

## The 3 Gs of Progress: Growth, Gender Gap, and GDP

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### Abstract

The challenges before humanity are, and always have been, to uphold the sanctity of life in equal form without any discrimination, whether based on race, religion, nationality, color, or gender. This paper investigates one such practice affecting half of the world's population: the presence of a gender gap in employment. Social and religious practices are barriers that women need to overcome to reduce the gender gap. Liberal societies have fewer barriers and a lower gender gap but still face problems of sexual harassment in varying magnitudes, depending on the prevailing social and psychological stigmas in those societies. The current research discusses how Islamic and developing countries can benefit from women's employment and how their contribution can boost GDP, especially by exploring opportunities in developing countries. It also elaborates on how the fear of sexual harassment affects socio-religious cohesion and contributes to the gender gap.

**Keywords:** Gender Gap, GDP, Sexual Harassment, Women, Women Empowerment, Liberalization, Islam, Education, Social Reforms, Crimes against Women.

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## INTRODUCTION

The challenges before humanity are, and always have been, to bring sanctity of life in equal form without any discrimination of any kind, whether based on race, religion, nationality, color, or gender. This paper investigates one such practice affecting half of the world's population: the presence of a gender gap in employment. History has not treated women kindly; they are victims in every conflict, as dominating forces treat them as easy targets to dishonor their enemies. This has happened for centuries, and human societies have developed protective mechanisms to safeguard their honor by building barriers in the name of women's protection and hiding behind male custodians. These barriers take the form of social and religious practices over time.

These protective barriers are behind the gender gap that exists in every country. The more liberal a society becomes, the fewer barriers there will be, and the more opportunities there will be for women's employment. On the other hand, with the closing of the gender gap, the problem of sexual harassment arises.

Employment of women, without monumental changes in social and psychological mindset, provides opportunities for individuals who are unable to control their unhealthy desires and cross limits when position and power give them access to females in the workplace.

Since time immemorial, nature has given females attractiveness in their physique, and the face is believed to be the most attractive feature. This is proven by the usage in most advertisements, media, and movies, which incite sexual charm to sell their narratives by creating a stereotypical image of women, classifying them as decorative, submissive, and affectionate. The physical beauty of a woman is the reason for their sexual objectification, which further exploits human emotions for commercial purposes.

The typical social narrative for women creates an image that becomes stronger over time. Society, in general, tends to approve this image and then forces the next generation to abide by it. Both males and females try to accommodate themselves according to social boundaries, where the male biological predisposition to

mate, or in simple terms, desires, takes over, taking circumstantial advantage and crossing the boundaries of sexual harassment.

The purpose of closing the gender gap is to give more opportunities to women. The current research further elaborates on this by discussing how developed countries benefitted from women's employment and how their contribution boost GDP. The paper emphasizes the significant opportunity that exists in Islamic countries to reduce the gender gap, which could benefit the economy by increasing GDP by 10 to 80%, depending on the initial value of the female labor force participation rate (FLFP), taking initiative from (J. D. Ostry, 2018) research. It explores the reasons behind the stereotypical image of women, how it is used by mass media for commercial gains, and how it relates to the sexual harassment faced by women in the workplace. The paper further elaborates on how the fear of sexual harassment affects the socio-religious fabric in Islamic countries and contributes to the gender gap.

The data that supports the arguments comes from the databanks of two organizations. First, it utilizes data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to study cases related to sexual crimes in different countries. Second, it examines the position of the gender gap using data from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023, focusing on countries where sexual crimes are highest and lowest to understand the reasons behind the gender gap and how it affects Islamic countries, where strict religious norms prevent women from working. In the end, the study moves to suggest measures to improve the situation and reduce the gap.

### Crime against Women

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines sexual violence (ICCS 0301) as an unwanted sexual act, an attempt to obtain a sexual act, or contact or communication with unwanted sexual attention without valid consent, or with consent obtained through intimidation, force, fraud, coercion, threat, deception, use of drugs or alcohol, or abuse of power or a position of vulnerability. The source of data, as mentioned by the UNODC, is national data on offenses and victims collected through the United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Criminal Justice Systems. Tables on violent sexual crimes include national figures on offenses and victims of selected crimes recorded by the police or other law enforcement agencies, as submitted by member states (Violent & Sexual Crime, 2023).

The data analyzed from the UNODC is in the form of two indicators: victims of serious attacks and sexual violence. These are further categorized into crimes conducted by an intimate partner or family member, other perpetrators known to the victim, unknown perpetrators, and cases where the relationship to the perpetrator is unknown.

The second form of data, also taken from the UNODC, includes specific counts of sexual violence categorized under rape, other acts of sexual violence, and assault. The category of sexual exploitation is mentioned separately. The two sets of data from the same source serve different purposes. The first set, including the number of sexual assault and rape cases, comes from tables compiled from law enforcement agencies' records, while the second set describes the reported social counts based on surveyed data.

The data represents most of the information from the year 2020; if it is not available, the last surveyed record is used for analysis. While developed countries have their numbers, the same cannot be said for Islamic countries, as only 30 Islamic countries have released their data, including three countries with data older than five years. The unavailability of complete data categories from Islamic countries makes it difficult to compare them in totality. Still, the numbers are useful in establishing the fact that differences in cultural and religious practices in the workplace between Islamic countries and developed countries contribute to the comparatively low number of sexual crimes in Islamic countries with low women employment ratios.

