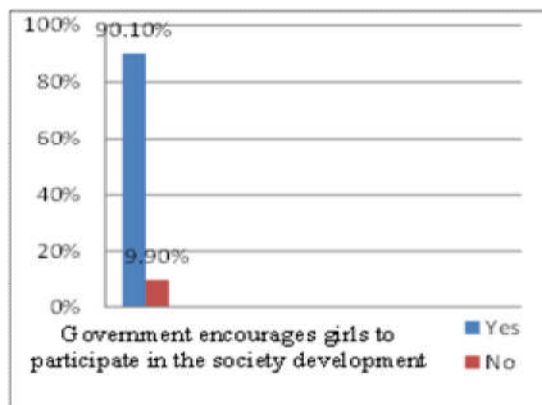
Graph 23



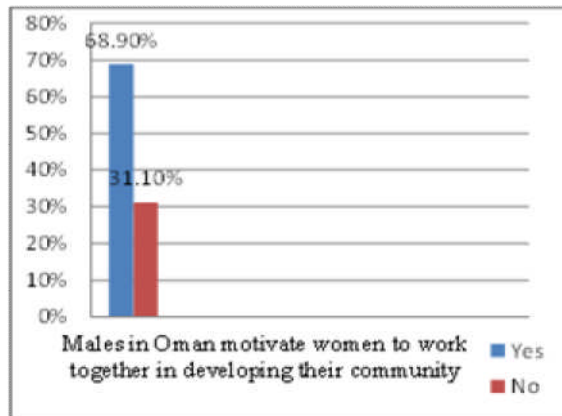
Graph 24



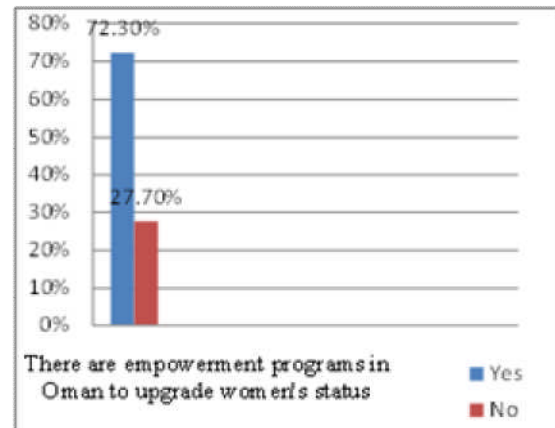
Graph 25



Graph 26



Graph 27



Graph 28

Graph 15 shows that 78.10% of the respondents said "Yes" to the question whether women have the power as men, and that there is no difference in their abilities and skills to be leaders. Females can hold high positions and be good leaders

Graph 16 explains that despite women's contribution in the political development in Oman, men still dominate the Country Council with 85.6% saying "Yes" and 14.4% saying "No"

Graph 17 indicates that 61.4% of the respondents said "Yes" to the question whether Omani females contribute to the political development of Oman, while 38.6% said "No"

Graph 18 demonstrates that because of the absence of equality between men and women in politics, they do not have the same political power, as 62.9% disagreed that men and women share the same political power.

Graph 19 shows that there is obvious prejudice in the private sector in terms of employment with 56% saying "Yes" and 44% saying "No"

However, graph 20 shows contrary findings where there is no gender difference between genders in the public (government) sector with 53% saying "No" and 47% saying "Yes". However, it seems that in the in private sectors males are somehow dominating, but in public jobs males and females share the same rights and empowerment

Graph 21 shows that 57.70% of the respondents said "No" to the question whether society pays more attention to males, while 42.3% said "Yes" it does

It is obvious from Graph 22 that there is equality between males and females in terms of their rights as in graph 22 which shows 70.6% saying "Yes" and only 29.4% saying "No".

In Oman, females have the opportunity to pursue their jobs when they get married. As in graph 23, 87.8% of the participants said "Yes" to the question whether females can continue their careers when they get married, while 12.2% said "No" as graph 23 indicates.

Graph 24 shows that Omani women are aware of their important roles in developing the country as 90.1% agreed that females see the importance of taking part in community development, and only 9.9% disagreed.

In the Sultanate of Oman, as graph 25 indicates, the government stimulates women's effective participation in community development through women's associations scattered in all regions and provinces. 90.1% agreed that the government encourages girls to participate in the development of society, and only 9.9% disagreed.

