

Women in OIC Countries: State of Participation, Freedom and Supportive Legislation

Abstract

This study discusses the current state of women rights and their socioeconomic participation in Muslim majority countries. The study also sheds light on effective legislation for promoting gender equality. Secondly, the paper also presents the Islamic perspective on gender equality and difference in gender roles in Islamic social framework. The paper explicates Islamic teachings, recommended social attitudes and the rationale for having certain prescribed differences in assigning roles to both the genders in the Islamic institution of family. It is discovered that Muslim majority countries have made significant progress in raising school enrollment for females and female labour force participation. Quite a few Muslim majority countries have also embarked on effective legislation to provide equal civil rights to women at work and to ease their engagement in social roles by providing accommodating legislation. The paper highlights regional differences and traces the reasons for the differences through historical experiences, economic and political structures and the cultural norms of the Muslim societies.

Keywords *Women in Islam, Feminism, Women Empowerment, Islamic Social*

1. Introduction

The desire for equality with recognition of difference is a basic dilemma in the discussion on Islam and rights of women¹. Islam grants equal rights to all humans in almost all matters irrespective of gender. On the other hand, Islam identifies certain natural differences which entail that there can be effective institutionalization of the family system by having specialization of roles. It does not mean that the roles remain completely non-overlapping. Cultural practices, norms and socioeconomic context of one period when economic development was standing at a particular stage should not to be mixed up with the divine guidance on the roles and responsibilities of both genders in the Islamic texts.

It is often alleged that norms in Muslim communities do not ensure that women are empowered and this may have negative consequences on overall development of the Muslim societies². Nonetheless, economic well-being alone might be insufficient to achieve gender equality. For ensuring gender

¹ Hammami, Rema. "Gender Equality and Muslim Women: Negotiating Expanded Rights in Muslim Majority and Immigrant Contexts." *Development and Equity*, BRILL (2014), pp. 118 – 131.

² Adida, Claire L., David Laitin, and Marie-Anne Valfort. "Gender, Economic Development and Islam: A Perspective from France." Institute for the Study of Labor. Discussion Papers, No. 6421 (2012), pp. 1 – 49.

equality, participation in the political structures is also important³. As per some empirical research, institutional quality, education and penetration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) better explain the effect on development than religion⁴.

Furthermore, Muslim countries are not a homogeneous group. Muslim countries show tremendous political, economic and cultural heterogeneity. It is not entirely true that Muslim women in Muslim majority communities are challenged by religious norms. Rather, women embrace, preach and lead Islamic discourses and movements in countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia.

Muslim scholars argue that Islam provides generous rights to women in many matters and Muslim societies do not need to look beyond their faith towards providing women human, civil and socioeconomic freedoms⁵. Distinctions between religion and culture can provide a flexible basis of legal and cultural changes in the Muslim society⁶.

³ Spierings, Niels, Jeroen Smits, and Mieke Verloo. "On the Compatibility of Islam and Gender Equality." *Social Indicators Research*, 90 (3), (2009), pp. 503 – 522.

⁴ Kucuk, Nezahat. "Gender Inequality in the MENA: Myths versus Facts." *Topics in Middle Eastern and North African Economies*, 15(2), (2013), pp. 71 – 104.

⁵ Hashim, Iman. "Reconciling Islam and Feminism." In *Gender & Development* 7, No. 1 (1999), pp. 7 – 14.

⁶ Warren, Christie S. "Lifting the Veil: Women and Islamic law." In *Cardozo JL & Gender*, 15(1), (2008), pp. 33 – 65.

In this backdrop, this paper looks into the above-mentioned issues by discussing the current state of women rights and their socioeconomic participation in Muslim majority countries. The paper also sheds light on effective legislation for promoting gender equality. Secondly, the paper also presents the Islamic perspective on the issue of gender equality and difference in gender roles. It explains the Islamic teachings, recommended social attitudes and the rationale for having certain prescribed differences in assigning roles to both the genders in the Islamic institution of family.

2. Current State of Socioeconomic Participation of Women

This section looks at the current state of women rights and their socioeconomic participation in Muslim majority countries. In Table 1, it can be observed that only in Chad, the net enrollment for females in primary education falls below the average by 10%. In other OIC countries, the difference is lower whereas, it is also negative in some cases as well. This shows that as per the recent statistics, the access to basic education has been made fairly equally available to both males and females as compared to the past.

