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Quality of work life of Emirati women and its influence on job satisfaction and turnover intention

Evidence from the UAE

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the paper is to examine the quality of work life (QoWL) and its influence on job satisfaction and turnover (job-leaving) intention of Emirati women employed in various public sector organizations in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected through a structured questionnaire gleaned from literature, and were analyzed through partial least squares structural equation modeling.

Findings – QoWL was found to have a significant relationship with all variables in the model, and was found, as hypothesized, to have a positive effect on job satisfaction and a negative effect on turnover intention.

Research limitations/implications – One of the main limitations of this study is that the sample is drawn from only Emirati female employees who were working in public organizations based in the Abu Dhabi region, the capital of UAE, and hence, cannot be generalized.

Practical implications – This study helps policy makers by identifying crucial points that can improve Emirati female employees' QoWL with a commensurate reduction in turnover intention in a collectivistic society. Public sector organizations should address the factors that directly affect Emirati women's QoWL and job satisfaction, as it will ultimately result in less staff turnover, greater productivity, and will also support the localization strategy.

Originality/value – The study is one of the first enquiries which stresses the importance of understanding how Emirati female employees perceive and categorize themselves as a valuable element of the workplace alongside the significance of augmenting their sense of belongingness to their organization.

Keywords United Arab Emirates, Job satisfaction, Public Sector, Turnover Intention, Emirati women, Structural equation modelling (SEM), Quality of work life (QoWL)

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The population of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is approximately 9.5 million with nationals accounting for approximately 1.4 million (Snoj, 2015) with an almost equal split of local males and females (Dubai Women Establishment, 2012a, b). Having benefited from the extensive higher education opportunities made available to them by the government, Emirati women, with an overall 91 percent literacy rate, account for a significant portion of the country's graduates and are expected to actively participate in the economic development of the country. The strong preference of Emiratis for public sector jobs has been established through various survey-based evidence (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2012).



Emirati women in the workforce: preferences and reluctance

Various scholars have affirmed that female labor market participation has a positive impact on a nation's socioeconomic development (Gaddis and Klasen, 2014; Tsani *et al.*, 2013). However, according to a report published by Tahseen Consulting (2015), female labor market participation rates in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are significantly below the OECD average, and are amongst the lowest in the world: labor market participation of UAE female nationals is 20 percent as compared to their male counterparts at 58 percent.

Emirati women prefer public sector employment which is relatively well-paid, less strenuous and provides substantial benefits over the private sector (Dubai Women Establishment, 2012a, b; Kirdar, 2010). Currently, 89 percent of employed UAE female nationals work in the public sector, second in the GCC only to Kuwait where almost 94 percent of females are similarly employed (Tahseen Consulting, 2015). Although public sector employment in the UAE is generally more secure and provides higher benefits than private sector employment, high turnover rates have been observed and reported by the UAE Federal Government. For example, an employee turnover report covering 54,000 employees in 17 ministries and 18 federal entities reveals that the employee turnover percentage is 4.2 percent in the UAE. Out of 1,400 employee turnover cases, the majority (64 percent) were females (Federal Authority for Government Human Resources, 2015). As per the UAE Vision 2021, "Gender balance with regard to both rights and duties is the primary path to achieving happiness, security, stability, a high standard of living and progress. Based on this concept, the UAE has been a leader in this domain as it has made men and women equal in all aspects of life and has achieved progress in women's empowerment by helping them achieve greater levels of success, which in turn advances society as a whole" (United Arab Emirates Cabinet, 2015). Therefore, a focus on increasing female employment participation rates is a strong priority for the UAE.

Work life balance is a key aspect that influences Emirati women to stay in the labor force (Dubai Women Establishment, 2012a, b). Although many UAE organizations have addressed work life balance concerns, women remain more likely to switch careers or stop working due to misalignment of organizational and individual mindsets (Dubai Women Establishment, 2012a, b). This may be due, in part, to what Pontefract (2016) identifies as "workplace actualization," where a person's satisfaction at the workplace is the result of whether their individual purpose is in alignment with the organization's purpose, as well as with the duties required to accomplish in the role itself.

