PATRIARCHY AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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Abstract: This paper argues that the culture of patriarchy is one of the reasons the Middle East and North African region is not growing economically as fast as other developing regions. Although women have been on average more educated than earlier generations of women in the region, and women now have fewer children, they do not participate in the labor market in large numbers as women do in other developing regions. In fact, the region has the lowest rate of female labor force participation in the world. This paper argues that since patriarchy in MENA defines women as caregivers and homemakers and defines the private sphere as the only appropriate space for women, patriarchy creates barriers for women's access to the labor market. By shrinking the pool of potential workers, patriarchy systematically decreases the potential economic growth in the region, not only in the short run, but also in the long run.

Keywords: Culture, Economic Growth, Women, Female Labor Force Participation. Middle East and North Africa, Patriarchy.

A country's long-term economic growth has a positive impact on national income. The expansion of the economy, which means higher levels of production and income, results in higher standards of living. Although economic growth by itself does not improve the quality of life for all citizens in a country, it is an essential part of economic progress.

According to macroeconomic textbooks, increasing the quantity of factors of production and improving the quality of these factors result in economic growth. Factors of production are identified as natural resources, physical capita, labor force, and technology. Higher growth rates of Gross Domestic Products (GDP), lower rates of unemployment, are among principal goals of macroeconomic policy making.

Growth in the labor force is one of the key determinants of any nation's maximum potential rate of economic growth. A growing labor force can provide a considerable boost to the potential rate of economic growth and increase the standard of living. In many countries, the entry of women into the labor market has significantly increased the average annual growth rate of real GDP. The entry of educated women can boost the economy's potential growth even further (IMF 2016; OECD 2012; Klasen and Lamanna 2009).

Although many countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have an abundance of natural resources, due to many reasons, such as petroleum's price volatility and political and social unrest, in recent decades, on average, they have not had substantial increase in the growth rate of their GDP compared with other developing regions (figure 1).

The international statistics on FLFP such as the World Bank as well as many studies on FLFP show that MENA, as a region, has the lowest rate of FLFP in the world (table 1). According to economic literature, higher enrollment in different levels of schooling as well as low fertility rates and a higher age of marriage for girls are associated with higher rates of FLFP. In almost all countries in MENA, access to education for women, as well as the gender gap in education, has improved significantly over the last three decades. Female enrolment in primary and secondary schooling has increased substantially and female enrolment in tertiary education is at its highest (figure 2).

Furthermore, in many MENA countries, the fertility rate is declining significantly and consistently. The recent increase in women's educational attainment was accompanied by an increase in their age of marriage as well (Solati 2017). However, the effect of the above changes on FLFP has been limited. FLFP has increased in MENA over the past three decades, but still, the region has the lowest average rate of FLFP in the world and the gender gap in labor force participation is not shrinking, as it has in other developing regions (Solati 2017). The higher levels of education however, has contributed to higher rates of female unemployment as many women are educated and looking for paid work (figure 3). MENA in fact, has the lowest rate of female employment to population in the world (figure 4).

Studies shows that in MENA, while basic education has a moderately positive effect on FLFP, tertiary education has no clear effect (Solati 2017). Furthermore, fertility rate in MENA is declining due to persistent inflation and economic stagnation in recent years in MENA (Solati 2017). Ironically, although women are more educated and have fewer children, they do not participate in the labor market as much as women do in other developing regions (figure 4).

Studies shows that the deep-rooted institution of patriarchy is the primary explanation for the low rate of FLFP in MENA countries (Solati 2017). In this region, patriarchy not only affects the supply of women's paid work, but also alters the demand for female labor (Solati 2017). In MENA, patriarchy is

the law of the land, enforced by patriarchal states and legitimized by religion. Even desperate economic need has not been able to shake the patriarchal order. Women's employment in MENA is often determined by the interaction between economic, ideological, and political forces (Solati 2017).

Recent studies show that MENA is the most patriarchal region in the world. Particularly, MENA is most patriarchal with regard to women's participation in public spheres such as the labor market (Solati 2017). Although women in MENA are now more educated and have fewer children, they do not participate in the labor market as much as women do in other developing regions. This is due to the persistence of the culture that defines women mainly as caregivers and limits them to the private sphere (Solati 2017). The laws in turn (such as labor law and family laws) are in accordance with the patriarchal culture, which defines the private sphere as the appropriate space for women. Culture affects laws and laws affect economic outcomes.

The domino effect starts from the patriarchal beliefs and culture and finishes at lower levels of Gross Domestic Products. Laws, which are often in accordance with religion have legitimized the patriarchal culture and in many cases, oil income has made patriarchy affordable (Solati 2017). Patriarchy in MENA assigns the home as the appropriate space for women and defines women mainly as mothers and wives. These two features of patriarchy in MENA negatively affect the supply and the demand for women's work in the formal market. Consequently, MENA countries lose close to half of their potential labor force, which in turn reduces their potential production and income.

