



# OSRA Grant Cycle 5 Public Reports

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and Qatari Families

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## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>JUSTIFICATION .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>RESULTS/FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>IMPACTS .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>BENEFITS TO ARAB COUNTRIES IN TERMS OF ISSUES RELATED TO THE ARAB FAMILY.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>14</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The ongoing economic, social, and political changes in Kuwaiti and Qatari societies during the last four decades can be attributed to many historical, cultural, and socioeconomic factors. The discovery of oil and gas played a significant role in accelerating the process of modernization and socioeconomic development in these two countries. In recent years, Kuwaitis and Qataris alike have been going abroad especially in Western countries to further academic pursuits. The East-West contact has led to a radical change affecting not only the material and consumer aspects but also the family norms and values of Kuwaiti and Qatari societies as a whole. Arab sociologists (see Al-Nasser, 2004) assert that with the development of an industrial economy and the growth of urban cultures, the family structure and its functions in contemporary Arab societies gravitate toward an independent nuclear family form. Therefore, we need to study how these changing socioeconomic contexts shape and/or reshape spousal relations that have implications for their involvement in household labor.

Family scholars agree that wives perform most of the household labor across cultural communities. The skewed distribution of household labor between the husband and the wife continues even in contemporary Western families (Baxter et al., 2008). Wives in the Western world are now saddled with the “second shift” where employed wives come home to start the second shift to complete routine household chores (Hochschild, 2003). Empirical research on the spousal distribution of household labor in most Asian societies including the Arab world is extremely limited. Based on cultural familiarity and anecdotal observations, we speculated that sex-linked distribution of household labor would be common in traditional Asian, especially Arab families. These observations and contemplations have prompted us to explore the nature of the distribution of household labor in contemporary Arab societies that are witnessing a rapid increase in women’s employment, modernization, and economic development. The core notion underlying the current study is to move away from the “wife-centric household chores” paradigm to the “husband’s involvement in household chores” model that recognizes the importance of husbands’ participation in household labor. It is essential to explore the spousal distribution of household labor in understudied societies as husbands’ involvement in household labor has positive implications for wives’ mental health, marital relationships, and children’s academic growth and social adjustments (Roopnarine & Yildirim, 2019; Tornello, 2020). In particular, the paucity of data prompted us to build a coalition of an international research team to design this new study.

## OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE

The study examined the following research questions:

1. Do husbands and wives differ in their reports of time spent in six major domains of household labor (doing housework, preparing meals, shopping, doing laundry, tracking expenses, and maintenance) in Kuwaiti and Qatari families?

2. Do sociodemographic (age, education, income, paid assistance, family size, length of the marriage, paid assistance), support (familial, extended, extra-familial, and institutional), marital satisfaction, and personal gender role belief variables influence husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor?

Gulf societies such as Qatar and Kuwait have been undergoing rapid urbanization and educational and technological advancement since the 1970s. These changes have significant implications for changes in family values, interactions, and relationships. Yet scientific research on family relations such as the spousal division of household labor in these two societies is noticeably limited. The lack of empirical research has prompted us to employ the bioecological system theory as a conceptual framework to examine the levels of husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor and the influence of demographic and sex role belief factors on their involvement in household labor in the family. The undertaking and the completion of this project signify several important considerations. The project has developed much-needed pioneer empirical data on family cohesion and resilience in understudied Arab communities. The base-level data are expected to stimulate scholarly interest in conducting future scientific research on Arab families. Of equal importance, the findings from this project inform educators and policymakers to institute relevant tools and resources for Arab husbands and wives to strike a complementary or egalitarian sex role balance across work and family life. By forming an international research collaborative team, this project endeavor enhances DIFI's efforts of building human resource capacities and research skills to groom Arab scholars to take leading scholarly roles in global research forums.

## JUSTIFICATION

A primary context for conducting this research was to establish an empirical data set on family relations and cohesion as measured through the spousal distribution of household labor in Qatari and Kuwaiti societies. It was because there is hardly such data available from these two Gulf societies. Another rationale for conducting this research was to forge an international research coalition to strengthen human research capacity among the research personnel. Recruiting and training university students in Qatar and Kuwait was a significant example of such a feat. The achievement of these goals justifies the implementation of this project.