It is economically beneficial for companies to address work life balance. Companies incur substantial direct and indirect costs due to employee turnover (Niedermann and Summer, 2003; Harhara *et al.*, 2015), and are adversely impacted by distressing operations as well as group dynamics and performance, translating into additional monetary overheads (Mello, 2011). Establishments that offer superior quality of work life (QoWL) are able to more easily attract and retain skilled workers (Sidhu, 2011), which will help the organization to attain competitive advantage in the long run.

In the UAE context, several studies have been undertaken to explore the relationship between employee turnover intentions (Yousef, 2002; Suliman and Al-Junaibi, 2010; Harhara *et al.*, 2015) and job satisfaction (Abdulla *et al.*, 2011). However, no previous study has conceptualized or measured the QoWL construct of Emirati females in a public sector context, or tested a model that considers the role of QoWL, job satisfaction, and turnover intention. To fill this research gap, this study tested the effects of QoWL on job satisfaction and turnover intentions of Emirati females in the UAE public sector. Specifically, the first objective of this study is to identify the major factors that influence the QoWL of working Emirati women. The second objective is to determine the effect, if any, between factors of QoWL, job satisfaction and turnover intention of the Emirati women. The third objective is to study the QoWL of Emirati women in relation with their socioeconomic background, and to suggest the measures to improve their QoWL.

To achieve the above stated research objectives, the contents of this paper are divided into five sections as follows: second section gives a review of literature on QoWL, job satisfaction, turnover intention, and a series of hypotheses proposed; third section presents the research methodology that covers a detailed description of data and analyses; fourth section depicts the research findings and discussion, and fifth section provides the conclusions, limitations, suggestions for further research, and recommendations that might enhance the QoWL of Emirati females and reduce turnover intentions along with actual overall turnover.

Literature review and theoretical foundation

QoWL

QoWL has been defined by previous researchers (Walton, 1975; Elizur, 1990; Carayon, 1997; Sirgy *et al.*, 2001; Sinha, 2012). According to Carayon (1997), QoWL embodies the composite connections of the work structure components such as the individual, the responsibilities, structural factors, the environment setting, and work related technologies and equipment's. Davis (1983) has defined QoWL as "the quality of the relationship between employees and the total working environment, with human dimensions added to the usual technical and economic considerations." Casio (1992) and Wan and Chan (2012) defined it as employees' perceptions of their physical and mental well-being.

There are two dominant theoretical approaches in the QoWL literature, namely need satisfaction and spillover (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). The need satisfaction approach to QoWL is based on models developed by Maslow (1954), McClelland (1961), Herzberg (1966), and Alderfer (1972). According to this approach, workers derive satisfaction from their jobs to the extent that their jobs meet basic needs. The QoWL can be conceptualized in terms of worker satisfaction with two major categories of needs: lower-order (basic) needs and higher-order (growth) needs (Maslow, 1970). The Spillover approach to QoWL posits that satisfaction in one area of life may influence satisfaction in another. In other words, workplace job satisfaction extends into non-work spheres to create positive or negative influences on employees' overall life (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). Eventually, QoWL has grown to be one of the most substantial organizational topics (Harrington and Ladage, 2009), and has gained extensive popularity in research and policy fields (Gregory and Milner, 2009).

The benefits of QoWL are linked to both employees and employers (Adhikari *et al.*, 2011). For employers, it nurtures positively a more flexible, dedicated, and motivated staff, vital for the company's competitiveness and sustainability (Bassi and Vanburen, 1997; Roth, 1993). Further positive outcomes include reduced absenteeism, lower turnover, and improved job satisfaction (Havlovic, 1991; Cohen *et al.*, 1997; King and Ehrhard, 1997). Various authors (Knox and Irwing, 1997; Lewis *et al.*, 2001; Daud, 2010; Tabassum *et al.*, 2011; Naguib and Jamali, 2015) have reported the predictors of QoWL in various organizational and national settings: Knox and Irwing (1997) reported that autonomy is significantly associated with QoWL; however, Lewis *et al.* (2001) found that pay, benefits and supervisory style are the major contributors to QoWL satisfaction.

