#### AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

# WOMEN'S ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT: TOWARDS MORE SUPPROTIVE HR PRACTICES AND SYSTEMS

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# WOMEN'S ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT: TOWARDS MORE SUPPORTIVE HR PRACTICES AND SYSTEMS

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### AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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The dissertation aims to untangle the organizational and societal hindrances to women's access to employment and career advancement in the Lebanese private sector by suggesting and implementing Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices as possible facilitators of women's access to employment and career advancement in the workforce. First, the research presents literature pertaining to societal (macro-level) influences on women's career entry and advancement, such as patriarchal values, economic stagnation, and political unrest. The research then diverts to presenting reasons at the meso-level, such as occupational stereotypes, limitations to networking, and the gendered organizational culture. After uncovering the hindrances that women experience, I adopt an institutional theory framework in order to uncover which HRM practices can be implemented in order to support women's access to employment and career development. Notably, the literature presents several elements to shed light on, such as the coercive, normative and mimetic pressures placed on HRM as well as the initiatives conducted by organizations to advance women's positions that are currently in place but should be revised in order to support women in their careers and more importantly their entry into the labor force.

The research also uncovers and presents the perspectives of HR professionals in Lebanon, as well as the views of women who have reached their desired career destinations, or are still in the process of doing so. This is presented through the methodology adopted, which makes use of interviews conducted on a sample of 20 women, 5 who are HR professionals, and the remaining 15 women being working women at their early and mid level career stages.

The data is analyzed using a thematic analysis approach in order to identify, from women's own perspectives, what is blocking their access to employment and their career development opportunities. Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews conducted with HR managers will allow me to identify supportive HR practices in light of the current institutional realities in Lebanon. Finally, the findings are discussed in terms of theoretical and practical implications in support of women's access to employment and career development, while highlighting the limitations of this study.

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#### CHAPTER 1

#### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background

The roles that men and women play in society are not biologically determined; so much as they are socially determined (Sangeeta and Sharma, 2012). From the moment of birth, gender expectations influence how boys and girls are treated. Unfortunately, career differences can be easily seen in the career choices of men and women, especially that women participation in the labor force is mostly concentrated in traditional areas such as teaching, nursing, and low-level administrative work (Sangeeta and Sharma, 2012). Furthermore, despite the rising number of working women in the Arab Middle East, the percentage of women in the Lebanese workforce has remained below that of other countries across the world, due to the extent of discrimination between males and females in the workplace. In the Middle East, the total percentage of women in the labor force has increased from 1990 till 2017. For example, Saudi Arabia experienced an increase from 10.6% to 16.2%, Kuwait 24.2% to 28.2%, Iran 10.4% to 19.0%, Iraq 9.6% to 20.1% and Lebanon 22.5% to 24.5% only (World Bank, 2017).

On a similar vein, other countries across the world have experienced significant increases from 1990 till 2017 in the percentage of women in the labor force. For example, the total percentage of women in the labor force increased from 34.5% to 42.9% in Brazil, 40.5% to 46.5% in Germany 35.8% to 44.0% in Greece, 28.5% to

42.9% in Colombia, and 13.2% to 22.4% in Pakistan (World Bank, 2017). Thus, as evidenced by the low percentage (24.5 percent) of women making up the total Lebanese labor force (World Bank, 2017) Lebanese women still experience difficulties in accessing formal employment.

Furthermore, Lebanese women face the glass ceiling and are under-represented at the managerial levels as their careers continue to be significantly hindered by: (a) the patriarchal socio cultural values that give men prominence over women by virtue of their gender and status as the main breadwinners; and (b) the multitude of organizational constraints that hinder their career progression ranging from discriminatory organizational cultures and negative stereotypes, unfair allocation of promotion and training and development opportunities, to exclusion from the networking activities and absence of mentoring and role models (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2010).

Based on the above, it seems that social norms and cultural constraints still influence the degree of female economic activity and participation in the labor force (IWSAW, 1997). Women continue to face many barriers on their way to the top that are unique to their gender, and they are often under-represented in organizations, especially in senior management roles and corporate boards (Jamali et al., 2006). The constraints facing women come from the socio-cultural environment, where for example, Lebanon continues to describe the role of women as mothers and homemakers (Jamali et al., 2006).

Another set of constraints is derived from the stereotypical attitudes perpetuated with corporate cultures, such as viewing women as being less committed because of their family obligations especially when they get married or pregnant. Afiouni et al. (2013) point out that women in the Arab region in particular are more likely to choose careers that align with the cultural requirement of a work-life balance which allows women to earn an income while fulfilling culturally-mandated familial duties. And aside from the overall employment of women, there are sectors that seem less favorable of women, such as the STEM fields, where women are not encouraged to become educated in such fields or even to participate in them. STEM fields remain highly segregated by sex (Michelmore and Sassler, 2016), highlighting ways in which the labor market is structured by gender (Ridgeway, 2011). The limited encouragement of women to become educated in STEM fields has led to the decline of women in technical industries, which in turn is leading to the decline of women leaders in this field (Kemp et al., 2015). Furthermore, despite the attempts to include and promote women, women also remain underrepresented in many other sectors, for organizational as well as individual reasons.

#### 1.2. Current Situation in Lebanon

According to the World Economic Forum's annual Gender Gap Report, only 26 percent of working-age women are in the workforce in Lebanon, compared to 76 percent for men (Sidahmed, 2014). And in the 2014 Global Gender Gap Report, Lebanon fared particularly badly, ranking 135th out of 142 countries (World Economic Forum, 2014). Thus, Lebanon maintains a 24.8 percent female workforce participation rate, making it one of the weakest countries in female workforce participation in the

region. In addition to the case of Lebanon, the country, while having achieved what the United Nations Development Programme's 2015 Human Development Report defines as a high human development index (HDI), still suffers from a low gender development index (GDI) score than most of its Arab counterparts (UNDP, 2015). In 2014, the HDI for females was 0.718 in Lebanon, 0.796 in UAE, 0.741 in Oman, and 0.972 in Kuwait (UNDP, 2015). On the other hand, the GDI was 0.899 in Lebanon, 0.954 in UAW, 0.909 in Oman, and 0.972 in Kuwait (UNDP, 2015). The confessional structure of government (i.e. formal pluralistic sectarianism) has been noted as working to reinforce patriarchal interpretations of the law and therefore to further restrict the rights of Lebanese women, particularly as they relate to family, personal status, and sensitive issues concerning citizenship and nationality (Bazalgette and Mohamed, 2015). This, in part, helps to explain Lebanon's poor ranking on international gender indices such as the Global Gender Gap index noted earlier, as well as the Gender Inequality Index.

Moreover, Lebanon is a small country with a turbulent history marred by war, large waves of emigration and rampant corruption permeating the functioning of the private and public sectors (Al Ariss and Özbilgin, 2010). And although the Lebanese constitution guarantees the equality of all its citizens, the inclusion of freedoms for the different confessional communities within the constitution results in a reinforcement of patriarchal socio-cultural gender norms that are often not in keeping with the principles of gender equality (Bazalgette and Mohamed, 2015). Thus, Lebanon does not have a civil code regulating personal status. Moreover, the increasing political instability and conflict in the region since 2011 has created a particularly harsh environment for women (Afiouni & Karam, 2014). And as a result, since Lebanon is seen to operate in a

context of deterrence, multilevel factors play a role in the restrictions on Lebanese women's retention and career growth, as well as their access to managerial and leadership positions. However, Lebanese women have been pioneers, in comparison to their sisters in neighboring Arab countries. This is happening as a result of the women who are forging their ways into employment and other public roles and responsibilities outside those traditionally allocated to women in this region (Tlaiss and Mendelson, 2014). Thus, this is the current situation of Lebanese women in regards to their careers, and this is happening due to the influence of macro-level factors and organizational factors, and the lack of effective HR practices needed to untangles such influences.

Certainly, the lack of effective HR systems and practices is not the only explanation behind the underrepresentation of women in the Lebanese private sector. This study therefore, through interviews with 5 women who are HR managers, and 15 women in their early and mid career levels, will aim to investigate possible reasons for the underrepresentation of women. This research along with the interviews conducted will discover the perspectives of HR professionals and women at work in Lebanon regarding the issue of gender in the workplace, the obstacles women face in the workplace throughout their careers, the factors that usually hinder not only their advancement, but also the initiatives conducted by organizations that aim to advance women's careers, and the human resource management practices which aim at solving these obstacles.

#### 1.3. Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to uncover problems limiting women's career chances and growth, while suggesting possible solutions by drafting HR policies. Objectives that will be addressed include:

- 1. Identifying the types of employment hurdles that women face, and assessing to what extent and how they could be controllable or uncontrollable.
- 2. Analyzing the perspectives and opinions of women in several industries in the private sector in order to identify their views of hindrances to their career growth, and accordingly be able to suggest the HRM practices needed in order to challenge such issues at the organizational level.
- 3. Suggesting organizational policies that support women's access to employment and career progression (by following international standards such as the SDG's, and specifically goals number 5 and 8 which are gender equality and decent work and economic growth, because empowering women and girls has a multiplier effect, and helps drive up economic growth and development).

#### 1.4. Motivation

The main motivation behind this research study is to untangle the organizational and societal hindrances to women's access to employment and career development in the Lebanese private sector by suggesting and implementing Human Resource Management (HRM) Practices as possible facilitators of women access to employment and career development in the workforce. The research will represent hindrances to women's career progression due to reasons pertaining to societal (macro-level) influences on these employees' advancement, such as patriarchal values, economic stagnation, demographic factors, and political unrest. In addition to reasons at the meso-level, such as occupational stereotypes, limitations to networking, and the gender organizational culture.

After uncovering the hindrances that women experience, and adopting an institutional theory framework, the research will then suggest how and which HRM practices can be implemented in order to support women's access to employment and career development. These practices will be developed according to the SDG guidelines, specifically goal number 5 on gender equality and are intended to help alleviate the various multi-level constraints experienced by women. In order to do so, we will first identify current initiatives undertaken by organizations to advance women's career development. We will then analyze these practices in light of the current challenges that women face and identify areas of mismatch. Thus, by juxtaposing the perspective of HR professionals in Lebanon, with the views of women at various levels in their careers, we will gain insight about current mismatches, and then suggest HR policies and practices, in line with SDG goal 5, that will help address

women's experienced challenges and concerns. The contribution of this research is that it will help address the current gender gap in Lebanon, namely in regards to economic empowerment, by suggesting a set of HRM policies and practices aimed at facilitating women's access to employment and career development.

#### 1.5. Structural Map

This research will identify the causes of why women are underrepresented in the workplace, and why they face barriers to entry and delay in career advancement, in order to draft HR practices as a possible solution to employee empowerment, and more specifically towards reducing these problems for women. Thus, the findings will serve as an improvement of the current HRM practices, and will also suggest new HRM practices to minimize the disadvantages that women are facing when it comes to employment or career advancement especially in the Lebanese private sector. Thus, the chapters will be divided as follows:

<u>Chapter 1</u> – Introducing the Topic: This chapter offers overall background information about women in the workforce and in managerial positions, especially in the private sector in Lebanon, as well as why women are underrepresented in the workforce, and what sectors seem less favorable of women. This chapter also presents the aims and objectives of this research, and how certain HR practices can be adopted in order to help in addressing this issue.

<u>Chapter 2</u> – Macro-Level Influences: This chapter will focus on uncovering the external factors that lead to the decline of women in the Lebanese workforce and that act as barriers to entry, especially from a cultural perspective. These factors will also be tested during the interviews, to identify whether they have affected the interviewees and to what extent, and what could be the possible hindrances to organizational change.

<u>Chapter 3</u> – Meso-Level Influences: This chapter will focus on presenting an overview of organizational-level obstacles that women face in organizations as they attempt to progress in their careers. These obstacles are internal factors on the organizational level, and are controlled by the organization itself. They are behaviors that are enrooted in the way the work is being done, and can act as barriers to career development and even barriers to top-level positions for women. Therefore, this section will aim to give attention to organizational-level hindrances in the development of women's careers, in which such hindrances are also referred to as meso-level influences, and how these obstacles are leading to a decline in the female leadership, especially that HR practices have not been effective in helping to address these issues.

<u>Chapter 4</u> – The Institutional Theory as a Theoretical Framework - This chapter focuses on the institutional theory as a theoretical framework in which human resource practices can be applied through. The best-fit approach to HRM focuses on the need to match HR practices to prevailing conditions in a specific organization field, rejecting the notion of one best way of doing things in all contexts. So in this case, the best-fit approach would be to match the HR practices to the different industries being studied

and the context they are all operating in, which is the Lebanese private sector. Thus, this chapter will discuss the importance of the institutional theory to HRM by proving how the institutional environment is the source of legislation, rewards or incentives, as well as constraints or sanctions, on organizational practices.

<u>Chapter 5</u> – HRM Practices – This chapter presents how and which HRM practices can be implemented in order to support women's access to employment and career development.

<u>Chapter 6</u> – Methodology – This section will focus on the research method, approach, design, and sample.

<u>Chapter 7</u> – Results and Discussion – This section will summarize all the findings from the primary and secondary research, along with their theoretical and practical implications, in addition to their limitations.

<u>Chapter 8</u> – Conclusion – This is the final chapter in this research. It will summarize all the findings of what was done, and what still needs to be done by pointing out avenues for future research. It will outline how the findings could serve in improving current practices or by suggesting new practices to challenge the disadvantages women face in the private sector in Lebanon.

## CHAPTER 2 MACRO-LEVEL INFLUENCES

#### 2.1. What are Macro-Level Influences

Many of the under-achievements and barriers that women experience are outside their personal control. Thus, external factors exist which lead to the decline of women in the workforce, and act as barriers to career entry and career progress. Such factors intervene from a societal angle, and play a major role in limiting women's career access and advancement, while also acting as hindrances to organizational change. Such influences further add to the discrepancy of women as effective leaders versus the social standards imposed on these women. Thus, factors such as the patriarchal values which shape women's careers, benevolent sexism, economic stagnation, political instability, and legal legislations are going to be discovered in order to point out the extent to which they affect women's entry to the workforce.

#### 2.2. Patriarchal Values and Women's Careers

Women in Lebanon are highly influenced by cultural forces, which act as constraints to their career entry and advancement when it comes to joining the labor force. According to Afiouni (2014), women in this society are socialized to view their role as nurturers to be a priority over their role as breadwinners. This is one of the many consequences of the patriarchal values that have influenced women's careers. Most of the women in the Middle East, and moreover in Lebanon, are constrained by the

patriarchy, which refers to the social system that provides men with privileged access to power and authority across several areas. Patriarchy preserves the dominance of men by propagating traditional gender roles and the numerous associated practices that oppress women and restrict their participation (Walby, 1997). Men under this system wield the capacity to dominate economic leaderships and demonstrate moral authority. This patriarchal system plays a big role in influencing the societal expectations of women, while limiting their role in the workforce, which is explained due to the societal expectation that women are responsible for household care while men are chosen to care for employment, household income, and security. Such patriarchal structures are also closely linked to the roles and norms of the traditional family, where women are expected to engage primarily in tasks that are related to the maintenance of the household, leaving attention to the other structures (paid work, culture and state) as secondary (Afiouni and Karam, 2017). In this reality, women's production is primarily geared as reproduction, including tasks related to child birth, childcare, preparing food, maintaining shelter, cleaning, providing emotional support for family, and fulfilling the sexual needs of the patriarch (Afiouni and Karam, 2017). Thus, the patriarchal, maledominant nature of Arab societies, in which masculinity is preferred, generates traditional gender stereotypes that spillover to organizational boundaries (Tlaiss and Mendelson, 2014).

Patriarchy can take form through two structures: public and private. For example, public patriarchal structures involve the collective misuse of women's opportunities for full participation and personal growth primarily relating to relations in paid work, cultural institutions, and the state (Walby, 1990). This involves the

oppression of women in decision-making, control, and even inequality in pay even when she is granted access to participate in decision making and control. On the other hand, private patriarchal structures are closely linked to the roles and norms of the traditional family (Walby 1990). Patriarchy through the private sphere renders the home as the focal domain of a woman's work, existence and identity. Thus, with this traditional idea taking over, women are expected to engage only in tasks that are related to the maintenance of their household, instead of tasks related to paid work. In this reality, women's production is primarily geared as reproduction, including tasks related to childbirth, childcare, preparing food, maintaining shelter, cleaning, providing emotional support for family, and fulfilling the sexual needs of the patriarch. In this formulation, paid work for women is limited because it is outside the home and is only acceptable if it contributes to the upkeep of the household. Thus, women are less likely to join the workforce the more their norm-defined nurturing role is internalized and the more familial care needs arise (Speirings et al., 2010).

Within the current Lebanese context, women are likely not to engage in work due to the perceptions that their family and community hold, which involves a generally restrictive collective belief that when women engage in paid work opportunities, this distracts them from fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in the private sphere, meaning their household and familial obligations. Family responsibilities have long been considered an important factor in influencing women's career advancement potential. According to Tharenou (2005), children are considered to take up time that could be devoted to careers, and male partners, who often work excessive hours, have little time to provide the domestic support required. Thus, despite the idea behind more

equal sharing of home duties, according to society and due to family obligations, women typically still hold the primary responsibility for children and household care. Therefore, engaging in paid work is only perceived as valid when it also helps in fulfilling private sphere roles and responsibilities (Afiouni & Karam, 2017). And even when women engage in paid word, there are certain factors that shape and bind their career options and choices. For example, a lot of women choose academia as a line of work, and are attracted to this field, due to its work flexibility as it allows more time for them with the family (Afiouni, 2014). Moghadam (2003) and Karam et al. (2013) provide another possible explanation for the choice of academia as a line of work. The results of their research show that the flexibility of academic work allows women to fulfill their childcare responsibilities, and women seem to be encouraged by others to opt for this profession, namely because of the flexibility it provides and its social desirability for women in the region. In addition, the education sector nowadays is perceived as receptive to employing women, especially that women in many countries have started to outnumber their male colleagues in this sector.

Furthermore, in societies where traditional values are held, it is difficult for women to acquire any form of paid work, and even academic work, because such societies place great importance on parent-child ties and traditional family values. This has been evidenced to be the case in the Arab Middle East, where extended family systems are common and gender roles are very well differentiated (Karam and Jamali, 2013). Such familial obligations and cultural constraints could be overwhelming for women. Karkoulian et al. (2016) suggest that women suffer from added stress caused by attempting to balance between paid work and meeting societal expectations in terms of

providing familial care needs. This has not just been the case in Lebanon, but also a general global case, because in light of societal expectations, women are seen as incapable of living up to the expectation of being entirely fixated on a job.