1. In the year 2020, France had the highest count in terms of serious assault and sexual violence cases against females. These counts include incidents involving intimate partners and family members, perpetrators known and unknown to the victims, and cases where the relationship to the perpetrator is not known.
2. France leads in sexual violence and assault cases under the category where it is perpetrated by intimate partners and family members, followed by Colombia and Germany. It also leads in counts where the relationship to the perpetrator is unknown in both sexual assault and violence cases.
3. In the top 10 countries, France is mentioned 4 times, Colombia 2 times, Germany 2 times, Italy and Canada only 1 time each. The sexual violence and assault indicator is categorized into 4 parts, and these countries have the highest counts, which is why three countries are mentioned more than once in the top 10.
4. Germany has the highest number of counts in cases where the perpetrator is known to the victims but is not recognized as an intimate partner or family member, followed by Canada and Colombia.
5. According to UNODC data, under specific indicator sets, the highest number of counts of sexual violence was reported in the UK (162,030), USA (126,430), Brazil (56,477), France (56,374), and Mexico (53,145).
6. The highest number of rape cases was reported in the USA (126,430), UK (58,657), Brazil (47,701), South Africa (40,035), and France (25,550).

7. In Islamic countries, the highest counts of sexual assault in 2020-21 were reported from Turkey (9,030), Indonesia (4,741), Morocco (4,194), and Saudi Arabia (3,757).
8. The highest count of rape cases from Islamic countries is reported from Pakistan (6,522), Uganda (1,454), Malaysia (1,360), and Kazakhstan (1,317).
9. In the category of other types of sexual violence, the highest counts are reported from Uganda (17,395), Malaysia (1,343), Morocco (789), and Jordan (118).
10. While the highest number of counts of sexual exploitation in Islamic countries comes from Albania (183), Azerbaijan (141), Jordan (54), and Syria (49).
11. In terms of the minimum crime against women, smaller countries have a good record due to their smaller population to govern. When these countries have resources in terms of per capita income and higher education, the rate of crime drops to a minimum, as is the case with Luxembourg and other developed countries with comparatively smaller populations and areas to govern.
12. Countries suffering from internal conflicts and economic suffocation have a higher number of crimes, and they often have less reliable records, with many crimes going unreported. Similarly, some governments also downplay crimes to improve the country's image in the outside world.

Underreporting of crimes, social environments that force women not to report sexual crimes for fear of demeaning their status in society, and legal systems that are not supportive of women work against the objective of decreasing the gender gap. By either not providing data or providing incomplete or manipulated data to organizations like UNODC, many countries avoid tarnishing their image in the international community and facing economic consequences such as decreases in tourism and foreign investment, as well as pressure on their political establishments.

### Advertisement and Females

To understand the reasons behind the gender gap, research needs to explore the social and psychological barriers a woman must cross before she can work outside. Every society endorses stereotypes (Shrikhande, 2003), according to which men and women try to act, and these stereotypes become a norm or a scale through which male and female roles are defined. These stereotypes dictate how men and women should behave in society. Movies, advertisements, and social media play important roles in establishing new norms (Lynn J Jaffe, 1994), a phenomenon called cultural shift, while also reinforcing old and prevalent social norms (Sangeeta Sharma, 2021). Stereotypes categorize women into household, relational, sexually oriented, decorative,

and submissive roles. With cultural shifts and women entering the workforce, these stereotypes are slowly diminishing, especially in developed Western countries.

One should study advertisements portraying women in different roles where their physical beauty, sexual objectification (Soni, 2020), and treatment as commodities exploit them by segregating their bodies into different parts, often portraying them as decorative items in sexually appealing roles, (Sangeeta Sharma, 2021) quoted Das (2000) and others in this context.

(Chatley, 2018) also states that sex is an emotion used by advertisers to sell their products, and even in male-only products, females are used to promote them. It is a psychological tactic to gain male interest in the product, with females being objectified in various capacities (SEENA J., 2014). They are used as a retention tool, capturing male attention by exploiting sexual content to promote the product. This strategy helps advertisements achieve their purpose of retention, as human memory retains the parts that arouse inner feelings, aiding in longer-term product recall and immediate recognition at the time of purchase.

The result of such glorification of women in the digital world and movies is primarily due to the presence of men in creating those spaces, reflecting their perspectives on the screen. The standards established by these agencies pressurize women to achieve these standards if they want to be successful or acceptable in society (Soni, 2020).

The idea behind the screen is to garner enough desire and pleasure content to dominate the human mind and attract people to spend money on the items. Both males and females are treated as customers, with perfect stereotype figures presented as the ideal choice. (Nina Åkestam, 2021), describes four types of stereotypes based on gender: physical characteristics, role behavior, occupational status, and personality traits. For each of these, society provides role models, and both males and females aspire to achieve those standards to appear successful.

(Stefanie K. Johnson, 2010) states in her research findings that physical attractiveness is beneficial in gaining an edge in most jobs. Her findings confirm that the concept of "what is beautiful is good" has robust acceptance. (Yu Tian, 2019) experimental studies confirm that both men and women take longer when viewing attractive faces regarding time perception. Similar studies confirm that face and physical appearance are preferred ways of gaining the initial attraction that the human mind demands. (Saxe, 1976) describes the same, stating that physical attraction is a more important factor in female evaluation. He further describes women's physical attractiveness and correlates it with dating popularity. He quotes Elder's study, which describes physical attractiveness as the best predictor

behind a woman's marriage to a high-status man. He also quotes Miller's experiment, which finds that individuals who score low on attractiveness are often perceived to have negative and undesirable traits, whereas highly attractive individuals are accorded favorable traits.