QoWL and job satisfaction

QoWL is a construct that concerns the well-being of employees, and is conceptually different from job satisfaction (Sirgy *et al.*, 2001). QoWL enhances employees' dignity through job satisfaction and humanizing work (Adhikari *et al.*, 2011). The scope of QoWL not only affects employees' job satisfaction but also their lives outside of work, such as family, leisure, and social needs. When employees' needs are not met, they are likely to experience work life stress which may have adverse consequences on their well-being and job performance (Gallie, 2005). Previous research (Chi and Gursoy, 2009; Lu and Gursoy, 2013; Rich *et al.*, 2010; Ziegler *et al.*, 2012) have explicitly emphasized job satisfaction due to its

positive affect on job performance and firm's performance. Hence, it is important for researchers to capture the key antecedents of employee job satisfaction:

H1. QoWL is positively associated with job satisfaction.

QoWL and turnover intention

Turnover intentions refer to one's behavioral approach to leave their workplace, while turnover describes the real act in separating oneself from his workplace (Aydogdu and Asikgil, 2011). Previous researchers (Jang and George, 2012) have reported a robust link between intentions and actual behavior, and therefore turnover intention is reflected as a proxy sign to predict real turnover. According to Surienty *et al.* (2014), supervisory behavior, job characteristics and work life balance all have a significant negative relationship with turnover intention with work life balance the most significant predictor of turnover intention. Enhancing the QoWL for employees would surely lead to lowered absenteeism, employee turnover and grievances (Wan and Chan, 2012; Celik and Oz, 2011). Moreover, it would help to entice and hold talented staff (Catanzaro *et al.*, 2010), and may cause in augmented organizational success particularly in developing countries (Aryeetey and Sanda, 2012). Thus:

H2. QoWL is negatively associated with turnover intention.

Job satisfaction and turnover intention

Job satisfaction is a type of motivational vigor that deters workers from thinking about leaving the workplace (Direnzo and Greenhaus, 2011; Hom *et al.*, 2012). Various researchers (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Cegarra-Leiva *et al.*, 2012) have affirmed the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention. Poor attitudes of job contentment arise when the worker starts feeling that an undesired financial, emotional and intellectual benefits are associated with his employment (Holtom *et al.*, 2008) which may prompt him to adopt a withdrawal behavior such as absenteeism and substandard performance (Mihelič, 2014). The rise and decline of job satisfaction correspondingly account for a variation in turnover intention (Chen *et al.*, 2011). We therefore posit that the relationship between QoWL and turnover is mediated by job satisfaction:

H3. Job satisfaction is negatively associated with turnover intention.

Proposed conceptual model

The proposed conceptual model is depicted in Figure 1 which visualizes three proposed relationships: the effect of the QoWL is hypothesized to directly influence job satisfaction, job satisfaction is hypothesized to directly influence turnover intention, and QoWL is hypothesized to directly and indirectly influence turnover intention.

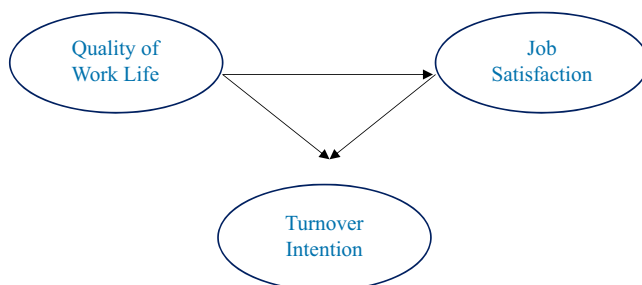


Figure 1.
Conceptual model

Methods

The stratified sample for this study was drawn from 12 major public sector organizations that employ high proportions of Emirati females, namely oil and gas, facilities, national employment services, and education. Respondents identified by each company's Human Resources department were selected through random sampling. Bilingual (Arabic and English) paper-based surveys were distributed to 500 employees. In all, 323 completed instruments were returned resulting in a response rate of 64 percent.

The required sample size was determined using Cohen's power analysis procedure (Cohen and Cohen, 1983) to ensure statistical validity. The power of a statistical test is the probability that the test will detect an effect in a sample when, in fact, a true effect exists in the population (Aiken and West, 1991). Using a target power of 0.8 and an effect size of 0.10 with an alpha of 0.05 (Cohen and Cohen, 1983), the estimated minimum sample size for the study was 305 subjects. Therefore, the sample of 323 was found to be satisfactory.

