Chapter 17
Gender Equity in Surgical Academia in Kuwait and the Arabian Gulf Region

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ABSTRACT

Gender equity has been a topic of interest in medicine for decades; however, it has extended to include surgery, a field that has been dominated by men for centuries. Nowadays, gender inequity in surgery is a worldwide issue that needs to be addressed since significant disparities exist in the surgical field compared to the medical one. In this chapter, authors introduce the current status of Kuwait and the Gulf region regarding gender equality, and outline the history of women surgeons in the region. The evolution of medical education in surgery and the evolution of the healthcare system and how these relate to gender equity in surgical academia is presented. Challenges related to the uniqueness of the Arabic and the Islamic culture and the future directions of where the field of surgery is headed in relation to gender equity is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Gender equity has been a topic of interest in medicine over the past decades; however, it has extended to include surgery, a field that has been dominated by men for centuries. Nowadays, gender inequity in surgery is a worldwide issue that needs to be addressed since significant disparities exist in the surgical field compared to the medical one.

In this chapter the authors will introduce the current status of Kuwait and the Gulf region regarding gender equality, and outline the history of women surgeons in the region. The evolution of medical education in surgery and the evolution of healthcare system and how these relate to gender equity in

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surgical academia will be presented. Challenges related to the uniqueness of the Arabic and the Islamic culture and the future directions of where the field of surgery is headed in relation to gender equity will be discussed in this chapter.

BACKGROUND

The Arabian Gulf Region is located in the Middle East, and includes six countries; The State of Kuwait, The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), The Kingdom of Bahrain, The State of Qatar, The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Sultanate of Oman with a population of 54.6 million in 2017. These countries share religious and social bonds that are rooted into the Arabic and Islamic culture for centuries. In 1981, a Charter was signed as these countries have formed a political and economic alliance called the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (GCC, n.d.); in realization of the unique global power this region holds with its strategic geographical location and its wealthy oil and natural gas resources and revenues. On the other hand, this region is situated in the center of the Middle East neighboring regions of conflict and facing ongoing challenges related to the regional and global struggle of power.

Where do the Gulf Countries Stand in Gender Equity Globally?

To appreciate gender equity in surgical academia in the Gulf region, we should start by clarifying where the Gulf countries sit compared to the rest of the world in gender equity in general. According to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report of 189 countries and territories in 2017, the Gulf countries have very high Human Development Index (HDI), with the UAE topping the Gulf countries in the 34th position, followed by Qatar in the 37th, KSA in the 39th, Bahrain in the 43rd, Oman in the 48th and Kuwait in the 56th position; however, when it came to gender equality, the Middle East and North Africa regions remained to rank last globally as measured by the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and the Gender Development Index (GDI). The GII reflects gender-based inequalities in three dimensions; reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity; and the GDI measures gender inequalities in achievement in three basic dimensions of human development: health, education; and command over economic resources (UNDP, 2018; UNDP Human, 2018). In that report, the UAE continued to be the highest among the Gulf countries, ranking in the 120th position globally, as it has made remarkable improvement on gender parity in ministerial positions and wage equality for similar work and has closed the overall gender gaps by 65%; while Bahrain, ranked in the 126th position and have closed 63% of the overall gender gaps (Gulf Business, n.d.) Kuwait, Qatar and KSA ranked 126th, 130th and 138th, respectively. It is worth mentioning that in 2015, Kuwait has pledged to meet the UN Sustainable Goals including Gender Equity by 2030 and Bahrain, UAE and Qatar have resembling stands (UNDP, n.d.; UNDP “Kingdom of Bahrain”, n.d.; Cookman n.d.; “Qatar UN Goals”, n.d.). In the light of this report, it is imperative to appreciate that some political, legislative and cultural variations exist among the Gulf countries and that may have resulted in discrepancies in relation to the progression of gender equity in the medical profession and that the Gulf countries require more work to improve gender disparities overall.