Communication is an art, and advertisements, movies, and the digital social world confirm that human faces and physical attractiveness are utilized to sell dreams and develop new stereotypes like physical perfection, thin bodies, fair skin, and so on for women. The basis on which sales are promoted is a main reason for sexual harassment of women in the workplace.

The legal definition of sexual harassment varies from country to country, but in general, it includes behavior where a person, especially a woman, is subjected to uncomfortable glances, rude gender-related jokes, demeaning comments, sexual assault, and threats or acts of physical violence (Hersch, 2015). Harassment can take the form of sexual advances communicated through verbal or physical gestures, or any kind of unwanted sexual advances that make the victim feel uncomfortable and humiliated.

It is not necessary that only women are victims, but the majority of surveys confirm that, in most cases, women are victims. (Burn, 2019), in his study, blames male biological predisposition to mate and their uncontrolled desires for driving them towards sexual harassment. These advances are interpreted by women who are uninterested in reciprocating the same feelings as sexual harassment (Diehl, 2018). He further elaborates that in sexual harassment, the sociocultural gender perspective of a woman, in the form of sexual objectification and approval of violence against women, aligns with masculine behavior and denotes power over women, guided by belief and supported by sociocultural stereotypes.

In general, most victims are young, have low educational qualifications, and hold lower positional jobs in an organization, which denotes the vulnerable victim hypothesis (Rospenda, 1998). It states that persons of low sociocultural power, like women, racial and sexual minorities, are most likely to face sexual harassment from people in superior positions. Those in superior positions use reward and punishment to make inappropriate advances tolerated in anticipation of reward or fear of negative consequences at the job (Bowes-Sperry, 2005). In cases of sexual harassment, gender harassment is more prevalent and mostly goes undetected as victims often don't complain in public, and fewer incidents are reported compared to the actual number because companies' policies are weak in nature and tend to avoid or remain silent over the issue.

(Hendriksen, 2017) defines four characteristics of sexual harassers. The first one is the Dark Triad, a combination of Narcissism, Psychopathy, and

Machiavellianism. The second characteristic is moral disengagement, where individuals justify their actions and create their own versions of events devoid of any moral principles. Third, sexual harassers often excuse their behavior by claiming that women are employed in male-dominated fields like the military, police, surgery, and finance. Lastly, harassers maintain a hostile attitude towards women, and most of them lack self-awareness about the inappropriateness, unwelcomeness, and immorality of their actions.

(Chelsea R. Willness, 2007) argues that situational factors may contribute to the likelihood of sexual harassment cases. (Areguin, 2020) states that individuals who score high on the Likelihood to Sexually Harass (LSH) scale are more likely to exploit situational factors when given the chance, compared to individuals who score low on LSH.

The negativity associated with sexual harassment affects work culture, leading to decreased job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and reduced productivity. This often results in regular conflicts, increased job stress, and withdrawal symptoms. On an individual level, it affects victims differently both psychologically and physically. Psychologically, it can increase post-traumatic stress levels, depression, emotional exhaustion, and anxiety. Physically, it can cause issues such as gastric distress, upper respiratory problems, headaches, and difficulty in sleeping (Bergman, 2019).

(Hersch, 2015), utilizing data from the US and the European Commission Directorate General of Employment, found that the rate of sexual harassment varies from country to country. Survey data shows that 84% of respondents in Spain, 81% in Austria, 78% in Luxembourg, 72% in Germany, 60% in Greece, 54% in the UK, and 44% in the USA acknowledged experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace. In contrast, Denmark (11%) and Sweden (2%) reported the lowest percentages, while other European countries reported rates between 25-40%. In the Middle East, only Algeria and Morocco have laws against sexual harassment.

### **Understanding Gender Segregation and Its Reasons in Islam**

The perspective of Islamic countries can be summarized in three considerations: Firstly, the human face and physical appearance, especially in females, are seen as the primary reasons for attraction. Secondly, mixing of sexes in the workplace is believed to increase the probability of sexual crimes. Thirdly, the punishment for sexual crimes in Islamic countries is severe and extreme. To prevent any chance of moral degradation, Islamic countries find it easier to segregate genders in fields where it is possible.

Any prohibition on women working and earning is not related to any principle or part of Islamic teachings, but rather stems from Muslim scholars who find it easier to limit women to their houses to avoid the risk of moral degradation that comes from gender mixing in the workplace. A woman has the right to be educated and is free to earn a living by all legal means, provided she observes the Islamic code of conduct, which includes dressing in a manner that does not reveal her physical appearance by wearing long and loose apparel that hides most parts of her body.

The objection raised by modern-day reformers concerns the applicability and understanding of the Islamic code of conduct for women. In Islam, men and women are not part of religious seclusion, unlike in Christianity, where religious obligations are carried by priests (fathers) and nuns, or in Hindu and Jain communities, where women are revered as *sadhvis* (female religious disciples). These individuals are honored in society as people who have chosen to devote their lives to God and sacrifice all worldly pleasures and relationships.

Islam does not promote seclusion in any manner. There is no instruction in either the Quran or Hadith for people to renounce the world and human relationships to please the Almighty. On the contrary, the Prophet said, "follow me in religion," which means Muslims should emulate his actions and follow his instructions as mentioned in the Quran. The justification for imposing restrictions on females, particularly regarding dress code, should be understood in line with the practices of female religious devotees in other religions. Just like nuns and *Sadhvis*, whose attire commands respect and signifies their life objectives, Islam demands that every woman be respected, and her attire reflects the justification of her life goal.