For most policy-makers in the region, the argument that "the higher rates of FLFP can empower women and improve women's status" is not a popular argument. However, almost all policy-makers in the region are trying to enhance their countries' economic performance by increasing their GDP growth rate and decreasing the unemployment rate. Change in attitudes towards women's participation in the labor market can happen through educational system and legislation, which can then result in a major increase in the quantity of the labor force. Since women are, on average, skilled and educated, the higher rate of FLFP improves factors of production substantially, which can promote economic growth in the region by reducing unemployment rates and increasing GDP growth rates.

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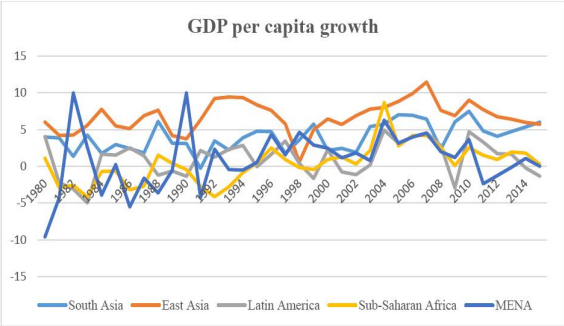
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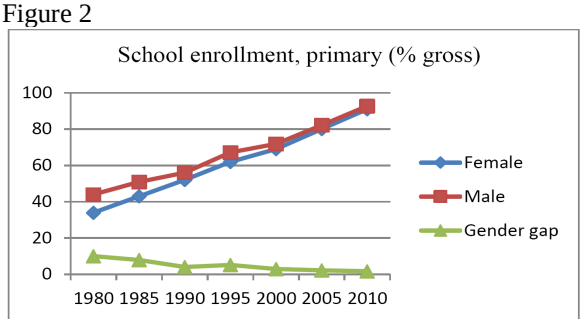
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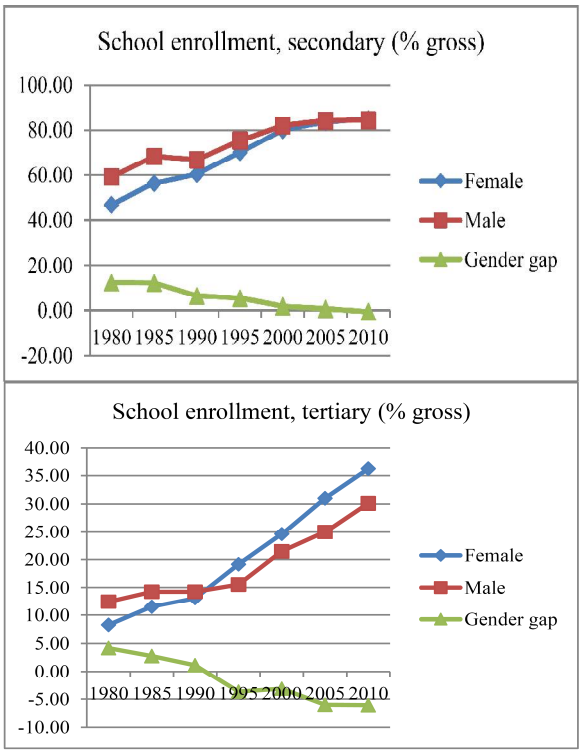
Figure 1



