

Fathers and microfinance empower women

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Graduation Credit: 123rf

Two studies published in the latest issue of the *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* addressed women's empowerment through education and political engagement.

Despite [common stereotypes](#) of paternalistic Arab-Muslim societies, the numbers of Arab [women](#) travelling to Western countries to further their education is on the rise. Amani Hamdan from the University of Dammam in Saudi Arabia wanted to know how Arab-Muslim women who studied in Canada perceive gender and what factors influenced their educational achievements.

Hamdan conducted in depth interviews with nine Arab Muslim women to understand the factors that enabled them to achieve academic and career success in Canada. She found that the factor mentioned most often and most emphatically was paternal support. In the interviews, the women said their fathers protected them from cultural norms and traditions that are unsupportive of female education. The women believed their fathers wanted them to have an education to ensure socio-economic circumstances similar to those they grew up in. In several cases there was a longstanding family tradition of promoting female education. Most of the fathers were described as taking an approach to Islam that affirms gender equality, especially when it comes to women receiving a solid [education](#).

"The value of this research project," writes Hamdan, "is that it disrupts the typical and inaccurate monolithic representation of Muslim women. It challenges Western assumptions about these women as constituting a homogenously oppressed group."

On the other side of the globe, Faraha Nawaz from Flinders University in Australia was interested in evaluating the role of microfinancing on Bangladeshi women's [political engagement](#). Most literature on the impacts of microfinancing has focused on women's socio-economic empowerment. Fawaz conducted in depth and focus group interviews with 40 women who received microfinance assistance from two non-governmental organizations working in the country. She asked the women about their knowledge of the political process and their

involvement in it through voting, campaigning, and belonging to [political parties](#). Her research revealed that the women's involvement in microfinancing schemes played a role in increasing their political awareness and participation in the voting process. Only a small number, however, became active in political parties and in campaigning. Representatives of the NGOs and interactions with other women partaking in the schemes seemed to play an important role in this regard. The women mentioned group meetings as a platform for sharing knowledge, making informed decisions, and providing encouragement.

"NGOs need to consider women's political empowerment more seriously by offering opportunities for appropriate training and advocacy in this area," Nawaz concludes.



Women in the decision making process for a project in Bangladesh. Credit: Asian Development Bank

Provided by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)

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