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Intersectionality and Islamic Feminism: Key Tools for Eradicating Gender Inequality in the Saudi Labor Market

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Abstract

This study examines the persistent socio-cultural barriers obstructing Saudi women's full participation in the labor market, despite governmental initiatives to enhance their economic inclusion. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, it integrates intersectionality and Islamic feminism with a qualitative methodology, drawing on 36 in-depth interviews with Saudi men from three Bedouin tribes in Arar, Northern Saudi Arabia. The paper highlights how tribal identity and religious ideology shape restrictive norms that sustain gender disparities. At the core of this analysis lies the concept of "invisible rules" (*hudud*), implicit boundaries that govern gender segregation and restrict professional opportunities. These deeply embedded social norms present a significant obstacle to governmental efforts aimed at achieving full integration of women into the labor market. Intersectionality exposes the interplay of these socio-religious factors, while Islamic feminism offers a critical framework for reinterpreting dominant narratives and dismantling gender inequalities. By challenging entrenched structures, this study underscores the necessity of reconfiguring socio-religious norms to advance gender equality and facilitate Saudi women's full integration into the workforce.

Keywords: intersectionality, gender equality, saudi labor market, islamic feminism.