Vol. 12, Issue (1), December 2025
Pp: 158-169
Dr. Nasim Khan Mahsud, 2025

**Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL)**
Journal Homepage: https://pjsel.jehanf.com/index.php/journal
ISSN
2521-8123 (Print)
2523-1227 (Online)

# Gendered Empowerment and Migrant Status under Saudi Vision 2030: A Comparative Qualitative Study of Saudi and Pakistani Women in Riyadh

**Dr. Nasim Khan Mahsud**[1]

**Original Article**

1. Asistant Professor, Dept. Of Sociology, Allama Iqbal Open University-AIOU
Email: nasim.khan@aiou.edu.pk

**Keywords**

Women's empowerment, Saudi Vision 2030, Pakistani expatriate Women, citizenship, Migration status, Gender inequality, Riyadh

**Abstract**

*Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 has introduced reforms intended to expand women's mobility, employment and participation in public life. This qualitative study explores how Saudi and Pakistani expatriate women living in Riyadh perceive and experience women's empowerment within this changing context. Using a comparative design and convenience sampling, qualitative data were gathered via in-depth interviews administered by a bilingual research assistant fluent in Urdu and Arabic from nine participants. Thematic analysis identified perceptions of expanded mobility and public participation alongside continuing constraints related to sponsorship, employment relations, business costs, nationality, and sociocultural expectations. The findings suggest that empowerment is multidimensional and uneven: formal reforms may expand opportunities, but women's ability to translate them into substantive autonomy is shaped by citizenship, residency status, occupational position and economic resources. Given the small convenience sample, findings are exploratory and not statistically generalizable. The study highlights the importance of assessing reform through women lived experiences and differentiated institutional positions.*

## 1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 represents a state-led programme of economic and social transformation aimed at diversifying the economy and expanding women's participation in public and economic life. Reforms concerning mobility, employment, and legal status, including the lifting of the driving ban in 2018, have significantly changed the institutional context of women's lives (Eum, 2019; Rizvi & Hussain, 2022; Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). However, empowerment extends beyond formal rights to encompass access to resources, agency, and the capacity to make meaningful choices (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999). These reforms may be experienced differently by Saudi nationals and expatriate women due to differences in citizenship, residency, employment protections, economic resources, and institutional

opportunities. Migrant labour and sponsorship arrangements shape expatriate women's employment conditions, mobility, and economic security (Adham, 2023; Hammer & Adham, 2023). Overseas Pakistani women living in Saudi Arabia may therefore experience new opportunities alongside constraints associated with migration status and labour-market segmentation. Riyadh provides a relevant context for examining these differences, as Saudi and Pakistani women share the same urban reform environment while occupying different institutional and sociocultural positions. Existing research has examined women's employment barriers, workplace inclusion, gender norms, and workforce localization in Saudi Arabia (Alfarran et al., 2018; Eger et al., 2022; Albelali & Williams, 2022; Aldossari & Murphy, 2023). However, limited comparative attention has been given to how Saudi nationals and expatriate women experience empowerment within the same reform context. This study addresses this gap by comparing Saudi and overseas Pakistani women's perceptions and experiences of empowerment under Vision 2030, focusing on mobility, employment, economic autonomy, and social participation.

### 1.2. Significance of the Study

The study contributes to understanding women's empowerment as a differentiated process shaped by gender, nationality, migration status, and institutional inequalities. Comparing Saudi and overseas Pakistani women provides insights into how reforms translate into varying opportunities, autonomy, and experiences. Its findings may contribute to sociological scholarship on gender, migration, and social stratification and inform more inclusive approaches to women's empowerment and economic participation in Saudi Arabia.