On the labor force participation (LFP), it is interesting to see that women in African Muslim majority countries participate actively in the labor force and in relatively much better proportions. Most of the Arab World countries fall

below the median on this rank.

Strikingly, almost half of the OIC countries rank better than average for the middle-income countries on this indicator. It implies that half of the Muslim majority countries in the sample outperform the middle-income countries on this indicator. It suffices to say that despite the room for improvement on this indicator, Muslim countries cannot be all clubbed together as having very low and insignificant female labor force participation.

Table 1: Education and Economic Participation of Women

Country	Primary Enrollment %	Female Primary Enrollment %	Female LFP
Albania	95.92	95.25	40.28
Algeria	98.81	96.43	16.92
Azerbaijan	94.26	92.96	61.98
Bahrain	98.00	98.48	38.89
Bangladesh	94.93	99.98	43.19
Benin	95.87	88.20	69.98
Bosnia	N/A	N/A	34.39
Brunei	N/A	N/A	50.77
Burkina Faso	69.66	67.86	76.59
Cameroon	95.11	90.60	71.05
Chad	79.12	68.70	64.00
Comoros	81.30	79.88	35.51
Cote d'Ivoire	79.25	74.71	52.46
Djibouti	57.37	53.98	36.53
Egypt	98.94	99.36	22.93
Gambia, The	75.97	79.63	72.21
Guinea	78.02	72.24	79.45
Guinea-Bissau	69.23	67.55	67.34
Guyana	85.03	83.57	41.85
Indonesia	90.57	90.07	50.93
Iran	99.25	99.83	16.24
Iraq	92.31	86.59	15.20
Jordan	89.32	89.18	14.39
Kazakhstan	99.74	99.92	66.23
Kuwait	98.70	99.33	48.07
Kyrgyz Republic	97.93	97.44	49.56
Lebanon	83.52	80.80	23.64
Libya	N/A	N/A	27.83
Malaysia	98.09	98.36	49.31
Maldives	94.84	96.00	57.57
Mali	60.73	57.27	50.29
Mauritania	79.90	81.71	29.19
Morocco	98.92	98.81	25.46
Mozambique	89.13	86.83	82.34
Niger	63.28	58.31	40.30
Nigeria	65.67	59.97	48.47
Oman	98.04	98.01	30.11
Pakistan	73.85	67.88	24.57
Qatar	96.57	97.25	53.30
Saudi Arabia	97.69	98.46	20.06
Senegal	72.99	76.38	45.16
Sierra Leone	99.38	99.32	65.07

Somalia	N/A	N/A	33.28
Sudan	54.75	56.06	24.32
Suriname	94.66	95.12	40.52
Syria	70.87	70.14	12.28
Tajikistan	98.89	99.62	59.55
Togo	97.46	89.79	81.05
Tunisia	99.61	98.26	25.12
Turkey	94.24	93.80	30.36
Turkmenistan	N/A	N/A	47.33
Uganda	93.80	95.27	82.33
UAE	95.96	95.71	41.81
Uzbekistan	97.13	96.02	48.44
W. B. & Gaza	92.25	92.70	18.09
Yemen	85.33	78.25	26.01
Low income	80.95	78.60	70.01
Middle income	92.35	91.75	46.96

Source: World Development Indicators 2016

Table 2 presents the proportion of seats in the parliament held by women in OIC countries. African Muslim majority countries have much better standing in terms of having a greater proportion of women holding seats in the parliament. As per expectations, Muslim majority countries in the Arab World have a lower proportion of women holding seats in the parliament. The average for Muslim countries is lower than the low income, high income and middle-income countries. Nonetheless, there are 16 out of 52 countries in the sample whose proportion of women parliamentarians exceeds the average of middle-income countries. Thus, one-third of the Muslim majority countries outperform middle-income countries on this indicator.