Source: Calculated from the World Bank Development Indicators

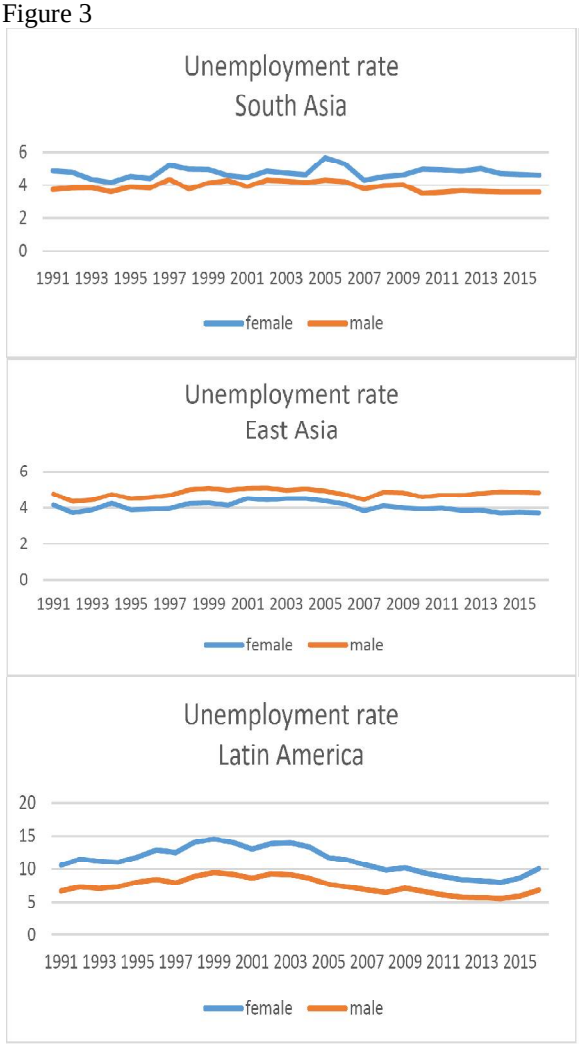
Figure 2

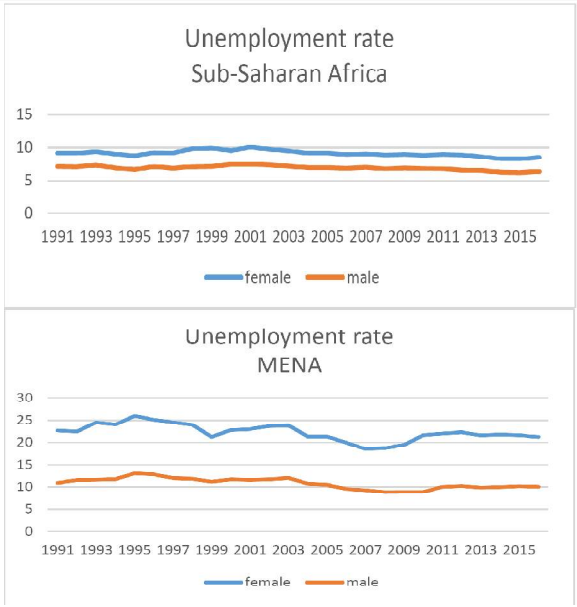




Source: (Solati 2017)

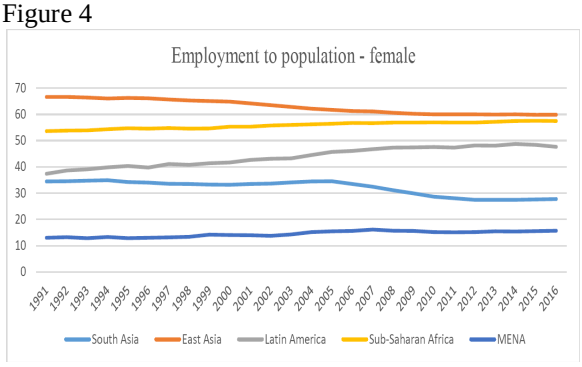
Figure 3





Source: Calculated from the World Bank Development Indicators.

Figure 4



Source: Calculated from the World Bank Development Indicators.

Table 1

Female labor force participation rate (FLFP):

Countries	1975-1980	1981-1985	1986-1990	1991-1995	1996-2000	2001-2005	2006-2010
Bahrain	11.00	12.80	16.20	18.20	19.80	21.00	18.75
Egypt	29.00	27.80	27.00	25.60	24.60	24.00	23.75
Iran	19.00	19.00	20.40	23.00	27.20	28.20	29.50
Iraq	12.00	12.20	13.20	14.00	15.00	16.00	16.25
Jordan	14.00	14.60	15.40	18.00	20.00	21.20	22.50
Kuwait	13.00	16.60	23.60	24.50	23.40	24.60	24.25
Lebanon	19.00	20.00	21.20	22.00	22.80	23.80	25.00
Libya	11.00	12.00	13.60	16.60	20.60	22.60	22.75
Morocco	23.00	23.00	23.60	24.80	26.00	25.20	26.00
Oman	19.00	16.20	14.60	12.40	14.80	18.40	18.25
Qatar	10.00	12.00	13.20	14.60	15.00	16.00	13.50
Saudi Arabia	9.00	10.20	11.00	11.20	13.20	15.00	15.75
Tunisia	19.00	19.80	21.00	22.60	24.40	25.60	26.75
Turkey	27.00	27.00	29.60	28.60	28.20	27.00	26.00
UAE	5.00	6.80	9.20	10.80	12.00	13.40	14.25
MENA	21.65	21.63	22.02	23.03	24.43	25.01	25.76
World	38.13	38.38	39.13	39.50	39.60	39.74	39.98

Note: Female labor force participation rate is the percentage of female population ages 15 and older that participate in the labor force.
Source: Calculated from the World Bank Development Indicators (Solati 2017).