The government is not the only body that supports Omani girls to participate in community development, but families have a significant role in motivating their girls to compete with men in order to achieve the progress of society, graph 26 shows that 80.9% said "Yes" to the question whether families encourage women to participate in society's progress, but 19.1% said "No".

Graph 27 reveals that Omani women are lucky to receive support from all sides, even men support and motivate women to work for the development of the country, 68.9% agree that males motivate women to

work together in developing the society, while 31.1% disagree.

Participants assured that the Omani government is applying programs to improve women's status, including economic, political, and social programs, as 72.3% said "Yes"; in contrast, 27.7% said "No" because they are not aware of such programs. Graph 28 explains this

Graph 29 shows that 82% agree and 18% disagree that there is a women's association, or foundation for women unity. There are 38 associations all over Oman, and any Omani woman can be involved in these programs.

Women have worked hard for the advancement of Oman, but with the large denial that they face, chart 30 shows that women contribute less than men in the community development. 43.1% agreed and 56.9% disagreed.

Graph 31 illustrates that families ask their girls about their opinions about family decisions before making the final ones. It can be seen that 74% of their families ask their opinion before decisions are made at home as opposed to 26% disagreed.

Graph 32 indicates that men consult women before making decisions related to family issues. 74.9% of respondents agreed and 25.1% disagreed.

#### **Males' perceptions of women in the Omani Society**

Graph 33 shows that males want their wives to stay at home in order to take care of the family and their children. They have much fear about women's imbalance between work and duty toward their families; so they prefer their wives to remain at homes, with 63.50% saying "Yes" and 36.50% saying "No".

Graph 34 shows that even though males believe that females can look after themselves outside the home, which takes 77.7% from the results, they still want them to stay at home, while 22.30 said "No".

The result in graph 35 shows a contrast with the previous graph because males prefer their wives to stay at home, but also they like them to work. Sometimes husbands encourage their wives to work to enhance the family income redundant with 59% supporting working women and 41% against.

Graph 36 shows that 68.9% believe that men supportive of women in achieving their dreams, while 31.3% saying "No" males do not support women.

Male employees refuse to see women as their bosses because they think that women are sensitive and deal with work emotionally, not mentally. Graph 37 shows that 68.90% said "No" while 31.10% said "Yes".

Graph 38 shows that the Omani society believes that women cannot be a burden on it because they help to develop the society, and they are a part of the process of continuous development of the country. 73.6% do not see the woman as a liability, and 26.4% see her as a liability.

Graph 39 shows that 75.5% of the respondents said "Yes" to the question whether Omani females play important roles in the development of the economy, while 14.5% said "No" they didn't play important roles in the development of the Omani economy

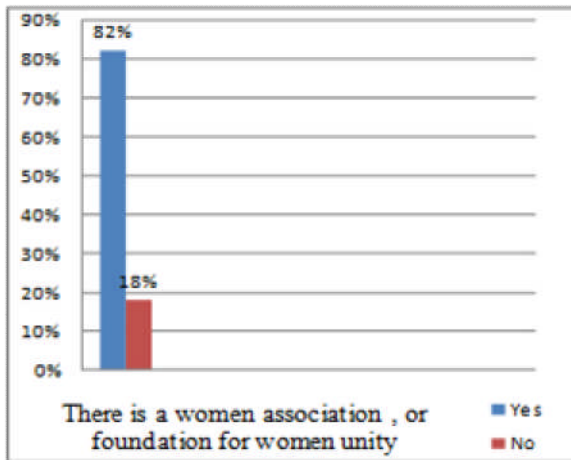
#### **SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of females' freedom in choosing their area of specialization, majors and colleges in Oman. The results have proved that, in terms of educational freedom, women have total freedom to specialize in any major. Thus, females are totally free to study in any university/college, and they are given the chance to choose the faculty of their own.

