

July 2015

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Jabareen, Yosef (2015). Reducing Poverty among Arab and Muslim Women: The Case of Arab Women in Israel. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 16(3), 117-136.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol16/iss3/9>

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Reducing Poverty among Arab and Muslim Women: The Case of Arab Women in Israel

By Yosef Jabareen¹

Abstract

The international experience suggests that work is the best way of lifting families out of poverty. Thus, this paper assumes that one crucial policy, among many others, aimed at poverty reduction is to increase the women's participation in the labour market and their access to decent work. This issue is critical among Arab and Muslim women around the world in general and among Arab women in Israel since the participation rate of women in the labour market is quite low and about 55% of the Arab families live under the poverty line. Therefore, this paper aims to identify the reasons behind the low rate of Arab female participation in the labor market, and based on that to propose a framework for increasing their participation rate and reducing poverty among them and their households. An empirical study, based on 574 personal interviews, was conducted among unemployed Arab women in Israel. This paper identified four major domains that affect the level of employment participation: the *socio-cultural domain*, the *ethno-political domain*, the *personal domain*, and the *spatial domain*. Eventually, the paper proposes interference policies based on these domains in order to reduce poverty among Arab minority women in Israel.

Key Words: Arab Women, Palestinians, Gender, Employment, Ethnic Conflict, Poverty

Introduction

Gender inequalities in areas such as wage conditions, sectors of economic activity, job and occupational segregation, vulnerable employment shares, and labor force participation rates are a persistent feature of contemporary day labor markets around the globe (ILO, 2009). This is amply illustrated by the fact that the 2008 world labor force participation rate of 65.1% comprises rates of 77.5% for men and 52.6% for women. However, it must also be noted that global male and female labor force participation rates have been showing signs of transformation in recent decades, albeit at a very slow pace (ILO, 2014). Internationally, perhaps the most striking aspect of female labor force participation in recent years has been its steady, linear upward trend (Cohen and Bianchi, 1999; Cohen et al., 2009). Yet, the lowest regional female labor participation rate belongs to the Middle East, at a conspicuously low rate of 21.3% (in contrast to 68.8% among males) in comparison to 56.8% and 64.2% in Sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia respectively (ILO, 2010: 48). In the Middle East, Arab countries continue to stand out as having the lowest female participation rates of all (ILO, 2010; UNDP, 2006). The case of Israel in this context is particularly interesting. Even though Israel has an advanced economy, labor participation among Arab females in the country is nonetheless extremely low, standing at 21.1% in 2008 (Jabareen et al., 2010; CBS, 2010).

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The *Global Employment Trends 2014* (ILO, 2009, 2014) suggests that the gender gap in employment continues to be large in developing countries, with a general tendency towards a further widening, and that decent work deficits are the primary cause of poverty and social instability and that access to full and productive employment and decent work is crucial for all. Importantly, the international experience suggests that “work is the best way of lifting families out of poverty” (OECD, 2010: 3). Thus, this paper assumes that one crucial policy, among many others, aimed at poverty reduction is to increase the women’s participation in the labour market and their access to decent work. This issue is a critical among Arab and Muslim women around the world in general and among Arab women in Israel since the participation rate of women in the labour market is quite low. This paper assumes also that it is crucial to understand the low rate of Arab women participation in the labour force prior to developing policies towards increasing their participation and reducing poverty rate consequently. Therefore, this paper aims to identify the reasons behind the low rate of Arab female participation in the labor market, and based on that to propose a conceptual framework for increasing their participation rate and reducing poverty among them and their households.

The statistic, reflecting not only women’s low employment rate but a broader distinctive pattern of gender inequality, female poverty and marginalization from economic life in general, raises several crucial questions: What accounts for this unique social phenomenon? Is it primarily the result of Arab and Muslim culture and social structures, as most scholars assume? Or, is female labor participation impacted by other important factors as well?

The scholarship on Arab female labor participation rates has generated valuable knowledge that has contributed to our understanding of the phenomenon. Still, the majority of studies undertaken thus far have been concerned with only a few aspects of the phenomenon. Most suggest cultural interpretation as the major determining factor, while others examine socioeconomic variables, fertility rates, education, female structural adjustment, stage of state development, economic structure, and social and cultural policies as possible explanations for the phenomenon (Assaad, 2003; Doumato and Posusney, 2003; Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov, 1992; Moghadam, 1998, 2005; Nassar, 2003; Tzannatos and Kaur, 2003).

The cultural explanation is based on the premise that women in Arab and Muslim societies are “perceived as wives and mothers, and gender segregation is customary, and sometimes legally required,” and that “whereas economic provision is the responsibility of men, women must marry and reproduce to earn status” (Moghadam, 2003: 4; see also Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov, 1992). In *Beyond the Veil*, Fatima Mernisi (1987) draws attention to the specific forms of the gender labor divisions in Muslim societies, particularly as they occur within the family. Apparently, in Arab countries, an extreme form of occupational gender segregation is typical, based on cultural attitudes regarding female family roles and appropriate and inappropriate occupations and professions (Moghadam, 2002; 2003). The family structure in the Middle East has been described as extended, patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal, endogamous, and occasionally polygynous (Baraket, 1993), and patriarchal ideology and family structure have persisted for centuries despite the challenges posed by the modernization of Arab countries. As a result, women’s legal status and social position are worse in Muslim countries than anywhere else in the world. According to socioeconomic indicators and gender statistics, women in the Arab region are more disadvantaged socially, economically, and politically on average than women in other world regions, not to mention women in regions with similar income levels and/or at similar stages of economic development, such as Latin America and Southeast and East Asia (Moghadam, 2005: 3).