Table 2: Parliamentary Seats Held by Women

Country	Seats Held by Women in Parliament (%)	Country	Seats Held by Women in Parliament (%)
Afghanistan	27.70	Malaysia	10.40
Albania	20.70	Maldives	5.90
Algeria	31.60	Mali	8.80
Azerbaijan	16.90	Mauritania	25.20
Bahrain	7.50	Morocco	17.00
Bangladesh	20.00	Mozambique	39.60
Benin	7.20	Niger	13.30
Bosnia	21.40	Nigeria	5.60
Burkina Faso	9.40	Oman	1.20
Chad	14.90	Pakistan	20.60

Comoros	3.00	Qatar	0.00
Cote d'Ivoire	9.20	Saudi Arabia	19.90
Djibouti	12.70	Senegal	42.70
Egypt	14.90	Sierra Leone	12.40
Gambia	9.40	Somalia	13.80
Guinea	21.90	Sudan	30.50
Guinea-Bissau	13.70	Suriname	25.50
Guyana	30.40	Syria	12.40
Indonesia	17.10	Tajikistan	19.00
Iran	3.10	Togo	17.60
Iraq	26.50	Turkey	14.90
Jordan	12.00	Turkmenistan	25.80
Kazakhstan	26.20	Uganda	35.00
Kuwait	1.50	UAE	22.50
Kyrgyz Republic	19.20	Uzbekistan	16.00
Lebanon	3.10	Low income	24.19
Libya	16.00	Middle income	20.70

Source: World Development Indicators 2016

3. Effective Legislation for Gender Equality

On the legal front, there is a need for effective legislation and its effective execution to legislatively safeguard the rights of women in Muslim majority countries. Table 3 shows that in 36 countries, there is yet to be a legislation for ensuring equal remuneration, while in 17 Muslim majority countries, such legislation has been made. In 37 countries, there is yet to be legislation for ensuring non-discrimination in hiring, while in 16 Muslim majority countries, such legislation has been made. Except in Suriname, there has been legislation to provide maternity leave. Such legislation can ensure long-term stay in labor force as well as re-entry into the labor force. In 14 countries, there is yet to be legislation for ensuring no child marriage, while in 38 Muslim majority countries, such legislation has been made. Finally, in half of the OIC countries in the sample, there is yet to be legislation on banning domestic violence.

Having said that, doing such legislation is not impeded by Islam. Rather, Islamic principles are favorable to equal remuneration to same quantity and quality of work, non-discrimination in hiring and providing personal and social freedoms to women.

Table 3: Legislation for Gender Equality in OIC Countries

Country	Equal Remuneration	Nondiscrimination in Hiring	Maternity Leave	No Child Marriage	No Domestic
Afghanistan	No	No	Yes	No	No
Albania	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Algeria	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Azerbaijan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bahrain	No	No	Yes	No	No
Bangladesh	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Benin	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bosnia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brunei	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Burkina Faso	No	No	Yes	No	No
Chad	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Comoros	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Cote d'Ivoire	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Djibouti	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Egypt	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Gambia	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Guinea	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Guinea-Bissau	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Guyana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Indonesia	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Iran	No	No	Yes	No	No
Iraq	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Jordan	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kazakhstan	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kuwait	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Kyrgyz Republic	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lebanon	No	No	Yes	N/A	Yes
Libya	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Malaysia	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maldives	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Country	Equal Remuneration	Nondiscrimination in Hiring	Maternity Leave	No Child Marriage	No Domestic Violence
Mali	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Mauritania	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Morocco	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Mozambique	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Niger	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Nigeria	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oman	No	No	Yes	No	No
Pakistan	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Qatar	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Saudi Arabia	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Senegal	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sierra Leone	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Somalia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Sudan	No	No	Yes	No	No
Suriname	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Syria	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Tajikistan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Togo	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Turkey	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Turkmenistan	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Uganda	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
UAE	No	No	Yes	No	No
Uzbekistan	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
W.B and Gaza	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Yemen	No	No	Yes	Yes	No

Source: World Development Indicators 2016

Next, an analysis of social attitudes towards women is provided across a broad cross section of 64 countries. The survey respondents include Muslims as well as non-Muslims. The data is taken from the World Values Survey for sixth wave (2010-14). Table 4 summarizes the findings.

Since Islamic social norms make it obligatory for males as fathers and husbands to earn living for the family and to spend on family, Muslims tend to generally opine that when jobs are limited, men must have more right to a job than women. Nonetheless, around 40% of the Muslims disagree with this view. More importantly, the response has to be understood in the light of the directive that men are made exclusively accountable for earning income for their families and to spend on their families as a religious responsibility. Hence, it is due to this reason that 16% of the Muslims might feel that

university education is more important for a boy than a girl. However, 84% of the Muslim respondents opine otherwise even to this statement. For instance, in a country like Pakistan, subsidised education in engineering and medical schools is provided in public universities. If the person receiving that education does not become part of the labour force, then it is the waste of public resources. Thus, these views do not necessarily emanate from any gender biases, but due to the effective and immediate outcomes people foresee in their societies of such a change in gender roles. Nonetheless, 84% of the Muslim respondents like the majority of non-Muslim respondents feel that higher studies at the university level are equally important for a boy and a girl.