#### 2.3. Benevolent Sexism

Also acting as a macro-level hindrance to women's career entry and advancement, the role of benevolent sexism in gender inequality continues to spill over and affect women. One of the mechanisms through which benevolent sexism contributes to gender inequality is stereotyping at both the entry level and during career development. For example, organizations and government offices are frequently dominated by men. And a woman competing against a man at entry level for a high-ranking position in one of these institutions may face hostile sexism because she is viewed as a threat to the status quo of male authority. In fact, women, who are regarded as the nicer, kinder sex, have a cultural stereotype that is in general more positive than that of men, yet women often are victims of prejudice (Heilman and Eagly, 2008). Unfortunately, it is not the negativity of gender stereotypes that acts as a hindrance to women, instead it is the mismatches with desirable work roles that underlie biased workplace evaluations. This idea was even articulated by Heilamn (2001) as a "lack of fit" model, in order to promote the idea behind being prejudiced towards women.

Although it is well-known that women's career progress is slower and that women are underrepresented in certain organizations (e.g. IT organizations) and in top management positions compared to men (Catalyst, 2014; Ceci and Williams, 2011),

research into women's minority positions showed that due to men's higher status within society, men have a more privileged position (Risman, 2004), due to the ongoing gender stereotypes between men and women in occupying certain positions. A consequence of these gender stereotypes is the limited encouragement of women to join the STEM fields, such as science, technology, engineering, mathematics, medicine, and construction. For example, construction is one of the most male-dominated industries, with female participation remaining stubbornly stagnant. The field of construction portrays a negative public image of being "dirty", "dangerous", and this has been a major reason for women's lack of participation in the field of construction. The industry is considered to be tough, conflict ridden; with long-hours work norms, a strong culture of presenteeism and human resource management (HRM) processes and procedures that are both inequitable and inconsistent (Raidén and Sempik, 2012).

The difficulties women experience, either as construction workers or in professional roles have been strongly linked to the industry's culture with its prevailing masculine attitudes and discriminatory work practices (Dainty, Neale, et al. 2000), which have become the dominant idea behind working in the field of construction, and which has further added to the barriers that women face when wanting to enter such a field. In addition, such hindrances for women arise due to the lack of social network support and organizational support that they don't receive. The dearth of social network support available to female expatriates is also a significant barrier (Linehan et al. 2001). Females usually receive less career development and mentoring, while men are predicted to receive more support compared with females. Thus, it has been argued that the more powerful positions in organizations are filled almost exclusively by men

(Selmer and Leung, 2002). Women further lack the interpersonal support needed which could assist their entry or advancement into the jobs they desire. Women, but not men, who received early encouragement from peers and supervisors were more likely to have moved into upper management two years later rather than to have fallen back into lower management (Hutchings, 2010). This gender stereotyping suggests that women who would like to reach high management positions may actually need more organizational and external support than men, due to the obstacles they have to face, which are much more than the obstacles men are exposed to. The idea of having external support may in fact play a significant role for women at earlier stages of their careers.

Moreover, women are also underrepresented in academic medicine, mainly because they are deterred by concerns about work-life balance, they lack adequate mentors and role models for their participation in this field, and due to the gender discrimination and bias they experience in academic medicine. Thus, women have become more interested in teaching rather than research, which has discouraged women into academic medicine. The influence of role models and mentors also influence employment choices. For example, parents may encourage children to follow their occupational footsteps, so having a parent employed in STEM may enhance occupational entry (though this may be more true for men than women) (Sassler et al., 2016). Moreover, family commitments, the culture, and parenthood, are all considered as barriers to an academic career in medicine for women, or any other STEM field. The most career oriented women, who expected to marry late and limit fertility, were no more likely to enter STEM jobs than were women who anticipated marrying young and having two or more children, thus, these are the missing women in STEM (Sassler et al.,

2016). Evidence for concerns about work—life balance, which typically affects women more than men, indicated that women were concerned about work—life balance in academic medicine because female medical students and residents believed that it would be difficult to balance academic commitments with home and family life, with few able to identify role models who had achieved this (Edmunds, 2016). In addition, in a survey that was conducted about gender discrimination that women experience in medical school, the results showed that female students and residents had been subjected to gender-based harassment such as offensive remarks, behaviors that result in a hostile environment, and being ignored or not being treated with respect (Edmunds, 2016). Hence, women in male-dominated occupations encounter significant obstacles, ranging from problems of significance and integration. Thus, due to such discrimination, women have more difficulties in being taken seriously than did men.

A possible solution to try and reduce the idea behind women being underrepresented in the academic field of medicine is by achieving a more enabling environment for these women. Meaning, instead of focusing on an individual's career choices, this focus must be shifted instead to the societal and organizational contexts and cultures within which the choices of women are made. Increasing women's presence in STEM occupations may therefore require a more concerted effort at "undoing" gender, starting by making the culture of STEM work less "masculine" (Cech, 2013). Such attempts could include increasing the proportion of women completing degrees in STEM fields, by attracting women to STEM majors at the university level as a first step, which would later lead to an increase in women's presence in the STEM labor force.

Another common reason suggested for the lack of women participation in the labor force is female disinterest in pursuing certain positions. Women's reluctance to take assignments for personal reasons is not because of a lack of interest, but rather because of family and broader social/community obligations (Sinangil and Ones, 2001). Attitudes regarding family roles shape women's pursuits in important ways (Sassler et al., 2016). This adds to the importance of having organizational support for women, because a climate of encouragement for women may help them break through the barriers they are facing and achieve their full potential. Since education, training, and challenging work also seem to play an important role in advancement, particularly at higher levels, organizations should consider ways to encourage and assist women who might benefit from further development (Tharenou), such as education. However, there are overwhelming distinctions in education between the sexes in some developing countries. Socio-economic, cultural, demographic and geographic factors all play a role in affecting the educational participation for women. And what most of the cultures don't realize is that education is an asset, as well as an investment in human capital, and as it increases, the individual's skills and competencies will also increase.

#### 2.4. Economic Stagnation and Tight Labor Market

Considering the economic situation in Lebanon, paired with the patriarchy aimed at providing men with positions of power for the sake of adhering to their gender roles (Olmsted, 2005), women are held at a disadvantage when attempting to join the workforce. Despite the country being heavily literate, with females representing 53 percent of all university students in the country in 2001 and literacy reaching 98 percent among boys and girls aged 15-24, women's penetration of the labor force remains

limited (Jamali et al., 2010). Thus, women are still struggling to get into the labor market, even though many employers need job applicants and are reporting shortages of skills. And this struggle has increased with the case of the current refugee crisis in the region, which has also affected the country. The Syrian refugee influx in Lebanon has aggravated political, economic, and security challenges, impairing major drivers of economy and decreasing job opportunities (Cherri et al., 2016). In addition, one-third of young Lebanese laborers are unable to find work competing in a patriarchy intensified informal sector that contributes to more than 56% of total employment (Cherri et al., 2016). Thus, this crisis has tested Lebanon's economic, social, and political resilience.

There are numbers of studies in the literature which emphasize on the impact of gender inequality in education that affects females, since female education has a great impact on the well-being of the families and societies (Ince, 2010). When females are educated, their productivity increases which can in turn lead to rising output in economic activities. Furthermore, education is seen as literacy for women, and this can give women the feeling of empowerment. With an increasing literacy rate, women will have more access for getting a better position in the labor market, and this will enhance women's position in the society (Ince, 2010). Thus, the greater amount of educational attainment for women, the more skilled, well-knowledged and productive they will be in their societies. However, when gender inequality exists between males and females, this inequality will reduce the average amount of human capital in a society, thus harming economic performance. According to Ince (2010), findings show that gender inequality in education significantly reduces the level of GDP per capita, thus, this

discrimination highly impacts such levels of GDP. So as a result, the rate of economic growth and the level of female education were both found to have a strong positive effect on female labor force participation.

Unfortunately, perceptions of women's competence and commitment to the labor force are undermined by employer's views and gender beliefs, as well as their cognitive bias, because such beliefs and discrimination shape how women are evaluated, which also explains the shortage of women in STEM occupations. The entry of women into traditionally male occupations has intensified in recent decades, but outflows still remain significant. Identifying the reasons women continue to leave traditional male occupations is important because cutting the high rate at which women leave male-dominated jobs could substantially reduce the level of occupational segregation by sex (Torre, 2014). If the national economy is to continue to prosper, than the skills and talents of women cannot continue to be under-utilized in the wrong way. With less chances for women to access employment, women are taking lower status, are accepting lower paid work out of necessity, and part-time jobs, which will continue to result in high levels of unemployment.

#### 2.5. Political Instability and Corruption

Political unrest in a country leads to changes in certain policies, creating volatility and negatively affecting macroeconomic performance. Whenever there are unstable political conditions, organizations get affected by many ways and one of them is quality due to employee behavioral changes, thus the employee is affected with respect to society as well. This will result in de-motivation, insecurity, distraction, etc.

And if more employees are needed or additional training is required, this might not be met because the budget available will most probably be limited due to the country's economic and political situation, which further explains the absence of empowerment training.

The increased presence of Lebanese women in the workforce has been motivated by many reasons, including the resulting brain drain of the country, in addition to the local culture. Between the Lebanese civil war and its aftermath, Lebanon's national net outstanding public debt of US\$45.62 billion as of early 2011 (Ministry of Finance in Lebanon 2011) represents 147% of the country's gross national product (GDP) (Tlaiss and Mendelson, 2014). As a result, young educated men and women immigrated to neighboring countries in pursuit of security and better living conditions. This created a brain drain and a shortage of labor supply, and hence the opportunity for women to increase their participation in the workforce.

However, to add to the legitimacy of women not being able to get engaged in paid work, in regions such as Lebanon, family ties lie at the core of society and play a major role in political, economic, social and even religious spheres (Karam and Kwantes, 2011). Such interpersonal connections have played a role in either facilitating or hindering the chances for women in entering the labor force. Status and family links have often been evidenced to facilitate access to institutions, jobs and governments services (Hutchings and Weir 2006). Yet, those who lack such links have found it more difficult to even find a job. This lack of access is regarded as "wasta", a term referring to interpersonal connections. Wasta is the process of using help, which might not be available to other candidates competing for the same job or promotion, in order to move

forward and fulfill objectives (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). The role of "wasta" affects women's opportunities and can even override gender in the workplace (Afiouni and Karam, 2014).

Therefore, training and development opportunities, in addition to managerial recruitment, promotions, and many other aspects of management, end up being based on individual relations, family networks and not on an individual's ability (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). And this is how wasta is used, in terms of a powerful facilitator through connections and networks that individuals use to advance their career progression. And in situations where many individuals pursue the same objective, the candidate with the strongest wasta connections will be successful (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011), and this is definitely an unfair practice of job entry and advancement. Furthermore, using wasta to get recruited, promoted and to fulfill career advancement objectives was perceived to be a critical factor in the Lebanese banking sector, and this was seen in the workforce as well through the results of 200 managers that were surveyed in the Arab World, in which 80% of the respondents perceived wasta as more important than gender for recruitment as well as managerial progression up the company hierarchy (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). As a result, the role of wasta disregards the candidate's qualifications and merit, and renders their success in getting recruited or even promoted. Therefore, human resource departments should work on setting up practices that reduce the influence of wasta in organizations in order to identify the appropriate candidates through their qualifications and work experiences.

#### 2.6. Legal Legislations

Law plays a vital role in establishing not only regulation but also actual thoughts and behavior in defining what is acceptable by society and what is considered natural or unnatural (Shehadeh, 1998). Furthermore, the Lebanese legislation governing the status of women does not reflect their actual condition in society. For example, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stipulates that no married woman is allowed to apply for any vacancy in the diplomatic corps (third category) (Shehadeh, 1998). Thus, most of the work discrimination is aimed at married women.

Unfortunately, most of the time the Lebanese law places barriers for women rather than being of advantage to them. For example, the Lebanese law places more obstacles for a pregnant women at work instead of protecting her rights and facilitating her maternity leave. While a man has to have worked for at least three months out of the six months prior to the date of delivery of his wife in order to be eligible for maternal insurance, a woman, in addition to the above, has to have been enrolled in the social-security program for a period of not less than ten months before the date of delivery (Shehadeh, 1998). In addition, the current laws that directly affect women are still unjust. For instance, the current law gives women a 10-week maternity leave. However, this is still lower than the ILO-recommended 14 weeks (Mazin, 2014). In addition, the number of women judges in Lebanon soared from almost none in the 1990s to 38 per cent of all judges in civil, criminal and commercial courts, and 28 per cent of judges in the administrative courts by 2010 (ILO, 2014). However, women are still not allowed

to serve as judges and female lawyers in religious courts (ILO, 2014). And in 2012, labour force participation in Lebanon was 70.9 for males and 22.8 for females (ILO, 2014).

There are also no laws on equal pay within the private sector, which has led to inequalities in what women and men receive for the same amount or position of work. Thus, the need for the administration of laws of 'equal pay for equal work' in Lebanon, alongside with the need for pay and employment equity to enhance the satisfaction levels of women with the objective aspects of their careers, have been strongly advocated for (Tlaiss and Mendelson, 2014). Hence, organizations should work on establishing systems and practices in which individuals, especially women, are chosen for certain positions based on their talent instead of any other irrelevant influencing factors. The law and the economy play a factor together in making the labor market a suitable environment for women and easily accessible. However, while structural changes such as laws and economic policies may take time to reform, social norms in Lebanon should shift towards working on making the workforce easier for women to enter (Mazin, 2014).

The absence of tangible laws and policies that support women in the labour force has further resulted in discrimination at the workplace, in addition to the lack of provision of social benefits (Avis, 2017). And although some laws exist to ensure equality between men and women through the Lebanese labour law, such laws are not actually implemented in practice. In turn, this has led to the establishment of many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that aim to help women in seeking equality in society and in the workplace. One such organization is the CRTD-A (The Collective for

Research and Training on Development-Action), which seeks to contribute to citizenship, social justice, and gender equality in Lebanon and also in countries of the region. CRTD-A tackles certain key pillars, such as women's economic rights, participation and empowerment, women's right to full and inclusive citizenship, in addition to women's leadership, and public and political participation. On the other hand, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was also established and adopted as a principal treaty on women's human rights by setting out a framework for achieving equality as well as putting obligations on states to eliminate discrimination against women and girls.

However, in December 2016, women in Lebanon through the CRTD-A signed and put forward a petition which stressed the need to lift the reservations on the CEDAW, in order to readdress the freedom of choice in application of said convention with its attendant optional protocol. The petition also pressed for giving no longer than 2-year grace period for the amendment of pertinent laws related to personal status towards the realization of a civil law that guarantees equal rights of women on parity with men. The reservations that the CEDAW placed concerned the realization of the principle of gender equality, the right of women to acquire, change and retain a nationality and pass it on to their children, the right of women to conclude contracts, administer property and be equal in all stages of court and tribunal procedures and the right of women in marriage, divorce and child custody. Thus, the CEDAW reservations contradicted the ILO guidelines, which elaborate on the importance of equality in the world of work. The elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation is one of the central and most important concerns of the ILO (ILO, 2003). It

features prominently in the Declaration of Philadelphia, annexed to the Constitution of the ILO, which states that:

All human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity; [..] – (ILO, 2003).

In addition, events were held by the CRTD-A in order to fight against the patriarchal society in Lebanon which impedes progress on women's right. One of the meetings held was entitled 'Women in Lebanon: Reality and Rights', with the subject being that despite all efforts to help establish their rights, women in Lebanon remain deprived of the social and political entitlements. The meeting was held in order to lament the power of the patriarchal system which prevents any progress in the correct direction, while drawing attention to the role of the constitution in substantiating the system. The problem in this case is in article nine of the constitution, which requires compliance with the personal status law formulated to appease the patriarchal mindset that extends authority exclusively to the father, while stressing on the fact that the personal status law incites and promotes gender inequality. Thus, Lebanon's reservations to certain stipulations of the CEDAW were criticized, namely those related to mothers granting nationality to their family members.

Lebanese women raised their voices further through the CRTD-A on obstacles impeding the advancement of Lebanese women. Unfortunately, despite the progress made towards women since Lebanon's accession to the CEDAW, many obstacles continue to constrain the advancement of women, and mainly in legal issues.

Discrimination was also observed against women in recruitment at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, when a memorandum calling for applicants was posted on the ministry's website including eligibility criteria. One of these criteria was that women applicants should be "single" and should prove her status. This criterion was seen as unfair and discriminatory. And despite the attempts during previous years to review such criteria, none of the attempts have succeeded due to the various political obstacles that the country faces. In addition, such laws are drawn from previously approved laws by the ministry, which is unacceptable since such laws do not equally apply to men and that is regarded as discrimination against women and women's participation in the workforce. Furthermore, such discrimination causes economic and moral prejudice to women and is in gross violation of the international conventions that Lebanon has ratified and should adhere to, namely CEDAW which was ratified in 1996.

As a result, organizations should take action regarding legal and legislative performance in order to remove discriminatory conditions against women which are already embedded in national laws. Thus, such laws should be tackled in a comprehensive manner, and organizations should work on affecting the government in order to lift its reservation on the CEDAW agreement.

# CHAPTER 3 MESO-LEVEL INFLUENCES

#### 3.1. What are Meso-Level Factors?

There may be macro-level factors affecting career entry and advancement of women, but at the same time there are also meso-level organizational factors causing such hindrances for women. They are organizational-level obstacles that women face in organizations as they attempt to progress in their careers. These obstacles are internal factors on the organizational level, and are controlled by the organization itself. They are behaviors that are enrooted in the way the work is being done, and can act as barriers to career development and even barriers to top-level positions for women. And although several factors are likely to influence the perceptions of women managers in terms of their career success, research suggests that work-centered factors along with other factors can strongly influence the career advancement of women managers, due to the fact that a number of gender equities exist in the workplace (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). Such obstacles lead to a decline in female leadership, especially that HR practices have not been effective in helping to address these issues.

## 3.2. Stereotypes

Stereotypes are referenced in the literature as a form of barrier that could play several roles in being detrimental to women's career success (Tlaiss, 2015). Due to the discrepancy in the perception of women versus men, such unfair and uneven

expectations could influence the way women's performances are perceived. As a result, when the expectations of women's performance are based on stereotypical perceptions, their chances of attaining male-dominant positions and even higher positions in their organization decline. Due to this stereotypical attitude, it is very unlikely for a woman who has the same qualifications as a man to be found in the same positions, or to even be considered for that position. This situation is referred to as "homophily", where it is the case that male seniors promote those who mostly resemble them (Pryce & Sealy, 2013). In addition, gender stereotypes in the workplace could even lead to the women themselves accepting the generalized norms and conforming to the myth of natural male dominance, leading to the maintenance of the view of meritocracy despite the absence of enrooted gender bias (Pryce & Sealy, 2013). And because of the consistent gender differences in career development and payment, women feel undervalued at work and this leads them to re-evaluate their priorities while also being tempted to "opt out" (Ellemers, 2014).