Islam stresses that women should present themselves in a certain manner in front of non-relatives to curb the same reasons for which women are cast in advertisements. The question should not be whether women should wear a particular attire, but rather whether they have the choice to be religious, semi-religious, or non-religious. Based on their choice, they should have the freedom in all matters of life.

### **GDP and Women's Employment**

GDP numbers are mostly synonymous with economic growth, and employment numbers are directly related to it. (Levine, 2013) believed that employment picks up in a lagged manner when a positive economic turnaround is seen in an economy. Industries wait for certainty of increased demand before employing more labor and try to increase productivity from their current workforce.

With economic growth picking up, and it no longer being possible to increase productivity without

employing additional labor, companies then boost employment numbers. This means that to increase employment, one must aim for GDP growth that exceeds labor productivity growth. Similarly, an increase in employment growth should be greater than the increase in the labor force in order to achieve a decreasing unemployment rate.

To boost real economic growth, GDP numbers should relate to real output growth that exceeds productivity and labor growth, which will reduce the unemployment rate. If the labor force and GDP numbers are equal and there is potential for productivity growth, there is a good chance that the unemployment rate will increase as companies resort to practices that maximize productivity without increasing their workforce. This concept is known as Okun's Law. It emphasizes the importance of the growth rate in potential output, which denotes the capacity of an economy when all its resources, especially labor and capital, are fully employed.

In the long run, it is necessary to have GDP growth that surpasses the growth rate of the labor force and productivity. In simple terms, new employment is necessary to improve output. When the actual GDP is less than potential GDP, the result is an output gap that needs to be filled either by increasing productivity or by deploying additional resources, if available.

### **Will Employing More Women Boost GDP?**

According to (J. D. Ostry, 2018), the research highlights the benefits of increasing female labor force participation (FLFP) by approaching gender diversity as a means to hire new skills through women in the workforce. Sectoral reallocation occurs through economic development as household income increases, and the service sector requires more hands, providing more opportunities for women. It is believed that the service sector is comparatively more gender-equal than other sectors like manufacturing or agriculture. It points out that countries with faster growth in the service sector are better at implementing gender equality. Research also suggests that lowering the gender gap in labor force participation could benefit GDP by 10 to 80 percent, depending on the initial value of the FLFP.

The model applied in the research illustrates that with income growth, more women will join the labor force as demand for services increases. Countries with high barriers to FLFP, which contribute to a high male-to-female employment ratio, gain more compared to countries with low barriers and a low FLFP ratio. Ostry, finds that the MENA and South Asian regions have the largest barriers for women, which can be equivalent to a 50% tax rate. The study also suggests that gender diversity helps boost male income as gender complementarity increases productivity. The model works better when there is a shortage of more qualified male workers or when the job market is competitive and

provides equal opportunities without any gender discrimination.

Another study, (Women in the workforce: An unmet potential in Asia and the Pacific, 2015), suggests through a simulation model that a 30% increase in per capita income is possible in an average Asian economy, despite women facing lower quality jobs with lower wages compared to men. In his study, (Dawn Holland, 2023) estimated that the global economy could be boosted by USD 7 trillion by closing the gender gap. (Sangwan, 2021) suggests that financial freedom will improve women's household decision-making and provide better food choices with a diverse food basket.

According to (Progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023, 2023), it is unfortunate that women and girls are still living on an income of \$2.15 a day, with most of them (220 million) residing in sub-Saharan Africa. In employment, gender inequalities mean women are less likely to receive social protection from regular employment. Globally, 73.5 percent of women do not have social protection from their wage employment.

The problems for women are numerous: they are more food insecure than men, face scarcity of potable water and sanitation facilities, have limited access to financial institutions, and are overemployed in the agricultural sector. The same is true in seasonal, informal, part-time, or low-wage employment, where they have limited or no access to social protection. Research encompassing 190 economies found that 69 economies have laws that constrain women's decision to work, and 43 economies have no laws on sexual harassment in the workplace. There is extensive literature on the violence and harassment faced by women worldwide. These safety issues, along with cultural and social restrictions, keep women physically and economically immobile (Making the workplace work for women, 2019).

Women entrepreneurs face an uphill task as they find it more difficult than men to arrange capital and other resources. Lower and middle-income countries provide more entrepreneurship opportunities to women compared to higher-income countries. It has been estimated that assigning a monetary value to women's unpaid work may exceed 40 percent of GDP (Measuring unpaid domestic and care work - ILOSTAT), as women spend 2 to 10 times more on unpaid care compared to men (Gaëlle Ferrant, 2014).

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) report, (Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work, 2022), women are preferred as paid care workers, especially in health, education, and domestic work. The report estimates that expanding care services could create 300 million jobs by 2035, significantly benefiting

social and economic progress. The paper (Investing-in-free-universal-childcare-in-sub-Saharan-Africa, 2021) suggests that investment in the care sector will benefit women, as they could secure 70 to 90 percent of these jobs. The study indicates that the care sector will provide almost three times more jobs while producing 30 percent less greenhouse gases compared to the construction industry from the same investment.

According to the UN Women report (Migrant women and remittances: Exploring the data from selected countries, 2020), 48 percent of the 281 million migrants are women, but they remit more money than their male counterparts. The occupational divide is also evident among migrant workers: women are more prevalent in care and domestic work sectors, while men are more prevalent in industrial and construction work.