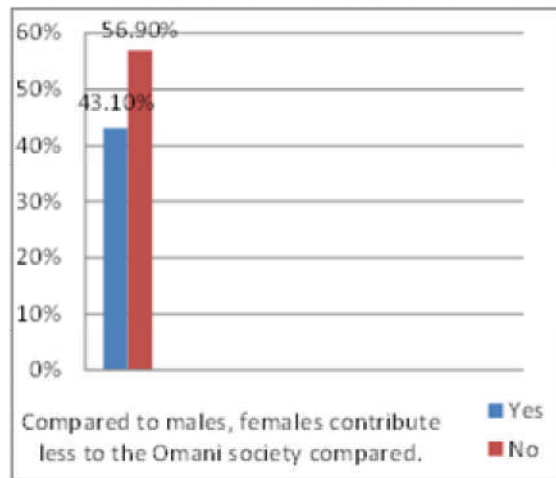
Moreover, Omani women are allowed to pursue their studies abroad and they seemed to take advantage to complete their studies when their husbands are studying abroad.

Also, women are encouraged by their husband to continue their studies after marriage. The role of women in education is not confined only to study, but to decision-making as well.

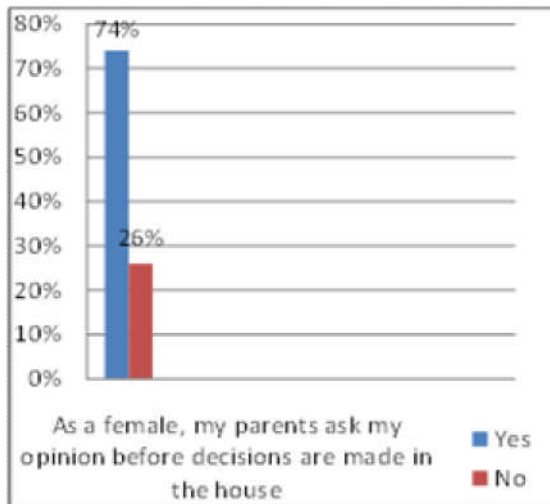
Considering equality between men and women in terms of leadership and community, it seemed to be balanced but despite the progress and development that women received, it is unfortunate seeing gender discrimination where the faculties staff like to have males as their Heads of Department compared to females. More results show inequality between men and women in Oman by seeing the majority of the university vice chancellors/colleges being males and one female if there is. Besides, it seemed women are still denied certain high positions despite their involvement



