

# Balancing Women's Roles at Work and at Home

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Without doubt, one of the greatest problems professional women face in most countries, the United Arab Emirates included, is that of achieving a balance between their work on one hand and the demands and requirements of their homes and their families on the other. My research and survey of others' research (1) on this problem in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) reveals that such a balance is not impossible to achieve and that, rather than taxing the energies and abilities of women, maintaining active roles within and outside of the home actually enables women to lead richer, fuller and more effective lives as professionals, wives and mothers. The management and communication skills women must develop as homemakers and mothers often prove to be indispensable in the professional world. By the same token, work experiences can enable women to be better decision-makers and problem-solvers in the home.

My investigations into the situation of working women in the UAE focused on the following questions: In general, why do women in the UAE go to work? What kinds of work do women do in the UAE? What are the overall effects on women's work of the process of development which has occurred in the UAE in recent years? What are the salient characteristics of

women as a work force in the process of development? What is the effect of the foregoing on women's education? Furthermore, is it true that a woman's work has an impact on her home and children, and is this impact positive or negative? What are the main problems that women face in the workplace? This brief report on my research findings concludes with some suggestions and recommendations which might lead to appropriate solutions to the problems and challenges women inevitably confront as they strive for a balance between their roles as workers, wives and mothers.

Among the most important results of my research are the following:

Women's work has become necessary to society in the UAE to such an extent that it is no longer reasonable to suppose that this important human force should remain excluded from the building of society.

The encouragement of women's education has led to women's entry into the labor market, and women workers have thus become a basic social reality in our time.

Women in the UAE work for a variety of reasons, the most salient of which are to help realize the material needs of their families and to achieve personal goals.

Until today, men continue to view some fields of work as unacceptable for males, and thus, they readily accept women's pursuit of these professions, such as teaching and nursing.

Women's work outside of the home does not impact negatively on their roles as mothers; rather, to the contrary, women workers are usually better mothers than those women who remain at home. In the work environment, women develop communication and conflict resolution skills which are very applicable in the home environment.

Some important studies have confirmed that women workers are better off psychologically than women who work only in the home. This reflects positively on home life because women who work are more effective in dealing with challenging family situations. Women's professional experiences enhance their self-esteem, allow the expression of strong emotions, both positive and negative; afford them an opportunity to develop their skills and realize their potential; and provide them with a sense of empowerment and self-sufficiency; all of which leads to good mental health and effective communication and interaction in all contexts.

There are still certain



Standing for the Lebanese National Anthem during the opening session of the conference on "Arab Women and Business Management" are (from left to right) Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr, Director of the IWSAW; H.E. Katchik Babikian, President, Lebanese Management Association; Mrs. Nazik Rafic Hariri, Conference Chairperson; H.E. Leila Najjar Sharaf, Keynote Speaker and former Jordanian Minister of Information; and Siham Jubayli, Conference Coordinator and LAU alumna.

negative realities which impact on women's work in the UAE, for example, the predominance of men's stereotypical ideas and attitudes concerning work. Thus, women still carry within themselves conflicts concerning their various roles. Because of the lack of public information and awareness of the challenges facing women workers, most women do not know the solutions to their work-related problems.

There are -- without doubt -- viable solutions to the problems women confront in attempting to strike a balance between their work and the demands of their families. What women must do is spend much effort on themselves, on society, and on the owners of businesses in order to reach these solutions.

#### Recommendations

To resolve the tensions between her roles as worker, as mother and as wife, the professional woman must begin with her own unexamined attitudes, acquired through the socialization process. First and foremost, she must reject the idea that her work interferes with the process of growth and development of her family and the realization of her happiness as a wife and mother. Secondly, women must strive to reconcile the demands of their work and the requirements of their home. For instance, the professional woman must organize her work schedule so that it does not conflict with the needs of her husband and children, or she should choose a type of work appropriate to her household situation, or work part-time in the home and part-time in the office.

Thirdly, the government should arrange programs of training and instruction to enable women to work more efficiently, such as training in time-management, negotiating skills, decision-making, and enhancing her ability to think practically and theoretically. Fourthly, public consciousness must be raised concerning the necessity and the importance of women's work, and likewise concerning the topic of legislation which facilitates women's entry into the work-force. Lastly, the expansion of private institutions for the care of children during their mothers' working hours is crucial if women are to continue to play an important role in the UAE's work-force and, by extension, in the development of UAE society.

*Translated from Arabic by  
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This research project relied on a group of academic studies which were recently carried out on women and work in UAE society. In addition, I have made use of governmental reports of the UAE which are to be presented at the upcoming International Women's Conference in Beijing.