### 1.3. Problem Statement

Despite significant reforms under Vision 2030, women's empowerment may not be experienced uniformly across social groups. Saudi nationals and expatriate women differ in citizenship, residency, employment protections, and access to resources, potentially shaping their ability to benefit from reforms. Although existing scholarship has examined women's empowerment, employment, and workplace barriers in Saudi Arabia, limited comparative research explores Saudi and overseas Pakistani women's experiences within the same reform context. This study addresses this gap by examining how nationality, migration status, and sociocultural expectations shape women's empowerment experiences in Riyadh.

| Objectives | Corresponding Research Questions |
|---|---|
| 1.To examine Saudi women's perceptions of empowerment reforms under Vision 2030. | 1.How do Saudi women perceive empowerment reforms under Vision 2030? |
| 2.To explore overseas Pakistani women's perceptions and experiences of these reforms. | 2.How do overseas Pakistani women perceive and experience these reforms? |
| 3.To compare both groups regarding mobility, employment, economic autonomy, and social participation. | 3.What similarities and differences exist between the two groups regarding mobility, employment, economic autonomy, and social participation? |
| 4.To examine how nationality, migration status, and sociocultural expectations shape women's empowerment experiences. | 4.How do nationality, migration status, and sociocultural expectations shape women's experiences of empowerment? |

## 2. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

### 2.1 Conceptualizing empowerment: resources, agency and achievements

Empowerment is often used to describe a broad range of social, economic and political changes, but the concept requires analytical precision. Kabeer (1999) defines empowerment as a process through which people who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire that ability. Her framework links resources, agency and achievements. Resources refer not only to material assets but also to social and institutional claims that shape the conditions in which choices are made. Agency concerns the ability to define goals, make decisions and act, including negotiation and forms of resistance. Achievements refer to the outcomes of those choices. The framework cautions against treating any single indicator—such as employment, income or legal access—as sufficient evidence of empowerment.

Sen's (1999) capability approach complements this perspective by emphasizing substantive freedoms: the real opportunities people have to pursue lives they value. Formal permission to work, travel or establish a business does not necessarily imply the capacity to do so. Conversion of rights into capabilities may be affected by economic resources, social relationships, institutional arrangements and personal circumstances. This distinction is especially useful in examining the accounts in this study, where legal and mobility reforms were perceived positively while employment and business experiences remained subject to additional constraints.

These perspectives guide the analysis of empowerment as multidimensional. Mobility and legal reform are considered in relation to agency; employment, sponsorship and business ownership are examined through access to resources and institutional conditions; and participants' descriptions of autonomy, opportunity and social acceptance are interpreted as perceived achievements. The framework avoids assuming that empowerment is complete whenever a legal reform has been introduced.

### 2.2 Vision 2030, state-led reform and women's public participation

Vision 2030 places women's employment and participation within a broader agenda of economic diversification, modernization and national development. The reforms have changed the public visibility of women and expanded opportunities in areas that were previously more restricted. However, the relationship between state-led reform and gender equality is complex. Eum (2019) argues that women's reform policies should be understood in relation to state ideology, national economic objectives and the political context in which reforms are introduced. This perspective does not negate the practical significance of legal changes; rather, it encourages analysis of the objectives, institutional conditions and limitations of reform.

Legal reforms concerning travel, employment and economic participation have been reviewed as important developments in women's rights (Rizvi & Hussain, 2022). The World Bank's Women, Business and the Law reports document changes in the legal frameworks affecting women's economic participation and provide comparative indicators of formal rights (World Bank, 2020, 2023). Such indicators are useful for understanding changes in institutional opportunity, but they do not independently establish how women experience those changes or whether opportunities are equally accessible across social groups.

Empirical research also points to the importance of women's own accounts. Al-Qahtani (2022) examines empowerment through resources, agency and achievements and identifies the importance of legislative change while noting obstacles to the effectiveness of reforms, including awareness and resistance within social and family contexts. Alhawsawi and Jawhar (2023) emphasize the interaction of structural and cultural mechanisms in women's educational and employment experiences. Together, this literature supports a distinction between policy-level reform and the lived process through which women negotiate new opportunities.