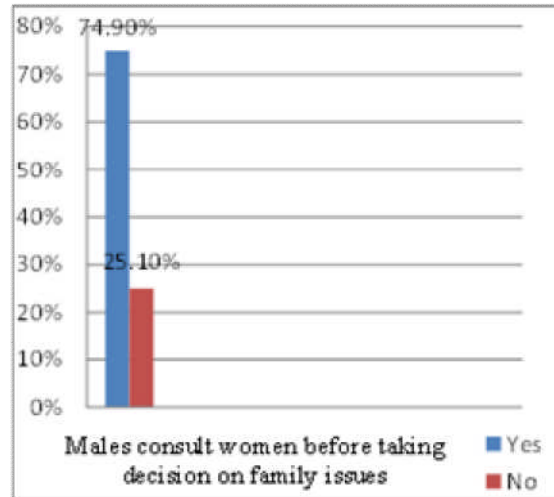
Graph 29



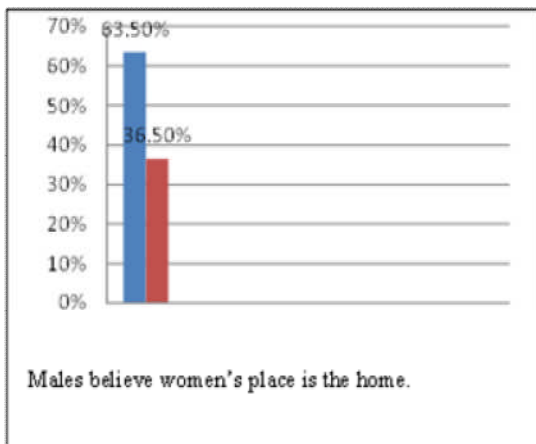
Graph 30



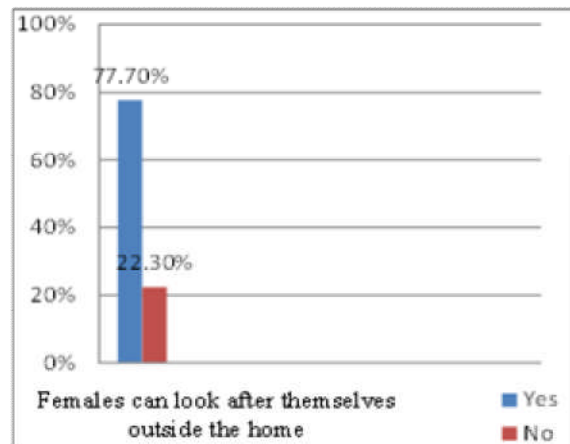
Graph 31



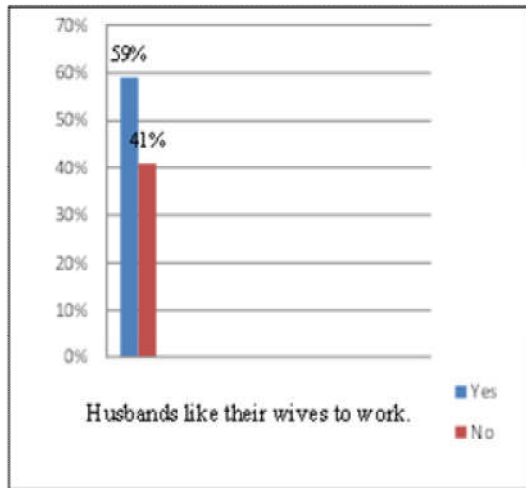
Graph 32



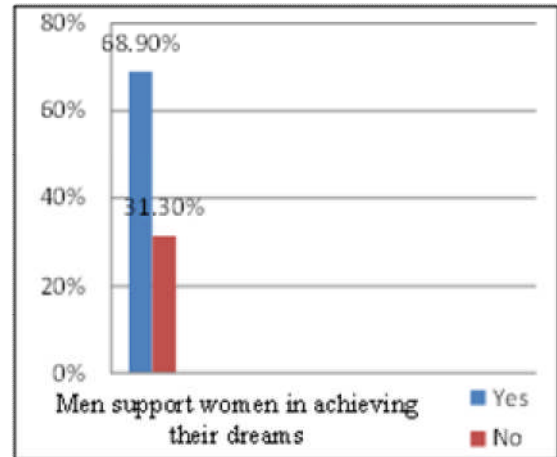
Graph 33



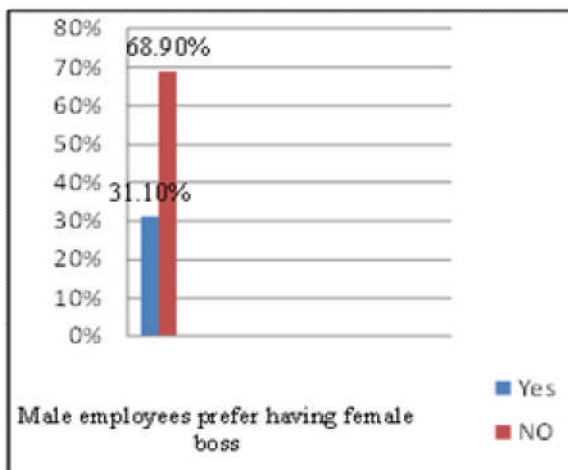
Graph 34



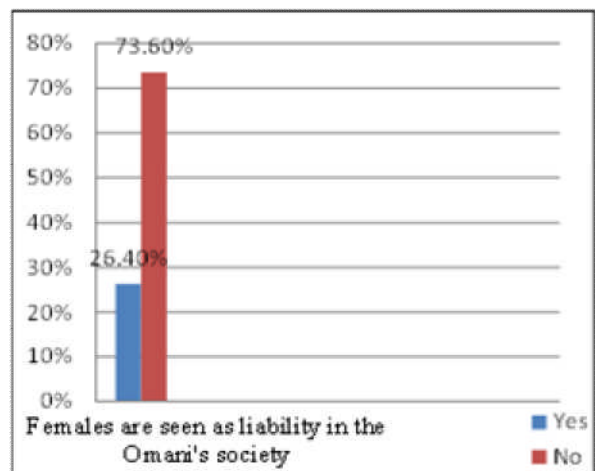
Graph 35



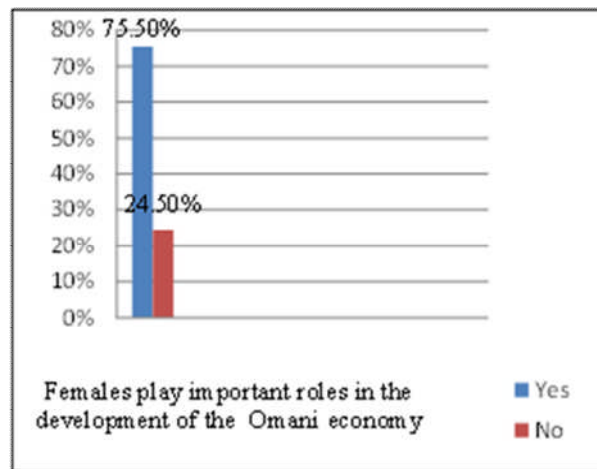
Graph 36



Graph 37



Graph 38



Graph 39

in the community decisions. Although, it is stated in the constitution the concept of equality and power sharing between citizens regardless of gender.

Further, women are believed to be good leaders and they participate effectively but they still failed in politics and to have significant impact and power in the country Council. In addition, employment discrimination is notified and promulgated in private sectors and eliminated in public sectors. Hence, both genders are respected and attained attention in Omani society with equal rights. Developing the country is shared responsibility between men and women, so women see the prime roles that they should play to progress the community as well in the family.

From men's perspectives, husbands want their wives to stay at home to take care of the family and for economy and supporting purpose; they prefer their wives to work to help them economically. Even though, it is obvious that men help women in achieving their dreams but men still do not want women to be their bosses or heads in Omani society.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study can be used by the Social Affairs Ministry to know about women's status in Oman and do the necessary procedures to improve weaknesses and strengthen the powerful point. There are suggestions that could be utilized to enhance females' educational needs and their empowerment: (a) Government should open the doors to females to enroll in other specializations and majors in which females there are fewer women. (b) Women leadership programs and empowerment should be frequently conducted and established for encouraging women to be leaders. (c) Women chancellorship, deanship and head of

departments should be encouraged and culturally supported in Higher Education. (d) The culture of not like to see females as bosses should be abolished and the government should expose women skills and instill in the minds of males that females can be good leaders in Omani community.

(e) Government should keep an eye on private and public sectors in forbidding any kind of gender discrimination in employment. (f) Government should give women the same political power as men; for example, the Country Council chairs have to be comprised equally with females and males.