Therefore, it may be concluded that women aiming to succeed in a paternal or patriarchal culture ought to choose between acquiring this status within the organization and facing external societal backlash, or accepting the gendered organizational culture as natural and losing advancement opportunities (Alvesson and Billing, 2009). When women are always viewed this way and this attitude becomes guidance for their direction to current positions and even future positions, they are faced with no choice but to accept the sad reality in which they live in, and the difficult changing and unfair circumstances which hold them back from obtaining the positions they desire. There are

far-reaching effects of implicit gender bias, which can start a cycle of lost motivation and self-defeating responses among working women (Ellemers, 2014).

The extent of stereotyping in the workplace can also be seen through the gendered division of labor, where women are channeled into specific areas and others being discriminated against certain departments such as engineering, IT, manufacturing, etc. As a result, the common pitfall on why women are prevented from making the same career choices as men is because people tend to rely on implicit gender stereotypes to make inferences about the ambitions, characteristics, and priorities of men and women in organizations, and this unwittingly evaluates men and women at work differently (Ellemers, 2014).

Furthermore, some women-dominated occupations have lower compensation than male-dominant positions, and this has added to the list of demotivating factors for women in the labor force. In academia, for instance, women are less well represented than men at the highest scientific and organizational levels, systematically receive less funds for research (Bedi, Van Dam, & Munafo, 2012), and are paid less at the same job levels, across different areas of science (Shen, 2013). Discrimination on the basis of sex resulted in wide disparities between men and women in education, life expectancy, employment rates, and income, making women seem like they are subordinate to men due to such unfair differences (Chateauvert, 2015). Masculinity predicts women's as well as men's career advancement, beyond factors such as human capital (Tharenou, 2001). For instance, men and women who opt to work in a masculine organizational culture (characterized by aggressiveness rather than supportiveness) over time earn

higher salaries than those who avoid this organizational culture (O'Neill & O'Reilly, 2010). Thus, the interplay between what organizations value, on the one hand, and behavioral preferences of men and women, on the other hand, contribute to current gender differences in organizations (Ellemers, 2014). So the problem has to be resolved from within the organization and by the organization itself. Because when hen organizations are unable to offer attractive career prospects to their female employees, this is likely to lower women's motivation to perform well, and to increase their levels of absenteeism and turnover (Ellemers, 2014). However, company cultures make it difficult to change workers' mindsets about the possibility for equal opportunity employment to function in ways that promote or allow for equality (Myers, 2015).

## 3.3. Benevolent Sexism on the Organizational Level

Benevolent sexism is manifested in a multitude of ways, and it is important to understand how this prevalent ideology adds to the existing gender gap. Benevolent sexism also continues to spill over, acting as both macro-level and organizational hindrances to women. One of the mechanisms through which benevolent sexism contributes to gender inequality is stereotyping at both the entry level and during career development. For example, organizations and government offices are frequently dominated by men. And a woman competing against a man at entry level for a high-ranking position in one of these institutions may face hostile sexism because she is viewed as a threat to the status quo of male authority.

Those who accept benevolent sexist ideas typically perceive women as incompetent outside of domestic roles; and men will see themselves as superior to women and will treat them in a patronizing manner. In addition, women are also faced with a more understated type of prejudice, in which women are stereotyped as affectionate, delicate, and sensitive (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). People make implicit associations about women's and men's likely behaviors. For instance, whereas females are more easily linked to family, males are more easily associated with careers (Ellemers, 2014). Those who hold benevolent sexist beliefs conceptualize women as weak individuals who need to be protected and provided for. And when facing an employer's benevolent sexist attitudes, women doubt their cognitive capabilities and perform significantly worse on their tasks.

Not just for entry level positions, but also when filling in senior management positions, women got used to the fact that men were being chosen over women for such positions; and not because of blatant discrimination, but because the common idea is that moving women up doesn't feel right yet (Myers, 2015). Unfortunately, this has been the dominant attitude because of the general idea that most of the time women will eventually leave to take care of their kids so why take them seriously and give them high level positions which they will not be responsible enough for due to their responsibilities outside the workplace (Myers, 2015). Thus, due to such stereotypical attitudes within organizations, achieving equal opportunities is perceived as a difficult battle for women, especially in a masculine work environment.

Therefore, women's empowerment cannot simply be defined in terms of being able to perform specific activities or benefiting from propitious outcomes; it results from a process whereby women can freely analyze, develop, and voice their needs and interests without them being predefined or unwillingly imposed by social norms or other stereotypical attitudes (Highlight, 2013). Hence, without access to resources, power, and a higher social status, it will be difficult for women to showcase their skills and advance. And in order for the problem of benevolent sexism to be solved especially through HRM, talent management, skills evaluations and job perspectives need to be reexamined, especially when hiring women.

### 3.4. Networking

Research shows that women are given less networking opportunities than their male counterparts, and this is because women are seen as less likely to network without support or women-centered events that would likely encourage these women to interact with peers under similar conditions to network (Barnes & Beaulieu, 2017). This is also discussed by Fitzsimmons (2012) who argues that women do not have access to informational and informal networking due to multiple causes that could be traced to exclusivity or societal circumstances.

Furthermore, the lesser networking capacity of women may be attributed to what Pryce and Sealy (2013) refer to as gendered power relations, such as homosociality, whereby men would prefer to build friendships with male peers, mostly because they tend to see women affectionate, dedicate, and sensitive. Thus, men may have the upper hand in obtaining higher level positions because they are better connected and capable

of being recommended for higher level positions. Furthermore, in most cases, organizations choose men as board members and not women, thus women are denied advancement because of their inability to create the internal connections that their male peers can make.

# 3.5. Gendered Organizational Culture

Building on the elements of gendered stereotypical attitudes, as well as the role of benevolent sexism, and networking limitations, gendered organizational cultures can be considered as an aggregate of all these organizational-level factors. A further possible explanation for gender differences in career development and organizational success is that work organizations tend to favor male over female employees. At first, this may seem unlikely, as laws establish equal rights for men and women in the workplace and enforce gender-neutral treatment of workers (Ellemers, 2014). However, even when success criteria seem gender neutral, organizational decision makers may differ in their expectations, performance appraisals, and treatment of men and women (Ellemers, 2014). Thus, organizations can be viewed as places for either gender construction or career development and advancement. Gendered stereotypes can contribute to the segregation between men and women in organizations. Hence, gender relations may play a key role in the functioning of the organization through the foundations of organizational and occupational cultures, such as aims, values, and leadership (Alvession and Billing, 2009). And while organizations can be viewed as sites of gender construction, they may also promote equal opportunities by downplaying gender to undo its effect on the advancement of employees (Alvession and Billing, 2009) and especially women.

People think of gender bias as negative attitudes about women, endorsed by men, and unfortunately, such blatantly sexist behavior undermines women's performance (Ellemers, 2014). The organizational norms can be modified in order to exclude gender bias by being gender-neutral. For example, within the lines of these organizational norms, because the definition of such a culture was developed as being gender-neutral, this culture may lead to the exit of female workforce from organizations (Cahusac and Kanji, 2014). This argument is based on the neglect that could arise in organizations when it comes to maternity and the resulting consequences of maternity needs whereby the dominant group encouraging women to exit from the workplace is deemed by the organization as something natural as a result of the discrepancy between the role of a mother and that of an employee (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014). In this context, it is also seen that family responsibilities may impact career development for women. Because women spend more time on housework and childcare than men do, this combination of one's career ambition with family responsibility raises logistic complexities (Ellemers, 2014). And this is the same case for men and women; however, it is implicit bias which makes people think that women should take primary responsibility for resolving these difficulties, especially that supervisors generally perceive women as less able to combine work and family, particularly in societies with low gender equality (Ellemers, 2014).

As a result, in terms of the organizational environment, it is apparent that the organizational culture and environment strongly favors men over women, and those men are likely to be promoted into higher level positions at a faster pace than women. Small initial differences between men and women can magnify over time, as they learn which behaviors are encouraged in the organization (Ellemers, 2014). For instance, being the only female in a group of men leads women to assume that their contributions are likely to be considered unimportant, and this undermines their motivation and performance (Ellemers, 2014). It would also appear that gender inequalities are strongly entrenched in the organizational culture of Lebanese companies and are thus negatively impacting the career advancement of women and women managers (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). Thus, it appears that work experience and education do not guarantee career success for Lebanese women and play a miniature role in women's career entry and advancement. Unfortunately, this is the case because when it comes to professional development and promotions within Lebanese companies, women managers are measured on a male model of career development (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011).

Consequently, it can be concluded that such cultures are discriminatory towards female managers and may attribute to the prevailing social and cultural values, as well as to the practices that influence the recruitment methods of organizations. Therefore, the thinking behind Lebanese organizations appears to be male oriented, fostering the managerial advancement of men rather than women, which in turn reflects the patriarchal nature of the organizations and managing bodies (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). What women need is a more supportive organizational culture that encourages qualified

women based on their merits and performance rather than their gender. Thus, the very conviction that individual merit is the only relevant criterion—and can be judged objectively—makes people less vigilant for bias (Ellemers, 2014). However, they then fail to suppress faulty judgments that may lead them to prefer male over female candidates in hiring or promotion (Ellemers and Van Laar, 2010). This counter-intuitive but well-documented observation is a reminder that commonsense solutions to achieve gender equality do not always work as intended.

Lebanese companies can best utilize the talent available to them by removing barriers for the recruitment of and upward mobility of women, and concentrating less on the differences in managerial styles of men and women and more on harnessing these differences and diversity in the workplace in order to understand what each individual has to offer (Tlaiss and Kauser, 2011). This can be further done by the introduction and implementation of HR practices which can aid women in their career entry and advancement. And if Lebanese organizations take part in advancing such practices, this would benefit the development of a gender neutral corporate environment and might quicken the pace at which women progress their careers (Tan and Subramaniam, 2013). Various factors contribute to the effects of gender diversity in organizations. However, having women represented in strategic leadership positions can actually help companies penetrate new markets by catering to different customers and suppliers (Ellemers, 2014).

In addition, gender-mixed management teams display more creativity and innovation, and can engage in more effective problem solving, due to the presence of different perspectives (Ellemers, 2014). Thus, organizations should encourage gender

diversity in the workplace and female representation in leadership. The most consistent conclusion from relevant research is that gender disparities in organizations have no single cause, which leads to the accumulation of multiple disadvantages, with small differences becoming insurmountable barriers over time (Ellemers, 2014).

# CHAPTER 4

# THE INSTITUTIONAL THEORY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## **4.1. Defining the Institutional Theory**

The best-fit approach to HRM focuses on the need to match HR practices to prevailing conditions in a specific organization field, rejecting the notion of one best way of doing things in all contexts (Boselie et al., 2009). So in this case, the best-fit approach would be to match the HR practices to the different industries being studied and the context they are all operating in, which is the Lebanese private sector. The importance of the institutional theory to HRM is derived from the view that the institutional environment is the source of legislation, rewards or incentives, as well as constraints or sanctions, on organizational practices (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). The institutional perspective points to local forces that influence organizational practices, thus, the basic thesis within the institutional perspective are that organizations are under social influence and pressure to adopt practices - such as HRM - that are viewed to being appropriate for the situation (And organizations use different ways to respond to the institutional pressures, depending on how the organization functions internally. As a result, institutional theory can help in understanding the determinants of certain HRM practices and their implementation.

In recent years, the institutional theory has emerged as a powerful explanation to account for the influence of external forces on organizational decision

making and outcomes (Dubey et al., 2017). The institutional theory is a theoretical lens that has been widely used to study the adoption and diffusion of organizational forms and practices (Fey et al., 2007). The theory argues that organizational processes are institutionalized through a series of adaptive processes that are less influenced by individual members, and in which these processes lead to organizational isomorphism that is the result of imitation of the best practices due to government or regulatory norms (Dubey et al., 2017). Adaption is hence leading organizations to adopt similar structures, strategies and processes (Sarkis et al., 2011), with forces within the organization and environment encouraging certain practices. In addition, the institutional theory looks for evidence behind the adoption of any practice that enhances its legitimacy, while helping to explain the intention behind the adoption and implementation of such practices (Chow, 2004). Institutional theory also views organizations as social entities that seek approval for their performance in socially constructed environments, in which these organizations are shaped by the institutional environment which surrounds them (Chow, 2004).

Organizations adopt certain features because of pressure from outside forces, including legal compulsion, gaining legitimacy, conforming to institutionalized rules, etc. (Chow, 2004). Hence, in response to such institutional pressures, firms adopt appropriate practices in order to gain legitimacy and acceptance in order to survive (Chow, 2004). Institutional theory emphasizes the role of social and cultural pressures imposed on organizations that influence organizational practices and structures (Delmas and Toffel, 2004). Moreover, organizations are embedded in institutional environments and as a result many organizational practices, including HRM practices, form

reflections of, or responses to, rules and structures that hold in these environments (Boselie et al., 2009). Thus, to receive support and legitimacy, individual organizations need to conform their practices to the rules and requirements of these institutional environments (Boselie et al., 2009). However, conforming to institutional pressures does not necessarily imply that the most effective and efficient option is chosen, which implies that productive success and legitimacy are potentially contradictory goals (Jaffee, 2001).

As a result, institutional theory needs to be utilized as a framework to analyze HR practices in the Lebanese private sector by looking at the influence that environmental factors such as social and political systems have on the adoption of HR practices. From an institutional theory point of view, HRM practices in Lebanon remain bounded by cultural and legislative systems. The relationship between HR practices and the effectiveness of these practices depends on the degree of fit with the institutional environment. However unfortunately, in the Lebanese private sector, legal and cultural constraints, demographic factors, and the limitation of resources, may all impede the proper innovation of HRM practices. Thus, the decisions to adopt certain practices are influenced by three institutional mechanisms – coercive, mimetic and normative isomorphism, that create and diffuse common set of values, norms and rules to produce similar practices and structures across organizations (Delmas and Toffel, 2004). In line with this, it is suggested that the role of institutional forces in HRM is best applied in a separate construct, labeled institutional fit.

#### 4.2. Coercive Mechanisms

Coercive mechanisms are those applied due to the formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations which depend on the cultural expectations of the society they are already operating in. Such mechanisms include the influence of social partners, organizational factors, and socio-cultural aspects, which all affect HR practices. Coercive isomorphism results from pressures on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependant and by cultural expectations in society, resulting in organizations becoming more alike, such as the influence of social partners (i.e. trade unions and work councils), labor legislations, and government in HRM (Boselie et al., 2009). For example, regulations or HR practices that involve coercive action may depend upon normative and cognitive elements, as when the country's role in regulating the organization/institution is overshadowed and augmented by the interests of those in high and powerful positions (such power sources are stronger than the organization). In this case, organizations may have to apply their HRM policies and practices in response to the coercive pressures they are being subjected to.

Institutional pressures are coercive in nature, driven by the threat of either legal sanction (civil, administrative, etc.) or social sanction (civil, administrative, and criminal penalties) (Hoffman, 2001). For example, government action cannot be seen as an isolated force within the field, because their action is often the product of pressures from within the field (Hoffman, 2001). Thus, coercive legal requirements and public perceptions play a significant role in driving organizational strategies. In addition, Malik et al., (2017) explained through his research that MNCs achieved global integration by diffusion of parent firm best practices using expatriates and due to

coercive isomorphic pressures, such as adopting HRM practices of recruitment, training, and retention or local responsiveness. As a result, coercive mechanisms are embedded in regulatory processes, which can manifest themselves at different levels and in different forms, and also differ in their degree of enforcement (Jaap and Paul, 2003). Also, coercive mechanisms stem mainly from political influence and the problem of legitimacy (Jaap and Paul, 2003). Thus, the implementation of certain practices occurs as a result of regulatory pressures. And coercive mechanisms are embedded in regulatory processes, which can manifest themselves at different levels and in different forms, and also differ in their degree of enforcement (Jaap and Paul, 2003).

Regulations or HR practices that involve coercive action involve organizations having to apply HRM policies and practices in response to the coercive pressures they are being subjected to. Thus, conventional gender roles which are divisive and prevalent in organizations can be transformed systematically by having the government ensure that the implementation of laws, to create a favorable environment to reinforce equality and women should be involved in policy development and planning (Sangeeta and Sharma, 2012). The ensuing policies and programs are more likely to be helpful and effective if these policies reflect the perspective of girls and women, and this is what organizations should be following and applying as a result of the impact of the environment they are operating in.

#### 4.3. Normative Mechanisms

Normative mechanisms refer to the relation between management policies and the background of employees in terms of educational level, job experience, and networks of professional identification (Paauwe and Boselie, 2003). Normative mechanisms are associated with the adoption of standards and routines considered appropriate in a specific environment, resulting from the impact of HR professional bodies and employer's associations. For example, having HR professionals who work in the same industry and have received education from the same institutions and are associates with the same trade associations, will lead the organizations that employ these professionals to adopt similar HRM practices, and this will make it difficult for new practices to be created which may help in the employment opportunities for women.

Normative mechanisms are associated with professionalization (Paauwe and Boselie, 2003). The professionalization of employee groups through formal education programs leads to HRM homogeneity in relation to that specific group (Paauwe and Boselie, 2003). For example, accountants, lawyers, judges, surgeons and pilots all need to go through professional training of some kind before they are allowed to perform their job. Their professional norms and values for example, in terms of their ethics and standard operating procedures, are part of this formal education and training (Paauwe and Boselie 2003). As a result, the professional associations of which they become members during or following the completion of their formal training will strengthen these norms and values, and in this way these norms and values become increasingly more institutionalized (Paauwe and Boselie, 2003). The HR system in the organization

becomes affected by the nature of these professional employee groups with their strongly embedded norms and values. However, a high degree of institutionalized professionalization of a specific group limits the options for the adoption of different HR policies and practices, implying possible limitations on the room for maneuver in the design of HR policies and practices from the perspective of the employing organizations (Paauwe and Boselie, 2003).

Furthermore, if certain organizations start adopting practices which would help in creating employment opportunities for women, this can become the norm, and more organizations would want to follow up to meet this standard. For example, organizations can choose to adopt internationals standards, such as the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) and goal number 5, which is gender equality, in order to work towards achieving career advancement for women. Such standards are also considered to be international normative pressures. Today, there are more women in office than before. But, if more organizations start adopting international standards which will encourage women to work and also women leaders, this will help strengthen the policies and legislation for greater gender equality, especially in the work place. Furthermore, employers can approach sex discrimination by implementing genderrelated education and training programs (Paauwe and Boselie, 2003). Training is the most prevalent starting point for managing diversity. And in the case of trying to achieve gender equality in the workplace, awareness training is needed, which focuses on creating an understanding of the need for, and meaning of managing and valuing diversity, and on increasing participant's self awareness on diversity related issues such as stereotyping and cross-cultural insensitivity (Blake and Cox, 1991).