Both Kuwait and Qatar are high-income societies and about 98% of the people are employed in the service and industrial sectors. Other socioeconomic indices such as low infant mortality rate, high life expectancy, and access to modern health care and educational opportunities have a transformative impact on family functions and relations in these two nations. At the same time, the practice of patriarchy and sometimes an inaccurate interpretation of Islamic tenets on sex roles create a confusing narrative on the distribution of household labor between husbands and wives in the family. Therefore, many Arab women remain conflicted about their independent roles and identities in the labor market as they prioritize their involvement in

family roles over education and paid work (Al-Kubaisi, 2017; Al-Naser, 2004; Hossain, Al-Nasser, Al-Kubaisi, & Shaukat, 2023; James-Hawkins et al., 2017; Rajakumar, et al., 2017). Therefore, this study was timely as it addressed one of the key family roles the husband and the wife play within a complex mix of traditional values, transitional family patterns, and modernization of Kuwait and Qatar.

In the present study, research concepts and models assessed the amount of hours husbands and wives spend on traditional household chores and the variables that predicted husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor. Another unique aspect of the research inquiry was to chronicle respondents' personal views toward the division of household labor between husbands and wives. This objective was unique because early research on household labor hardly examined the link between personal beliefs and the spousal distribution of household labor. An extensive literature review convinced us that the current study was the first scientific research attempt to collect empirical data on the spousal distribution of household labor in these two Gulf nations. The composition of the research team and the research topic itself vouch for the transdisciplinary aspect of this research. This transdisciplinary approach to research on household labor is consistent with what contemporary sociologists, social workers, psychologists, and family and education scholars have been working together to address family issues.

## METHODOLOGY

We were interested in documenting the distribution pattern of household labor between husbands and wives and the factors that predicted their involvement in household labor, and therefore, we primarily used a quantitative approach to collect and analyze the data to address the research questions. Accordingly, we employed parametric statistical tests such as multivariate analysis of variance and regression analyses to the research hypotheses.

Using non-random sampling techniques, we interviewed husbands and wives from 125 Kuwaiti and 137 Qatari families to collect the data. According to Cohen's (1988)  $f^2$  with a medium effect size (.15) and a power of .95, this was a large enough sample for the study. The participant families were identified through the local charity and/or community centers, religious and social organizations, cultural centers, personal contacts, and word of mouth. We recruited and trained four project assistants in Qatar and three projects in Kuwait to interview the families. We had to maintain health safety protocols as the home visits and data collection were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost 95% of the contacted families agreed to participate. We employed the following instruments to collect the data: (1) Demographic Sheet (12 items); (2) Division of Household Labor Questionnaire (19 items); (3) Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (3 items); (4) Social Support Questionnaire (15 items); and (8) Personal Beliefs about Gender Roles Questionnaire (8 items and 5 narrative questions). The internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha) of the measured variables were high (.75 and higher).

## RESULTS/FINDINGS

The primary objectives of this project were to examine the distribution of household labor between husbands and wives and the factors that predicted their involvement in household labor in Qatari and Kuwaiti families. Up to this point, we conducted three sets of data analysis, and the summary findings are presented below.

For the first analysis, we conducted 2x2x6 (Sex-of-Spouse X Countries X 6 areas of measured variables: housework, meal preparation, shopping for groceries, laundry, keeping track of expenses, and maintenance) multivariate analyses of variance to examine whether participants' involvement in 6 areas of household labor varied as a function of sex-of-spouse and country of residence. Results showed significant main effects for sex-of-spouse [ $F(6,377) = 27.68, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31$ ] and country [ $F(6,377) = 11.60, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$ ], and the significant sex-of-spouse and country interaction effect [ $F(6,377) = 10.99, p = .001, \eta^2 = .15$ ] suggesting husbands and wives in Qatar and Kuwait differed significantly in the amount of time they spent in six domains of household labor. Whereas Kuwaiti and Qatari wives spent more time on housework, meal preparation, laundry, and shopping for groceries, husbands spent more time on maintenance. Husbands and wives showed similar involvement in tracking household expenses in both countries. The findings revealed a sex-linked skewed distribution of household labor that is also typically observed in other Western and non-Western societies. Compared to Kuwaiti wives, Qatari wives spent more time in maintenance. Both the husband and the wife spent the most amount of time shopping for groceries and other household items. We stipulate economic solvency, evolving modern way of life, and easy access to goods and services encourage men and women in these two Arab countries to spend more time in shopping activities. Broadly speaking, husbands' involvement in traditional housework including preparing meals and doing laundry is very minimal in both societies and this could be perhaps due to the availability of maid services and strong belief in a patriarchal structure. Future research can expand on these aspects. The current data suggest husbands and wives in both countries spent the least amount of time in keeping track of household expenses. This could reflect the fact that Qatar and Kuwait are high-income societies, and therefore, most families do not need to feel stressed about household expenses.