The issue paper (Investing-in-free-universal-childcare-in-sub-Saharan-Africa, 2021) highlights that the impact of climate change will be severe on women as they are more involved in sectors that depend on the environment and ecosystem. It is projected that 158.3 million females will suffer from poverty by 2050, 16 million more than males. Food insecurity is expected to affect 236 million more women compared to 131 million more men.

It is interesting to read (McLaughlin, 2005), where he studies US history related to women's empowerment. His work explains that in the 1800s agrarian society, women's place was mainly at home, doing household chores such as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the family. He quoted Degler (1980), who noted that women also helped during harvest and planting. McLaughlin observes that by 1850, women worked in 175 different occupations, and one-quarter of the labor force in factories consisted of unmarried women, who earned one-fourth to one-third less than men for the same work. During WWI, women entered the workforce first as volunteers because their husbands and sons were at the war front. Later, in WWII, they worked as replacements for men who were serving in the war. However, at the end of the war, the women's share in the workforce decreased from 36% to 12% in just four years (1944 to 1948) as men returned from the war, and the government sought to replace women with men.

In 1932, the Federal Economy Act was passed to restrict the wives of federal employees from holding government jobs. Women in industry with employed husbands were the first to lose their jobs as the US tried to emerge from the economic downturn. The National Recovery Act of 1935 (Women in the labor force: a databook No. 1092, 2021) mentioned that women would receive 25% less pay than men.

(Miles, 2013) also elaborates on the reasons for differential pay systems. His study states that over a 10-year period, women are five times more likely to leave

their jobs than men. It is the work-life imbalance that forces females to prioritize family responsibilities and circumstances, leading them to sacrifice their career goals. The data explains how today's developed countries faced similar taboos that Islamic and developing countries use to restrict women from working outside the home.

### Analysis of the Global Gender Index

Global Gender Gap Index (Global Gender Gap Report, 2023) is responsible for tracking the gap that exists between genders using four key dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. In its 2023 edition, it benchmarks gender parity across 146 countries, including 39 Islamic countries, excluding 16 that are unable to fulfill the main requirement of having at least 12 of the 14 indicators comprising the index. It uses a score from 0 to 100 to measure the distance covered towards parity (i.e., the percentage of the gender gap that has been closed). It provides cross-country comparisons through ranking, explaining each country's progress over time and in comparison to other countries as well.

The index is structured to evaluate gender-based disparities in access to resources and opportunities within countries, rather than the total resources and opportunities available in those countries. Additionally, it assesses nations based on the results achieved rather than the efforts or resources invested. A unique characteristic of the Global Gender Gap Index is that it ranks countries according to how close they are to achieving gender equality, rather than focusing solely on women's empowerment. The goal is to determine whether the disparity between men and women in the selected indicators has decreased.

The sub-index of Economic Participation and Opportunity includes indicators like labor-force participation rate, wage equality for similar work, estimated earned income, legislators, senior officials and managers, and professionals and technical workers. It focuses on measuring the participation gap by using the difference between women and men in labor-force participation rate. Secondly, the remuneration gap is measured by taking the ratio of estimated female to male earned income. Thirdly, the disparity between the advancement of women and men is quantified using two specific statistics: the ratio of women to men in leadership roles such as legislators, senior officials, and managers, and the ratio of women to men in technical and professional occupations. These figures highlight the differences in gender representation in both leadership and specialized fields.

Under the Educational Attainment sub-index, indicators include literacy rate, enrollment in primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education. Besides the enrollment, the literacy rate measures the

ability of a country to provide equal education to women and men.

The third sub-index, Health and Survival, includes indicators like sex ratio at birth and healthy life expectancy. The sex ratio at birth specifically aims to address the issue of "missing women," which is common in countries where there is a strong preference for male children. Additionally, the index examines the disparity in healthy life expectancy between women and men. This measure estimates the number of years both genders can expect to live in good health, factoring in the impact of violence, disease, malnutrition, and other health issues.

The fourth sub-index, Political Empowerment, includes indicators such as women in parliament, women in ministerial positions, and years with a female/male head of state (over the last 50 years). To assess the gender gap in top political decision-making, the index looks at the ratio of women to men in both ministerial and parliamentary positions. Additionally, it includes the ratio of women to men based on their tenure in executive roles, like prime minister or president, over the last 50 years. This approach captures the extent of women's representation and influence in high-level political leadership.

### Analysis of the Global Gender Gap report 2023, in Relation to Islamic Countries

The selection of countries is based on the availability of data, requiring at least 12 out of the 14 indicators to be available. For this reason, 16 Islamic countries are excluded. The Global Gender Report comprises 146 countries, including 39 Islamic countries. Albania (ranked 17th) is the only Islamic nation within the first 50 countries, having the smallest gender gap. Between ranks 51 to 100, there are Bangladesh (59), Kazakhstan (62), UAE (71), Ethiopia (75), Uganda (78), Kyrgyzstan (84), Indonesia (87), Togo (90), Cameroon (94), Brunei (96), and Azerbaijan (97). The remaining 28 countries are ranked between 102 and 146, highlighting the significant gender gap that exists in Islamic countries.

In addition to smaller countries, major Islamic economies that are omitted include Iraq, Uzbekistan, Libya, and Sudan, where ongoing disturbances make it difficult for any agency to work.