Measurement items

This study employed a structural equation model to assess the perceived QoWL of national females employed in the public sector. All measurement items were selected from previously established scales and were modified to align with the local context. QoWL was estimated through eight dimensions proposed by Walton (1975) to be essential constructs of essential job needs and satisfaction: adequate and fair remuneration, safe and healthy working conditions, opportunities to use and develop human capacities, opportunities for growth and security, social integration within the organization, constitution in the workplace, work life balance and social relevance of work life. Job satisfaction was assessed using Brayfield and Rothe (1951) job satisfaction scale with a modified five-item version of this scale developed by Judge *et al.* (2000). Questions included concepts of satisfaction with the respondent's present job, enthusiasm for work, and feelings of enjoyment about work. Turnover intention was assessed through a direct question which asked respondents to indicate their likelihood of actively looking for a new job in the following year.

Measurement instrument

The survey instrument was administered in both Arabic and English. To develop the Arabic version of the survey, questions were translated into Arabic followed by cross-translation back to English to confirm consistency with the original constructs. All items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." In addition, demographic and socioeconomic information on gender, age, salary, work experience, length of tenure, marital status, education, specialization, work designation, and other factors was collected.

Data analysis

To analyze the research model, we used the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach. Smart PLS (Ringle *et al.*, 2015) and SPSS version 22.0 were used to analyze the data. Following recommended PLS analytical procedures (Andersen and Gerbing, 1988; Henseler *et al.*, 2016), we explored the validity and reliability of the measures and structural model. To test the significance of the path coefficients and the loadings, a bootstrapping model (5,000 resamples) was used to determine the significance levels for loadings, weights and path coefficients.

Results and discussion

Respondent characteristics

The sample consisted of respondents belonging to different age groups. In total, 22.4 percent were between the age of 18 and 25 years, 51.9 percent were between 26 and 35 years,

21.7 percent were between 35 and 45 years, and 3.4 percent were 46 or above. In all, 48.9 percent of the respondents were married/ married with children, whereas 42.4 percent were single and 8.7 percent were divorcees. Most respondents held graduate degrees (75.2 percent) with business (59.4 percent) and non-business (40.6 percent) specializations. The majority of the respondents (55.3 percent) had less than five years of experience with their current employer, and were working at a variety of levels such as employee (47.9 percent, managerial (35.5 percent), and supervisory (16.6 percent). Full details on respondent characteristics are included in Table I.

Measurement model

In order to examine the properties of the measurement scales, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to assess reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity (see Table III).

Demographic variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-25	72	22.4
	26-35	167	51.9
	35-45	70	21.7
	46-55	11	3.4
	Over 55	2	0.6
Marital status	Married	64	19.8
	Married with children	94	29.1
	Single	137	42.4
	Divorcee*	12	3.7
	Divorcee with children*	16	5.0
Monthly income (AED)	Less than 10,000	4	1.3
	10,001 to 20,000	37	11.6
	20,001 to 30,000	97	30.4
	30,001 to 40,000	109	34.2
	40,001 to 50,000	47	14.7
	Over 50,000	25	7.8
Education	Diploma	70	22.3
	Graduate	166	52.9
	Postgraduate*	70	22.3
Specialization	PhD*	8	2.5
	Business major	183	59.4
	Non-business major	125	40.6
Employment	Government	194	62.2
	Semi-government	101	32.4
Years served at company	Less than 3 years	106	33.5
	3 to 5 years	69	21.8
	5 to 10 years	88	27.8
	More than 10 years	53	16.8
Designation	Employee	150	47.9
	Managerial*	111	35.5
	Supervisory*	52	16.6
Years of work experience	Less than 5 years	149	47.3
	5 to 10 years	99	31.4
	11 to 20 years*	55	17.5
	More than 20 years*	12	3.8
Spouse's employment	Non-working	34	17.7
	Working: government	99	51.6
	Working: private sector	33	17.2
	Working: semi-government	28	13.5

Note: Categorical items indicated with asterisks (*) have been collapsed due to small Ns

Table I.
Summary of
respondents

Convergent validity. Reliability of the measurement scales, or measures of convergent validity, describe the extent to which variables consistently measure the same construct. Convergent validity can be assessed through examination of the factor loadings, composite reliability, Cronbach's α and average variance extracted (AVE) (Chin, 1998). An initial analysis confirmed that factor loadings exceeded the recommended cutoff values of 0.5, all composite reliabilities and all Cronbach's α exceeded 0.7 and all AVE's were greater than 0.5, yielding convergent validity according to Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Henseler *et al.* (2016). When developing the model, it was observed that three constructs (Work Influence A, Job Satisfaction C and E) did not load as expected. These constructs were negatively worded on the survey instrument, and therefore it is hypothesized that respondents were either confused by the change in directionality or that the translation from English to Arabic did not adequately capture the concept. Thus, these indicators were excluded from the model. See Table II for measurement model results.