In the second set of analysis, standardized coefficients showed education ( $\beta=.28$ ) and sex-role belief ( $\beta=.53$ ) positively influenced Kuwaiti husbands' involvement in housework, work hours ( $\beta=.34$ ) positively influenced time spent shopping, and family size ( $\beta=.40$ ) positively influenced time spent on maintenance. For Kuwaiti wives, education ( $\beta=.28$ ) and income ( $\beta=.29$ ) positively predicted their involvement in housework, and age ( $\beta=.49$ ) and sex-role belief ( $\beta=.33$ ) positively influenced time spent in keeping track of bills. In Qatar, marital satisfaction ( $\beta=-.24$ ) negatively but institutional support ( $\beta=.25$ ) and sex-role belief ( $\beta=.62$ ) positively influenced husbands' time spent on housework. Education ( $\beta=.39$ ) predicted time spent in shopping, sex-role belief ( $\beta=.41$ ) positively influenced time spent in keeping track of bills, and work hours ( $\beta=.28$ ), income ( $\beta=-.24$ ), and family support ( $\beta=.33$ ) positively influenced time spent in maintenance.



For Qatari wives, work hours negatively influenced their involvement in meal preparation ( $\beta=-.41$ ), marital satisfaction ( $\beta=.33$ ) and institutional support ( $\beta=.26$ ) positively influenced time spent in shopping, and age ( $\beta=.76$ ) positively, and income ( $\beta=-.34$ ) and institutional support ( $\beta=-.31$ ) negatively influenced their involvement in maintenance. Highlights of the findings suggest more educated Kuwaiti husbands and wives participated more in housework. Also, younger wives with constructive sex role beliefs showed higher interest in keeping track of family financial health. Whereas challenges in marital relationships discouraged Qatari husbands' involvement in housework, institutional support and constructive sex role beliefs aided them in participating more in housework. For Qatari wives, marital satisfaction engaged them in shopping for groceries and a busy work schedule kept them away from preparing and cooking meals. A high income discourages both the husband and wife from engaging in maintenance tasks in Qatari families as these tasks can be done by hired professionals. Findings from regression analyses underscore the importance of SES (e.g., education, age, work hours, income), relationships (e.g., family and institutional support), and evolving sex role belief factors for husbands and wives to get involved in household labor in contemporary Gulf societies.

The third set of data analysis was conducted to explore the link between sex-role belief and husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor in the family. The findings revealed husbands and wives differed significantly in their sex-role beliefs in both countries. Compared to husbands, wives showed stronger personal and cultural sex-role beliefs but similar religious beliefs toward the spousal distribution of household labor in Kuwait. In Qatar, wives showed higher personal, cultural, and religious sex-role beliefs than husbands did. Regression analyses showed personal, cultural, and religious belief structures did not uniformly influence husbands' and wives' involvement in housework, meal preparation, shopping, laundry, keeping track of expenses, and maintenance in both countries. Broadly speaking, personal beliefs positively but religious or cultural beliefs negatively influenced husbands' and wives' involvement in various household labor.

The research project also attempted to collect a small amount of qualitative information from research participants. The qualitative section included two general questions about **personal narratives about involvement in household labor** and three general questions about **global views toward gender roles**. A quick perusal of the responses showed personal choices and awareness are important considerations for participating in household labor. Respondents also perceived that husbands should participate more in doing household chores. However, the responses were not as in-depth as we expected. We have not worked on this data yet due to a lack of resources (personnel and money). We hope to code and analyze the responses in the future.