A weakness of the existing scholarship on the subject is its lack of multifaceted conceptualizing and the fact that it usually overlooks the multidisciplinary nature of the phenomenon. Furthermore, research addressing aspects of the phenomenon other than culture—such as race, ethnicity, and gender—remains limited (Hite, 2007). As a result, we lack the conceptual frameworks necessary to understand the reasons behind not only the low rates of female labor participation in Arab societies but of gender inequalities in such societies in general. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the multifaceted social, cultural, ethnic, personal, familial, spatial and structural factors that shape the participation and non-participation of Arab women in the Israeli labor force, and to assess the impact of these factors on women who do not participate in the labor force. The constructs of the conceptual framework will facilitate the generation of theoretical intervention strategies that may serve to increase the employment rate among Arab women. In order to identify the factors behind female low participation, this paper will focus on Arab women in Israel. An empirical study, based on 574 personal interviews, was conducted among unemployed Arab women in Israel.

The Arab Minority in Israel

Israel's Arab or Palestinian population makes up about 20% of the population of the country (see Jabareen, 2010a, 2010b, 2014; Zoabi & Savaya, 2011). They became a minority in Israel in the aftermath of the 1948 war and the establishment of the state, when most Arabs living in the area incorporated into Israel became refugees in neighboring Arab countries.

Arab women in Israel live in a context of Arab culture, and their surrounding society shares many social, religious, and cultural characteristics with the Arab world. Arab society in Israel, as elsewhere, is collective, hierarchical, and patriarchal (Al-Krenawi and Graham, 2005; Barakat, 1993; Dwairy, 2004) and is currently undergoing a gradual transition to a more individualistic and liberal form of society (Abu-Bakr and Dwairy, 2004; Al-Haj, 1989; Haj-Yahia, Bargal and Guterman, 2000; Lowenstein and Katz, 2000). The collective dimension, however, is still dominant (Barakat, 1993; Dwairy, 2001; Haj-Yahia and Edleson, 1994), and the society as a whole remains largely conservative and religious.

Like the Arab minority as a whole, Arab women in Israel include members of three religious groupings: Muslims (80%), Christians (10%), and Druze (10%). They live in Israel, which has an advanced economy and a democratic and liberal political system. They constitute part of an ethnic minority struggling for equal rights in a variety of social fields, including employment.

For these reasons, the proposed case study of Arab females in Israel stands not only to provide us with insights regarding culture, gender, and employment in an Arab and primarily Muslim society and ethnicity, gender, and employment in an advanced economy, but also promises to make an important contribution to the construction of conceptual tools to better understand female labor participation among Arabs in Israel and elsewhere.

Poverty in Israel and Among Arab Minority

In Israel, poverty is more widespread than any of the 30 OECD countries (OECD, 2010). Importantly, the poverty level among Arabs in Israel is about 4.5 fold the average of the OECD countries as Figure 1 shows. Figure 1 presents poverty rates in various countries in the OECD and among Arabs in Israel (OECD, 2010). Income poverty rate is the percentage of population in

households with income of less than half the national median (OECD, 2010). Arab minority males and females are much less likely to have jobs, and they are more likely to be poor than the general Jewish population in Israel (OECD, 2010). Moreover, the poverty level among Arabs in Israel has consistently remained at about four times the levels of poverty among Israeli Jews, as Figure 2 and Table 1 demonstrate.

According to the OECD (2010), there are several factors that explain why Arabs tend to have poorer outcomes on a range of socio-economic measures: (1) structural issues, such as differences in education systems; (2) regional differences in infrastructure investment; and (3) mistrust between communities arising from the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, the OECD states that “unfortunately, policies to redress discriminatory practices have had limited effectiveness” (2010: 3). Importantly, the OECD report suggests that based on the international experience, “work is the best way of lifting families out of poverty” (2010: 3).

It is important to mention that the system of calculating the dimensions of poverty used by the OECD is similar to that developed by the National Insurance Institute and used in Israel; both define the median disposable financial income as the relevant indicator of standard of living and define the poverty line as half of that. However, the system of translating the number of persons in a family to standard persons (“equivalence scale”) differs by country (Barkali, Endeweld, Fruman, and Gottlieb, 2011: 33).