#### IMPLICATION

Omani women's education was not available until 1970 and the number of schools did not exceed three primary schools where teaching 900 male students, and there was no education for women at all. After His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said became the leader, education became available to all citizens, regardless of gender. The opening of Sultan Qaboos University in 1986 was a milestone in efforts to empower women in the Sultanate of Oman, since 1970, Oman has done a lot for providing education for boys and girls bringing the number of schools of the three provided educational services for 900 students to 1020 government schools and 134 private school serving 601,461 students, half of them are female. Omani government policy has given women their rights as men, whether in education or employment according to the statute of the country. H.M Sultan Qaboos has repeated his call for Omani women citizens to do everything they can to support the development process of the country, and he often describes women as the half of the capabilities of Oman. The Sultanate of Oman is proud of being the



first Arab country to appoint a woman as ambassador abroad, and it was recently appointed two women as ministers, with a third has the same level at the head of a government body.

Today, women play an important role in the Shura Council and the State, and furthermore it has been recently appointed five women to the position of attorney general. Omani women have contributed significantly during the past ten or fifteen years, and in 1993 women accounted for 9% of the total workforce in the country and large numbers of them have took government's jobs (three-quarters of the total). Today, the increased participation of women in the public and private sectors is large, a notable increase on the numbers of women workers, and currently women constitute 36% of the total public sector employees of Oman, and most importantly, they have become involved in decision-making after holding and prestigious jobs. With the increasing of educational opportunities for women, different functions that they hold, and decision-making positions; Omani women are able to be a model for other countries. All these in turn lead to develop Oman, and allow women to participate in the development of society lead to the burden-sharing between genders. Women's freedom of choice their specialization give them a greater opportunity to create and show all their capabilities because they are convinced of what they do.