Thus, it is important to treat training as an on-going education process rather a one-shot seminar, because in most cases, training is limited and is viewed as an expense rather than a long-term investment in human capital. Therefore, firms should not ignore the longer term, proactive human resource strategy, such as the provision of training and the identification of talents and competence. Thus, organizations should work on offering training programs which should also be viewed as one of the organization's routines. Further practices can also be adopted, such as organizations carrying out a culture and management systems audit as a regular practice, which is a comprehensive analysis of the organization culture and human resource systems such as recruitment, performance appraisal, potential assessment and promotion, and compensation (Blake and Cox, 1991). The primary objectives of this audit would be to uncover sources of potential bias unfavorable to women, and to identify ways of untangling such sources. The institutional effect of normative mechanisms is relevant for organizations, because education, training, and professional associations determine to a large degree the takenfor-granted norms and values related to the profession (Paauwe and Boselie, 2003). However, organizations involved will have less leeway in deciding and developing relevant HR policies and practices for women if organizations continue to adopt a high degree of institutionalized professionalization with limited chances of change for the better benefit of all.

## 4.4. Mimetic Mechanisms

Mimetic mechanisms refer to the imitation of another organization's strategies and structure, because of the belief that the structure of the latter organization is

beneficial. This behavior usually takes place when an organization's goals or means of achieving these goals is unclear. From an HR perspective, mimetic mechanisms may take place when organizations follow other organizations who are adopting strategies and practices towards achieving gender equality in the workplace for women. Another view is that mimetic mechanisms result from standard responses to uncertainty; and mimetic mechanisms refer to imitations of strategies and practices of competitors as a result of uncertainty, or fashionable fads in the field of management (Boselie and Paauwe, 2003). Thus, current interest shown by organizations for the development and implementation of an HR scorecard might turn out to be a typical example of a mimetic mechanism in the field of HRM (Boselie and Paauwe, 2003).

When organizations adopt the practices of other organizations as an imitation in order to keep up with the pace that the latter organizations are at, the organizations adopting these practices and implementing them might be able to achieve a competitive advantage. However, this advantage is likely to be lost when the mimetic mechanisms are also adopted by a large majority of organizations. Mimetic change can also be described as a low-cost response to work process indeterminacy since individuals judge themselves in terms of standards set by their environment (Dirsmith and Fogarty, 2001). Mimetic behavior is seen as promoting organizations change. Hence, a range of firms will all apply the same kind of solution or blueprint, sometimes out of uncertainty, or simply to avoid the risk of being out of step with their direct competitors (Boselie and Paauwe, 2003). However, these practices that help companies to improve or retain competitive advantage often lead to an increased degree of HRM homogeneity across organizations (Boselie and Paauwe, 2003). As organizations grow more similar through

attempts to imitate each other, the range of individual differences, as a result of role modeling in the organization, will narrow (Dirsmith and Fogarty, 2001). The adoption of a new practices or organizational forms is often seen as a proxy for a change in institutional logics (Suddaby, 2010). However, what actors of organizations often don't realize is that they themselves do not understand their motives for subordinating themselves to social pressure, and whether the practices their organizations have adopted are for mimetic reasons or practices that have actually improved organizational performance.

Integral to the process of mimetic change are diffusion processes in which behavior patterns are developed, exported, and repeated in new contexts, such as modeling, which can become a more passive complement to directed efforts of socialization (Dirsmith and Fogarty, 2001). Although the initiative for modeling resides primarily in the individual, the organization may facilitate the process through selective development and display of the characteristics of the ideal role incumbent through awards such as employee of the month (Dirsmith and Fogarty, 2001). Another mimetic mechanism is mentoring. Mentoring is richer in terms of fulfilling organizational needs, especially that it encompasses a wide set of psychological, career and developmental needs. Mentoring relations impart a customized socialization influence that usually goes beyond that which the organization can routinely offer (Dirsmith and Fogarty, 2001). Mentoring should be conceived as an organizational structure that is embedded in most organizations rather than just a set of informal processes that organizations may be forced to follow. Thus, in organizations where individuals progress through a series of

hierarchal roles, mentoring should thrive because superiors have much information about the performance of their subordinates (Dirsmith and Fogarty, 2001).

Moreover, different organizations have different mechanisms, meaning that how the diffusion of practices in one organization takes place depends on the uniqueness of the organization's tasks and methods. In sum, there are mimetic isomorphic forces involved in socialization practices at the individual, organizational, and interorganizational levels (Dirsmith and Fogarty, 2001). At the individual level, new members of the organization imitate other members performing their roles in order to be able to quickly adapt and fit into the work environment and organizations. New members are also actively and implicitly taught the skills, behaviors, and values necessary for career advancement in the organization by imitating hierarchically superior mentors, and this involves a complex interplay of cognitive, behavioral and environmental elements (Bandura, 1999). At the organizational level, socialization practices used in a sector are imported and imitated, and such practices are redirected externally to legitimate it to possible recruits and other external constituents, establishing that it is appropriately progressive in its commitment to the training and social needs of its members (Dirsmith and Fogarty, 2001). Thus, socialization practices are diffused across organizations. And at the interorganizational level, when individuals develop career paths that transcend roles and employers, they bring with them the expectations about what effective socialization practices are (Dirsmith and Fogarty, 2001). And due to the pressure that organizations face by conforming to such expectations in order to remain competitive in labor markets, greater diffusion of social practices takes place. And the result of such mimetic behavior at these three levels leads

to the homogenizations of socialization practices in and among organizations (Dirsmith and Fogarty, 2001).

However, as long as coercive legislations on organizations continue to be absent and professional HR bodies continue to be nonexistent, greater emphasis will be placed on the mimetic effect and the adoption of mimetic mechanisms, since coercive and normative mechanisms are not effective enough and not leading to the required change. The only solution in this case would be for organizations to adopt practices, systems and strategies in favor of gender inequality, and for the rest of the organizations to do the same. Hence, if more companies decide to adopt gender equitable HRM practices, this will put pressure on other companies to follow the same norm, and this would be the way forward towards more gender equitable HR practices in Lebanon, instead of waiting for and relying on legislations and professional bodies to force organizations to adopt gender equitable HR practices.

# CHAPTER 5

# HRM PRACTICES TOSUPPORT WOMEN'S ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT

#### 5.1. The Institutional Fit

Institutional fit is the alignment between HRM and the institutional environment (Boselie et al., 2009). And institutionalization refers to the processes by which societal expectations of appropriate organization actions influence the structuring and actions of organizations. However, institutional fit could differ depending on what level it is studied. What is seen as innovative or deviant could differ between organizations, occupations, sectors or countries as norms can differ between these levels (Boselie et al., 2009). Institutional fit is a construct with an inherent balance. It reflects the tensions organizations experience when pursuing both efficiency and legitimacy goals and does not simply involve maximization of "performance" or legitimacy. Achieving institutional fit involves finding an optimal level of conforming to institutional pressures and differentiation from competitors. This construct can contribute to our understanding of strategic HRM by providing insight in this more nuanced and balanced goal setting of organizations (Boselie et al., 2009).

Achieving institutional fit involves finding an optimal level of conforming to institutional pressures and differentiation from competitors (Boselie et al., 2009). The mechanisms that play a role in achieving this institutional fit are the normative, coercive and mimetic mechanisms. However, if one type of mechanism works for an

organization, it does not mean that this same mechanism will work for another organization. What is regarded as innovate in one setting could be seen as less innovative in another (Boselie et al., 2009). Thus, such mechanisms also affect the adoption of certain HR practices and systems especially that the negative mechanisms offset the positive mechanisms in the Lebanese private sector, for example unequal pay, the influence of wasta, short maternity leave, etc. which are all caused due to the absence of a proper HR system. Companies should implement the correct mechanisms for adopting the most effective equitable HR practices, even by aligning with international norms such as the SDG's, which will in turn create mimetic pressures for other companies to follow. The correct handling of institutional mechanisms – correct in terms of handling it better than competitors – can be a source for organizational success, even if the organizations operates in a highly institutionalized context (Boselie and Paauwe, 2003).

As a result, various institutional mechanisms shape HR practices, and organizations should capitalize the correct mechanisms and create new paths through HR systems that can facilitate women's access to employment and career development. Therefore, in the next chapter, HR practices which support women in Lebanon will be assessed and synthesized in order to understand the current situation in Lebanon regarding women, and accordingly be able to match the HR practices with the best mechanisms to achieve the most suitable institutional fit.

# **5.2.** Assessing Current HR Practices

Employee Empowerment is portrayed by the literature as a tool for an effective workforce by correlating empowerment practices with higher job satisfaction levels (Hanaysha and Tahir, 2016). Unfortunately, there is limited research on employee empowerment in Lebanon; however, insights into managerial misconceptions that could be deterring empowerment initiatives are still offered (Skaff and Hammoud, 2012). In addition, in a study conducted by Skaff and Hammoud (2012), the results showed that 75 percent of managers are not aware of empowerment practices. And in another study conducted, the gender-neutrality that was uncovered among HR managers in the private sector served to demonstrate the lack of knowledge among managers in terms of how empowerment can be used for the sake of gender diversity (Jamali et al., 2010). In Lebanon, there are no professional HR bodies regulating the HR profession to ensure the standardization of practices and the dissemination of best practices (Afiouni and Nakhle, 2016). This leads to an absence of normative pressures which can cause organizations to adopt practices and systems that will enhance its HR system in promoting gender equality. Moreover, certifications are not required for entry into the profession, and HR jobs are often occupied by employees, who have never had any sort of formal HR education, and there are institutional and cultural factors that shape the development and implementation of HR practices (Afiouni and Nakhle, 2016).

Human Resources Management in Lebanon is viewed as an unfulfilled potential of its function. Until the year 2000, the HR function in Lebanon was merely a personnel department, responsible for handling payroll and social security, employee files and complaints, and basic administrative functions; however, this function later changed

from Personnel to HRM department, with its practices remaining somewhat constant (Afiouni and Nakhle, 2016). Reasons why the HR function in Lebanon was not flourishing was because there were insufficient bodies governing the HR profession, and even not enough education regarding HR, so people were not aware of its implications and the benefits of such systems and practices.

The overall consequences of having inequalities in the workplace have led organizations to take action in dealing with diversity management. Diversity means visible and non-visible differences of people such as sex, age, race, background, disability, personality and work style (Abidi et al., 2017). And diversity management starts with accepting these differences and aims to harness them to create a productive environment where everybody feels valued, their talents are being fully utilized and in which organizational goals are met (Abidi et al., 2017). Workforce diversity is proclaimed to be an aspect of countless value for organizations, due to the fostering of the richness of gender and culture (Barrena-Martinez et al., 2017). The value of diversity in organizations depends upon both the strategic choices made by the firm and the HRM systems that the firm puts in places (Ali and Konrad, 2017). Thus, organizations need to adopt the most appropriate practices and systems in order to implement diversity management in the workplace which can help in enhancing gender equality. In addition, organizations can adopt strategic diversity management as an approach to managing diversity, which enhances the performance and productivity of employees through initiatives such as work-life balance, flexible working hours, and cultural awareness. Organizations should eliminate the gendered organizational practices that limit women's equal opportunities to career entry and career

advancement. Managers within organizations should be well aware that supportive HRM policies and practices may not directly affect intention to promote women; rather such HRM initiatives serve as a vehicle to create positive behavioral beliefs which guide the future decision intentions related to promoting gender equity in the senior management team (Biswas et al., 2016).

Another factor affecting career decisions and HRM practices is sectarianism. Job-seekers often apply for jobs within organizations dominated by the same sect or religion; and organizations often seek employees who belong to preferred sects (Afiouni and Nakhle, 2016). Furthermore, political leaders who also happen to be business men and sect leaders in the country, often interfere in the form of wasta to place individuals in organization. Unfortunately, this becomes the dominant coercive mechanism which organizations are forced to adopt due to the pressure being exerted on them by political leaders and the society they are operating in, in which the society itself is also mainly operating through the practice of wasta. And if organizations refuse to apply wasta, they can face certain troubles from the leaders of the country which can affect their organization's existence and way of work. Thus, job discrimination based on sect is a common practice in Lebanon (Afiouni and Nakhle, 2016). In addition, Tlaiss and Kauser (2011) found that women managers perceived wasta, as opposed to education and achievements, to be the most essential catalyst of career progression. Thus, sectarianism and nepotism greatly affect recruitment, selection, and promotion decisions, and the real abilities of employees have been overlooked due to the prevalence of such nepotism. Some of these informal practices have persisted.

In many organizations, managers continue to assess their staff as much on the quality of their relationships with them as on formalized performance criteria and continue to use 'personalized', patrimonial power to punish and reward (Dalton and Bingham, 2017). HR practices which deal with nepotism and wasta can similarly be adopted for patriarchy and its effect on women's careers. Thus, what organizations can do is demolish gender-biased structures by acknowledging that social differences between genders exist, and that the focus should be on elimination structural barriers that block women's career advancement by adopting as one of the ways gender-neutral selections (Afiouni and Nakhle, 2016). Looking for talent means that merit and competence should be the leading factors in selecting people for recruitment and later, for promotion (Biswas et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, gender inequality has been a characteristic of modern organizations, in which a particular view of masculinity shapes career development systems and management norms (Tlaiss and Dirani, 2015). This perception of inequality has affected the way HR practices and systems are produced and applied. The international model of HRM values transparency, impartiality and equity in recruiting, selecting for promotion, training and redundancy. However, there is consensus among respondents that while more systematic recruitment processes may be permeating, informal practices from the past are still commonplace (Dalton and Bingham, 2017). HR is an applied field so it not surprising that, traditionally, there has been a clear link between HR research and HR practice (Wilson et al., 2014). But, as noted by many before, this link is not as clear as it once was and there seems to be a real gap between research and practice in HR (Wilson et al., 2014). Managers should work on bridging

this gap, by applying their organizational practices accordingly, and establishing closer links between HR research and practices in order to enhance women's career access and development. And once organizations start finding ways to bridge this gap, other organizations will start adopting the same methods in order to achieve a competitive advantage, thus organizations will start imitating each other which will result in mimetic mechanisms being applied in order for organizations to be able to link HR research with practices. Hence, if more companies decide to adopt gender equitable HRM practices, this will put pressure on other companies to follow the same norm, and this would be the way forward towards more gender equitable HR practices in Lebanon. And Organizations use different ways to respond to the institutional pressures, depending on how the organization functions internally, by choosing to adopt coercive, mimetic and normative mechanisms.

In Lebanon, examples of coercive mechanisms on gender equitable HRM practices relate to the absence of many rules and procedures regarding women's equality in the workplace. Due to the country's policy on maternity leave, all organizations are forced to comply with offering short maternity leave for women. And because of the cultural perception and effects of family traditions on women choosing certain fields to study or work in, there has been an absence of women in many STEM fields, which has lead to most of the organizations offering women only part time jobs or low level positions, because the higher positions and STEM jobs are more suitable for men. Furthermore, the role of wasta in the country has affected the way many organizations hire their employees, especially women. As mentioned previously by Tlaiss and Kauser (2011), wasta is the most essential catalyst for the career progression

of women, disregarding their education and achievements. Thus, organizations have been affected by the prevalence of wasta in the country, to the extent that recruitment, selection and promotion decisions are all dependant on the wasta that the employee or women has, and who's wasta is stronger, which facilitates such decisions and sometimes prompt promotion. As a result, most of the organizations have started adopting HR practices in favor of the patriarchal system of the country that their organization is operating in. And since the country also has no laws regarding equal pay within the private sector, most organizations do not offer men and women the same amount of pay or even equal pay for the same level positions occupied by both genders.

Consequently, the mechanisms adopted by organizations and the extent to which their practices and systems affect the degree of gender inequality in the workplace, are all controlled by the laws, stereotypes and patriarchal systems that the country operates within. The main problem is that Lebanese personal status laws discriminate against women, and the rights and security of women in Lebanon remain unprotected.

Legislations are not coercive in terms of forcing organizations to adopt gender equitable HR practices, thus, such legislations add greater barriers for women in their access to employment and career development instead of facilitating their entry into the workforce.

In Lebanon, examples of normative mechanisms on HRM practices relate to the adoption of certain standards which can aid in the enhancement of women's participation in the work force. For example, organizations can choose to adopt international normative pressures as mechanisms for integrating women, such as the

SDG's and goals numbers 5 and 8 specifically. Goal number 5, which is gender equality, is dedicated to recognizing women's equality and empowerment, since gender discrimination is still being woven through legal and social norms which are affecting organizational practices.

Organizations can implement HR practices which ensure that women have a right to equality in all areas, especially in high level positions which are mostly dominated by men, and in equal pay. On the other hand, goal number 8 can be connected to goal number 5, since it is about decent work and economic growth. Given that the sustainable economy fosters growth with benefits for everyone, employment is the entry point for such economic well-being. In an inclusive economy, decent work means a living wage, workplace safety and protection against discrimination (Abebe, 2016). Thus, economics should be geared towards achieving women's rights and gender equality for greater economic dynamism. This is achieved when women have equal access to decent work, productive resources, and financial services as well as voices in economic decisions. This includes having organizations adopt systems in which there are equal pay and equal work for both men and women, better access to employment opportunities for women, and safety from sexual harassment in the workplace. Private sector organizations should adopt efforts to get rid of gender discrimination wherever they appear within organizations.

In 2012, ILO began discussions with Lebanon on the implementation of a Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP). Thus, organizations in Lebanon can start by adopting and sustaining the use of the ILO working conditions, which aims to

establish a sound legislative environment, improve governance and social dialogue, improved decent work conditions, enhance productive employment opportunities, and improve the provision of social security.

Also, there is the absence of training, which most employees and women need in order to adapt to the organization's work and system. When organizations adopt training as a key practice for entering the workforce, the knowledge and skills of employees will develop and they will be able to adapt faster to the organization's work structure and perform better. This way, organizations will also be teaching their employees that the same training is carried out for everyone, meaning that the work is equal for both men and women, and the work for both genders is carried out in the same way. This will help organizations spread the norm of overcoming gender bias among employees. Due to the absence of proper HR practices and systems which can help in reducing gender inequality in the workplace, organizations should adopt the HR systems which are best suitable for them. When they do, organizations will become oriented in one direction to fight gender discrimination or to help achieve women equality in the workplace. Adopting similar standards and routines helps organizations agree on one direction which will allow them to focus on the importance of what they are trying to achieve through the implementation of new practices and systems. Unfortunately, Lebanon lacks professional bodies which can regulate HRM practices in organizations, such as SHRM (The Society for Human Resource Management) in the US, which has been the leading provider of resources in serving the needs of HR professionals and advancing the practice of human resource management, in addition to CIPD (The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development) in the UK, who have been setting professional

standards for HR and people development in order to drive positive change in the world of work.