Figure 1. Poverty Rates: Israel, OECD countries, and Arabs in Israel (50 Percent of the Current Median Income)

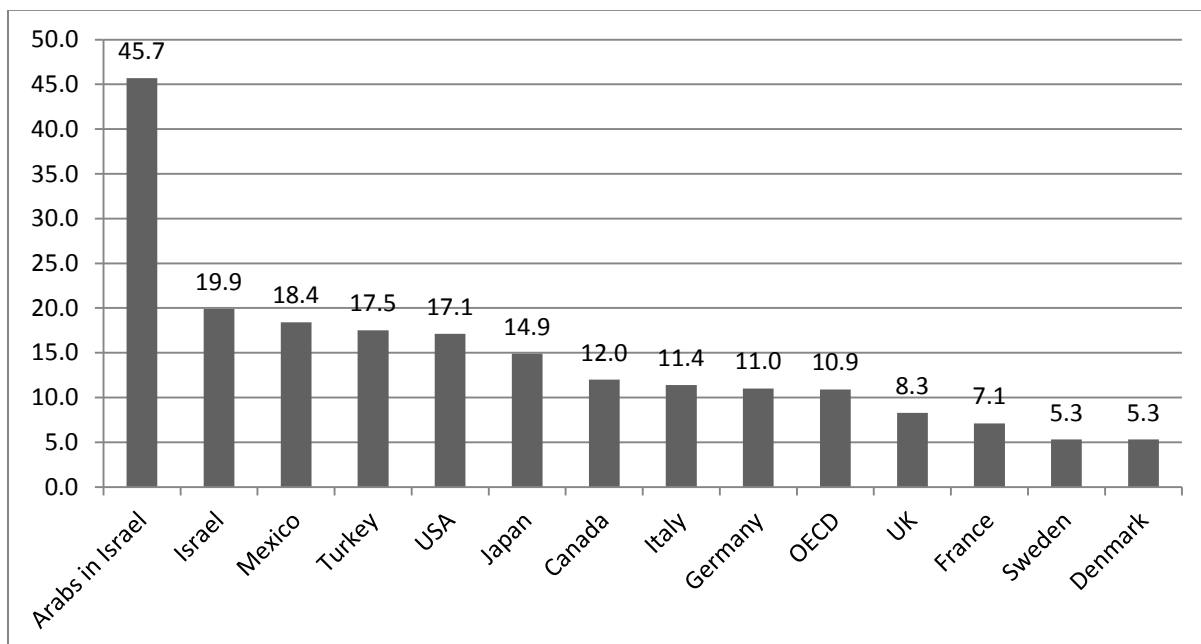


Figure 2. Poverty Rate among Jewish and Arab Families in Israel (%)

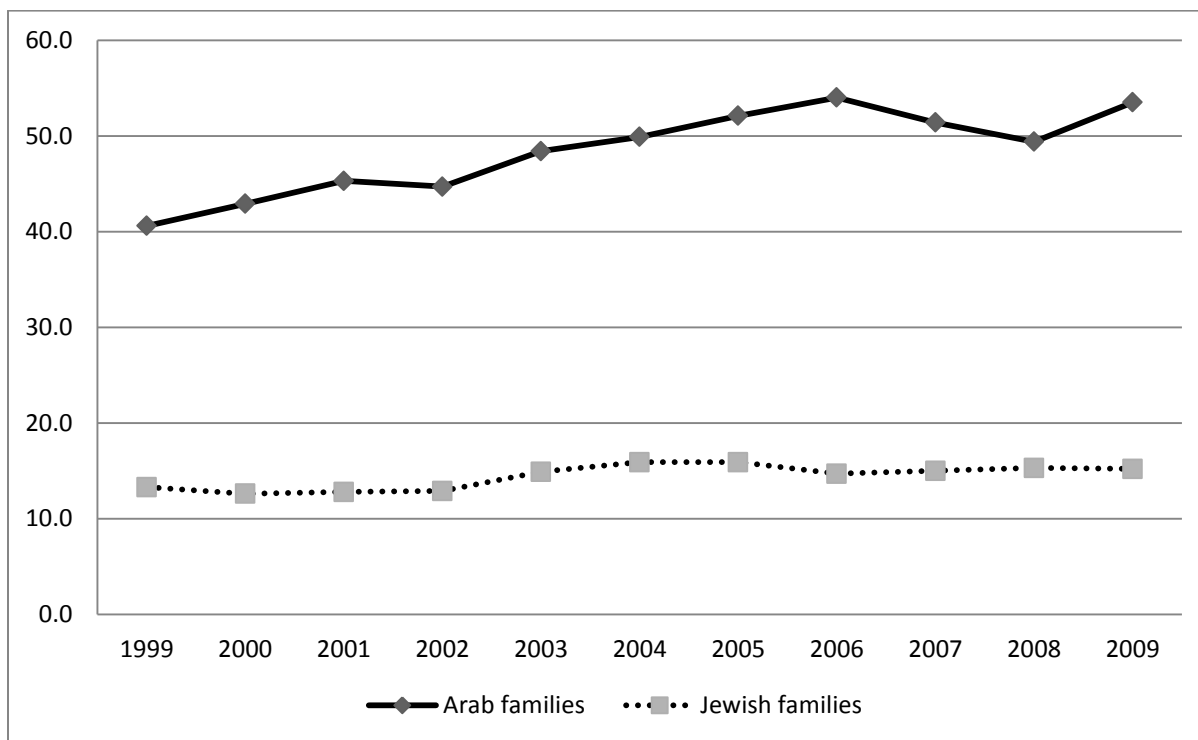


Table 1. Poverty Rate among Families, Persons, and Children (%)