**2.3 Women's employment, organizational barriers and gendered power**

Employment is a central domain of empowerment because it may provide income, social participation, skills, networks and a basis for decision-making. Yet the presence of women in employment does not automatically eliminate inequality. Institutional and organizational arrangements can affect access to jobs, occupational mobility, workplace inclusion and the distribution of authority. Alfarran et al. (2018) examine institutional barriers to women's employment in Saudi Arabia, including the relationship between employment policies and the obstacles faced by women seeking work.

Research on workplace integration illustrates how organizational beliefs and cultural expectations can shape women's access to employment. Eger et al. (2022) identify leadership priorities, perceptions of women, organizational arrangements and norms concerning the cultural appropriateness of tasks as relevant to firms' decisions to integrate women into workplaces. Albelali and Williams (2022) show that workforce localization and the increased employment of Saudi women can affect gendered power relations in private-sector workplaces, creating variation rather than a uniform transformation. Aldossari and Murphy (2023) analyze Saudi working women's negotiation of inclusion within organizational and societal contexts, highlighting tensions between employment participation and gendered moral expectations.

These studies suggest that employment should be analyzed as both an opportunity and a social relation. For the present study, this is relevant to Saudi professionals' accounts of changing career possibilities and to Pakistani participants' descriptions of sponsorship, leave and employment-related dependency. The distinction between entering employment and possessing autonomy within an employment relationship is analytically important.

**2.4 Migration, sponsorship and labour-market stratification**

Migrant labour is an important feature of Saudi Arabia's labour market, and expatriate workers occupy differentiated positions in relation to employment, residency and institutional protections. Adham (2023) examines labour-market segmentation and the structural demand for migrant labour in Saudi Arabia, emphasizing the interaction between institutional arrangements and employer practices. Hammer and Adham (2023) analyze mobility power under the sponsored labour regime and show how control over mobility can be differentiated across workers and employment arrangements. Azhari (2017) provides a critical examination of the kafala sponsorship system in relation to migrant workers' rights and institutional power.

Migration scholarship also emphasizes that migrant workers' vulnerability is not simply an individual characteristic but can be produced through legal status, employment dependency and immigration controls (Anderson, 2010). Castles, de Haas and Miller (2014) situate

migration within wider social, economic and political processes, including labour demand and the institutional regulation of mobility. These perspectives help interpret participants' accounts of sponsorship as a structural relationship rather than merely a personal disagreement between employee and sponsor.

Although the present study focuses on women and does not represent the full range of migrant labour experiences, sponsorship-related accounts reveal how residency and employment arrangements may shape the exercise of autonomy. For expatriate women, empowerment in public mobility may coexist with employment-related dependency or economic constraints. This makes migration status an important dimension of the analysis.

### 2.5 Citizenship, intersectionality and sociocultural expectations

Gendered experiences are shaped by social position and cannot be assumed to be identical across women. Intersectional analysis emphasizes that systems of inequality may operate together, producing experiences that cannot be explained through a single category (Crenshaw, 1989). In this study, an intersectional analytical sensitivity is used to examine how gender intersects with nationality, citizenship, migrant status and occupational position. The study does not claim to test intersectionality as a formal model; rather, the perspective directs attention to the differentiated institutional positions represented in participants' accounts.

Saudi women's experiences of public participation are also situated within historically specific gender relations, family expectations and state-society dynamics (Al-Rasheed, 2013). Reform may change formal opportunities while everyday norms and expectations remain subject to negotiation. The literature on Saudi employment and workplace integration similarly indicates that organizational and social attitudes can shape women's experiences even when policies promote participation (Eger et al., 2022; Aldossari & Murphy, 2023).

Generational perspectives are relevant because women may interpret changing opportunities differently depending on whether they experienced earlier restrictions directly or entered adulthood within a reform environment. The present interviews include a student who anticipates professional opportunities and employed participants who describe changes through their work and family experiences. These accounts provide exploratory insight into how empowerment may be understood across different life stages.