From an HR perspective, mimetic mechanisms may take place when organizations follow other organizations who are adopting strategies and practices towards achieving gender equality in the workplace for women. Furthermore, more recommendations regarding HR in the workplace can be suggested, in which HR practices towards achieving gender equality in the workplace can be solved through means of job advertisements; such as reviewing job advertisements, encouraging both men and women to apply to job advertisements, and running campaigns in universities and colleges to attract women applicants to nontraditional areas such as the STEM fields (Paauwe and Farndale, 2007). Thus, when organizations start implementing change through job advertisements, other organizations will adopt the same method because they will observe how far they can get in attracting change through advertising, which will help spread the intention faster. Also, more organizations will start attracting women to the STEM fields, once they see that their counter organizations are doing so, in order not to fall behind on productivity and outcomes.

All organizations can also set certain goals which can help in minimizing gender discrimination, such as increasing the general recruitment of women, recruiting and developing women in areas where they are under-represented (such as technical areas), enhancing the professional development of women, increasing their number in management, ensuring equal pay, improving flexibility and the balance between work,

family and social life, and more importantly brining about a change of culture to support such gender equality (Oligiati and Shapiro, 2002).

### 5.3. Levels of Support to Women's Career Access

Today, most HR managers in Lebanon do not hold any formal education or professional certification in HRM, which numbs the awareness that the HR function adds value to business (Afiouni and Nakhle, 2016). For example, in the Lebanese banking sector, the banks lack a well-defined HRM plan. And even if they have a charted plan, they have difficulty in implementing it for reasons such as lack of line manager's buy in, and nepotism and favoritism that distort proper selection, training, promotion and compensation practices (Afiouni, 2007). As a result, this leads to the loss of credibility of all HR initiatives, and ends up demeaning the HR function (Afiouni, 2007). Thus, one of the ways to decrease the negative impact of wasta (nepotism) is to institutionalize it within organizational practices, and to subject it to a specific set of standards (Afiouni and Nakhle, 2016). For example, the way many banks in Lebanon have dealt with wasta by subjecting all referred candidates to a set of psychometric tests; as a result, only those who meet the minimum level of qualifications can be considered among the pool of applicants (Afiouni and Nakhle, 2016). When one back starts adopting an effective HRM plan as a normative mechanism, other banks in the country will do the same because they will observe how such a mechanism is considered the most appropriate in fighting the dominance of wasta. As a result, banks will observe how an effective HRM plan can improve their practices and ways of operating.

Unfortunately, most HR managers support diversity management rhetorically, but not through concrete action, and this resistance is attributed to equity and diversity management, to deeply entrenched patterns of power relations, dominance and past discrimination (Afiouni and Nakhle, 2016). On the organizational level, diversity management is seen as a valuable HRM function that yields higher organizational performance and competitiveness (Abidi et al., 2017). For example, work-life balance programs support positive effects of non-management gender diversity in organizations. The implementation and promotion of work-family balance programs is likely to assure employees about employer's intentions about gender diversity, which can increase the potential of diversity in enhancing performance (Abidi et al., 2017). This will encourage women to apply to such jobs, while being assured that they will be able to establish a work-life balance. The absence of such work-life balance programs is considered as a negative normative mechanism which is lacking in most organizations, because such programs can actually enhance women's participation as they will be encouraged to apply to jobs, knowing that they will be able to establish a balance between their work responsibilities, and family and household responsibilities. And this further adds to the perceptions of employees that fairness of HRM practices has positive effects on their organizational commitment (Abidi et al., 2017).

At a micro and meso level, the focus is on the internal processes of HRM, in view of the observation of scarce human resources, of aging workforces, and of increasing work-related health problems, thereby underscoring that the sustainability of the HRM system itself becomes a 'survival strategy' for organizations who are dependent on high-quality employees (De Vos and Heijden, 2017). The traditional

HRM response to accommodating women is predicated on reacting to and defending against external pressures. This may be the case when a firm is forced, through contract compliance or other legislative dictates, to implement employment equity, which can be regarded as coercive in terms of the pressures exerted on these firms. In this type of organization, achieving employment equity may be viewed as simply another form of unnecessary government interference (Abidi et al., 2017). Thus, developing a womenfriendly structure is not viewed as strategically significant. The firm can begin to hire more women overall, thus increasing representation, and place some women in nontraditional jobs, thus somewhat altering patterns of occupational segregation (Abidi et al., 2017). The more organizations start to alter patterns of occupational segregation, the more such alterations will become an imitation for other organizations. As a result, little effort is made to change the dominant, male-centered corporate culture. And unless men overcome their fear of loss of opportunities and promotion, and begin to utilize the family-friendly policies themselves, the gender division will continue to increase, with women taking the majority of part-time and flexible work, and thus, remaining disadvantaged in terms of their career development (Burroway, 2016).

Gender discrimination is mostly evident in areas of job recruitment, promotion, remuneration and job assignments (Harel et al., 2003). According to Ashley (2000) when it comes to dealing with the controversies surrounding the concept of discrimination and equal opportunities, there are two main perspectives to implementing equal employment opportunity in organizations. On the one hand, the 'social justice' perspective proposes 'that the justification for equality is that it is morally right and should be pursued for this reason regardless of the costs or inefficiencies it occasions

for business' (Ashley, 2000). The 'business case perspective', on the other hand, suggests that 'unequal achievement by women and men is a problem that should be addressed primarily because it is inefficient rather than because it is wrong or unjust' (Ashley, 2000). Furthermore, women are shown to be behind their male colleagues with regard to career progression, salary received and training undertaken (Harel et al., 2003). The implementation of equal employment opportunities in organizations through training programs for both genders, and the provision of equal salaries, must be regarded as normative mechanisms for all organizations. Equality in such factors should be the common standard and routine in which organizations are operating at.

The appropriate HR systems and organizational practices must be embedded in organizations. Certain HR practices should be applied to the workplace context of hiring decisions or decisions regarding the selection of individuals for promotion, training, or desirable job assignments. However, HR practices towards minimizing gender bias in the workplace can be done in different ways. For example, HR practices that can be adopted to try and minimize gender discrimination in the workplace. According to Bielby (2000) there are three main ways of doing so. First, what constitutes job-relevant information should be established through a systematic job analysis. Second, a mechanism must be in place for potential candidates to make their interests and qualifications known to those making the selections. And third, substantive oversight of decision making needs to be implemented, beyond simply "signing off" by a higher-level supervisor (Bielby, 2002). Bringing these features to a personnel system can short-circuit the other automatic tendency to rely on stereotypes and circumvent informal networks that isolate women and minorities (Bielby, 2000).

The human resource profession can develop a straightforward template for deciding which system is most appropriate in a given organizational context, in order to avoid any discrimination which may arise in the process of selection and hiring.

Research examining the relationship between organizational policies and disparities by gender and race in career outcomes demonstrate that formalized policies are insufficient to reduce bias effectively (Bielby, 2000). A further practice is the "identity-blind" process, which is composed of practices designed to ensure that the human resource decision making process is the same for each individual, whether that individual is a male or female (Bielby, 2000). Another practice could be implementing as part of an organization's human resource information system the regular monitoring and analysis of patterns of segregation and differences by gender and race in pay and career advancement (Bielby, 2000). Such monitoring would assess whether disparities are greater than what might be expected based on differences in job-related knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests and other job related factors that would influence an employee's contributions to the organization.

Organizations that value their human resources enact 'high performance work practices, and such practices handle employees according to their competencies, knowledge, skills and abilities rather than deal with irrelevant characteristics such as gender (Harel et al., 2003). This should always be the most appropriate strategy used by organizations because women's increased education and participation in the workforce is further empowering them and increasing their ability to claim more of a role at the societal and organizational levels (Tlaiss and Dirani, 2015).

## 5.4. Levels of Support to Women's Career Development

When talking about women in management, the human asset most cited as under-utilized in organizations is women, particularly those at the management level (Harel et al., 2003). Greater participation of women in senior management is an important organizational endeavor, particularly as women in senior management have been linked to an increase in firm performance (Dezsö & Ross, 2012). Recent research on leadership style based on gender difference indicates that female leaders and managers tend to enact an environment of equality and transparency more effectively than their male counterparts due to their behavioral differences in embracing diversity (Xiu et al., 2017). However, according to the results of research conducted, the majority (80%) of the Lebanese women managers confirmed that their employers did not have an HRD department. If and when an organization had an HRD department, it was mostly inactive (Tlaiss and Dirani, 2015). The absence of a proper HR department has been regarded as negatively affecting the way an organization operates. Thus, organizations need to adopt positive normative mechanisms such as having an HR department which is responsible for the proper implementation of practices, which will facilitate women's access to employment and career advancement. This norm can be adopted by organizations and can become the common dominant norm, which will further spread once other organizations observe its effectiveness through the recruitment processes and outcomes.

Unfortunately, women may be denied promotions into senior management positions not so much because of the biases of organizational policies, but because of the commonly held stereotypical attitudes toward such promotional behavior, that men, not women, should be senior managers (Woodrow and Guest, 2013), and in addition to the lack of HR practices and systems in place within organizations to fight such overriding discrimination. Thus, HR practices and systems should be implemented to eliminate such stereotypical attitudes which are embedded in most organizations.

Practices and systems that promote diversity and equal opportunity should be adopted. This can be done by having firms ensure fairness and non-discrimination on grounds of race, sec, religion, national origin or age in its human resource management (Barrena-Martinez et al., 2017). This will make workers understand the possible benefits of achieving diversity equity in the workplace. Diversity produces a wider range of behavioral scripts among employees that prompt behavioral flexibility for organizations, and has in general been associated with high levels of creativity and innovation (Xiu et al., 2017). Organizations can create diverse work teams to generate more creativity, ideas, and opinions from employees (Barrena-Martinez et al., 2017). This functional diversity can affect further cooperation between workers and reduce barriers to creativity, and superior organizational performance can also result from such processes (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Fair treatment is an appropriate tool to optimize human resource capabilities, thus producing organizations that perform on higher levels.

Women, as other minority groups in organizations, may suffer from various forms of unfair treatment, such as discrimination in selection, promotion and wage (Harel et al., 2003). When unfair treatment exists in an organization, job satisfaction will be reduced, and this will result in poor employee performance and also poor performance by the organization. Thus, women should be provided with fair high-performance HRM practices which enhance their employment opportunities, which in turn will lead to organizational effectiveness. Thus, in general, large firms with high percentages of women managers have high economic performance, which leads to a positive relationship between HRM practices, fairness in promotion of women into managerial positions and organizational effectives (Harel et al., 2003). And as a result, investment in efforts to promote women into management is not only a normative and ethical approach, but also has practical implications, which are of economic significance (Ashley, 2000). In addition, organizations with female CEOs may embrace and induce diversity better than male CEOs because females are more sensitive to homogeneity in a work environment (Xiu et al., 2017).

The proper implementation of the HR function in Lebanon can take place if more awareness is raised regarding the practices and systems which can promote the access and advancement of women into the workforce. Such practices and systems are advantageous normative mechanisms, since they would be adopted by organizations as routines which are considered appropriate for the organization within the context that it is operating in. As a first step in raising awareness, HR managers can hold regular gatherings where the HR managers will meet, compare notes, and learn from each other by sharing their experiences of how they entered the workforce, how they advanced,

and they can recommend advice to each other to help others build up their professional profiles and succeed. HR managers with, for example, a more positive attitude towards promoting women may be more likely to develop supportive HRM practices in the first instance (Biswas et al., 2016). Such gatherings will become routines that organizations carry out as a way for their employees to learn from others and expand their knowledge and skills. Thus, when managers are in an environment which is characterized by supportive HRM policies and practices, they will be more likely to have positive attitudes towards supporting the behavior of promoting women. Decision-makers in such organizations will, through these mechanisms, have positive behavioral intentions to promote women to senior management positions (Biswas et al., 2016).

As a result, practices can be adopted which prohibit gender-based discrimination and encourage women to engage in skill development towards career progression by providing information that relate to the fit between women's working role and leadership (Biswas et al., 2016). Supportive HRM policies and practices involve employees in organizational decision-making, to facilitate employee development and ensure fairness of rewards and career progression (Biswas et al., 2016). Thus, it is important for all employees and especially women to be given the chance to participate in decision-making within the organization, as well as in giving opinions regarding issues or fairness and rewards, and growth and development opportunities. Such practices can lead to perceived organizational support towards the employees and women. Recruitment, selection, compensation, participation and development are all supportive intentions to promote women, also by being objective rather than subjective, and being based on merit and providing equal opportunity to employees of both genders

(Biswas et al., 2016). When women observe that the HRM practices in their organizations are fair and transparent, this will have a positive effect on their attitudes and they will be more motivated to achieve organizational goals. In addition, other organizations will want to adopt HRM practices as well in order to achieve fairness and transparency. This will result in the implementation of positive mimetic mechanisms as organizations are imitating each other through the adoption of such HRM practices. Furthermore, selection and promotional systems governed by fair and transparent HR policies create less room for discrimination in terms of promotion on the ground of gender or race (Biswas et al., 2016).

The HR systems can also work towards establishing policies and practices that ensure equal opportunity for all employees, measuring the performance of employees based on objective quantifiable results, the organization counseling all employees on career development irrespective of their gender, and women having opportunities to be promoted over men in cases where the female candidates possess better qualifications. The role of supporting HRM policies and practices is not only to eliminate opportunity for discrimination but also to encourage the development of deeper attitudinal acceptance of women's role in senior management and promotion to such roles (Biswas et al., 2016).

Further HR practices can also involve training and development with the aim of developing competence and knowledge between employees of an organization.

'Training and development' is defined as the process of developing the key competencies that enable individuals to better perform current or future jobs through planned learning (Tlaiss and Dirani, 2015). Training and development practices can

help to increase employee knowledge, skills and abilities, that employees can then utilize (Bos-Nehles et al., 2017). Such practices may also be understood as a social exchange phenomenon, in which employees understand training and development practices as the organization's personalized commitment to themselves. Training programs which are women-friendly should be developed to help managers identify and overcome gender bias (Harel et al., 2003). The existence of training programs should be an essential norm in every organization, which all employees have to undertake before performing their jobs. Training should be part of the professional values that the organization holds, being a norm which is increasingly becoming more institutionalized. Discrimination creates a waste of talent, reduces effectiveness and, within a wider framework, could hinder future realization of the potential of societies at large (Harel et al., 2003).

Furthermore, autonomy is described as the degree of independence and freedom that employees experience in how they carry out their tasks and roles (Bos-Nekhles et al., 2017). However organizations should ensure that such degrees of autonomy are exercised by both men and women equally. Career counseling can also be offered by the HRM department, to understand what women are searching for in organizations. It can be regarded as another normative mechanism which every organization offers for its employees, in order to help employees identify the areas they are best at and the areas in which they need more mentoring or training in. The organizations can also offer 360 degrees performance appraisal systems, in which an evaluation system exists where employees receive confidential and anonymous feedback from all the people who work with them and around them, e.g., peers, managers, etc. (Baruch, 2015). Career

workshops can also be held, as induction and orientation sessions, offering special programs and systems for ethnic minorities, to identify future leaders based on their capacity to learn and adapt, rather than on the basis of seniority (Baruch, 2015).

Unlike most tangible resources, the human resource is variable in its ability to create added value, and is very much dependent on a well-thought-out managerial approach. Applying the best HR practices, including the appropriate utilization of women in managerial workforce, would impact the outputs of the human asset, and as a result, firms fully utilizing the diverse talents of women managers stand to gain competitive advantage over those that do not (Harel et al., 2003). This is why it is essential for organizations to adopt coercive, normative, or mimetic mechanisms, any type of mechanism which will best fit their institution and the way it operates.

Combating discrimination by enhancing the association between remuneration and performance, providing opportunities for participating in decision making, focus on training and basing promotion on merit within the internal labour market would all provide women with both visibility and opportunities to express their capabilities, and thus contribute to organizational effectiveness (Harel et al., 2003).

A firm needs to develop a "soft" environment that facilitates the implementation of technical flexibility (Xiu et al., 2017). Such an environment is usually characterized by a high level of diversity, transparency, and democracy, because strategic changes impose heavy decision loads and collaboration (Xiu et al., 2017). According to Cattaneo et al., (1994), there are essentially two ways for the organization to become women-friendly: one is in response to external pressures (such as legislation) through coercive

mechanisms such as pressures towards the establishment of practices which will decrease patriarchy and stereotypical attitudes within the organization, decrease the effect of wasta on the recruitment and selection processes, and fight inequalities such as unequal pay; the other is through the activities of internal champions, persons who are pushing for this particular objective, through the continuous implementation of certain normative mechanisms by applying the most appropriate HR practices to the organizational environment. However, the case of internally-based change towards adopting practices which are more women friendly is more complex.

In general, to obtain organizational change, it is necessary to have something actively promoting the new idea (Cattaneo et al., 1994). Furthermore, in order for the change to be successful, it is necessary for top management to be supportive; it is therefore important to analyze the likelihood of women-friendliness in relation to the attitude of the CEO (forces against women-friendliness), and the attitude (for or against women-friendliness) (Cattaneo et al., 1994). Thus, transforming an organization from having practices which are male-centered to women-friendly practices and systems all depends on the level of organizational commitment and the support received. Such transformation depends on the role played by internal change agents, the ability and willingness of those agents to support the efforts of those championing the interests of women and the degree to which the corporate culture is altered (Cattaneo et al., 1994).

Human resource management (HRM), in the form of high performance work practices can have a direct impact on organizational effectiveness (Harel et al., 2003). Firms must consider HRM to be the major determinant of global competitiveness by

promoting opportunities for women, because women are more accepting of diversity, more adaptable to change and more comfortable with ambiguity – the actual traits required – while men are more linear and concerned with control (Harel et al., 2003). Fairness in promoting women into managerial positions would enhance their organizational commitment, increase their job and organizational satisfaction, reduce turnover and absenteeism and consequently improve their performance (Harel et al., 2003). Organizations with a strategy to promote their flexibility and responsiveness to environmental changes would benefit from adopting innovative HR practices that include selective hiring, extensive and well-designed training, self-managed teams and decentralization of decision making, information sharing throughout the organization, comparatively high compensation, and compensation contingent on organizational performance (Xiu et al., 2017) instead of being affected by stereotyping.

In addition, Evans and Davis (2005) argued that innovative HR practices lead to better firm performance by positively influencing the internal social structure (e.g. network ties, norms of reciprocity, shared mental models, and role taking) of an organization.

Organizations should make their employees feel that top management positions endorse equitable opportunities, and such a message would be motivating for those employees, especially women, who are hesitant to take initiative, or engage in discretionary behavior because they are afraid that their efforts may not be compensated well due to potential discrimination (Xiu et al., 2017).

# **CHAPTER 6**

## **METHODOLOGY**

#### 6.1. Research Approach

Since this research aims to identify the organizational and societal hindrances to women's access to employment and career development, the perspectives of women and HR professionals need to be discovered. Thus, this research tends to uncover the views of women who have already climbed the career ladder and arrived to their desired destination, or are still on their journey up the ladder, in order to discover their experiences. This will be done through qualitative (interview) research methods in order to identify the thematic links between interviewees, to understand their motivations, and uncover explicit and implicit biases.