Years	Arab families	Jewish families	families	persons	children
1999	40.6	13.3	17.8	18.8	24.9
2000	42.9	12.6	17.6	19.6	26.9
2001	45.3	12.8	17.7	19.6	26.9
2002	44.7	12.9	17.7	20.0	28.1
2003	48.4	14.9	19.3	22.4	30.8
2004	49.9	15.9	20.3	23.6	33.2
2005	52.1	15.9	20.6	24.7	35.2
2006	54.0	14.7	20.0	24.5	35.8
2007	51.4	15.0	19.9	23.8	34.2
2008	49.4	15.3	19.9	23.7	34.0
2009	53.5	15.2	20.5	25.0	36.3

Table 2. Poverty in Israel by Gender

Year	Males	females
1999	15.2	17.1
2002	16.2	16.9
2003	17.4	18.8
2004	18	19.7
2005	18.7	20.2
2006	18.2	19.6
2007	18.1	19.2
2008	17.6	19.5
2009	18.8	20

The economic and employment conditions of Israel's Arabs in general, and the employment prospects of Arab women in Israel in particular, have captured the attention of many scholars (e.g. Azaiza, Abu-Baker, Hertz-Lazarowitz, and Ghanem, 2009; Jabareen, 2007, 2010; Khattab, 2002, 2005; Kraus and Yonay, 2000; Lewin-Epsein, and Semyonov, 1992, 1994; Rosenhek and Shalev, 2000; Rosenfeld, 1978; Sa'di, 2003; Semyonov, 1988; Shavit, 1992). The labor force participation rate among female Arabs in Israel is one of the lowest in the world, standing at 21%, in comparison to 57% among Jewish women in 2008 (Jabareen et al., 2010; CBS, 2010). In the same year, the employment rate of Arab and Jewish males of labor age (15-65) was 62.4% and 61.5% respectively. Recent decades have witnessed a marked improvement among Israel's Arabs in the realm of education, with the average number of years of schooling increasing from 1.2 to 11.3 between 1961 and 2007, an increase of more than 900%. This dramatic increase in education, however, has not been adequately reflected in the employment sphere, a phenomenon that according to the OECD is unprecedented in the world economy (2009). According to a survey carried out in 2008 by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 9,000 of Israel's 10,000 female Arab university graduates who were unemployed at the time had lost hope of finding a job. If the policy of non-intervention in the Arab employment sector continues, the number of unemployed Arab university graduates in Israel is expected to reach 30,000 in five years (Jabareen et al., 2010). In 2007, the average gross monthly wage in the Arab sector was NIS 5,419, in comparison to NIS 8,056 in the Jewish sector. Statistics from the same year reflected a 23% gap between the wages of Arab and Jewish women, and indicated that approximately 50% of all Arab families in Israel live below the poverty line, in comparison to about 15% of Jewish families (Jabareen et al., 2010).

Methods

Data collection was based on personal interviews during June-July 2008 in which Arabic language questionnaires were administered among a sample of 580 Arab women who do not participate in the labor force. The research questionnaire contained the following general subject areas: (a) personal, family, demographic, and socioeconomic traits of the participants; (b) questions regarding participants' personal attitudes towards family, social, cultural and religious values and beliefs regarding the employment; (c) questions regarding participants' personal preferences toward future employment and willingness to participate in the labor force, including

where, when, and in what occupation; (d) questions on the barriers faced by participants in participating in the labor force; (e) questions regarding spatial variables regarding employment such as transportation.

Sampling

The study was based on a random stratified cluster sampling method. The sampling frame is divided into one stratum and two clusters as follows:

Stratum a: *Spatial distribution*: (1) Cities with more than 30,000 residents; (2) towns with 10,000-30,000 residents; and (3) small towns and villages with less than 10,000 residents.

Cluster a: *Religion*: According to the Arab population composition: (1) Muslims; (2) Arab Christians; and (3) Druze.

Cluster b: *Regional distribution*: (1) Northern Israel; (2) the Negev Desert (mostly Bedouins); (3) the Triangle region; and (4) Israel's ethnically mixed towns.

Procedure

Personal interviews with the participating Arab women within the labor age were conducted one-on-one using structured questionnaires. Interviews were carried out by female Arab students who were selected for the task based on experience. Female interviewers have better access to Arab women, particularly in small villages and the Negev desert, where most Arab Bedouin live.

Participants

All respondents in the sample were 18 years or older. 52.9% were between 18 and 29 years old, 22.1% were between 30 and 39 years old, 17.3% were between 40 and 49 years old, and 7.7% were 50 years or older. The mean of age was 31.5 years old (SD, 10.4). Marital status: 35.3% were single, 58.3% were married, 4% were widows, 2.3% were divorced, and the rest were single family mothers (0.2%). Among the participants, there were 11% Arab Christians, 19% Druze, and the remaining 70% were Muslims.