### 2.6 Research gap and analytical propositions

The reviewed literature documents legal reforms, employment growth, workplace barriers and the continuing significance of sociocultural expectations in Saudi Arabia. However, a comparative focus on Saudi nationals and Pakistani expatriate women residing in the same city can illuminate how common reforms are interpreted through different citizenship and migration positions. The present study therefore examines four related analytical propositions, used as sensitizing concepts rather than hypotheses: (a) mobility reforms may be perceived as shared opportunities (b) employment and economic autonomy may remain differentiated by nationality and residency status (c) sponsorship and workplace relations may mediate the exercise of autonomy among expatriate women and (d) formal reforms may coexist with cultural and familial constraints. These propositions guide the interpretation of the qualitative accounts.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design and Setting

The study employed a qualitative comparative design to explore women's perceptions and experiences of empowerment under Vision 2030. Conducted in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the study compared Saudi nationals and Pakistani expatriate women living within the same urban reform context. A qualitative approach was adopted to understand participants' experiences, interpretations, and perceived opportunities and constraints.

### 3.2 Participants and Sampling

Nine women were recruited through convenience sampling based on accessibility, residence in Riyadh, and willingness to participate. The sample comprised five Pakistani expatriates and four Saudi nationals from diverse occupational and educational backgrounds. The small sample was exploratory and not intended for statistical generalization.

| Participant group | n | Profile |
|---|---|---|
| Pakistani expatriates | 5 | Teacher, nurse, salon worker, business owner, computer-science student |
| Saudi nationals | 4 | Doctor, accountant, IT professional, business owner |
| **Total** | 9 | |

### 3.3 Data Collection and Research Procedures

Data were collected through in-depth interview guide covering mobility, employment, legal reforms, economic autonomy, social participation, and sociocultural expectations. A Pakistani working woman (research assistant) familiar with Arabic assisted in field data collection after briefing and training by the researcher. Interviews were conducted in Arabic/English and Urdu than recorded responses were transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Data were analysed manually using thematic analysis through repeated reading, coding, and grouping of responses into themes, followed by comparison between the two participant groups. Informed consent was obtained, participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained through participant identifiers and secure data storage. The study was limited by its small convenience sample, six-month duration, and potential translation-related differences. Findings represent participants' reported experiences and are exploratory rather than statistically generalizable, thematic saturation was not formally established.

## 4. Study Findings

The thematic analysis identified six connected themes. Participants in both groups recognized changes in mobility and public participation. However, the accounts differed in relation to sponsorship, employment, business ownership, citizenship-based opportunities and the cultural negotiation of reform. These themes are presented as experiences within this sample rather than as generalizations about all Saudi or Pakistani women.

### 4.1 Participants’ perceptions of legal reform and mobility

Driving and changes associated with guardianship-related regulations were among the most frequently discussed and readily recognized reforms. Participants from both groups described these changes as significant for everyday freedom and access to public life. The Pakistani teacher explained that her mobility had changed from relying on her husband to driving independently. Saudi participants also described driving and travel-related changes as expanding personal autonomy. The convergence of these accounts suggests that mobility reforms were perceived as visible improvements across nationality groups.

> mobility and everyday independence: “Earlier, if I needed to go somewhere, I depended on my husband. Being able to drive myself has made daily life easier and has given me more independence.” [Pakistani teacher]
>
> mobility reforms: “The changes have made it easier for women to move around and take part in activities outside the home. It feels like more choices are available now.” [Saudi participant]

However, the accounts also distinguished legal permission from the ability to act without social constraint. The Pakistani teacher described continuing cultural, religious and family-related expectations affecting travel beyond Riyadh. The Saudi doctor discussed cultural expectations concerning dress, noting that formal changes did not necessarily lead to immediate changes in practice. Participants’ accounts therefore indicate that mobility is shaped by both institutional permission and social negotiation. Legal change may expand the range of possible actions, while family expectations and cultural norms continue to influence how those possibilities are exercised.

**4.2 Sponsorship, employment and migrant dependency**

Sponsorship arrangements emerged as a major source of difference in the accounts of Pakistani participants, particularly those employed in service and professional settings. The Pakistani nurse described the procedures she faced when seeking leave following her father’s death in Pakistan. Her account involved navigating workplace procedures and sponsor-related exit and re-entry arrangements, which she contrasted with the procedures followed by Saudi colleagues. The salon worker similarly recalled that her sponsor could influence her leave and travel arrangements during her employment.