In sum, we observed a skewed spousal distribution of household labor both in Qatar and Kuwait, which affirmed the existing patriarchal paradigm of traditional sex roles underscoring wives' foremost contributions to household labor and caregiving in the family. Among others, education, income, age, work hours, institutional and family support, and marital satisfaction

played a significant role in wives' and husbands' involvement in household labor. Furthermore, changing personal beliefs and evolving cultural practices significantly influenced husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor. There is an intuition that husbands should participate more in household labor echoing the Islamic value of complimentary spousal roles and practices in the family.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the current findings, our recommendations focus on two areas as follows:

- **Program and Policy Development**
  - Strengthen educational programs and opportunities for women
  - Support national dialogues and awareness activities to deconstruct patriarchal sex roles
  - Institute flexible work schedules and incentivize parental leaves
  - Reinforce behavioral science curricula by incorporating materials related to parent education and Islamic philosophy on engaged and complimentary parenting styles
    - At the undergraduate level, introduce a required general education course focusing on marriage, divorce, and family relations
    - Other elective courses focusing on topics such as family life, family sociology, parenting, and child development can be developed
  - Sponsor more scholarly activities on cohesive and healthy family development
  
- **Future Research (can employ)**
  - Mixed methodologies so that the qualitative narratives extract the context of unique circumstances regarding the spousal distribution of household labor
  - Large Pan-Arabian samples for generalization
  - Random samples so that the findings can be generalized across Gulf societies
  - Procedures to tease out the influence of hired maids in determining husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor
  - DIFI can use the findings from the current study as baseline data to sponsor future empirical research projects on family relations in Gulf societies

## IMPACTS

The study is unique and pioneering in Kuwaiti and Qatari family contexts and the findings make significant contributions to the field of social and behavioral sciences. Behavioral research on Gulf families is limited and the current findings strengthen the psychological and sociological literature. With reference to the sociocultural contexts of Kuwaiti and Qatari families, the findings have policy impacts and implications in the following major impact areas:

First, the increasing modernization of Arab countries has both short- and long-term economic, cultural, and social impacts on Kuwaiti and Qatari societies. We speculate the globalized family life influences Arabs to slowly move away from their collective and interconnected ecology and inspect Western ideals of individualized growth and family relations. The current findings help us understand the interaction dynamics and roles of husbands and wives in family chores in contemporary Gulf families. The sex-linked spousal distribution of household labor indicates family roles in Arab societies are still embedded within a strong cultural heritage of patriarchy. Given the current technological changes, evolving mercantile and corporate culture, and growing economic opportunities, especially for women, we need to focus on how employed Arab husbands and wives negotiate their involvement in family chores. Relevant government sectors and agencies may want to explore the links between husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor and their changing cultural-ecological and economic contexts of livelihood so that national family policies (e.g., paternal leave, flexible work hours) can be developed to support working husbands and wives in their family involvement.

Second, the findings have the potential to encourage behavioral science students and aspiring scholars to engage in empirical family research and professional development activities in Kuwait and Qatar. This international cooperative research project may act as the springboard for the Kuwaiti and Qatari academic institutions to foster international teaching and research collaboration.

Third, this is the first field-based research study to address how contextual factors such as support variables, socioeconomic provisions, and personal attitudes affect husbands' involvement in traditional household labor in two Gulf countries. Based on the current findings, family programs and policies need to focus on self-awareness about egalitarian sex roles, women's education, work hours, and the young generation/parents for developing a healthy family life. Starting with this pioneering research, there is a potential for Kuwaiti and Qatari scholars to assume regional and international academic leadership in researching family relations within the context of egalitarian sex roles.