Furthermore, while about 40% of the Muslims may opine that wife earning more than the husband might cause problems, 60% of the Muslims do not feel that it is a cause of concern. To understand this result, it must be kept in mind that the historical participation of women in labor force in the last one century in Muslim societies has been on the lower side due to the agrarian structure of economies and manual nature of labour requiring physical exertion. Thus, social attitudes change gradually. This figure might be very much the same in non-Muslim societies of the West before and during the industrial revolution. As a matter of fact, the property and voting rights to women in Western societies is a rather recent phenomenon as will be discussed in the next section.

More than half of the Muslim and non-Muslim respondents opine that having

a job makes a woman an independent person in the best possible way. Note again that people who disagree with this statement might do it because of not necessarily having an inferior opinion about women, but for the want of more social freedoms and dignity for women to perform their role in society. This role does not necessarily have to be serving customers at restaurants, hotels, airlines, shopping malls, banks, night clubs and casinos. Also, this role does not have to be using the physical appearance to attract customers or entertain men for their lavish spending. Performing these roles at lower wages than men, while not being able to serve one's children and spouse might not be perceived as the best way to be an independent person. After all, decent work opportunities which allow women to have freedom to have a private space and fulfill their role in family to raise and educate children might be more desirable as perceived by the Muslim respondents than having an outright freedom to provide all kinds of labour with binding restrictions at a wage lower than men in general.

Furthermore, the social attitude towards working mothers is similar among Muslims and non-Muslims. Here, the Muslim respondents feel more strongly about the children suffering since it is not just the physical nourishment, but moral and spiritual upbringing which is important to inculcate values which make children to become better human beings. Daycare, packaged infant milk and processed food for children might fulfill the need for physical nourishment partially and inorganically. However, the function of character building requires strong bonding and attachment.

On the other hand, Muslims in general tend to opine that men are better political leaders and business executives than women. This response has to do with experience and economic structure than with any bias. As a matter of fact, there have been Muslim female heads of state in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Singapore, Turkey and Indonesia. Even United States of America is yet to elect a female as president. This is not necessarily due to any legal or social bias, but because of the different level and pace of social transformation in economic and political structures in various regions.

Finally, 35% of the Muslim respondents as against 22% non-Muslim respondents feel that being a housewife or homemaker can be having as much fulfillment for a woman as providing her services professionally for pay. The difference is discernible given the important social role women play in moral leadership and character building of future generations through the children they raise who require not only physical nourishment, but imparting values, ethics and morals.

Table 4: Social Attitudes towards Women

Social Attitudes towards Women	Percent of Muslim Respondents Who Agree	Percent of Non-Muslim Respondents Who Agree
Men to have more right to a job than women when jobs are limited.	60.73	32.54
When a wife earns more income than husband, it will certainly cause problems.	41.61	27.46
Having a job makes a woman an independent person in the best possible way.	51.30	57.36

Children of working women suffer since their mothers are able to spare less time for them.	24.83	13.95
Men are better political leaders than women.	39.72	18.16
Higher studies at university level are more vital for a boy as compared to a girl.	16.52	8.19
Men are better business leaders than women.	30.26	14.20
Being a housewife can have as much fulfillment as providing professional services for pay.	35.51	22.52

Source: Author's Work from World Values Survey Data 2010-14

4. Islamic Perspective on Gender Equality and Difference in Gender Roles

4.1. Islam and Contemporary Paradigm for Women Rights

The institution of family is deemed highly significant in Islamic social framework. It is established with bonding between a man and a woman with the relationship of marriage. As per Islamic viewpoint, physical and mental competencies in human are the blessings of Allah. These faculties enable human beings to function in different roles in the world. Human beings hold these faculties as a trust in this life in the world. Hence, depending on the variations in these physical and mental capabilities alone, no one is superior or inferior in the eyes of Allah. In Islam, there are numerous and significant civil and social rights granted to women as early as in 600 A.D. In what follows, a brief discussion of women rights in the Islamic social framework is

provided next.