> leave and sponsor-related procedures: “When there was a death in my family, arranging leave and travel was not simply my decision. I had to follow the procedures and seek the required permission, which made an already difficult time more stressful.” [Pakistani nurse]
>
> employment and residency dependency: “Having a job does not mean that every decision is in your own hands. Your work and residency situation can affect what you are able to do.” [Pakistani expatriate employee]

These accounts indicate that access to employment does not necessarily translate into autonomy within employment relationships. The participants’ descriptions suggest that residency and sponsorship arrangements could influence their ability to respond to family emergencies, travel and negotiate leave. Sponsorship was experienced not merely as a technical administrative arrangement but as a relationship affecting the control of mobility and decision-making. The accounts are consistent with research that examines migrant labour through institutional segmentation and differentiated mobility power (Adham, 2023; Hammer & Adham, 2023). The contrast with Saudi participants was expressed through their descriptions of citizenship-related advantages and different administrative conditions. No Saudi participant in this sample described an equivalent sponsor-dependent procedure. This absence should not be interpreted as proof that Saudi women face no workplace restrictions, rather, it reflects a difference in the specific institutional experiences represented in these interviews.

### 4.3 Business ownership and unequal economic autonomy

The accounts of business owners illustrated the complex relationship between formal autonomy and economic conditions. The Pakistani business owner described a period when her business registration was held under a Saudi woman's name, with an arrangement involving a share of monthly profits. She associated the ability to register the business independently with greater control over business decisions and reduced dependence on a Saudi partner. She characterized independent registration as an important achievement because it placed the business more directly under her control.

> registration and autonomy: "Before, the business was registered through someone else, and I had to share the profit. Being able to register it in my own name gave me more control, but the expenses did not disappear." [Pakistani business owner]

> ongoing costs: "The business is mine, but there are still fees and other costs that make it difficult. Independence also means that I must manage these expenses myself." [Pakistani business owner]

> localization and business pressures: "Employing people has become more complicated because we must consider the requirements and the costs. These changes affect how a business is managed." [Saudi business owner]

At the same time, she reported continuing financial burdens, including comparatively higher registration-related charges, annual fees and taxation. These figures are participant-reported and were not independently verified by the study. Her account nevertheless provides an important qualitative insight: legal or administrative access to ownership may be experienced as a gain in agency while financial conditions continue to limit economic equality. The Saudi business owner described another side of the reform environment, reporting increased costs associated with employing expatriate workers and requirements related to workforce localization. The comparison suggests that entrepreneurship was experienced through different institutional positions. The Pakistani owner emphasized independence from a Saudi partner and the continuing costs of expatriate business ownership, whereas the Saudi owner described the pressures of employing foreign labour and meeting localization requirements. The two accounts illustrate how reform and economic restructuring may generate both opportunities and costs, depending on the position of the business owner.

### 4.4 Nationality and citizenship as axes of stratification

Nationality emerged as a central category through which participants interpreted differences in empowerment. Pakistani participants referred to residency-related expenses, sponsorship arrangements and perceived limits on occupational opportunities. The teacher highlighted sponsorship and residency costs; the nurse emphasized differences in leave and administrative procedures; and the business owner described the significance of independent business registration. Saudi participants also recognized citizenship as a source of institutional advantage. The doctor referred to certain positions as unavailable to non-Saudis, while the accountant and IT professional described citizenship as carrying benefits not necessarily available to expatriates.

Citizenship and migrant status: “We may live in the same city and see the same changes, but our situation is not the same. Residency and nationality affect the opportunities and procedures we face.” [Pakistani participant]

The convergence of accounts is analytically important because both groups identified nationality as a factor shaping access to opportunities. These accounts suggest that women’s experiences were not interpreted through gender alone. Citizenship and migrant status were also perceived as structuring access to institutional positions, economic resources and employment-related security. The findings therefore indicate a differentiated experience of reform within the same city and policy environment.

