

Advancement of Saudi Women

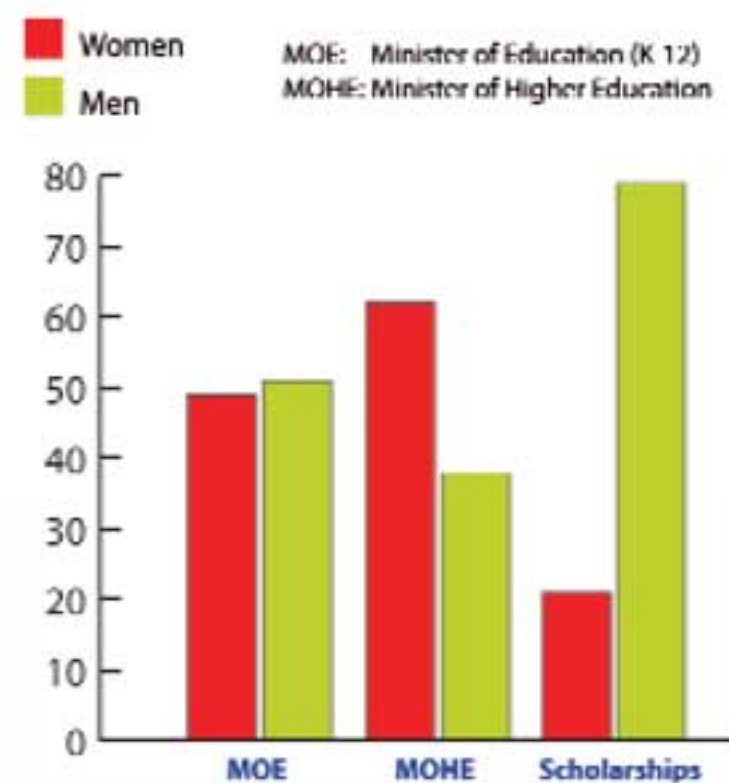
One of the most controversial issues about Saudi Arabia is the misconception many people have about Saudi women; perceived as oppressed and uneducated. In less than seven decades, Saudi women have made rapid advancement on different levels in a variety of sectors.

Women in Education

Education for girls formally began in 1960 with the opening of the General Presidency for Girls' Education with 15 schools and 5,000 students.

The latest Ministry of Education statistics show that there are now more girls' schools than boys' schools; as of 2009, there are approximately 17,000 schools for girls and 15,000 schools for boys. Currently, 49% of enrolled students in grades K-12 are female.

As for women seeking university education, Ministry of Higher Education statistics (2009) show that women make up 62% of total students enrolled in higher education. The Saudi government has not only provided women with educational opportunities within the Kingdom, but has also included women in scholarship programs to attend universities abroad. Today, 21% of scholarship students abroad are women.



Princess Noura bint Abdulrahman University

While public universities in Saudi Arabia have both male and female colleges, the Ministry of Higher Education recently decided to build its first all women university, Princess Noura bint Abdulrahman University (PNU). PNU, to be completed in 2010, will be the world's largest women only university. With the establishment of this university, comes the appointment of the first female university president, Princess Aljoharah bint Fahad Al Saud. PNU will offer a broad and diverse curriculum and will accommodate up to 40,000 students.



King lays foundation stone for women's university

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First Woman Deputy Minister

In February 2009, Saudi Arabia named its first female Deputy Minister for Education, the most senior government appointed position to be held by a woman in Saudi Arabia. Nora Al- Faiz's appointment is a significant indication of the broadening role for women in Saudi Arabia, on both the educational and political levels.

Women in the Workforce

In contrast to the education that women are receiving, their presence in the workplace is unfortunately still profoundly lacking. Less than 15% of employees in the general workforce are women. Worth noting, however, is that this number is triple what it was in 2005. The Saudi government is still encouraging women to enter the work force by opening female departments in many government agencies. The government is also encouraging the private sector to create more jobs to absorb the rising number of women graduates. Currently women are mostly employed in the educational and medical fields where they make up 48% of Saudi teachers and 40% of Saudi doctors. While women are still the minority in the workforce, it is also worth noting that approximately 35% of those employed hold managerial positions, such as principals, department heads, managers and deans of colleges.

Women and Business

The Ministry of Commerce in Saudi Arabia has opened up many commercial sectors for women to engage in. Women can now participate and hold management positions in a variety of businesses.

In 2009, Lama Al- Suleimein and Nashwa Taher, made history with an unprecedented victory of being elected to the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Dr. Nahed Taher, is the CEO of Gulf One Investment Bank. She is the first woman to be CEO of a bank in the Gulf Region.



Dr. Nahed Taher
CEO of Gulf One Investment Bank

Ms. Lubna Olayan became CEO and Chairperson of the Olayan Financing Company, and was the first woman to serve on a board of Directors for a Saudi bank. Ms. Olayan was named one of the top 100 Most Influential Women by Time magazine in 2005, and Forbes magazine in 2006.



Ms. Lubna Olayan

Women control a significant amount of business assets in Saudi Arabia, as shown below:

- 40% of family owned companies
- 30% of brokerage accounts
- 10% of real estate management in major cities
- 20% of commercial businesses
- Women, also own approximately \$12 billion in cash funds

Other important initiatives by women include:

- In 1998 The Khadijah bint Kuwailid Center at the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce was formed to train, qualify, and empower Saudi women.
- In 2008, the Luthan Hotel, the first women only hotel owned by women, opened in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The hotel is completely operated by women, from bellhops to electrical engineers.

The major developments that have been achieved by women on many levels in the last few decades will undoubtedly contribute to the future development of the country as a whole.