Discriminant validity. Discriminant validity assesses the degree to which items differentiate among constructs (or measure distinct concepts), or, more simply, is a method for analyzing relationships between latent (unobserved) variables (Henseler *et al.*, 2015).

Construct	Measurement item	Loading	CR	Cronbach's α	AVE
Capacity	CapacityA	0.786	0.852	0.785	0.540
	CapacityB	0.681			
	CapacityC	0.583			
	CapacityD	0.791			
	CapacityE	0.807			
Opportunities	OppsA	0.815	0.826	0.717	0.549
	OppsB	0.853			
	OppsC	0.714			
	OppsD	0.541			
	OppsE	0.722			
Remuneration	RemunA	0.815	0.844	0.721	0.645
	RemunB	0.864			
	RemunC	0.722			
Respect for law	RespectA	0.859	0.923	0.888	0.749
	RespectB	0.870			
	RespectC	0.875			
	RespectD	0.858			
Social integration	SocIntA	0.668	0.857	0.777	0.602
	SocIntB	0.826			
	SocIntC	0.800			
	SocIntD	0.799			
Social relevance	SocRelA	0.842	0.910	0.877	0.671
	SocRelB	0.888			
	SocRelC	0.706			
	SocRelD	0.833			
	SocRelE	0.818			
Working conditions	WorkConA	0.739	0.865	0.793	0.616
	WorkConB	0.752			
	WorkConC	0.789			
	WorkConD	0.855			
Work influence	WorkInfB	0.887	0.887	0.747	0.798
	WorkInfC	0.900			
Job satisfaction	JobSatA	0.872	0.920	0.869	0.792
	JobSatB	0.910			
	JobSatD	0.889			

Note: The measurement items are defined in the Table AI

Table II.
Measurement
model results

Discriminant validity was examined by comparing the correlations between constructs and the square root of the AVE for that construct (Chin, 2010, Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As shown in Table III, all square roots of the AVE were higher than the correlation values in the row and the column, indicating adequate discriminant validity. Thus, the measurement model was considered satisfactory.

Structural model. Sang *et al.* (2010) posited that the structural model indicates the causal relationships among constructs in the model (path coefficients and the R^2 value). Together, the R^2 and the path coefficients (β and significance) indicate how well the data support a hypothesized model (Chin, 1998; Sang *et al.*, 2010). Table IV and Figure 2 show the results of the structural model from the PLS output.

The parameter estimates relating to the observed variables to QoWL are detailed in Figure 2. All sub constructs were found to be significant: capacity (0.792), opportunities (0.818), remuneration (0.715), respect for law (0.863), social integration (0.743), social relevance (0.858), work conditions (0.752), and work influence (0.490).

For research *H1*, the effect of QoWL on job satisfaction is estimated at 0.75. It is positive and significant ($p < 0.001$); therefore, *H1* is confirmed. The effect of QoWL on turnover is estimated as -0.22 with significance less than 0.01. This confirms the negative effect of QoWL on turnover as posited in *H2*. *H3* examines the effect of job satisfaction on turnover, which is estimated to be -0.234 with a significance less than 0.01 confirming the negative association between job satisfaction and turnover. To verify if job satisfaction is mediating the relationship between QoWL and turnover, we tested the direct and indirect effect of QoWL on turnover. The findings show that the indirect effect of QoWL on turnover is -0.176 with a significance of 0.004. Therefore, the indirect effect of QoWL over turnover is significant. This indirect effect is via job satisfaction. Since the direct effect (-0.22) is also significant, this implies that satisfaction is a partial mediator of the relationship between QoWL and turnover. The total effect of QoWL on turnover is estimated to -0.395 with significance ($p < 0.001$). We also carried out the Sobel test to test the mediation effect of job satisfaction. This yielded $z = -2.84$ and a p -value of 0.002, confirming once more the significance of the mediating effect. Finally, to assess the size of the mediation effect we computed the proportion of the total effect that is mediated, and found 45 percent of the relation between QoWL and turnover is mediated by job satisfaction.