**4.5 Legal reform and cultural continuity**

Participants repeatedly distinguished formal legal changes from the transformation of everyday social attitudes. The Pakistani student emphasized that laws could change more rapidly than mindsets. The Saudi IT professional similarly described gender-based assumptions as continuing barriers in workplace settings. Family expectations were mentioned by the Pakistani teacher, Saudi accountant and student. These accounts suggest that social norms continue to mediate the exercise of newly available opportunities.

law and social attitudes: “Rules can change, but people’s thinking takes time. You can see new opportunities, yet some expectations are still there.” [Pakistani student]

workplace assumptions: “Even when women have opportunities, people may still make assumptions about what women can do. The policy changes, but attitudes in the workplace may take longer.” [Saudi IT professional]

The findings do not indicate that culture is static or that participants were uniformly constrained by family expectations. Rather, they show that formal reforms are negotiated within everyday relationships and organizational practices. Participants recognized change while also describing the persistence of expectations that may influence mobility, career choices and public participation.

**4.6 Generational perspectives and anticipatory empowerment**

The Pakistani computer-science student offered a perspective distinct from participants with established employment histories. She expressed optimism about professional opportunities, particularly in computing, while acknowledging that she could not directly compare her own workplace experience with earlier generations. Her account reflected anticipated empowerment an expectation of future opportunities rather than the experience of occupational autonomy.

anticipated opportunity: “I feel that women entering fields like computing have more possibilities now. I am hopeful about what I can do, although I am still at the beginning of my career.” [Pakistani computer-science student]

> generational change: “For younger women, many of these opportunities are becoming normal. For older women, the changes may feel much bigger because they remember how things were before.” [Saudi IT professional]

The Saudi IT professional and business owner also described differences between younger and older generations in their responses to social change. Younger women were portrayed as more likely to regard new opportunities as ordinary, while older women might experience the reforms as a more substantial departure from previous expectations. These accounts suggest generational variation in the meaning of reform, although the small sample does not support a broad claim about generational patterns.

**5. Discussion**

The findings indicate that women's empowerment under Vision 2030 is a multidimensional and uneven process rather than a uniform outcome of policy reforms. Although participants recognized improvements in mobility and public opportunities, their employment and business experiences revealed continuing financial, institutional, and sociocultural constraints. For instance, the Pakistani business owner associated greater control over business registration with additional financial obligations, while the nurse highlighted limitations concerning travel and leave. These experiences support Kabeer's (1999) argument that empowerment involves the interrelationship of resources, agency, and achievements, while Sen's (1999) capability approach emphasizes the distinction between formal opportunities and women's actual ability to exercise meaningful choices. The comparative findings further suggest that gender intersects with nationality and migration status in shaping empowerment experiences. Pakistani participants described sponsorship and residency-related constraints, whereas Saudi participants acknowledged citizenship-based institutional advantages. These accounts reflect inequalities associated with migrant labour and institutional mobility in Saudi Arabia (Adham, 2023; Hammer & Adham, 2023) and support Crenshaw's (1989) intersectional perspective on overlapping systems of social power. Economic restructuring also presents opportunities alongside financial and employment-related pressures, as illustrated by participants' accounts of business registration, employment costs, and workforce localization. These experiences demonstrate how economic reforms may redistribute opportunities and responsibilities, consistent with research on women's employment, workplace integration, organizational practices, and labour-market restructuring (Alfarran et al., 2018; Eger et al., 2022; Albelali & Williams, 2022). Furthermore, participants' accounts suggest that legal reforms do not automatically transform family expectations, workplace attitudes, and everyday cultural practices, reflecting the continuing interaction between institutional change and sociocultural conditions (Alhawsawi & Jawhar, 2023; Aldossari & Murphy, 2023). Generational differences also emerged in younger women's expectations regarding employment and future opportunities. Overall, the findings suggest that although Vision 2030 has expanded opportunities for women, the ability to translate these changes into sustained autonomy remains influenced by nationality, migration status, economic resources, occupational position, and sociocultural expectations.

