

Consolidating Emirati women's economic agency: Heritage and succession

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Summary

Purpose and importance of study for the UAE This research was undertaken to respond to the fact that Emirati women's economic participation remains limited despite decades of supportive state policy. The low uptake of economic opportunities by women, especially of women with children, has serious implications for the success of the localisation policy and the overall stability of the future UAE labour force.

Method Narrative methodology was used, and this gathers data from informal interviews. The unstructured nature of these interviews allows the participant to collaborate in her own way and tell the story she chooses. This permits personalised interpretations of broad societal narratives from which emerge new insights into changing social structurations and their implications for women.

Study key points This investigation revealed a celebration of the pre-oil generations of Emirati women who engaged in a wide variety of economic activities. It also discovered that expectations and values around women, work, and family are altering with many young people now assuming that women contribute economically.

Findings The cultural associations relating to women since the beginning of the oil wealth are mutating as women's professional agency is recognised as an important part of the UAE's development. The dichotomy of man as breadwinner and woman domestic as solely domestic is weakening.

Recommendations Broader awareness of the key role that Emirati women have played in the pre-oil economy will unquestionably endow women's economic agency with greater cultural acceptability. Consequently, this role should be celebrated in school textbooks and in heritage based public awareness campaigns. This will progressively construct a more nurturing

environment for economically active women; this will be especially beneficial for women with children.