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### **Saudi Arabia: Rights, Credit, and Property**

Women in Saudi Arabia and many other African and Middle Eastern countries are without many rights and not allowed access to credit or property. This is often a common problem in underdeveloped countries. Women hold a second-class status in Saudi Arabia. Discrimination against women has been occurring for years around the world. Women have been looked at as fragile and weak for centuries, from the middle ages to modern times. In developed countries, such as the United States, women are treated as equals. They have all the same rights as men and are able to do many things that a hundred years ago they would not have been able to do, such as vote and run for government offices. However, in multiple countries around the world this is not the case. Women are still viewed the same as they were hundreds of years ago, as fragile and weak creatures who cannot be trusted with such independence. In Saudi Arabia, this problem is quite large. Women are not entitled to the same rights as men and have to follow strict rules and codes concerning, where they can go, where they can work, and even what they can wear. The treatment they receive is unfair and unjust. Women are being repressed and it needs to end. Change needs to happen and it needs to happen soon. Women are not weak and they have a voice. The government needs to step in and help end the repression of its citizens. Gender and cultural discrimination is occurring in Saudi Arabia, this hinders women's access to credit and their rights to property.

In Saudi Arabia, a poor family lives in a tiny house on the rural outskirts of a city. Their soul provider is a young woman. She has two young children to support and her husband died suddenly a year ago. The only male in the family is her two-year old son. Without a male guardian, she is not able to travel or get access to resources. She cannot get a loan from the bank or get a job to help support her family. The small plot of land that they are able to farm is barely enough to keep them fed. Due to the unfair treatment of women that is taking place in Saudi Arabia, the woman and her two young children are living in poverty. Since the mother cannot work without the permission of a male guardian, she has no income. Without an income, she is not able to purchase the food that she is not able to grow. They are only able to afford to keep a single cow to produce milk. They are not able to afford meat. Because of this, she and her children are not getting proper nutrition. In addition, because she does not have an income, when her children reach the age where they should go to school, they will not be able to because their mother cannot afford to pay their tuition.

When in public, women have to follow strict rules that seem silly in America, but which are strongly-enforced in Saudi Arabia. Women are required to wear long black dresses called abayas as well as a black cloth that covers their faces, called a niqab (Mortada 1). They must cover their hair. It is illegal for women to show their faces in public. They are segregated from men in public. Women are not allowed to travel without a man. Women

can be whipped for breaking the law. Women are not allowed to do other things that most people take for granted too.

Women in America take the ability to travel around their town, the state they live in, and even into other states for granted. Women in Saudi Arabia are only allowed to travel when they are in the presence of a male guardian.

Women in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to do some things as simple as opening a bank account by themselves. They cannot get loans either. Most, if not all, legal matters are handled by the male guardian. Women have limited access to credit and the rights to property. Women are not able to get access to resources without a male guardian.

Women are not allowed to drive. The ban on driving for women is not a written law, but laws in Saudi Arabia state that a citizen must have a license that is issued locally. Women are not able to be issued the license required to be able to drive. Since they cannot be issued a license, they cannot drive. If a woman cannot drive then she cannot take her children to school, she cannot go to work, or in the case that there is an emergency, she does not have a means of transportation. If women could drive it would be a boost to the economy because the women that can now drive would need cars. It is not just simple things women are not allowed to do.

The young Saudi woman who has two children to support is not able to get a job at one of the few places where women are allowed to work due to her lack of a male guardian. She is very educated but cannot work. Most women are not allowed to work. The majority of Saudi Arabian women are very educated, but only five percent of the workforce is made up of women. They cannot work in most jobs. In order for women to work at the few jobs she is allowed to work at, she has to have the permission of a male guardian whether it is her father, husband, or son. If a woman's guardian tells her that she cannot work or asks that she does not work anymore, then she has to listen. If women were allowed to work without male permission, it would be a boost for the economy.

If something were to happen to a woman's husband, she would be left to care for her children on her own. If she cannot work then she cannot support and feed them let alone pay for them to go to school and get a good education. If her children cannot go to school then they cannot be a benefit to society. Children are more valuable if they are educated because they will understand more and can therefore do more to help improve their country. The young woman will not be able to send her two children to school when they reach the age when they should start their education because she cannot afford tuition. One of the few areas that women are allowed to work in is agriculture. This can be hard though because women are not able to travel with a male escort, so it may be a hassle to sell their produce.