Table III.
Discriminant validity
of constructs

Constructs	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Capacity	0.735							
(2) Opportunities	0.643	0.741						
(3) Remuneration	0.494	0.585	0.803					
(4) Respect for law	0.582	0.631	0.522	0.865				
(5) Social integration	0.567	0.531	0.433	0.683	0.776			
(6) Social relevance	0.600	0.658	0.566	0.718	0.553	0.819		
(7) Working conditions	0.540	0.526	0.533	0.588	0.425	0.580	0.785	
(8) Work influence	0.312	0.420	0.371	0.352	0.259	0.312	0.435	0.893

Table IV.
Structural model

Path	Hypothesis	R^2	Path coefficient	t -value	Results
QoWL \rightarrow job satisfaction	<i>H1</i>	0.74	0.750	28.919	Supported
QoWL \rightarrow turnover	<i>H2</i>	0.74	-0.220	2.637	Supported
Job satisfaction \rightarrow turnover	<i>H3</i>	0.74	-0.234	2.864	Supported

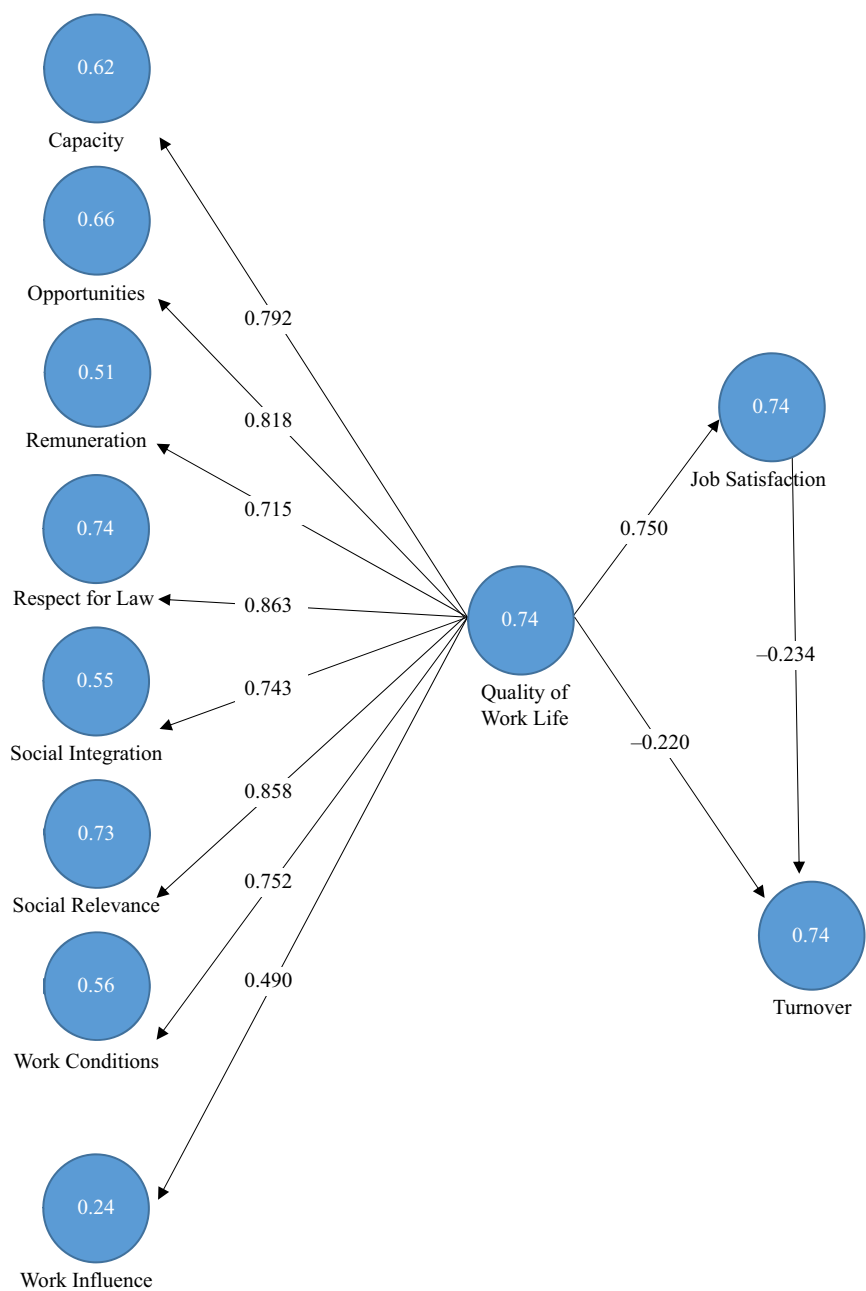


Figure 2.
The structural model

Findings and discussion

This study explores the QoWL of females from a collectivistic Arab society where the majority are employed in the public sector. The results indicate that QoWL and job satisfaction of Emirati women has a positive impact on reducing their turnover intention.

Being a collectivistic society, family is the central domain in the UAE, and thus problems and stress from work may affect the family (and vice versa), whereas the opposite in case of individualistic society (Mihelič, 2014). The findings are in alignment with the previous UAE research (Jabeen *et al.*, 2015; AlDhaheeri *et al.*, 2017), who reported that family support is crucial in Emirati females' success. The study highlighted the changing values of the female workforce, such as the awareness and demand for international working standards, utilization of one's capacities in the workplace, and the various growth opportunities that can be provided by employers. Also, emotional stability and job skills mismatch played a significant role in their career choice (AlDhaheeri *et al.*, 2017).

Notwithstanding the generally accepted premise that UAE public sector organizations provide generous remuneration for their employees, this research confirms that financial benefits do not constitute the sole, or even primary, motivation for Emirati females. Each of the eight dimensions proposed in Walton's model significantly predict Emirati females' QoWL despite the different national and cultural settings of this cohort. The findings have concluded that opportunities, challenges at work and development of human capacity are significant predictors of Emirati females' QoWL, and reflect their emerging orientation toward risk taking. The findings are in contrast to Hofstede (2001), where the UAE was given a score of 80 on this dimension and thus would be regarded as having a high preference for avoiding uncertainty. Countries exhibiting high uncertainty avoidance maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior; in these cultures there is an emotional need for rules, innovation may be resisted, and security is an important element in individual motivation.