A qualitative approach is best suited to uncover the perspectives of women. Qualitative interview data provides imminent information about the participant's attitudes, thoughts and actions (Kendall, 2008), and such qualitative data is obtained from the interviews. Much of qualitative research relies on spoken interviews with participants in order to gather detailed information regarding the phenomenon under examination (Polkinghorne, 2005). Hence, face-to-face interviews allow the observation of both verbal and nonverbal data (Hiller & DiLuzio, 2004).

Thus, the research will take up the qualitative method of conducting research, in which a semi-structural interview approach will be adopted. Brewerton and Milward (2001) suggest that the comparability of this form of interviews is secondary to

obtaining rich data for analysis, considering that this topic entails an underlying cultural matter. The point behind relying on this form of interviews with women is to identify their own views without limiting them to possible prejudices while guiding them within the boundaries of the research topic, such that the interview develops into addressing all the topics at hand with fewer limitations (Brewerton and Milward, 2001). Moreover, the choice to adopt this form of interviews is based on the need for more actual, objective data from women and HR professionals more than learning about their experiences as members of the organizational culture only.

These individual interviews will align with Thorpe and Holt's (2008) view on interviews, which is that the purpose of this tool is to provide the interviewer with qualitative input regarding the life of the interviewee. Thus, the purpose of these interviews will be to gain insight into the interviewee's experiences while comparing the findings of the interviews with other research findings, such as the results from interviews with HR professionals as well as secondary research.

## **6.2. Participants and Procedures**

Given the nature of the research questions, qualitative research methods will be used to collect and analyze the data. Data on the educational background, hindrances, barriers and professional qualifications of women at work and HR professionals will be collected through interviews addressed to HR professionals and women working in the Lebanese private sector.

This research resorts to face-to-face interviews with women who have experienced gender discrimination as barriers to entry to their jobs or as barriers to career advancement, in addition to interviews with women who are HR professionals. The first contact with the participants will be by email or via LinkedIn messages (publicly available profiles). The email will explain the objective of the study and the importance of their contribution. If interested in participating, respondents will provide their telephone number along with a suitable time to contact them, in order to arrange for an interview. Interviews will be scheduled through email or telephone, depending on the participant's preference. All interviews will be conducted in the space selected by the interviewee. If the participants wish to answer the interview questions at their own time, the interview questions will be sent by email. All participants will be ensured confidentiality. And when reporting data from their accounts, interviewees' names will be changed to a pseudonym.

The data collected through the interviews will be sufficient enough to gain insight on the perspectives and opinions of women in several industries in the private sector in order to identify their views of hindrances to their career growth, and their experiences, to be able to suggest the HRM practices needed in order to challenge such issues at the organizational level. All collected data will be de-identified upon the completion of the interview and will be assigned an alpha-numerical number, and the code sheet connecting the code to participants' name will be securely stored on the Principal Investigator's (PI) computer. Only the PI can access this information.

The sample of women will be chosen using non-probability sampling due to the lack of organizational research in the Lebanese corporate environment. Non-probability sampling simply means sampling without using random selection methods. So, the chosen method of non-probability sampling for this research will be purposive sampling, which is a selection based on purpose. Purpose sampling starts with a purpose in mind, and the sample is selected to include people of interest and exclude those who do not suit the purpose (such as women who have not experienced any form of gender discrimination throughout their careers). Thus, the groups of women who will be chosen are those who will prove a purpose which is the emphasis of gender discrimination in the workplace.

Women from different industries in the private sector will be chosen, such as women from the banking sector, healthcare sector, and also from law firms, as well as other possible industries. This will lead to obtaining results which are not biased towards one industry, or towards one group of women only, which will allow for better analysis and more concrete results. Thus, the sample size is estimated to be at least 20 women, in which the sample will be made up of 5 women who are HR professionals, and the rest will be women from different industries in the private sector and who are from early and mid career levels. In addition, there will be 2 interview protocols: 1 for women at early and mid level careers and 1 for HR professionals.

#### **6.3. Data Collection Instruments**

As a result, the data will be collected through interviews, whether face to face or by sending the questions and answers online. The interviews protocols for both working women and HR managers are located in the appendix. The data collected will be sufficient enough to gain insight on the perspectives and opinions of women in several industries in the private sector in order to identify their views of hindrances to their career entry and career advancement, and their experiences, to be able to suggest the HRM practices needed in order to challenge such issues at the organizational level.

This research is useful and timely as it will identify the causes of why women are underrepresented in the workplace, and why they face barriers to entry and delay in career advancement, in order to draft HR practices as a possible solution to employee empowerment, and more specifically towards reducing these problems for women. Thus, the findings will serve as an improvement of the current HRM practices, and will also suggest new HRM practices to minimize the disadvantages that women are facing when it comes to employment or career advancement especially in the Lebanese private sector.

## **6.4. Data Analysis**

The research approach which will be adopted in this research follows a two step approach. We will first engage in both deductive and inductive, however a bit more towards deductive reasoning. The inductive approach will be used to understand what

women and HR managers are saying, and then the deductive approach will be used to try and fit their answers into the three pillars of institutional theory.

The inductive approach will be used to identify larger categories of phenomena or variables, to understand the relationship between them, in order to be able to build a theory. So in the case of this research, this approach will be used to understand the larger, main idea of what women and HR managers are trying to say about their careers, and to link their similar perceptions into one main idea which must be tackled. While on the other hand, William (2012) refers to deduction as a process that entails developing a theory, and then empirically testing this theory. The authors also suggest that the formulation of this theory may stem from the researcher's personal experience or from secondary research. On the other hand, Gill and Johnson (1997) describe the process of deduction as one that begins with theory formulation, develops through making use of abstract concepts as indicators to base observations and conducting the observations empirically, and ends with either falsifying or discarding the initial hypothesis or creating new theories or predictions. Similarly, this research will utilize the aforementioned secondary research as a start point in conducting the interviews in order to discover the challenges and lack of supportive HR practices and systems through interviews with women and HR managers. This will make it feasible to test the relevance of employee empowerment in the empowerment of women in Lebanon's private sector.

This research will adopt the thematic coding process in which data is derived from interview sources and coded in such a manner that the key words used by

interviewees help to derive general themes from the thematic links of the phrases derived (Saunders et al., 2016). The use of this strategy was determined based on the possible availability of multiple interviewees who will have similar responses, or responses along similar themes pertaining to the overall research aim and objectives (Saunders et al., 2016).

Conducting interviews as part of data collection provides easily interpretable and concise descriptions of the emergent themes and practices, usually as the foundational phase of interpretation (Flick, 2009). However, in order to properly carry out thematic analysis, the researcher must be very familiar with the data being handled, and should have a comprehensive understanding of the content and should be familiar with the interactions of women during the interviews. Once the researcher is familiar with the data, that data must be well organized in order for the researcher to know what they want to achieve. For example, the researcher wants to arrive at information about the views of both women at work and HR professionals, therefore the data has to be organized into two interview protocols, each related to a specific theme.

Once the researcher will obtain the answers of the interviews, the answers will be analyzed as data extracts and will be sorted into different themes in order to make the interpretation process of the data easier. The themes can then be reviewed, and once they are reviewed, the researcher can decide whether there is enough data to support them, or whether they want to merge the themes or separate them or even remove certain themes to reduce the data further in order to arrive at a better understanding. Examples of themes resulting from interview answers can be understanding reasons

why women work and stay in specific workplaces, understanding their expectations and intentions regarding future employment, and an overview of their working conditions. The researcher will then be able to define the themes and even establish sub themes within the data obtained. However, further analysis will be needed in order to further enhance the identified themes and to arrive at conclusions. The researcher must not just report the findings or summarize each interview. Instead, the researcher needs to transform the analysis into interpretable information by using real life examples and relating them to the themes and literature at hand.

The way the answers are presented at the end must portray the validity of the analysis, while also supporting the analysis with empirical evidence that addresses the research question. This is why the Gioia method was adopted, which seeks qualitative rigor in research. This approach is a way of conducting qualitative, interpretive research and also a way of guiding the analyses and presentation of the research (Gioia et al., 2012). And in order to obtain good qualitative research, interviews were adopted to obtain both retrospective and real-time perceptions by the women. Taken together, the tandem reporting of both the women and the researcher allowed not only a qualitatively rigorous demonstration of the links between the data, but also allowed for the kind of insight that is the defining hallmark of high-quality qualitative research (Gioia et al., 2012). Thus, the data structure that was adopted provided a representation of how the research progressed from raw data to themes and solutions regarding barriers that women face, and this is a key component of demonstrating rigor in qualitative research.

# Demographic Table of the 20 Women Interviewed

	Working	g Women	
Name	Age	Marital	Years of Experience
		Status	
Maria	26	Single	5
Zeina	35	Married	12
Farah	35	Married	10
Nour	29	Single	7
Samar	38	Married	14
Leila	34	Married	10
Ayah	26	Married	4
Aline	27	Single	5
Nadine	31	Single	8
Ghada	35	Single	11
Carolina	37	Married	14
Abir	29	Single	7
Malak	28	Single	6
Dalia	33	Single	10
Sarah	39	Married	16

HR Managers					
Lina	40	Married	21		
Dina	43	Married	19		
Cecilia	41	Married	18		
Lara	38	Single	15		
Layal	34	Single	12		

# CHAPTER 7 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

# 7.1. Interview Findings

The themes and sub-themes are all summarized and presented in the following thematic table, which portrays the main ideas of hindrances to career entry and advancement for women. The first table presents the results of interviews with working women, and the second table presents the results from the interviews with women HR managers.

## Results of Working Women

Barriers to  Career  Entry/Barriers  to Career  Advancement	Theme	Sub-Theme	Number of Women who mentioned this point	Quotes
Career Advancement	Workplace Harassment	Hostile and Sexual environment	13	"Work hard, let your voice be heard, and don't stop participating

				and discussing
				in forums and
				professional
				groups"- Leila
				"Barriers are
				based on
		Gender		centuries of
Career Entry		Stereotypes and	15	sexist
		Patriarchy		mentality" -
				Samar
				"Empowered
				women
		Gender	10	empower
Career Entry		Inequality	12	everyone
				around them" –
				Aline
Career	Organizational			
Advancement	Support			
				"I am hungry
		Interpersonal		to further my
Career Entry		Support	10	career and
		Support		
				break as many

			barriers along
			the way for
			girls of the
			younger
			generation" –
			Nadine
			"Unfortunately,
			in a country
			like Lebanon,
			limited budgets
C			lead to limited
Career Advancement	Under Staffing	7	chances of
Advancement			improvement
			and
			advancement"
			– Carolina

				"It is very
				discouraging
				for a woman to
				feel motivated
				towards her job
				knowing that
				there is a
				certain level
		Lack of		she cannot
Career		Organizational	13	surpass
Advancement		Support		because of the
				glass ceiling
				and also
				knowing that it
				is not because
				of credentials
				but purely
				based on
				gender" –
				Samar
				"The strongest
Career	Career		11	fabric is
Advancement		Managers	11	women
				supporting

				women" – Abir
Career Advancement		Training	9	"I had no choice but to become self- reliant" - Maria
Career Advancement		Rewarding Experiences	11	"My efforts  and excellence lead my  colleagues and superiors to entrust me and seek my advice and knowledge in many issues"  - Leila
Career Entry	Work-Life Balance			
Career Entry		Family Responsibilities and Long Working Hours	12	"I have learned throughout my years of experience to attain a

				balanced
				lifestyle
				between work
				and non-
				working hours"
				– Ghada
				"I was my own
Comment Endown	Work Ethics	Wasta and	9	wasta through
Career Entry	WOIK Ethics	Nepotism	9	my efforts" –
				Dalia
				"No country
				can ever truly
				flourish if it
Career Entry	Situation of the	Economic	6	stifles the
	Country	Stagnation		potential of its
				women" -
				Zeina

Results of HR Managers

Barrier to				
Career				
Entry/Barrier	Theme	<b>Sub Theme</b>	No. of Women	Quote
to				
Advancement				

				"My main challenge
				was to practice HR
				processes such as
	Career Organizational Tra			Performance
				Management with the
				other high professionals
				in the organization;
Barrier to		Mantarchin and		Many HR functions
Career		Mentorship and	4	such as recruitment,
Advancement		Training		training and quality
				assessment are
				considered to be
				departing from
				'idiosyncratic' of
				individual professions"
				– Dina
Barrier to		Lack of Gender		
Career		Equitable HR	4	"We always pushed for
Advancement		Practices		gender equality" – Lina
Barrier to	Barrier to	Work-Life		"Do not compromise
Career		Balance	4	your social life to
Advancement				advance at work, after

				all your life and
				happiness is what will
				matter in 5/10/20 years"
				– Cecilia
Barrier to  Career  Advancement		Rewarding Experiences	5	"In my opinion, helping others is the greatest advancement" – Lina
Barrier to Career Entry		Interpersonal Support	3	"Success is never reached alone" – Dina
Barrier to Career Entry		Defined Career Paths	3	"When you believe you can, you will" – Lara
Barrier to  Career  Advancement	Awareness	Underestimating the HR Function	4	"Every time I inform employees about their termination, I wonder if my high position is worth their discouraging face expressions" – Lina
Barrier to  Career  Advancement		International Standards	5	"Less conversation and more action" - Cecilia

				"Employees were
				mostly resistant to
Barrier to	Workplace	Gender		taking women
Career Entry	Harassment	Inequality	4	managers seriously" -
				Lara
				"Every woman has the
		Discrimination		right to get the job she
Barrier to		in the Hiring	3	wants without any
Career Entry		Process		discriminatory waivers"
				– Layal

# Findings of Women at Work

## Theme 1: Workplace Harassment

## **Hostile and Sexual Harassment**

Environments can either be places of comfort or places of hostility for employees. And what takes place in the environment can significantly impact employees, either positively or negatively. Out of 15 women interviewed, 13 experienced different forms of hostile and sexual harassment in their work place. Maria mentioned that in her place of work, she was not personally sexually harassed, but she

saw how other women were harassed, and most of which did not report it, because abusers are protected under the Lebanese government.

"The hardest experience of my life so far was seeing other women being harassed but not being able to help them in order to not risk jeopardizing my career by trying due to the unfairness of the society we live in" – Maria.

Thus, these women were forced to endure it because they do not want to jeopardize their careers. According to Maria, men in high positions think that they can abuse their power and get away with harassment, and unfortunately, in a country like Lebanon, this is mostly correct because there are no laws against sexual harassment in the Lebanese Labour Law yet. Thus, such an environment discourages women and affects their psychological well-being. Furthermore, Zeina mentioned that the organization she works at does not appreciate women's efforts, which makes the chances of women in advancing to higher positions very minimal. Farah stated that at her organization, she was exposed to working with difficult people, who were also not appreciative or supportive, and people who do not admit one's excellence and high performance. Nour, who is in the law industry, pointed out that society differentiates between lawyers and females, and the idea of having females as lawyers. But luckily, Nour was in a law office which treated her as a respectable lawyer, and not as a female. Her work and efforts were appreciated. However, Nour pointed out that in most of the other law offices, a lot of women are facing the problem where society differentiates between a lawyer and a female. Thus, the results concluded that these women all experienced verbal harassment, through remarks due to their gender, which made them

feel like they don't belong in the workplace, especially in places mostly dominated by males.

## Gender Stereotypes and Patriarchy

Several of the women interviewed demonstrated how patriarchal-gendered values affect their work and the work of other women as well. Leila mentioned that the most challenging experience in her career so far is that most of the time, she is not taken seriously because of her gender, especially by the male employees. Additionally, Samar advised other women to be aware of the barriers they may have to tackle in their workplace because of their gender, and not to take it personally, because such

"barriers are based on centuries of sexist mentality in order to oppress women, and finally, not to be discouraged, but to find strength within them to fight through these barriers hoping that someday a woman can be judged based on her work and not on her gender".

6 of the women interviewed stated that they actually prefer to work at a bank, because working at bank is described as a feminine job. And 2 of these women actually declared that men are fit for jobs that require physical effort, and this can be seen from the effect of gender norms on the choice of occupations. In addition, most of the women pointed out that some jobs were assigned or not assigned to women based on their gender. For example, receptionists were mostly women, because a women's touch is needed along with a soft voice when it comes to answering phone calls. And at the same

time, sometimes women were not able to get jobs in call centers after midnight due to safety reasons. Thus, such discrimination is also characterized as benevolent sexism. Most of the women interviewed also pointed out that even though they are hard workers and their organizations are well aware of that, most of the opportunities are retained to certain types of people, being mostly males, which makes them opt out on certain job assignments due to their gender. 15 of the women mentioned that the most challenging experience in their career is their realization that they will continue to be treated differently than their male piers due to their gender regardless of how much better they are at work. Furthermore, Farah also stated that a lot of her friends were denied certain job assignments or advised that certain job positions are not suitable for them due to their gender, because these positions required robust personalities which in general are seen to be found in men and less likely in women.

## **Gender Inequality**

During the interviews, the interviewees were asked about how they perceive the fairness of employment between men and women. Majority of the women interviewed considered that women were discriminated against when applying for certain positions, especially if these positions are seen to be mostly occupied by men, such as the STEM fields. The respondents stated that most of the organizations are biased in terms of their selection processes. Leila stated that in her workplace not much attention is given to gender equality, and in fact, for most of the senior positions, the preferred candidates are males. More than half of the women mentioned that in their organizations, the top level executives include mostly men and only 1 or 2 women, because men are mostly

chosen for the positions of SVP's and directors. Furthermore, in Maria's workplace, all of the top-level employees are men.

Nour, who works in the law industry, experienced how difficult it was to be accepted as a female lawyer in a society which generalized law as being for men only, thus, she stated that she will always try her best to facilitate the entrance of women into the law industry, because she herself has experienced the difficulty of being accepted in such a field due to her gender. Aline, who works in a shipping company, stated that in her organization, some departments include only women and some include only men. For example, the customer service department is made up of women only whereas the logistics and port representatives are all men. As a result, stereotypes continue to spill into organizations and affect gender equality especially in the assignments of certain positions.

## Theme 2: Work Ethics

## Wasta and Nepotism

Another form of values that seemed to be a major issue when it comes to employment especially in Lebanon is wasta and nepotism. What most of the women mentioned as a great barrier to entering the workforce or even advancing in their positions is the influence of wasta and nepotism. One of the women being interviewed spoke about her experience when she was applying for a new job which is a higher

position within the same organization she works at. The director happened to be a good friend, and clearly told her

"To forget about the position she was applying for because it is open for someone else who one of the political leaders is bringing along"

And that the post was only being placed online for formalities only. In addition, nearly all the women expressed that it took them a lot of time to find a job, and they were only able to get internships but not fixed jobs. And when they had finally landed jobs, and got short listened for the interview process, they found out that they needed a strong wasta, or a connection to help them get in, disregarding their competencies and education. And at the end, they did not get the job because it was the person with the strongest wasta who was chosen for the position.