## 6. Contribution and scope

The study contributes to sociological analysis in three ways. First, it treats empowerment as multidimensional, distinguishing legal and mobility gains from economic and institutional autonomy. Second, it examines nationality and migration status as factors shaping women's perceptions within a shared urban reform environment. Third, it brings together employee and business-owner accounts to illustrate how employment relations and economic restructuring are experienced from different positions. These contributions are exploratory and bounded by the small sample; they identify analytical directions for further research rather than establishing population-level patterns.

## 7. Conclusion and Implications

This study explored the perceptions of Saudi and overseas Pakistani women living in Riyadh regarding women's empowerment under Vision 2030. Nine in-depth interviews revealed that participants in both groups recognized changes in mobility and public participation, particularly driving and guardianship-related reforms. These changes were described as meaningful opportunities in everyday life. At the same time, the comparative accounts highlighted differences associated with nationality, residency status, employment position and economic resources. Pakistani participants described sponsorship-related constraints, employment vulnerabilities and perceived financial burdens associated with business ownership. Saudi participants discussed changing employment opportunities and pressures linked to workforce localization. Participants also emphasized the continuing influence of family expectations, workplace assumptions and cultural practices.

The findings suggest that empowerment is neither uniform nor linear. It may expand in one domain while remaining constrained in another. Legal opportunities may improve while the ability to exercise them is shaped by institutional relationships, economic resources and social expectations. The study therefore argues for examining women's empowerment through lived experiences and differentiated social positions, rather than relying exclusively on formal policy indicators.

Because the sample is small and based on convenience recruitment, the findings should not be generalized to all Saudi or Pakistani women. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples across cities, nationalities and occupational categories. Longitudinal research could examine how perceptions change across generations and over time. Studies involving employers, institutional actors and migrant women from other nationalities may further illuminate how legal reforms, citizenship, residency and labour-market restructuring shape gendered opportunities. An inclusive assessment of Vision 2030 should consider not only whether reforms expand formal rights, but also the conditions under which women from different social and institutional positions can convert those rights into sustained autonomy, economic security and meaningful participation.

**References**

Adham, A. (2023). Structural demand for migrant labour: A bottom-up analysis of labour market segmentation in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 49*(7), 1746–1767. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1979390

Albelali, S., & Williams, S. (2022). Workforce localization, women workers and gendered power relations in Saudi Arabian private sector workplaces. *Employee Relations: The International Journal, 44*(2), 431–445. https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-11-2020-0503

Aldossari, M., & Murphy, S. (2023). Inclusion is in the eye of the beholder: A relational analysis of the role of gendered moral rationalities in Saudi Arabia. *Work, Employment and Society*. https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170231180823

Alfarran, A., Pyke, J., & Stanton, P. (2018). Institutional barriers to women's employment in Saudi Arabia. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, 37*(7), 713–727. https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-08-2017-0159

Alhawsawi, S., & Jawhar, S. S. (2023). Education, employment, and empowerment among Saudi women. *Gender and Education, 35*(4), 401–419. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2023.2189917

Al-Qahtani, R. (2022). Empowering Saudi women: Resources, agencies and achievements in the light of Vision 2030. *Journal of Umm Al-Qura University for Social Sciences, 14*(3), 88–99. https://doi.org/10.54940/ss42598499

Al-Rasheed, M. (2013). *A most masculine state: Gender, politics, and religion in Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, B. (2010). Migration, immigration controls and the fashioning of precarious workers. *Work, Employment and Society, 24*(2), 300–317.

Azhari, A. (2017). The kafāla 'sponsorship' system in Saudi Arabia: A critical analysis from the perspective of international human rights and Islamic law. *SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research, 10*(2016–2017), 61–80. https://doi.org/10.25501/SOAS.00024680

Castles, S., de Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2014). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world* (5th ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics.

License Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) 4.0 International.