Hofstede also conceptualizes the masculinity (the "tenderness" or "toughness") of a national culture (Fischer and Al-Issa, 2012). Contrary to Hofstede's assertion that the UAE culture is neither masculine nor feminine, this study finds that the achievement nature of Emirati females is aligned with masculine cultures which tend to be driven by competition, achievement, and success (Hofstede, 2001). This can be attributed to the fact that in the past decade, the UAE has witnessed significant changes such as urbanization, increased physical mobility, widespread access to world media and the internet, an increase in mass luxury consumerism, and social changes like the education of women and their entrance into the labor market in greater numbers (Bromfield *et al.*, 2016). These recent developments are in contrast to the characteristics of high uncertainty avoidance countries. Hence, the findings stress the need to retest the Hofstede dimensions in this emerging Arab country, and also other GCC countries.

The shift in the mindset of female employees may be attributed to the various empowerment and developmental initiatives taken by the UAE Government in line with its aspiration to be one of the most innovative countries in the world by 2021 (United Arab Emirates Cabinet, 2015). Policy makers and organizational leaders should establish the innovative employee engagement strategies aimed at enhancing female employees' sense of belongingness, challenge and capacity development in the workplace. Educational seminars on happiness and positivity are examples of initiatives undertaken by the UAE Government whereby federal and public employees are trained and educated on strategies to achieve happiness and positivity in their workplace and lifestyles (*Gulf News*, 2016). The findings are in alignment with the previous international research (Alniacik *et al.*, 2011; Sluss *et al.*, 2008; Surienty *et al.*, 2014) which found that positive increase in self-enhancement and self-worth can reduce employee turnover intention. These results further suggest that although UAE females are traditional in nature, a change in their working mindset – similar to a shift demonstrated by women globally – has been observed (Saklani, 2004; Mihelič, 2014; Surienty *et al.*, 2014).