#### Theme 3: Lack of Organizational Support

# **Interpersonal Support**

Most of the women interviewed had received extensive support from their families in joining the labor force. Zeina said that her family was very supportive of her pursuit for a successful career and were always trying to push her forward to reach even higher positions and to follow her ambitions. Farah's family was also very supportive, and they were the ones who pushed her into pursuing a career. Maria pointed out that it was her parents who have brought her up with the idea of attaining a high education in

order to pursue a career in a field she is mostly interested in, in order to be financially and emotionally independent regardless of her relationship status. She further added that

"Growing up with this motive definitely shaped her into becoming the woman she is today, and I am hungry to further my career and break as many barriers along the way for girls of the younger generation".

Nour, who is now a lawyer, mentioned that ever since she was still in middle school, she had already made up her mind regarding her profession and chose to become a lawyer. Luckily, her parents were very supportive of her choice, despite the society she was living in, which was against girls entering such industries, with the general idea in place back then that girls should finish school and get married. Nour's parents did not differentiate at all between men and women in job positions.

"However, it was very difficult for me when I started law school. People in my society started contradicting my parents and me, instead of being proud of me that I was the only female lawyer in the family. At law school, I got reactions from others such as 'you are a girl what are you doing here', in addition to many other criticisms and looks".

### **Under Staffing**

While the literature encourages the employment of women and their advancement, most women interviewed made an important claim that wasn't given much attention, which was that most organizations are under-staffed due to the low

budgets they have, which prevents them from also offering training programs or other beneficial plans for employee empowerment, or even hiring more employees. Some employees felt like they were being given more work than they are actually capable of handling, due to the preference of organizations to hire less staff for the sake of cost-saving. One employee even mentioned that the HR department in the organization was aware of this problem, but couldn't do anything about it because of the limited budget they had due to the country's economic and political problems, which acted as macrolevel influences affecting organizations and the way they function.

#### Lack of Organizational Support

The extent to which top management listens to the employees, addresses their concerns and supports them affects the work environment and how encouraging it is to the employees. However, if top management does not listen to the concerns of employees and adopts strict communication at all times, employees will be demotivated to approach top management and will not know how to work sometimes which may lead to a big mess. Not only that, but half the women interviewed mentioned that they did not get proper benefits from their organizations, mainly because they were also single women, so they were perceived as not needing that much benefits because they don't have a family they are responsible for. Thus, most of these women pointed out that they preferred to be employed in the banking industry because bank employment is perceived more as a feminine job, which offers benefits for women more than most of the organizations in other industries. For example, banks offer benefits such as paying for children's education, providing easy access to loans, and having reasonable working

hours which make it easier for women to balance between work and family. According to Nour, organizations need to support the entry of women into fields which are mostly dominated by men, and provide both genders with equal benefits.

Ayah recommended to have a more systematic, guided and international professional development. For example, the SDG's can be used to promote professional development within the organization, by working towards certain goals, which in this case would be having organizations adopt measures towards achieving goal number 5 which is gender equality. Leila further added that organizations can support their employees and help them grow by holding more conferences, especially for women, in order to assist them in expanding their network. Lamya stated that course offerings should be available from time to time by the organization, in which such courses will be directly related to the work and professional development of all levels. Furthermore, Samar mentioned that in order for her to be more motivated to perform better at her job, her organization should give its employees an incentive to promote their female employees into high-ranking positions.

Samar further added that "it is very discouraging for a woman to feel motivated towards her job knowing that there is a certain level she cannot surpass because of the glass ceiling and also knowing that it is not because of credentials but purely based on gender".

Aline stated that more motivation and incentives would be appreciated from her organization, in order for her and the rest of the employees to perform better and

advance. Thus, when organizations start promoting women into higher positions purely based on their efforts, women will feel motivated to improve their job performance, knowing they have a good chance in advancing with their positions.

# Role of Managers

Contrary to the findings, 11 out of the 15 women interviewed attributed their career progression to the role of their managers in facilitating such progression. Only 3 women stated that their managers made sure that whatever they did was noticed by upper-level management. For example, the manager would ask them to follow-up themselves regarding many issues at work, to send emails, and to present their work or ideas directly to upper-management to make others notice what these women are capable of and the extent of how knowledgeable and skilled they are. These women were also being exposed to many networking opportunities through their manager, who always introduced them to several heads in order to build their connections, and made sure they attended any events or meetings conducted by the organization. This could serve as an example of how managers could contribute to increasing the networking ability of employees, which could, in turn, allow female employees to make the necessary connections to advance in their careers (Fitzsimmons, 2012). Leila and Farah who actually got promoted into higher positions also attributed their career progression to their female managers, who had always supported them since day 1 at work, and where always making sure they learned the correct ways of carrying out the work and answered any questions they may have, which facilitated their promotion.

Nadine, who is a manger herself, explained how she made sure to provide continuous support and mentorship to the women in her organization, whether she was their own manager or not. For example, Nadine mentioned that every morning, she holds a meeting for only 20 minutes, which she calls the SCRUM meeting. In this meeting, she gathers all the women and employees in her department in order to discuss their tasks for the day and to make sure that everyone is aware of what they should be doing and to answer any questions an employee may have. On the other hand, most of the women pointed out that they were not provided with any guidance from their managers as to how they can advance in their careers. Three of the women being interviewed stated that no real career opportunities were actually available in their organizations, and even when any were existent, they were not visible to the talent pool of employees. Also, what hindered advancement was mainly due to the lack of support structures that facilitate internal career moves. Meaning, how managers react when it comes to helping their employees advance in their careers, and the opportunities, guidance, training, and mentorship provided by them. Many organizations and their managers actually underestimate the total career opportunities available to their employees, because their mindset is set to traditional career paths that are hierarchal and based on technical abilities instead of being based on potential. When organizations operate within a traditional mindset, they don't realize and pay attention to the opportunities available to them, and remain bounded by a few options of unleashed career opportunities.

#### **Training**

The women were asked to what extent career development of any kind was available at the organization they work in, such as mentorship, career guidance, and training. The answers were not very pleasing, especially that more than half of the women stated that training wasn't offered at their organizations, and not because of gender differences, but because the organization itself did not provide any professional development and training, considering such practices as unnecessary, or not giving much importance to. In Leila's organization, training is only offered the first 2-3 days, and it is offered through reading brochures and documents only. Thus, this makes it a bit difficult for new employees to learn how to carry out the work if it is not practiced at first through actions. And when asked about what was mostly needed at organizations to perform jobs better and advance, most of the women responded that more training programs were required (practical programs not just theoretical ones). Zeina exclaimed that in the organization she was working at, she and the rest of the employees did not receive guidance or mentorship of any kind. She further stated that she wishes more light can be shed on this aspect because it is generally lacking in many of our associations and organizations. Maria stated that when she started working at her organization, she did receive a little training from her superior; however, it was nothing close to a mentorship.

Maria added "I quickly noticed that asking for help or advice was perceived as a weakness in character by others and was met by condescension by my male coworkers,

which enriched their stereotype of how women are unfit to be in the workplace. And since then, I became more self-reliant and more alienated from my male coworkers".

# Rewarding Experiences

Women had to have rewarding experiences of some kind, and that was hoped to be answered by most women through the interviews. However, unfortunately, only some of the women had experienced rewarding experiences yet. Zeina stated that the most rewarding experience of her career was when she got promoted due to her efforts and hard work, and not because of how many years of experience she had. Zeina further mentioned that with hard work and self-confidence,

"Every girl should know that her voice and actions can change the world".

Farah was satisfied when she was able to help and provide people with services, and felt that she was someone who can impact people's lives and do much more, while keeping in mind that every girl

"Should believe that she can achieve great things and impact people and when she believes so, she is already halfway there".

Moreover, Leila mentioned that the most rewarding aspect of her career is the reputation she gained for being professional and always seeking excellence in whatever she did;

"This has led my colleagues and superiors to entrust me and seek my advice and knowledge in many issues".

This can also play a significant role in facilitating Leila's promotion due to the transparency of her work and the appreciation she is receiving. Samar feels that the most rewarding experience she always gains from her work is when she proves her worth to her company and breaks the sexist mentality they have of women, which makes her feel empowered and hopeful that the next generation of women entering the workforce will have less barriers to break than her and the fellow women of her current generation. The most rewarding experience for Nour was that she got into law school without the use of wasta, especially that many years ago, wasta was much needed in order to get into law school. Nour got accepted through her efforts and willingness, and she states that this will always be the most rewarding experience in her career life because of how daring she was.

#### Theme 4: Work-Life Balance

#### Long Working Hours and Family Responsibilities

One of the questions which was part of the interview protocol was "To what extent does your organization support your work-life balance? And have you had any type of organizational support to help achieve work-life balance?" The responses were shocking, as most organizations are not actually concerned about work-life balance, and are interested in other irrelevant factors instead. Leila pointed out that what was

required from her organization was less working hours, because at her workplace, employees are required to work 10 hours a day, with extra hours some days. Thus, with such long working hours, it is very difficult to achieve a work-life balance and be responsible enough for both work and family at the same time. Furthermore, 12 women mentioned that throughout their working years, they had never received any help in work-life balance, especially that the organizations they work at don't even offer such services for the employees, thus, Ghada added

"I have learned throughout my years of experience to attain a balanced lifestyle between work and non-working hours".

Samar mentioned that since she is a career-oriented person, her job is the first priority in her life, which her organization is very appreciate of. However, she also admits that her social life has suffered since she started her job, which she takes complete blame for. In addition, Samar was the only respondent whose organization actually supports social activities in order to boost morale and strengthen the bond between coworkers by hosting company retreats once a year and initiating after work gatherings such as dinners. Women from healthcare industries or other industries such as shipping are expected to have long working hours and sometime to work overtime and/or on holidays depending on the urgency of the situation. Thus, these women noted that it is kind of a struggle for them to keep a work-life balance when working in such industries.

# Theme 5: Situation of the Country

# **Economic Stagnation**

Since the Lebanese economy does not encourage growth, as mentioned by most of the women who were interviewed, it is normal to experience budget cuts, and the unlikely occurrence of promotions and financial rewards. In contrary, this places a limitation on the ability of organizations to invest in their employee's development through the provision of mentorship programs and training sessions. Thus, organizations must find ways to allocate more investments in such areas, in order to facilitate the process of women's access to employment and career advancement instead of suffering the consequences from this negative spill over of the economy.

# Findings of HR Managers

# Theme 1: Lack of Organizational Support

#### Mentorship and Training

As HR managers, most of the women claimed that they lacked the adequate training needed for them to excel in their field and be on the same level with other professionals. Dina further noted:

"My main challenge was to practice HR processes such as Performance

Management with the other high professionals in the organization. This is because they

require high level of occupational autonomy. And many HR functions such as recruitment, training and quality assessment are considered to be departing from 'idiosyncratic' of individual professions, so we used to manage them according to the official organizational procedures. I used to follow up (actually chase up) the partners and remind them to finish the paper work (such as performance appraisals, interview feedbacks, etc.) on time".

Lara further added that if she was trained enough, she would've actually understood the HR function better in terms of being an HR manager in order to be able to help other women in becoming managers as well.

#### Lack of Gender Equitable HR Practices

In terms of HR managers and gender equality in their organizations, all of the women HR managers which were interviewed stated that no HR practices regarding gender exist in their organizations. Attention is not giving to establishing a certain quota for having women managers, and this was evident through the answers of the women, who mentioned that the dominant gender of directors and top levels executives in their organizations were males, and that when it came to taking important decisions regarding the organization, such decisions were taken by males only. Women only had the chance to give their opinions, but not to make the decisions. In addition, it turned out that organizations do not monitor gender levels and balance such levels in organizations, in terms of recruitment, pay gap, career advancement, etc. because achieving gender

equality is not one of their top priorities. As a result, most of the HR managers stated that most of the female employees in their organizations constantly complained about this lack of equality between the two genders in terms of pay and benefits, especially their inability to establish a work-life balance, due to not having enough days off especially as managers. In addition, the interviewed HR managers mentioned that in a country like Lebanon, they always had to push for gender equality, especially when it came to hiring new employees and trying to hire more women.

"We always pushed for gender equality. In the last couple of months, we appointed a woman to be the managing partner" – Lina

Furthermore, 4 out of the 5 HR managers interviewed found it difficult to feel empowered in their organizations, especially in making decisions, and they had a hard time proving their opinions, because top management was mostly sensitized to having women managers and women in top positions interfering in the decision making process and functioning of the organization.

Cecilia added "They are sensitized to gender equality in terms of responsibility and how women can be a source of strength for the work".

And regarding the hiring process, the women affirmed that their organizations did not have any quota for hiring women, and did not even try to increase the number of women in the organization, because of the general perception against women that men perform better on average at certain tasks. Thus, the women managers themselves tried

to help other women in entering the workforce or in advancing within their positions by providing them with the interpersonal and organizational support they required.

"We, as HR managers, whenever we screened the CVs to be shortlisted, we made sure that we have a number of women for the first interview. However, the hiring process is a bit complicated, because we had to look /for the "full package" candidate, so the ones to be hired are the most qualified ones regardless of their gender. In other words, there was no quota for the number of women which should be in the firm, which is desperately needed nowadays" – Lara.

As a result, most of the organizations in the Lebanese private sector lack effective HR practices regarding gender equality, and even when women reach high positions such as becoming HR managers, they are unable to do much to help other women because of the constraints they are faced with in the organizations they are operating in which do not give importance to achieving gender equality

#### **Interpersonal Support**

Social interaction and social support (e.g. by family members and coworkers) can help mobilize psychological resources that can intensify recognition and confirmation, which on the other hand is able to substantially improve intercultural adjustment (Spieb and Stroppa, 2013). The role of interpersonal support is often neglected, when in fact it has a significant positive influence on the well-being of employees. Lina, whose parents actually wanted her to become an engineer, graduated

as a Telecom engineer, although that was not her field of interest at all. Instead, Lina was interested in HR and administrative work. Thus, despite graduating as an engineer, Lina decided to follow what she wants to become by changing her career path completely from being an engineer to entering the HR field. And when she became an HR manager, she realized that she made the right choice by leaving the engineering profession behind. However, she admits that it was very challenging for her to enter the HR industry after graduating as an engineer, since both fields are completely different from each other. And it was also even more challenging for her because she did not have the support of her parents for the new field of study that she wanted to adopt. Furthermore, since most of the HR managers interviewed were in favor of helping other women enter the workforce and even advance to higher positions, they all declared that when job vacancies open in their organizations, they encourage other women to apply by informing their female friends and family members and spreading the word to an experienced female pool of applicants. Hence, as a result, social support can act as a buffer against stress that usually occurs when women try to adjust to the male dominated environment of their workplace, or when they want enter a certain industry in which they don't have any support for. Thus, success intercultural adjustment is closely related to network partners and social support (Spieb and Stroppa, 2013).

### Work-Life Balance

Out of the 5 HR managers interviewed, 4 mentioned that their organizations don't have work-life balance policies because they don't see such policies as of significant relevance. On the other hand, in Dina's workplace, there was the option of

working from home, which helped her and the rest of the employees with their work-life balance. However, Cecilia added that her first career interruption was due to the difficulty of having a work-life balance, when she had her daughter, in which she stopped working for a period of 3 years. All of the managers mentioned that all their female employees complain about work-life balance and not having enough day offs; especially those who are married and have children.

# **Rewarding Experiences**

HR managers, just like any other employee, must also have experienced some sort of rewarding experience in their career journey. After analyzing the results of the respondents, it was found that all 5 of the HR managers claimed that the most exciting part of their job is finding out that they made an employee happy, or more motivated towards their work, and had gained their trust. This result was very pleasing because it proved that women want to actually help other women advance in their positions. In addition, Dina found it rewarding to be able to balance between achieving the profit the firm is setting for each year, and making sure that at the same time the employees (mainly the administrative staff and junior staff) are satisfied and happy with their work. This portrays the ability to leave a positive impact on the organization and its employees.

#### Defined career paths

In the absence of a clear career path, employees could choose to leave their organizations (Sharif, 2015). 3 out of the 5 HR managers who were interviewed had their career paths defined prior to entering university, thus they graduated with HR degrees and started their careers as HR coordinators, and with time and effort, got promoted to being HR managers. Having a defined and clear career path can help women in choosing the right industries to work in and to advance in what they are mostly committed too.

#### Theme 2: Awareness

# <u>Underestimating the HR Function</u>

Four of the women interviewed mentioned the same issue as the most challenging aspect of their jobs as HR managers, which is the termination or lay off of employees. Lina stated

"The first time I had to announce to an employee their termination was very brutal but with time you learn to control your emotions".

On the other hand, Dina added that although the employees of all levels dealt with her with respect, it wasn't easy convincing them of the importance of HR procedures and processes. In addition, top management had to constantly be pushed to

attend management training which helps in Performance Management (for example appraisal coaching) processes, since it was not a major interest to them.

# **International Standards**

All of the HR managers were in fact aware of international standards which can be adopted to help their employees and organizations grow. Dina was aware of the ISO 26000: One of its core subjects is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (for equal opportunities and non-discrimination). Also, Dina added that "it helps organizations in indirectly achieving the SDGs and specifically goal number 5 which is gender inequality". Furthermore, in order to track the level of gender balance in organizations, the women were asked if they collect any gender disaggregated data, and surprisingly, all of them answered no. In this case, organizations should start adopting normative mechanisms, by implementing such practices in order to monitor gender balance in their workplace. Hence, what managers must also work towards is applying international standards to spread awareness for gender equality in the workplace, not just being aware of them. And when one organization takes the initiative, the rest of the organizations will follow, and this will became a mimetic mechanism among organizations in the Lebanese private sector.

# Theme 3: Workplace Harassment

# Gender Inequality

As women managers, the respondents pointed out the extent to which they were not taken seriously because of their gender. Lara said that

"Employees were mostly resistant to taking women managers seriously"

And Cecilia added that she always had trouble convincing employees and other board members especially that she was the only women in a high-level position within the organization she was working in. Furthermore, more than half of the respondents mentioned the point that because they were in a work environment which was 90% male dominant, being an HR manager and especially a women in such a position was quite challenging. Lina, who has 15 years of work experience as an HR manager, and who previously worked as an HR manager in Canada and then as an HR manager in Lebanon, said that in Canada, she did not face any gender inequality challenges in the workplace even though she was a woman HR manager. However, when she moved back to Lebanon and continued her career as an HR manager, she faced a lot of gender inequalities that surprised her regarding the general misconception of women in the country. In addition, Layal mentioned that she faced challenges just because she was wearing a Hijab, however she didn't quit trying. She further mentioned that

"Every woman has the right to get the job she wants without any discriminatory waivers".