Women in Saudi Arabia are treated very unfairly. They were only recently granted the right to vote. Though this is a big step, it is not quite enough. Women deserve all of the same rights that men have. They could not be elected to government positions until

recently as well. The rights women get depend on the tribal customs of the area they live in. Change for women in Saudi Arabia has been slow in coming.

The government in Saudi Arabia has begun to do more for women's rights. The king of Saudi Arabia stated more than ten years ago that he would give women all the rights that men have (Husain 1). The first elementary schools for girls were opened in 1961 in the hopes that women would become better educated. A move to give women their own identity card was made in 2001 (Mortada 1). This would give women more say in both financial and legal matters. Women are now able to vote as well as run in municipal elections. Change may be occurring, but for many women it is coming too slowly.

Many women are fed up with their lack of rights. Saudi Arabian women protested the ban on women drivers by driving anyway. Saudi Arabian woman, Najla Hariri, has started driving in protest of the ban on women drivers. "There is no law against women driving. It's society's [convention] that says women are not allowed to drive" (Najla Hariri). The only reason women cannot do all of the things that men are able to do is because society does not believe they should. Many men in Saudi Arabia believe that women are not able to handle things such as driving or handling legal matters.

Still, many other women will not speak out against their lack of rights because they are afraid of the repercussions. Women can be punished very severely for breaking the law. They can be whipped or beaten. It is this reason that women are silent about the injustices they have to live with.

Women in Saudi Arabia need to gain more rights. Male attitudes toward women need to become more positive. The Saudi government needs to put an end to women having to ask male permission to do anything.

Life would be better for Saudi families financially if women were allowed to work. They could help to support their families. They could afford to send their children to school, making them a better asset to society. Educated, literate people are more valuable than uneducated, illiterate people. If more people are educated then they will be more intelligent and better able to help make their country better.

If both parents in a Saudi Arabian household are employed then there is generally a larger income for the family. If people have more money, they tend to spend it on more leisure items instead of just struggling to make ends meet. People spending money on leisure items is a plus for the economy. Therefore, if women in Saudi Arabia were allowed to work, it would be good for the economy.

Women in Saudi Arabia legally have the right to property such as land as well as bank loans. However, they rarely are allowed to receive these things due to laws or customs. Their ability to own businesses is limited due to the segregation of men and women in public. Even if a woman is the head of the household, she still needs a male guardian in order to access credit and other resources. This is a hassle and makes it so that women are not able to use their land to the fullest. If a woman is the sole provider of food for her

family, it can be hard for her to provide for her family if she has to get access to resources through a male. Sometimes there may not be a male guardian in the household so the female provider has to support their family by themselves. Seventy percent of the agricultural workforce consists of women, but most of these women do not own or control their own land and can only access it through their male guardians. If someone does not have control of their land, they will not be able to make important decisions concerning the land which can put a strain on their ability to sell their products. The young mother is not able to sell the food that she grows because she cannot travel without a male guardian.

Women are at a disadvantage in Saudi Arabia because their rights and freedoms are very limited. They are not treated fairly and have little access to resources such as credit and the right to property. They require a male guardian in order to do anything. They must follow strict codes of dress and it is not fair. The Saudi Arabian government needs to allow women the rights they deserve. They need to step in and do what is right.

Life would improve for everyone in Saudi Arabia if women were allowed more rights. The economy would get a boost if women were allowed to work. More parents would be able to afford to send their children to school. Gender equality in Saudi Arabia would be a plus for everyone.

Organizations such as the United Nations need to do more for the rights of women in Saudi Arabia. They should help create labor unions for women so that they can get the right to work in a wider variety of trades without the permission of a male guardian. UN officials could sit down with members of the Saudi Arabian government and discuss the need for women's rights. Laws regarding the segregation of men and women in public should be repealed so that it is easier for women to own and run businesses without having to go through a male employee. Women deserve all the same rights that men have. They should not have to follow strict codes of dress, have a male guardian, or not be allowed to drive. Women in Saudi Arabia need to be more independent and have more rights. Many other countries have this problem as well. Women are not treated the way they should. Saudi Arabia needs to do more. Most other developed countries have given women the same rights as men. The issue of women's rights is a more common problem in underdeveloped countries. No longer should women be repressed. They should have the same rights as everyone else. Women are people too. Women need to stand up and demand they receive the rights they deserve. They need to show that they, in fact, are not weak and that they have a voice. Women make up half of the world's population; they are an important part of the survival the human race. They deserve a little respect.

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