- The top five Islamic countries by GDP are Indonesia (87), Saudi Arabia (131), Turkey (129), Nigeria (130), and Egypt (134). These countries, except for Indonesia, are almost at the bottom in the Gender Gap ranking.
- Islamic countries that are at the bottom in the GDP ranking are not included in the Gender Gap ranking as they face economic and political disturbances and are unable to fulfill the criteria for inclusion.
- Among the last 20 countries in the Islamic GDP ranking, only nine are included in the Gender Gap ranking. This means that out of the 16

countries left out of the Gender Gap ranking, 11 have the lowest GDP among Islamic countries.

- Among Islamic countries ranked high in per capita income, only three (UAE (2), Brunei (4), and Kazakhstan (10)) of the top 10 countries are ranked under 100 in the Gender Gap index, i.e., UAE (71), Brunei (96) and Kazakhstan (62). All the other seven countries are languishing at the bottom with ranks above 100.
- The Islamic countries with the lowest per capita income that are included in the Gender Gap index are at the bottom of the Gender Gap ranking: Sierra Leone (112), Chad (145), Afghanistan (146), Niger (135), and Gambia (119).
- Bahrain, Bangladesh, and Kuwait are the only countries that made significant progress in their ranks from the last Gender Gap Index, improving by 18, 12, and 10 places, respectively.
- Guinea, Uganda, and Lebanon are the countries that suffered the most during the same period, with their rankings decreasing by 19, 17, and 13 places, respectively.
- Overall, there are 16 Islamic countries that have slipped in their ranking, four countries that show no change or are included for the first time, and the remaining 20 Islamic countries show positive results with improved rankings from the last Gender Gap Index.
- Under the Participation and Opportunity sub-index, smaller Islamic countries like Togo top the rank with an overall position of 13th, followed by Albania (18th), Azerbaijan (27th), Kazakhstan (28th), and Brunei (29th). The worst-positioned Islamic countries are Afghanistan (146), Algeria (145), Iran (144), Pakistan (142), and Morocco (136).
- In the Educational Attainment sub-index, the top 10 countries include both rich and smaller countries. Malaysia (1) tops the rank, followed by Kazakhstan (27), Kyrgyz Republic (29), Albania (33), and Brunei (44). However, the bottom-ranked countries align with their overall ranking due to widespread poverty, economic, and humanitarian crises. Afghanistan (146), Chad (145), Guinea (143), Niger (141), and Benin (139) are at the bottom of the Islamic countries ranking and the Educational Attainment sub-index.
- Under the Health and Survival sub-index, the index reveals that Kyrgyz Republic (1) and Uganda (1) top the table, despite Uganda suffering a severe setback in its overall ranking by losing 17 places from the previous Gender Index. Other countries include Togo (30),

Burkina Faso (39), and Kazakhstan (47). Surprisingly, rich countries like Indonesia (73), Malaysia (80), Saudi Arabia (114), UAE (119), Oman (135), Bahrain (136), and Brunei (140) are in the middle to lower section, whereas Qatar (143) and Azerbaijan (146) are even ranked lower than Afghanistan (141).

- In the Political Empowerment sub-index, Bangladesh (7) tops the table, followed by African countries Ethiopia (25), Albania (28), UAE (35), Senegal (37), Uganda (49), and Guinea (70). At the bottom are Afghanistan (146), Lebanon (144), Iran (143), Nigeria (142), and Oman (140).

### Analysis of World Bank Dataset

- Labor force female participation (% of total labor force) in the Arab world is low (20%) compared to the developed world, where it is between 40-47%. In high-income countries, it is 45%, in the European Union, it is 46%, even in low-income countries, it is 43%, and the world has an average of 40% labor force participation.
- Afghanistan (6.53%), Yemen (7.77%), and Iraq (13.88%) are the countries where female participation in the labor force is the lowest. In contrast, Turkmenistan (53%), Mozambique (51%), Azerbaijan (49.73%), Uganda (49%), Kazakhstan (49%), Togo (48%), Sierra Leone (48%), Cameroon (47%), Gambia (47%), and Ethiopia (47%) are the Islamic countries where female participation is not only good but better than in high-income and developed countries.
- The data shows that rich Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, and Oman have lower female participation, along with countries observing strict Islamic principles like Afghanistan, Yemen, Iran, and Iraq.
- Unemployment in the female labor force as a percentage of the available female labor force, with the world average at (5.26%), in low-income countries is (5.69%), whereas the USA has (3.47%), the European Union (6.83%), and in high-income countries, it is (4.75%).
- There are 20 Islamic countries where unemployment in the female labor force is less than 5%, with countries like Qatar, Niger, Chad, Benin, and Sierra Leone leading the table. At the bottom are Afghanistan, Yemen, Tunisia, Jordan, and Syria, with more than 25% of the female labor force unemployed.
- In high GDP Islamic countries, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, and Iran have a high unemployment percentage in the female labor force. On average, 19.31% of the female labor force in the Arab world is unemployed.