In the sample, the household average is 4.9 persons (SD, 2.15), which is the same as the average among the Arab population in Israel according to the census of 2008 (CBS, 2012). Only 1.6% had a one-person household, 8.3% were living in a two person household, 15.1% were living in a household of three persons, 18.8% were living in a household of four persons, 21.2% were living in a household of five persons, and 35.1% were living in a household of six persons or more. Among married women, the fertility rate (the average of number of children) is 3.46 children (SD, 2.31). Among them, 8.6% have no children, 11.6% have one child, 17.5% have two children, 17.3% have three children, 15.1% have four children, and the rest, 29.9%, have five children or more. Importantly, the average number of children who still live with the mothers is 3.2 children. The average age of those who live with the mothers is 10.9 years. Moreover, 31.7% among these women have children at home 5 years or younger, about half of the women have children younger than 9 years old, and 20% among them have children over the age of 18.

Interestingly, 54% among the participants have never been employed. The average number of employees in the participants' households is 1.27 employees (SD, 0.9). About 13.3% of the households have no employees at all, while 59% have only one employee; 17.9% have two employees, and the rest, 9.8% of the households, have 3 employees or more. About 8.7% of the participants perceive their household economic status as "excellent" and 38.1% as "good", and the rest perceive it as "bad" (38.2%) and "extremely bad" (15%).

Similarly to the Arab minority in Israel, about 94.6% among the participants' households privately own their apartment. The average room in the participants' apartments is 4.6 rooms, and the housing density is 1.1 persons per room.

The average education among the women is 10.9 years (SD, 3.3). About 30% of the women did not complete high-school, 45.8% have completed their high-school degree, 8.5% have professional certificate, and the rest, 15.6%, have an academic degree.

Results

Factors: Why Arab Women Do Not Work

As shown in Table 1, the results of this study demonstrate that there are several factors that prevent and negatively contribute to female participation in the work force. These are:

1. *Lack of jobs*: This factor appears as one of the most important factors contributing adversely to the female participation rate. Slightly more than half the participants (52.6%) argue that they do not participate in the work force because of the lack of jobs. Among those women, about 32% argue that there is a lack of jobs in their city and town.
2. *The burden of the housework*: About one third of the women argue that the burden of the work at their household prevents them from working outside the house. Usually, Arab and Muslim women are most responsible for many forms of household works, in addition to the reproduction and education of their children.
3. *Lack of qualifications*: About one fifth of the participants suggest that they do not have the adequate qualifications for jobs. In other words, they do not have the proper human capital to be employed.
4. *Cultural reasons*: About 18% of the participants suggest that their families "do not let me work" for social and cultural reasons.
5. *Learning in university*: About 12% of the participants suggest that they do not work because they are enrolled at universities.
6. *Children*: Some women, about 5%, suggest that they do not work since they have children at home and they cannot leave them.
7. *Helping old parents at home*: About 3% suggest that they do not participate in the labor market because they help their elderly parents at home.
8. *Do not want to work*: Some women, 3%, suggest that simply they do not want to participate in the labor market.

Table 3. Reasons Why Women Do Not Participate in the Labor Market (%)

<i>Factor of not working</i>	<i>Percentage (n=578)</i>	<i>Arab Muslims</i>	<i>Arab Christians</i>	<i>Arab Druze</i>
Lack of jobs in general	36.9	38.0	48.0	31.0
Lack of jobs “my city”	21.0	20.0	27.0	17.0
Lack of jobs	15.9	18.0	21.0	14.0
Burden of work at home: “I do a lot of work at home”	30.5	39.0	32.0	16.0
Lack of qualifications (Human capital)	22.1	29.0	5.0	6.0
My family do not let me work	17.6	30.0	2.0	8.0
Learning in university (student)	12.0	10.0	22.0	13.0
Health	7.6	6.0	8.0	22.0
Transportation	6.7	5.0	0.0	3.0
Children	5.0	5.0	6.0	14.0
Helping old parents at home	3.3	3.0	0.0	1.0
Don’t want to work	3.3	6.0	2.0	2.0

Women Preferences Regarding Employment in the Future

We asked the participants, who are unemployed at present, “If possible, will you be willing to participate in the labour market?” Interestingly, about 43%, as Table 2 shows, among the participants suggested that they are willing to participate in the labor market immediately if they have the opportunity to do so. This is a quite dramatic finding which suggests that the sum of the 20% of the Arab women who participate in the labor force at the present and those who are willing to participate (43% out of 80% who do not participate=34.4%) reaches about 55%. If we add to this the students and those with health problems the figures will be much more promising.

Table 4. Unemployed Women’s Willingness to Participate in the Labor Market

	<i>% (N=573)</i>
Yes will participate in the labor market	42.8
No will not participate in the labor market	57.2
Total	100.0

Women’s Preferences Regarding Place of Employment

We asked the women where they prefer to do their paid work. The results, as shown in Table 3, suggest that the vast majority (73%) among women preferred to work either in their homes or in their hometown. The rest preferred either outside their hometown or had no preference.