Despite women's development, traditional thoughts are still control men's thinking, for example, men do not want to see their bosses as females. Thinking man in that way affect badly in the development of the institution and society as a whole because their work in the organization will be less than if their boss is man. They have a negative idea about women's leadership and they are fanatics toward women. Then the organization will ask about the weaknesses and deficiencies in its staff, and it will find that men do not want women to be their president. So the organization will take action and expel the woman because they do not care about women; they care only about the profit and interest. Thus, we have pleased one gender and the other is exposed to gender discrimination and is contrary to what stated in the statutes of the country. Moreover, the gap between the genders will increase and this will move the country backward.

Also, 63% of men want their wives to stay at home to take care of the family instead working. Working may be a chance for women to work in order to cover expenses, and help her parents financially. Working married women assist their husbands on the expenses and burdens of everyday life, and education costs for children. The advantages of women's work can be shortened in providing the material increases the

income of the family income. Women working outside the home grown their physical and intellectual abilities, and help in the upbringing of children due to friction with the community and gained many experiences which help them to lead the rudder in case of the absence of the head of household. In addition, work contributes to improve the standard of living of the women and their families, and gives them experience, whether at work or in dealing with others. As well as the sense of independence and confidence in themselves which makes them able to face the aggression and face the self and its desires and its mistakes. What will happen if women completed their undergraduate studies but do not work?, this will affect the psychology of women and makes them frustrating.

Notice that gender discrimination reflects the families where different responsibilities, duties and rights between genders are required. Also, differentiation between genders in the workplace is considered as discrimination; a lot of jobs are limited to males, it found that society gives men more freedom and sovereignty in exchange for further restrictions and accept the rule of women by men. Discrimination limits some jobs for men leading to a monopoly, and this in turn reduces the role of women in the labor force.

Omani women do not have the same political power held by men which affects the decision-making because they are taken only from the perspective of a man although the decision-making is collective and shared responsibility between the two genders. This delays the progress of the community instead of develop it. If it is remained that women do not have the same political powers as men that will reduce women political roles among other nations.

## CONCLUSION

The Sultanate of Oman is witnessing a great advancement in women's status and their perseverance to gain equality with men. However, Women face obstacles in progress, but they still persist and strive to reach higher positions. As well as gender discrimination affects not only women but the progress of the country as a whole, so this research shows the strengths and weaknesses points of the status of women in Oman, allowing the government to take decisions and policies in order to develop this situation. This study aims to investigate the level of freedom in choosing females their majors, specialization and colleges in the Sultanate of Oman, and the extent of encouragement that married women gain by their husbands to complete their studies.

Moreover, to verify if Omani women are allowed to be leaders in the government or private sectors, and study the perceptions of Omani males toward women

leadership in the academic arena and in the society. The conclusion can be drawn based on the questionnaires that were distributed among Omani universities' students.

In terms of freedom in education, results show that women have the freedom to choose the major they want, and they are allowed to study in any college or university without any obstacles. Also, women are able to complete their studies outside the country and they are encouraged by the family and government, and they take the advantage of their husbands' presence abroad and complementing their study. This proves men support their wives to complete their studies when they marry. Women are helping to make educational decisions as the Minister of Education is a female.

Nonetheless, the equality between males and females is absent in some areas, for example, faculty want men to be as their Heads of Departments instead of females. Although that Basic Law provides the equality in rights and duties regardless gender, analyzing the results show that women suffer from discrimination in employment because most of the university vice chancellors/collages are men.

Women are considered good leaders as men, and exerting their efforts to participate actively in community development. However, women's political participation is low compared with men's participation because of inequality between men and women in political power as men dominating the Country Council. Moreover, gender discrimination is notified in the private and public sectors, but public sector has been reduced which now is not noticed anymore. Notwithstanding, both genders are respected and attain society's attention and they have equality rights, and women see the importance of participating in community development and men believed that the responsibility of the country progress is shared between both genders.

From men's perspectives toward women, husbands want to see their wives at home to do their household chores instead of working outside home, but in economic terms, they want their wives to help them in home appliances by working. Omani men help women to achieve their dreams, but they do not want a woman to be their boss or head. This paper can be used by the government in order to enhance women's status in Oman, and government has to raise the level of encouragement for women to become leaders. Government should supervise private sectors, prevent gender discrimination in jobs, and punish companies that have gender discrimination, thereby reducing the rate of discrimination. Women need to be given the same political power that is given to men to prove their political roles.

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