Table 1

Table A: Islamic Countries' GDP, Per Capita Income, and Global Gender Gap Index Ranking											
Country Name	GDP (current US\$)-2021	Rank (World)	Rank (in Islamic Country)	Adjusted net national income per capita (current US\$) 2020	Rank based on Per Capita Income (2020)	The Global Gender Gap Index 2023 rankings	Rank Change from 2022	Participation and Opportunity (Rank)	Educational Attainment (Rank)	Health and Survival (Rank)	Political Empowerment (Rank)
Albania	17,930,565,118.82	121	33	4208	16	17	1	116	135	67	25
Bangladesh	416,264,802,185.17	34	6	1999	29	59	12	127	90	68	144
Kazakhstan	197,112,255,360.61	54	12	6705	10	62	3	60	133	39	109
United Arab Emirates	415,021,590,687.54	35	7	35542	2	71	-3	18	33	133	28
Ethiopia	111,261,882,913.34	61	17	792	43	75	-1	78	124	104	128
Uganda	40,510,241,365.90	91	24	719	44	78	-17				
Kyrgyz Republic	8,740,681,889.21	150	44	873	40	84	2	132	93	143	133
Indonesia	1,186,505,455,720.81	16	1	3111	21	87	5				
Togo	8,334,047,485.51	152	45	808	42	90	1	137	125	97	37
Cameroon	45,338,285,386.10	89	22	1272	35	94	3				
Brunei Darussalam	14,006,497,000.25	132	39	22118	4	96	8				
Azerbaijan	54,825,411,764.71	87	20	3490	19	97	4	119	143	102	70
Malaysia	372,981,073,017.75	38	8	7277	8	102	1	129	139	61	92
Senegal	27,569,136,728.26	105	28	1299	34	104	8	141	115	130	90
Burkina Faso	19,737,616,003.02	115	31	681	45	109	6				
Tajikistan	8,937,805,347.14	149	43	865	41	111	3	130	87	114	131
Sierra Leone	4,249,234,573.99	165	49	421	52	112	-3				
Bahrain	39,303,403,989.36	96	26	17764	5	113	18	27	54	146	134
Gambia, The	2,038,414,973.57	181	52	560	48	119	2	105	121	70	93
Kuwait	136,797,422,273.87	59	16	28773	3	120	10	145	116	137	135
Maldives	5,405,557,161.74	161	48	5990	11	124	-7	70	132	57	74
Jordan	45,116,317,042.25	90	23	3794	17	126	-4				
Tunisia	46,687,298,709.35	88	21	3263	20	128	-8				
Turkiye	819,034,484,303.17	19	3	7164	9	129	-5	29	44	140	136
Nigeria	440,833,583,992.49	30	4	1712	31	130	-7	89	1	80	122
Saudi Arabia	868,585,871,464.54	18	2	16855	6	131	-4	122	57	136	99
Lebanon	23,131,941,556.78	111	29	4323	14	132	-13	140	119	90	85
Qatar	179,677,131,707.29	56	13	39483	1	133	4	146	146	141	146
Egypt, Arab Rep.	424,671,765,455.70	31	5	3022	23	134	-5	144	112	116	143
Niger	14,915,002,098.50	127	37	518	49	135	-7	13	136	30	86
Morocco	142,866,583,124.70	58	15	2687	27	136	-	118	51	87	137
Guinea	16,091,817,842.23	124	35	915	39	137	-19	143	138	132	95
Benin	17,690,083,519.93	123	34	1087	36	138	-	121	141	113	79
Oman	88,191,977,373.21	67	18	10803	7	139	-	139	122	126	7
Pakistan	348,262,544,719.25	42	10	1070	37	142	3	54	137	99	142
Iran, Islamic Rep.	359,096,907,772.99	41	9	1761	30	143	0				
Algeria	163,472,233,245.77	57	14	2760	26	144	-4	28	27	47	100
Chad	11,779,981,332.16	140	41	451	51	145	-3	133	99	100	118
Afghanistan	14,583,135,236.57	129	38	475	50	146	-	138	117	81	77
Turkmenistan		215	55	5448	12			126	145	72	105
Guyana	8,044,498,800.96	153	46	4454	13						
Gabon	20,217,946,921.21	114	30	4211	15						
Libya	39,798,423,941.03	94	25	3640	18			106	114	83	132
Iraq	207,691,599,310.35	52	11	3046	22			87	106	73	81
Suriname	2,984,706,243.65	173	51	3001	24						
Equatorial Guinea	12,269,393,392.16	139	40	2800	25			125	66	138	134
Djibouti	3,372,287,461.81	169	50	2680	28			71	29	1	107
Mauritania	9,996,240,418.71	146	42	1568	32			131	91	121	103
Uzbekistan	69,600,614,988.60	76	19	1375	33						
Syrian Arab Republic		214	54	1038	38			135	113	129	140
Yemen, Rep.		219	56	666	46						
Guinea-Bissau	1,638,517,606.89	184	53	614	47						
Sudan	34,229,513,774.99	99	27	387	53			102	126	1	49
Mozambique	15,776,757,419.52	125	36	331	54			128	86	119	35
Somalia	7,628,000,011.46	154	47	233	55						

Source: World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023 and World Bank Data bank

## CONCLUSION

There are 16 Islamic nations not included in the Gender Gap Index due to the unavailability of data regarding the 12 chosen indicators, which in itself points out that these nations are facing administrative and economic challenges. Of the 39 Islamic countries included in the Global Gender Gap Index out of 146 nations, 27 are at the bottom of the index with ranks above 100, 11 countries are ranked between 50 to 100, leaving only one country, Albania, ranked 17th. Albania, a Balkan country situated in Southeastern Europe, ranks high due to its proximity to Europe and successful transition from a socialist to a capitalist mixed economy.