Table 5. Preferred Place of Employment

	% (N=466)
Home	30.9
In the same hometown where they live	42.1
Outside their town residence	5.2
Anywhere	21.9
Total	100.0

Women's Preferences Regarding Interference Strategies to Let Them Work

We asked the participants "What should be done in order to let you be employed?" The findings show that most of the women ask for creating new jobs either in their hometown (41%) or adequate jobs for women. In addition, they suggest developing the transportation infrastructure and child care (preschool) institutions.

Table 6. Interference Strategies for Helping Women Participate in the Labor Force

Interference strategies	% (N)
Create jobs in my hometown	41 (254)
Job training	35 (202)
Create jobs adequate to women qualifications	26 (151)
Encourage the family to let women work	15 (88)
Develop adequate transportation system	11 (65)
Create jobs in a places designated for women only	6 (36)
Develop child care institutions during work hours	5 (27)

Who Cares about Women's Employment

We asked the participants "To what extent do various formal and informal institutions take care of the female employment issue?" These institutions include the Israeli Government, ministries, civil society organizations, and local and political leaders as shown in Table 5. The results suggest that according to the women's perceptions, formal and informal intuitions do not really help them in their employment issues. The vast majority of the participants suggest that the Government (76.5%) and its ministries do not help Arab women in their employment issue. It was the Employment Office who got the "best" scores, where about a quarter of the women suggest that this office helps them in finding jobs. Strikingly, the women suggest that the Arab leaders, members of the Parliament (the Kenneset) also do not help them in these issues. Neither, it seems, do the civil society organizations including women's NGOs.

Table 7. The Extent to which Institutions and Political Leaders Help Women with Their Employment Issues (%)

The Institution	Do not help	Not so much	Help	Total
The Government of Israel	76.5	14.7	8.8	100
Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services	76.1	16.3	7.6	100
The Employment Office	55.7	19.2	25.1	100
Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor	81.4	12.4	6.3	100
The Arab Mayors	80.5	12.3	7.2	100
The Knesset Members	84.3	11.9	3.8	100
The Arab Members of the Knesset	79.6	12.3	8.1	100
The Arab Follow-up Committee	79.3	13.5	8.2	100
Women's NGOs	68.7	14.3	17.0	100
Civil society organizations	77.4	12.7	9.9	100

Strategic Policies for Reducing Poverty

Increasing Participation in the Labor Force

The international literature suggests that there are various reasons for the explanations of the levels of poverty, such as the education level of the household; the dependency ratio or family size; place of living where living in periphery has a positive relation with poverty rate; the state of employment of the household's head; gender; accessibility to infrastructure; and number of employees in the household (Abu-Bader and Gottlieb, 2009; Wodon, 1998; Datt, Simler, Mukherjee and Dava, 2000; Datt and Jolliffe, 2005; Geda, de Jong, Kimenyi, and Mwabu, 2005; ILO, 2009).

Even though there are various explanations for poverty, this paper focuses on the employment rate among women. Following the international experience, "work is the best way of lifting families out of poverty, but tackling the causes of such entrenched and wide inequalities" (OECD, 2010). Importantly, the literature suggests that the vast majority of poor households have one provider or none. In Israel for example, 433,300 families were under the poverty line, among them only 7.4% have two providers or more, and the rest (92.6%) have one provider or less (Barkali, Endeweld, Fruman, and Gottlieb, 2011). That means increasing the rate of Arab women's participation in the labour market, in our case, will probably decrease the level of poverty among Arab families. The probability states that a family with two providers is more unlikely to be under the poverty line, according to the bank of Israel (2012).

Based on the empirical study, and the valuable literature on employment of women, we suggest a conceptual framework for increasing women's participation in the labor force, which we suppose would decrease the levels of poverty among women and their families eventually. In order to build the general strategic policies for increasing women's participation in the labor market and decreasing poverty among them, we identified based on the empirical findings and conceptualized the major factors that affect women's participation rate as follows:

Cultural Factors

These also could be named *gender factors*, which suggest that "gender analyses of labour markets suggest that it is more difficult for women than men to escape poverty through paid

work and higher incomes” (Kabeer, 2008: 3). The cultural model has also been used to explain patterns of minority women’s participation in Western labor markets and has served in general to explain the mechanisms that restrict women’s employment (Khattab, 2002). Much of the cultural perspective is premised on the centrality of family-instilled values (Hite, 2007). Azaiza, Abu-Baker, Hertz-Lazarowitz, and Ghanem assert that “culturally, control of the sexual behavior of women is a problematic issue in Arab society,” and that the concept of “family honor” is used to preserve societal structure and the patriarchal nature of the Arab family (2009: 341). Such values and beliefs have been developed throughout history to control women’s bodies, as well as their lifestyles and daily life practices. During October 2010, three Arab mothers in Israel were killed by other Arabs under the pretext of “family honor.” In conjunction with such practices, a traditional harsh value system has been used to compel women to act within defined roles in all life aspects. As the findings show, about 17% of the participants suggest that their families “do not let them go work” for traditional reasons. In addition, about 31% of the participants suggest that they have a burden of work at home (“I do a lot of work at home”) (30.5%), which prohibits them from outside paid work.