- **Right to Education**

Islam deems it compulsory that Muslim women must pursue education. This pursuit of education is not only permissible, rather it is required for women like for men (Source: Sunan Ibn-e-Majah, Book of Sunnah: Hadith No. 224). Several women who embraced the faith of Islam in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) time, became narrators and scholars of Islamic jurisprudence.

- **Right to Occupation**

Women can opt to work in public space and earn their professional remuneration for the work or service they render in society. However, they are not made responsible for it since their primary responsibility is to provide their specialized skills in leading the household affairs including moral leadership and character building of their children. Men are made responsible for earning for their families in the Islamic family system. These gender roles are not fixed in stone. In fulfilling their fundamental responsibilities in the family institution, women can work professionally and husbands are also recommended to help their spouse in household chores. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself made an example of doing many personal things for himself without asking anyone. He (PBUH) also used to assist his wives in household chores regularly.

- **Right to Personal Property**

Women can engage in contracts, trade and own private property in their own name. The first wife of Holy Prophet (PBUH) was a business woman. In contrast, right to own property, enter into contract or even vote is only recently granted in West some two centuries ago. Married women obtained the right to own property and enter into contracts in Europe only by the end of nineteenth century. Furthermore, women got the right to vote in elections in the United States of America only in the early twentieth century.

- **Right to Choose Spouse**

Women have the right to choose their husbands in marriage. First wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) initiated the marriage proposal herself. Married women are entitled to "*Mehr*" (i.e. wealth from the husband at the start of marriage) as well as "*Wirasat*" (i.e. prescribed share in the wealth of the male relative including husband, children and parents).

- **Exalted Status as Mother**

It is narrated in a Hadith that a mother must be respected three times more than the father (Source: Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book of Manners, Hadith No. 5971). In another Hadith, it is said that 'paradise lies beneath mother's feet'. It shows the significance of one's attitude towards mother for having success in the life hereafter. (Source: Sunan Al-Nisai, Book of Jihad, Hadith No. 3106)

- **Rights as Wives**

It is narrated in a Hadith that best men are considered those who are best to their wives. (Source: Jam-et-Tirmizi, Chapters on Suckling, Hadith No. 1162). In Islamic social framework, no man is allowed to have extra-marital relationships with any other woman. Rape, sexual harassment and prostitution are crimes in Islamic society that can lead to capital punishment.

In the institution of family, husbands are responsible for earning incomes for their families and to spend on their family members. Resigning from marriage is disliked for men as well as for women since it has dire consequences on the physical and psychological upbringing of children. Nonetheless, like it is the case for husband, if a wife wishes to separate from the husband, she has the right to do so through '*Khula*' (a procedure of resignation from marriage, i.e. divorce).

Due to these humane rights granted to women in 600 A.D, the Arabs at that time who were skeptical of Islam used to say that how one can accept this religion which gives such generous rights to women. In his very first marriage, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) married an old widow. On the effect of Islam on Arab civilization, Gustave Le Bon writes:

"The principles of inheritance which have been determined in the Qur'an have a great deal of justice and fairness. The person who reads the Qur'an can

perceive these concepts of justice and fairness in terms of inheritance through the verses I quoted. I should also point out the great level of efficiency in terms of general laws and rules derived from these verses. I have compared British, French and Islamic Laws of inheritance and found that Islam grants the wives the right of inheritance, which our laws are lacking while Westerners consider them to be ill-treated by the Muslim men.⁷

However, in some contemporary Muslim societies, one also gets to hear about honour killing and discouragement of education and social mobility of women in some parts of the Muslim world.

To answer these observations, one must understand that honor killing has nothing to do with Islam. It is to do with unawareness about Islam⁸. Education is a religious responsibility for both men and women. In social interactions, Islam has prescribed a set of etiquette. This etiquette to be observed in social interactions and in public space is also prescribed for men (*Al-Qur'an*, Al-Noor: 29). Women are also prescribed to cover themselves modestly in public space (*Al-Qur'an*, Al-Noor: 29). However, this etiquette does not imply that there is restriction on social mobility for women. In some narrations, it appears that Muslim women used to work in farms, engage in trade and ride camels even

⁷ Le Bon, Gustave. *The World of Islamic Civilization*. (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1974).

⁸ Aliyu, Basheer. A. "Status of Woman in Islam: Equality or Divine Balance?". In *International Seminar on Muslim Women: The Future and Challenges in Shaping the Ummah* (2005), pp. 1 – 15.

in the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) lifetime.