The Islamic countries left out from the index are also at the bottom of the GDP ranking. Among the last 20 GDP-ranked Islamic countries, only 9 were included in the Gender Gap Index. In terms of per capita income, among the top 10 Islamic countries, only three—UAE (2), Brunei (4), and Kazakhstan (10)—are ranked below 100 in the Gender Gap Index. The other seven are languishing almost at the bottom of the index. Countries with the lowest per capita income that made it to the Gender Gap Index and are also at the bottom include Afghanistan (146), Chad (145), Niger (135), Gambia (119), and Sierra Leone (112).

Islamic countries that have made significant progress in their ranks include Bahrain, Bangladesh, and Kuwait, whereas Guinea, Uganda, and Lebanon have suffered the most in terms of matching the Gender Gap Index criteria. Overall, 16 Islamic nations slipped from their previous ranking while 20 Islamic nations showed positive improvement in their ranks.

Under the participation and opportunity indicator, countries perceived to observe strict Islamic interpretation and facing internal turmoil find themselves at the lower end of the scale. In contrast, former Soviet Union countries such as Albania, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan, along with Brunei—a tiny island near Malaysia and Indonesia are performing well on the same scale.

The Educational Attainment indicator also points in the same direction with one change: Malaysia tops the rank, while countries at the bottom show only minor changes in position. Unlike the Participation and Opportunity and Educational Attainment indicators, the third indicator, Health and Survival, depicts a different picture. Despite Uganda's low ranking overall, it tops this indicator along with Kyrgyzstan. Notably, some rich countries are in the middle and at the bottom of this indicator, such as Indonesia (73), Malaysia (80), Saudi Arabia (114), and Brunei (140). Smaller and economically weaker countries are scoring better than rich Islamic nations. Surprisingly, Qatar and Azerbaijan are ranked lower than Afghanistan (141), despite being far better in terms of economic power.

In Islamic countries, nations from Africa and former Soviet countries have a better female participation rate, which is even higher than the female participation rate in high-income and developed countries. In contrast, rich Islamic nations following strict Islamic principles have low participation rates similar to poor countries that are at the bottom of the GGR index. Overall, Arab countries have approximately 20% female participation, whereas in developed countries, it stands between 40 to 47%. In the European Union, it is 46%, while even in low-income countries, it is 43%. The world average shows a 40% female participation rate. This suggests that in Islamic countries, female participation is mostly dependent on the extent of Islamic laws (moderate or extreme) followed in the country and society. Countries following a moderate form of Islam and having low income in Islamic countries promote female participation in the labor force, while nations applying strict interpretations restrict female participation in the labor force.

Unemployment data in the female labor force reveals a similar trend, where the world average is 5.26%, and in high-income countries, it is 4.75%. In comparison, 20 Islamic countries have less than a 5% female unemployment rate, which is appreciable. However, countries at the bottom of the GGR index facing more than 25% female unemployment is a real cause for concern. On average, the Arab world has 19.31% female unemployment, and even high-income Arab countries face the same issue.

The social, cultural, and religious restrictions faced by women are protective mechanisms imposed on them due to a lack of basic facilities like sanitation and potable water, along with possible sexual harassment at workplaces where little gender segregation is possible. Islamic countries impose restrictions on women out of fear of moral corruption, despite knowing the economic benefits that can be derived from bridging the gender gap.

The analysis of crime data against women from the UNODC supports the argument that severe penalties, including the death sentence, and gender segregation at workplaces and educational institutions act as deterrents and reduce the probability of male-dominated exploitation over women in Islamic countries. This can be verified by the lesser number of crimes reported in Islamic countries where law enforcement agencies are strong, and citizens are in better economic positions, such as in Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Islamic countries are in a phase similar to where the US was in the 18th century. As (McLaughlin, 2005) points out, in 1850, the majority of middle-class women in the USA believed that working outside the home degraded women and endangered their morality. Female teachers were fired if they married, as married women were supposed to stay out of the workforce. Only due to

the exceptional circumstances of World War II were women able to make a noticeable difference and prove they were capable of handling any challenges.

The social, religious, and psychological conditions in Islamic countries are similar to those in America, Europe, or any other country before industrial, religious, and social changes opened doors of opportunities for women. Countries are encouraged to reduce the gender gap for economic and social benefits, and Islamic countries are no exception. It is the socio-religious structure that prevents them from implementing policies that encourage women, in the absence of any mechanism to safeguard against sexual harassment, which can lead to deep moral corruption and irrevocable damage to the social and religious fabric.

Researchers suggest the need to change organizational climates to curb sexual harassment in the workplace. For this purpose, clear policies and procedures should be adopted and communicated, along with opening channels for reporting. Training on the issue is needed to increase knowledge regarding company policies and non-tolerance of harassment.

The choice rests with Islamic countries on the path of progress. Developed countries demanding improvement in gender index positions do not always present themselves as good examples. On the contrary, smaller developed countries like New Zealand and Luxembourg are well-appreciated for lower percentages of crimes against women. The common thread between countries reporting lower numbers of crimes against women is strong law enforcement agencies, higher education ratios, and economic prosperity. For Islamic countries, it is economic prosperity, along with strong law enforcement agencies and strict laws, that creates psychological fear and prevents crimes.

Sooner or later, the socio-religious fabric in Islamic countries will change. If the change is progressive and aligns with socio-religious principles, the rewards are more appreciated without much negativity and criminal consequences. Reforms such as promoting educational excellence without gender discrimination, along with economic prosperity, would be a good choice. This approach not only brings out the best in human beings but also limits the forces that lead to moral corruption and criminal intentions.

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