Family Traits

The family circumstance in which women live may affect their prospects of employment. Factors such as material wealth, number of children, and husbands’ income undoubtedly influence employment rate and earning (Tienda and Glass, 1985; England, Garcia-Beaulieu, and Ross, 2004). In our study, the participants suggest that they do not work also for reasons that are related to their families: burden of work at home (“I do a lot of work at home”) (30.5%), having children (5%), and helping elderly parents (3.3%). England et al. (2004) found that although marriage and husbands’ incomes no longer play a significant role in deterring employment, the presence of children does serve to deter employment for all ethnic groups. According to Khattab (2002), “the participation of Arab women in the Israeli labor market is determined primarily by their ethnic and religious affiliation, education, marital status and age.”

Ethnicity

Strikingly, the findings show that the lack of jobs for Arabs is a major reason for not participating in the labor market. In addition, the majority of the participant women argue that the Government and its institutions mostly do not care about their employment issues.

The well-known economist, Zvi Eckstein, Deputy Governor of the Bank of Israel, the central bank of Israel, which is responsible for the financial system and which “support[s] the Government’s objectives especially growth and employment” (Bank of Israel, 2012), suggested recently that the Arab minority suffer in Israel from: a lack of urban development and adequate infrastructures; lack of accessibility to jobs; high concentration of Arab employees, about 53%, in blue collar jobs; high poverty rate; low national investment in education comparing to the Jewish sector; and lack of adequate transportation accessibility inside their cities and between them (Eckstein, 2012). In many multi-ethnic societies, ethnicity still plays an important role in the process of stratification and in economic attainment and employment opportunities (Modood et al., 1997; Khattab, 2002; Kraus and Yonay, 2000; Khattab, 2005; Reid, 2002; Higginbotham and Weber, 1999). According to Khattab (2005), liberal theory dictates that achievement-related criteria in fields such as education will eventually replace criteria of ascription, such as ethnicity and gender, in determining the life opportunities and socio-economic rewards received by individuals. Accordingly, in industrial, liberal and democratic countries characterized by

educational expansion and increasingly ‘open’ and ‘meritocratic’ forms of society, access to socio-economic positions and socio-economic rewards depends on education, skills and qualification, or human capital. According to this approach, inequality in earnings is the result of differences in human capital, and not of ethnicity, gender, religion, age and other such traits.

Structural Factors

Labor market segmentation is the manner in which the labor market is structured by race and in which racial differences impact the employment rate and employment conditions of minority women (Reid, 2002). Arabs and Jews are situated differently vis-à-vis important structural features of the Israeli labor market, and this is one factor leading to differential rates of employment (Eckstein, 2011). Previous studies carried out in the United States found that structural features of the labor market are pivotal in explaining black women’s higher rates of lay-off, exit from temporary/seasonal work, and exit from work for other reasons (Reid, 2002: 728). It was also found that ethnicity-based occupational segregation serves to concentrate minority women in occupations that pay less and are more vulnerable to job loss (Reskin, 1999).

Spatial Factors

The enclave model has often been used to explain patterns of participation of minority women in western labor markets and the mechanisms that facilitate female labor market participation (Khattab, 2002). Arabs and Jews are situated differently relative to the labor market because of their respective concentrations in different regions of the country (Eckstein, 2011). Previous studies have suggested that the spatial segregation of Arabs in Israel plays an important role in developing the local ethnic labor market and that residential segregation of Arabs protects them from direct competition with European Jews (Kraus and Yonay, 2000). On this basis, Kraus and Yonay have argued that “paradoxically...the politico-ideological and social marginalization of Palestinians has also had positive aspects” (2000: 530). Previous studies have also found that Arabs working in mixed Jewish-Arab localities and all-Jewish communities suffer the detrimental consequences of occupational discrimination, while Arabs working in Arab towns and villages are shielded from Jewish competition (Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov, 1994; Semyonov, 1988; Shavit, 1992; Khattab, 2002). Moreover, McLafferty and Preston (1992) hold that “gender differences in labor market segmentation are central to the spatial mismatch debate, both in their effects on wages, occupation, and transportation access and their links to place-based variation in commuting and spatial access to employment.” The spatial mismatch hypothesis, proposed by Kain (1968) and elaborated by many others, describes the combined effects of residential segregation and economic restructuring on minorities’ spatial access to employment opportunities (Kasarda, 1989).

Human Capital

The findings of this study show that about one fifth of the participants argue that they do not work because of a lack of the work qualifications; in other words, they suffer from a deficiency in human capital. “Human capital theorists argue that an individual’s skills affect the likelihood of employment and that skills gained from education or workplace training make an employee more productive” (Desai and Waite, 1991; England et al., 2004; Reid, 2002). Studies have long found a positive association between education and employment (Cohen and Bianchi, 1999; Kahn and Whittington, 1996; England et al., 2004). England et al. suggests that education is related to employment for all groups, and this relationship is important in explaining the

employment gap between all groups of white women and women of color in the United States. In recent decades, the rise in employment among women has been greatest among the well-educated (Chinhui and Murphy, 1997; Cohen and Bianchi, 1999).