## **BENEFITS TO ARAB COUNTRIES IN TERMS OF ISSUES RELATED TO THE ARAB FAMILY**

This project was aligned with DIFI's focus on family cohesion which also traverses the themes of marriage, divorce, and family well-being and protection in the Arab world. The DIFI's role in advancing Arab nations' policies and efforts to build and support resilient families through research, knowledge, technology, and education. In view of this vision, our research and findings have implications for understanding family relations and developing family policies that ensure family well-being in Arab families including expatriates. Modernization influences family patterns that have always been an indicator of social changes in the contemporary Arab world. For example, Kuwait witnessed these changes resulting in two kinds of family patterns in the

country: nuclear (urbanized) and extended (tribal–traditional). Because the petroleum revenues contributed to an increased standard of living, access to education, and economic development, some Kuwaiti families that had followed the extended family pattern began to follow the nuclear form of living arrangement. Many newly married couples separated themselves from their parents and the joint family structure and started living on their own. The newly evolved Kuwaiti family structure is termed as the transitional form because it resembles the nuclear family structure yet it behaves like the extended family in its functions (Al-Nasser, 2004).

The remarkable economic, social, and political changes have been accelerating the process of modernization and socioeconomic development in Qatari, Kuwaiti, and other Gulf societies for decades. In recent years, young Arabs have been going abroad especially in Western countries to further professional and academic pursuits. The East-West contact has led to a profound change affecting not only the material and consumer aspects but also the family norms and values of many Arab families. Considering the continual development of an industrial economy and the growth of urban cultures, the family structure and its functions in Arab societies will gravitate toward an independent nuclear family form (Al-Nasser, 2004). These observations and assertions intersect with the current findings that we need to understand family relations and spousal interactions in contemporary Arab families at a much deeper level. The limitation of the current finding also reminds us of the importance of studying family relations and child development in other Arab families facing economic hardships and challenging historical events (e.g., migration). Likewise, the current study benefits Arab scholars as they are able to work and form an international research forum. There is a potential this international research collaboration will continue to explore avenues for conducting future research.

## CONCLUSIONS

The objectives of the current study were to examine the distribution of household labor between husbands and wives and the influence of selected SES and sex role beliefs on their involvement in Qatari and Kuwaiti families. The findings are important for understanding the levels of husbands' and wives' roles in household labor and how SES and personal, cultural, and religious belief structures influence husbands' and wives' involvement in various domains of unpaid household labor in contemporary Arab families. The distribution of household labor between the husband and the wife remained highly skewed and the wife spent more time in household labor (except maintenance) than her counterpart. Age, education, work hours, marital satisfaction, family and institutional support, and sex role beliefs played a vital role in influencing their involvement. Whereas personal and cultural factors remain significant predictors of how much husbands and wives participate in household labor, religious factor appears to have a less important influence on them. The negative relationship between cultural belief and household labor implies that the more the husbands challenge the traditional sex roles the more they are willing to take part in household labor. The current findings prompt us to consider the following points:

- Husbands need to make conscious efforts to get more involved in household labor which may help reduce the skewed distribution of household labor in both Kuwait and Qatar
- Wives' (women's) education and employment may act as change agents to support them in finding a work-life balance. In turn, this will encourage husbands to assume more household responsibilities
- Husbands and wives need to fully appreciate the Islamic principles of spousal complementarity in family roles (as opposed to following culturally molded patriarchal or hegemonic sex roles in the family)
- Personal worldview and cultural factors significantly influence how husbands and wives are involved in household labor

The current findings should be interpreted with several caveats. We collected data during the COVID-19 pandemic and interviewers faced restricted access to family visits. We used convenience sampling techniques and therefore, the generalizability of the findings across Gulf families is limited. These limitations aside, the findings enrich the field of behavioral sciences by generating new information about the levels of husbands' and wives' participation in household labor and the links between husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor and their changing cultural-ecological contexts of livelihood in understudied Arab families.

Data from future research can be helpful in explaining the influence of religious beliefs as well as other ecological factors on husbands' and wives' involvement in household labor in the family. We argue that the intersection of Islamic values of spousal complementarity and reverence, the cultural practice of male authority and age hierarchy, modernization, and economic development defines the structure of sex roles in Gulf societies. The practice of patriarchy vis-à-vis evolving norms of women's education and employment in the paid sectors creates a complex social and family order to understand the distribution of household labor in contemporary Gulf societies.

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