### Layal further added that

"Being a Lebanese was actually challenging when it came to climbing the career ladder because it can get very competitive and you have to prove yourself even harder when you don't have a wasta".

Lina added that among the 9 executives in her organization including the CEO, she was the only women among the directors.

# **Discrimination in the Hiring Process**

Organizations are mostly sensitized to gender equality and women are constantly pushing towards gender equality and for hiring more women managers. As an HR manager, Dina explained that whenever the HR department in her organization screens the CVs for short listing, they make sure that there are a number of women for the first interview at least. However, she mentioned that

"The hiring process itself gets a bit complicated, because at the end what matters are the candidates with the 'full package', meaning the candidates who are mostly qualified regardless of their gender".

In other words, there was no quota for women; however, organizations should start working on adopting such quotas, especially since most of the organizations in Lebanon lack this quota.

#### 7.2. Discussion

Since this research aimed to identify the organizational and societal hindrances to women's access to employment and career advancement, macro-level and meso-level influences had to be assessed, solutions had to be recommended, and most importantly the perspectives of women and HR professionals had to be discovered. After conducting research, the extent of how macro-level and meso-level factors influence women in the workforce became evident. The effects of these influences were presented in a way to prove how they actually hinder the chances of women in the workforce and discovering the perceptions of women made it easier to offer solutions which organizations can adopt to improve their practices and employee's attitudes towards gender equality in the workplace. Thus, suggestions had to be made on how and which HRM practices can be implemented in order to support women's access to employment and career advancement.

However, the relationship between HR practices and the effectiveness of these practices depends on the degree of fit with the institutional environment. And as a result, this led to adopting the institutional theory as a theoretical framework for applying such practices and systems. The institutional theory is a theoretical lens that has been widely used to study the adoption and diffusion of organizational forms and practices. Thus, the institutional theory in this research was used as a framework to analyze HR practices in the Lebanese private sector by looking at the influence that environmental factors such as social and political systems have on the adoption of HR practices. And from an institutional theory point of view, it was discovered that HRM practices in Lebanon remain bounded by cultural and legislative systems, and legal and

cultural constraints, such as demographic factors, the limitations of resources, which all impede the proper innovation of HRM practices. Hence, in order to adopt the most appropriate practices, organizations should implement the institutional mechanisms which best fit the organizational structure and the environment in which they operate, whether it is through adopting coercive, normative, or mimetic mechanisms.

Moreover, there is the Business Case for Gender Diversity which exists in order to promote gender equality within the organization from different angles which organizations can make proper use of. The business case aims to improve financial and market performance from Women in leadership and greater capitalization of talent especially from those highly qualified and educated women who are being underutilized. It also enhances leadership, team performance and motivation since heterogeneous teams prove to be more creative, and as women also bring different leadership skills and behaviors to the table (Smith, 2018). In addition, the business case aims towards achieving risk management/corporate governance, especially that companies with women in key board committee roles perform better (Smith, 2018). It further aims to achieve economic growth in order to unlock the hidden value of the female labor pool which is good for the economy, and also tries to establish a corporate social responsibility and culture because more gender diversity on boards may lead to greater corporate transparency and improved ethical orientation, and more gender diversity actually protects women against sexism and sexual harassment (Smith, 2018).

Lastly, the extent of gender discrimination in Lebanon can be further evident after the new parliamentary elections which were held on May 6, 2018. The new Lebanese women members of parliament represent 6 seats out of 128 which keep

Lebanon at less than 5% representation of Women in parliament. They were only 4 women in the past elections, which prove how slow the progress is. Organizations as well as the government have to keep lobbying for a higher participation of women, by achieving a higher quota for women. And these 6 seats for women are a result of how women build their own way up through grassroots and not through the help of any organizations or even the government. It was obvious from the interviews done with the women that their organizations and even the government in their country did not try pushing for gender equality, and if they ever did try, it was just at the beginning but did not sustain any initiative of doing so. Thus, in order to progress, women themselves started working on defining their paths forward and pushing for gender equality through grassroot behaviors instead of waiting for assistance which they may not acquire.

Hence, what all organizations need to establish is an infrastructure which supports their female employees and ensures that they receive the benefits of male and female leadership. As a result, considering the analysis presented in the previous sections, several factors can be pointed out as adding value to the literature while providing insights from the perspectives of female employees in the Lebanese private sector regarding multiple areas of their work that could influence their ability to enter the workforce or even progress within the workforce. Thus, the following sections provide the Implications and limitations of this research while offering suggestions for future research.

# 7.3. Theoretical Implications

This research aims to identify the barriers and hindrances that female employees in the Lebanese private sector face when trying to enter the workforce or advance in their careers. By identifying some key cultural norms, including stereotypical and gender-based values which have all become internalized, HR practices and systems can be developed in order to reduce these barriers and hindrances. Thus, these norms include gender-based assumptions regarding what occupations can be adopted by certain genders, which make it difficult for women to enter the workforce or even advance once they enter, in addition to the economic and political influence of the country, and the networking limitations and gendered organizational cultures that women experience. Thus, this dissertation theoretically contributes to the understanding of the macro-level and meso-level factors which affect career entry and advancement for women.

This research begins by providing evidence of how macro-level and meso-level factors affect career entry and advancement for women. To date, macro-level and meso-level influences still affect women, and not much has been done to directly target these influences which are leading to continuous negative effects on women. The dissertation first focuses on the macro-level influences, by uncovering the external factors that lead to the decline of women in the Lebanese workforce and act as barriers to entry, especially from a cultural perspective. Additionally, this research contributes to understanding some of the possible causes to the underrepresentation of women in the workforce and specifically in the STEM fields, and the influences of all these factors on organizations and how they function. And then, an overview of organizational-level

obstacles that women face in organizations as they attempt to progress in their careers is presented, and how these obstacles are internal factors on the organizational level which are controlled by the organization itself. This part of the research also discussed how such internal factors are enrooted in the way the work is being carried out, and how they can act as barriers to career advancement and even barriers to top-level positions for women, and how these obstacles are leading to a decline in female leadership, especially that HR practices have not been effective in helping to address these issues.

Tackling these issues requires the introduction and amendment of certain HR practices and systems, in order to increase the number of women being employed in the Lebanese private sector. The following part of the dissertation discusses the institutional theory as a theoretical framework in which human resource practices can be applied through, and explains how the best-fit approach to HRM focuses on the need to match HR practices to prevailing conditions in a specific organizational field, while rejecting the notion of one best way of doing things in all contexts, in addition to the importance of the institutional theory to HRM, and how and which HRM practices can be implemented in order to support women's access to employment and career advancement.

Thus, the adoption of the best fit mechanisms for organizations to achieve gender equality in the workplace is positively related to the identification of hindrances in order to bridge the gap between the existence of such obstacles and the lack of HR practices and systems needed to reduce these hindrances.

# 7.4. Practical Implications

The data from this dissertation reveals what factors are influencing the participation of women in the workforce, and the perspectives of women regarding these factors in addition to their experiences. Such factors include macro-level influences, such as patriarchal values, economic stagnation, and political unrest, in addition to meso-level influences, such as occupational stereotypes, limitations to networking, benevolent sexism on the organizational level, and the gendered organizational culture. However, first, it would be valuable to further examine how society constructs images of gender inequality and how this impacts woman's chances of entry into the workforce and advancement to high positions, and also the impact that these gender constructions have on how organizations function.

According to the general viewpoint, women are often portrayed as passive, weak, and emotional. This affects how women cooperate with larger society, and how society and organizations in turn interact with women. Thus, women are victims of the gender-based organizational structure and patriarchal society. And in order to change the discriminatory views that society and organizations hold towards women, action has to be taken. Organizations must adopt the appropriate mechanisms, practices, and systems in order to change the way they function towards gender inequality, and to encourage other organizations to do so as well.

Organizations can apply change through coercive mechanisms on gender equitable HRM practices which relate to the absence of many rules and procedures regarding women's equality in the workplace, such as short maternity leave for women,

the role of wasta and nepotism, and no laws regarding equal pay. Organizations can further adopt normative mechanisms which help in creating employment opportunities for women, and this can become the norm, and more organizations would want to do so as well in order to maintain a certain standard. This can be done when organizations start adopting international normative standards to raise awareness on gender equality. In addition, mimetic mechanisms can also be adopted, when organizations follow other organizations who are adopting strategies and practices towards achieving gender equality in the workplace for women. For example, when a few organizations start altering the number of men and women in the workplace to include more women through revising job advertisements, other organizations will adopt such effect methods as well. Hence, if more organizations decide to adopt gender equitable HRM practices, this will put pressure on other organizations to follow the same norm, and this would be the way forward towards more gender equitable HR practices in Lebanon. Certainly, society at large and organizations need to support efforts to change the perception of gendered stereotypes.

This research also uncovers the perceptions of women at work and HR managers through interviews, in which all women revealed their desire to work and keep advancing in their careers, and who all call on their organizations to provide the appropriate resources, guidance, mentorship and training to help more women in entering the workforce and advancing into higher positions. And the women who received interpersonal support were the ones who were more satisfied and interested in remaining in their organizations because they had hope in advancing and being promoted into higher positions due to their ambitions and hard work. While on the other

hand, the women who did not receive support of any kind, whether external support or support through the organizational practices and systems, found it difficult to remain in their current organizations and were close to giving up on the whole idea of having a respectful career. A majority of the women interviewed discussed practical implications. For example, most of the women stated that organizations should consider changing their hiring processes to include more women, and changing their organizational structure to promote gender equality in the workplace. Other women stressed on the need of having non-discriminatory HR systems and practices implemented in every organization.

In addition, peer pressure needs to be placed on males in organizations and especially in high positions to accept new constructs of gender roles that would need to be reinforced. This means breaking the cycle of stereotypes that are relayed from generation to generation about traditional masculine and feminine roles and replacing them with images that support, enhance, and promote gender equality in constructive ways for each gender, especially for women at work. This can be done through gender sensitive training which can be provided by organizations in order to ensure the equitable participation of both men and women, by developing training programmes that cater for both women and men's interests, ensuring that there is a sufficient number of women among the participants, using methods that increase the active participation of both women and men, and that address different learning capacities, ensuring a learning environment suitable for both men and women, adopting attitudes and behaviors that value differential experiences and perspectives, ensuring listening and respect for each other's experiences and views, facilitating good communication

practices in which misunderstandings, insults, blaming, and demands are recognized and resolved, and participants are brought back to facts, views, values, and requests (Gurung et al., 2009).

Furthermore, despite the literature indicating the macro-level and meso-level factors that influence the careers of women, and the lack of appropriate systems and practices within organizations to help women and their careers, women in the Lebanese private sector still believe that a solution can be found through the adoption and implementation of proper HR practices and systems by organizations. Women in this study showed a high level of interest in pursuing a successful career, thus, as a result, it may be deduced that the key de-motivator of having working women and women managers in the Lebanese private sector is the absence of opportunities for progression, and more importantly, the absence of HR practices and systems which can provide such opportunities.

#### 7.5. Limitations

Sample Size

The interviews were conducted by women from many different industries within the Lebanese private sector, such as the banking industry, healthcare sectors, lawyers, and HR managers in general. However, these industries were at time represented by a single individual, which may be questioned regarding its representation of the entire population of the industry. Therefore, it is difficult to claim that this research can be generalized over the remainder of the population of each industry, because a larger sample size is needed to ensure a representative distribution of the population being studied and to be considered representative of the different industries and the women in each.

#### Types of Banks

The types of banks represented in this research did not include multinational banks. And the reason for this was to focus on national level interventions within the boundaries of banks in Lebanon. Thus, the findings may not be generalized to banks in other countries.

#### **Interview Access and Findings**

I had some trouble finding women to answer the questions, especially HR managers, because most of them claimed that "there are too many questions". For

example, the interview protocol for HR managers included 20 questions, which women found a lot. Thus, what they did not realize is that taking their perspectives and experiences into consideration can help in bringing about change which will improve their careers. In addition, because most of the women had tight schedules, they preferred to answer the questions at their own time, type the answers and send them by email. This can have several drawbacks such as miscommunication and misinterpretation. An in-person interview can lead to building connections and can also lead to a better understanding of the women's experiences and what they are looking for, which can add valuable input to this research.

#### Research Bias

This study used only women to examine gender inequality in the workplace and the barriers faced by Lebanese women in trying to enter the workforce or advance.

Thus, it would have been interesting to consider the points of view of men as well, and how they see women in organizations, especially if they are competing against a woman for a high position. If both points of views of men and women are studied, the researcher can arrive at better findings in terms of tackling the barriers that women can experience through the identification of men's perspectives and what could possibly be hindrances for women caused by men in the workplace.

# Accuracy of Results

The accuracy of the findings could be influenced by bias and subjectivity on the interviewee's side. For example, the women's state of mind and emotional views regarding employment and gender inequality in organizations could have influenced the way in which they responded to the interview questions, which should be noted in qualitative research.

# CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

### 8.1. Summary and Key Contributions

This research presented the organizational and societal hindrances to women's access to employment and career advancement specifically in the Lebanese private sector by suggesting and implementing Human Resource Management (HRM) practices as possible facilitators of women's access to employment and career advancement in the workforce. The research first started by identifying the factors which influence women's career entry and advancement, caused by internal organizational factors known as mesolevel influences, such as occupational stereotypes, limitations to networking and the gender organizational culture. In addition to the external factors known as macro-level influences, such as patriarchal values, economic stagnation, and political unrest. The effects of these influences were discussed in a way to prove how they lead to obstacles that form in organizations which prevent women from achieving any career progression.

Subsequently, the research offered an insight from the literature into how HR practices and systems could play a role in reducing gender inequality in organizations, and in facilitating the entry and advancement of women into the workforce. After uncovering the hindrances that women experience, the research then diverted to include literature on how and which HRM practices can be implemented in order to support women's access to employment and career advancement. The literature presented several elements to engage in, such as the initiatives already in place by organizations to help women and reduce gender inequality but which should also be revised in order to

support women in their careers and more importantly their entry into the labor force.

And in order to provide the theoretical findings with practical evidence, interviews were conducted to explore women's experiences in the workplace.

The findings of the interviews were analyzed into themes and sub-themes, in order to identify the different factors that women perceive as hindrances to their careers and the different processes their organizations can adopt to improve their practices and the employee's attitudes towards gender equality in the workplace.

As a result, the aim of this research was to identify the causes behind the lack of women's access to employment ad career advancement, and the possible controllable organizational findings and opportunities, in addition to supportive HR practices and systems to support women in the workforce and reduce the barriers they face. The implications and limitations were then discussed in order to offer recommendations for possible areas of improvement in further research.

The findings from the literature and the practical research contributed to a better understanding of these causes and how women require their entry and advancement to be improved for the sake of being able to enter the workforce and remaining in their organizations to advance to higher positions. Thus, such changes are all dependant on the adoption of certain HR practices and systems in order for any improved change to take place, while also taking into consideration the situation of the country whether it is in terms of the macro-level and meso-level factors, economic stagnation, or the political unrest.

#### 8.2. Avenues for Future Research

Going forward, future research could take into consideration numerous additional elements that contribute to the barriers women face when trying to enter the workforce or climb the corporate ladder. However, this would require a considerably larger sample size of women and a representation of a wider range of industries.

Moreover, future research can work on identifying the reasons on why certain HR practices and systems haven't been implemented before, and why the adoption of international standards is not a norm between organizations in Lebanon. Further research would also identify the influences leading to organizational cultural differences despite their operation in the same national culture. More investigation can also be conducted on the upper management views in order to identify whether there is actually upper management commitment to ensuring gender equality in organizations.

Thus, this research invites future studies to explore how all these factors are interconnected, and how they can significantly affect women and their career opportunities. Lastly, studies can be conducted in developed countries in order to contrast the results and investigate whether their strategies and practices can similarly be applied in Lebanon in order to reduce gender inequality and facilitate the entry of women and advancement into the workforce and specifically in the Lebanese private sector. Thus, more research is needed that focuses on national legislations and policies to ensure a positive spillover on organizational practices which can lead to the facilitation of applying gender equality in the workplace.

## Appendix

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 1 – WOMEN AT WORK

- 1. Tell us about your perceptions of gender equality in your current workplace, and in the private sector more generally. Do you have any story that illustrates that?
- 2. What is the dominant gender of directors, top level executives and others who take important decisions regarding the organization?
- 3. Tell us about your first job search experience. How long did it take you to find a job? How easy or difficult was it? What were the main challenges encountered?
- 4. To what extent did you have support for your career development of any kind while working at your current organization, such as mentorship, career guidance, or training?
- 5. Has your gender prevented you from being offered or from accepting a job assignment? Can you tell us more about it?
- 6. To what extent does your organization support your work-life balance? Have you had organizational support to achieve work-life balance? Can you provide examples?
- 7. What do you think you need from your organization in order to perform better at your job and to advance?
- 8. To what extent is your family supportive of you pursing a successful career?
- 9. Can you tell me about the most challenging experience in your career?
- 10. Can you tell me about the most rewarding experience in your career?

- 11. At what age did you enter the labor force? Have you had any career interruptions? Can you tell us about it?
- 12. If you could give 3 pieces of advice for a woman who is now graduating from university, what would those be?

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 2 – HR MANAGERS

- 1. Can you please tell us about your career trajectory and how you became the HR manager in your organization?
- 2. How easy or difficult was your career journey? Can you highlight some challenges encountered and how you faced them?
- 3. What is the most challenging aspect of your job as an HR manager? How do you cope with that?
- 4. What is the most rewarding aspect of your job as an HR manager?
- 5. How are you, as an HR manager perceived by top management and employees?

  How easy or difficult is it for you to please both?
- 6. Have you ever perceived that your gender affected your career progression in any way? Can you tell us about it?
- 7. Tell us about your perceptions of gender equality in your current workplace. To what extent do you think employees and managers are sensitized to gender equality?
- 8. To what extent is gender considered when making HR decisions such as hiring, training, PA, pay, career development? Can you provide us with examples?
- 9. Does your organization have a diversity policy or work-life balance policy? Can you tell me about it? (Who drafted it, when, who uses it, does it slow down career if used?)
- 10. What is the dominant gender of directors, top level executives and others who take important decisions regarding the organization?
- 11. Do you collect gender disaggregated data to track the level of gender balance in your organization? (In terms of recruitment, pay gap, career advancement, etc.). If not, why? If yes, what actions do you take in case of imbalance?

- 12. How would you describe the culture in your organization?
- 13. What do female employees complain the most about and what do you do about it?
- 14. What do male employees complain the most about and what do you do about it?
- 15. To what extent do you feel empowered in your organization to make decisions? To what extent does top management interfere in HR decisions?
- 16. If you could give 3 pieces of advice for a woman who is now graduating from university, what would those be?
- 17. At what age did you enter the labor force? Have you had any career interruptions?

  Can you tell us about it?
- 18. Are you aware of any international standards in which you also follow regarding gender equality? If yes please explain

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