Social Capital

Research indicates that human capital and social capital are the two most important resources to immigrant self-employment and intergroup variation in business ownership (Sanders and Nee, 1996). While human capital is “what you know,” social capital “is not what you know, but whom you know” (Cannone, 2009: 39; Field, 2003; Putnam, 2000). In other words, the ‘social’—familial ties, friendships, group memberships, et cetera—constitutes a valuable resource, or ‘capital’ upon which to rely when we are in need of help (Cannone, 2009: 40; Bourdieu, 1986).

Policies for Reducing Poverty

In order to affect the factors of the participation rate we propose strategic policies that aim to increase women’s participation and eventually to reduce their poverty rate. The idea is to build strategies according to the specific factors. In other words, we must dismantle the factors that hinder women from participating in the labor market and build strategies to tackle each factor separately as well as collectively. In the end, there are four types of domains that affect the employment rate among women. The first is the socio-cultural domain, which includes the cultural and family factors. The second is the ethno-political domain, which includes ethnicity and structural factors. The third is the personal domain, which includes the human capital and social capital factors. The fourth is the spatial domain, which includes spatial factors such as transportation, place of living, et cetera. In brief, the following table summarizes the major policies according to the mentioned factors as shown in Table 6.

Table 8. Strategic Policies for Increasing Employment participation and Reducing Poverty

Domains	Examples for Policies
Socio-cultural Domain	
Cultural factor (or gender factor)	Enhancing the status of women through various policies: education in all levels; campaigns, etc.
Family factor	Enhance gender equality for women; share burden of household works
Ethno-political Domain	
Ethnicity	Promoting laws to prevent discrimination against Arab women’s employment participation; promoting affirmative action laws to enhance ethnic equality in the employment sectors
Structural factor	Promoting the entrance of Arab minority employees to high skilled jobs; prevent discrimination in employment through variety of laws
Personal Domain	
Human capital	Job-related training; and education for the low-

	skilled (OECD, 2006); enhancing high education among women; developing working skills relevant to the evolutionary labor market
Social capital	Developing skills for looking for jobs (writing CV, etc.)
Spatial Domain	
Spatial factor	Developing transportation infrastructure; enhancing accessibility and transportation to work places for women; developing adequate economic infrastructure

Discussion

This paper suggests that work is a crucial factor in combating poverty, and increasing the employment rate among poor families is critical as well. This paper analyzes the poverty among Arabs in Israel and suggests that the low rate of women participating in the labor market is one of the factors that contribute to the extremely high poverty rate among the Arab minority in Israel. Therefore, the idea behind this paper is that increasing the employment rate among women will probably lead to a decreasing poverty rate among them and their families. Moreover, in order to understand the employment participation among Arab women, this paper identified the factors that affect their participation rate through an empirical study and by utilizing the international literature on poverty and employment. Truly, as Morrison, Raju and Sinha conclude: “Female labour force participation, in particular, plays a key role in cushioning households from the impact of macroeconomic shocks and keeping them out of poverty” (2008: 16).

This paper concludes that employment among Arab women is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. And it identified four major domains that affect the level of employment participation. The *socio-cultural domain* includes the cultural and family factors and suggests that there are social and cultural values and systems that affect negatively the participation of women in the employment market. This domain is relevant to the Arab culture in general and not limited to the Arabs in Israel. It is apparent that women in the Arab and Muslim countries have a deteriorated social, political, and economic status. The international literature suggests that the Arab family structure in the Middle East is extended, patrilineal, patrilocal, patriarchal, endogamous, and occasionally polygynous (Baraket, 1993). According to socioeconomic indicators and gender statistics, women in the Arab region are more disadvantaged socially, economically, and politically on average than women in other world regions, not to mention women in regions with similar income levels and/or at similar stages of economic development, such as Latin America and Southeast and East Asia (Moghadam, 2005: 3).

The second domain, the *ethno-political domain*, includes ethnicity and structural factors. This domain suggests that ethnicity and ethnic relationships in a country affect in various ways the employment sector in general. In Israel, there is a long and harsh ethnic conflict between Arabs and Jews in the country. This conflict affects the entire arena of Arab males’ and females’ employment.

The third domain is the *personal domain*, which includes the human capital and social capital factors. This domain is almost similar to women in the Arab world as socio-economic

indicators and measures from the *Arab Human Development Report* (UNDP and RBAS, 2002, 2009) tell us.

The fourth is the *spatial domain*, which includes spatial factors such as transportation, place of living, et cetera. This domain suggests that there are spatial elements that affect the women's employment rate.

In the end, this study also provided some theoretical insights regarding women's employment in the Arab and Muslim cultures. On a practical level, this study suggests some policies for improving women's participation in the labor force, both in Israel and elsewhere. This paper suggests some measures to increase the participation rate among women. Yet, as the *Global Employment Trends 2009* suggests, job strategies have to be developed while keeping in mind that in the long run only decent jobs have a sustainable impact on poverty reduction, definitely not more poverty work.

Finally, this paper has some limitations, since its case study has some specific political and ethnic settings that differ from the Arab worlds and Muslim societies.

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