Complying with the norms of modesty, Muslim women play socio-economic and even political roles as well in most part of the Muslim world in East Asia, South Asia and parts of Europe. Regardless of how much the Muslim societies conform or do not conform to the Islamic ideals, the Islamic standpoint does not negate socio-economic mobility of women. Islam asks both men and women to lead their lives virtuously and it is only God-consciousness and good actions which make one person more successful than the other in the grand purpose of this life in the Islamic worldview.

The Islamic family system makes husbands responsible as head of family. This also means that they have an additional responsibility since husbands are made primarily responsible for their family's financial sustainability.

The primary contribution and expected responsibility of women as mothers is to inculcate right values as first nursery and learning institution for their children. Undocumented labor that women provide in agrarian economies understates their economic role in some Muslim countries where agriculture is still a significant contributor to the national income. As Muslim economies become more knowledge-based and industrialized in future, the labor force participation of women will further increase as has happened gradually in the West.

The institution of family fosters empathy, spirit of sacrifice, moral values, and responsibility. Empirical evidence shows that more crimes happen against women in societies where the family institution had been ignored or established with different norms. An international report from the Social Trends Institute highlights that the frequency of unwed mothers is much less in OIC countries of Asia & Africa as compared to non-OIC countries, especially Europe. In addition to that, divorce rates are considerably higher in non-OIC countries as compared to OIC countries⁹. Also, reported crimes against women are more in numbers in regions with less Muslim population.

Such societies can have market based services for daycare, old homes and paid sex experiences, but they may lack a strong family system, social capital and ethical standards which can make a human society any different from non-human ones.

4.2. Inheritance Law of Islam and Women

Even few centuries back, women did not have the right to share in the inheritance distribution in most parts of the world. The pre-Islamic Arabs were opposed to inheritance by woman, who could not inherit as long as a male member of the family was alive. These Arabs were greatly surprised when the *Qur'an* explicitly said:

⁹ Harrendorf, Stefan, Markku Heiskanen, and Steven Malby. "International Statistics on Crime and Justice". In European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, HEUNI Publication Series No. 64 (2010), pp. 1 – 178.

“For men is a share of what the parents and the near relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and the near relatives leave” (Al-Qur’an, Al-Nisa: 32).

In Islam, whether a woman is a wife or a mother, a sister or a daughter, she receives a certain share from the wealth of the deceased close relative. According to the Islamic law, a son receives twice as much as a daughter, a brother twice as much as a sister and a husband twice as much as a wife. But, this does not mean that the shares of men and women are unequal in all circumstances. In the case of father and mother, the share of both is the same in the wealth left by their deceased children.

Even if a deceased only leaves behind female heirs, they will be given their prescribed share in inheritance. If the deceased person leaves behind only one daughter, then she may receive as much as half of the inheritance and if there are more than two daughters, they together get two-thirds ($2/3$) of the remaining inheritance after paying debts and executing the will (if any) in which the deceased person has bequeathed up to one-third of the wealth to a non-heir person(s) or social cause.

As per Islamic inheritance law, in some relations and cases, men receive more share than women because the financial obligations of men in Islam far exceed those of women. Islam does not make it obligatory for women to earn for their family. However, they can earn for the family and yet they are not

obliged to spend their earnings on the family. They have a right to choose an occupation and earn incomes. However, men are obliged to spend their earnings on the family and they are made primarily responsible for earning the livelihood for their family as discussed before.

Thus, Muslim men usually have greater financial burdens than Muslim women. Male heir is burdened with all financial responsibilities; whereas, a female heir is burdened with no financial responsibilities. Hence, the share of working age male heir is greater in some relations and cases as outlined above. Nonetheless, in the case of parents of the deceased children, the share in inheritance is same for mother as for father.

Conclusion

This study explored the current state of women rights and their socioeconomic participation in Muslim majority countries. The study also looked at effective legislation for promoting gender equality. It is discovered that the access to basic education has been made fairly equally available to both males and females as compared to the past in Muslim majority countries. Almost half of the OIC countries rank better than average for the middle-income countries on female labor force participation. Furthermore, there are 16 out of 52 Muslim majority countries in the sample whose proportion of women parliamentarians exceeds the average for middle-income countries. Secondly, the paper also presented the Islamic perspective on gender equality and difference in gender roles in Islamic social

framework. The paper outlined Islamic teachings, recommended social attitudes and the rationale for having certain prescribed differences in assigning roles to both the genders in the Islamic institution of family.