Analysis of variance was conducted to examine differences in the QoWL, job satisfaction and turnover intention of various demographic characteristics. It was found that Emirati females aged 18 to 25 reported significantly higher QoWL and job

satisfaction than 26 to 35 year olds. No differences were reported for other age groupings. A very surprising result was observed in regards to marital status, where researchers found that divorced females record a higher QoWL and job satisfaction as compared to single and married females (either with or without children). However, significantly lower turnover intention was reported for married vs single respondents; similarly, married respondents reported lower turnover intention than their divorced colleagues. In the UAE, after the discovery of oil, Emiratis have entered the contemporary world. Although many changes have been positive, social problems, including divorce, have also increased (Bromfield, 2014; Bromfield *et al.*, 2016). Interference of family members, financial issues, lack of communication, and differences in age or educational levels are among some of the key factors that lead to divorces in the UAE (Bromfield *et al.*, 2016). Emirati divorces are similar in a number of ways to divorces anywhere else in the world, which indicates that culture plays less of a role than one might think or may be an indicator of slow transition of Emirati society from collectivistic to individualistic culture where the previous researches (Dion and Dion, 2005) consistently show that in more individualist cultures, divorce rates are higher. However, in another study, Toth and Kemmelmeier (2009) reported that highly individualist and highly collectivist societies are similar with regard to the structure of prevailing divorce attitudes. The result can be highlighted for policy makers given the increasing divorce rates in the UAE. According to the National Center for Statistics in Abu Dhabi, a total of 3,900 divorce cases (up from 2,300 in 2012) have been lodged in courts across the UAE in the year 2013 (Salama, 2014).

Along with strengthening female empowerment strategies, the UAE Government and policy makers may also address the importance of family ties by enhancing marriage counseling plans and other initiatives to help female employees balance the conflicting demands of family and work life which will in turn reduce turnover intention.

A report published by the Dubai Women Establishment (2012a, b) found that the existence of flexible work options was positively aligned with employees' sense of loyalty and QoWL. The results suggest the importance of flexibility options at the UAE workplace which may help employees balance their work and family responsibilities. Currently, limited flexibility options such as job sharing, flexi-locations, telecommuting, flexi-times and compressed hours schemes have been implemented in federal and government entities as compared to their private sector counterparts (Dubai Women Establishment, 2012a, b).

Emirati female employees reported a lower overall QoWL and higher turnover intention than their managers and supervisors. The study findings are similar to previous researchers (Ganesh and Ganesh, 2014; Lu *et al.*, 2016) who reported that supervisors have significantly higher work engagement and lower turnover intentions than line-level employees. Similar to their international peers (Evans, 2010), there is a strong trend in the female Emirati population to aspire toward leadership positions (Dubai Women Establishment, 2012a, b). However, females acquiring leadership or managerial positions are few in number despite the numerous efforts of the UAE government. It is imperative to mention that, due to the numerous efforts taken by UAE policy makers to promote women's participation in the economy, the UAE is ranked as a leader in gender equality in the region (World Economic Forum, 2016). This achievement comes from the fundamental belief that women and men are equal partners in society. However, still more needs to be done to help women reach higher-level positions at the departmental and organizational level, and to eliminate the perceived glass ceiling in various sectors. One possible avenue suggested by Foster *et al.* (2011) suggests that mentoring can play a significant role in enhancing women's opportunities to advance in organizations.

Emirati females who majored in business fields did not report significant differences in QoWL or job satisfaction; however, they reported significantly higher turnover intention than non-business educated respondents. Respondents with fewer years of work experience

(between five and ten years) reported lower QoWL and lower job satisfaction than their counterparts with over ten years of experience. The reason may be attributed to the lack of organized career development programs in the UAE public sector. Career development involves various alternatives such as developing abilities, preserving current skills and planning for the future vs just receiving promotions (Ko, 2012). Typically employees, especially those at the beginning of their careers, select establishments which provide opportunities to develop their careers in a progressive manner and provides pathways for pursuit of specific career goals (Çalık and Ereş, 2006; Wang, 2013). Employees tend to become disenchanted if companies do not meet their expectations for career advancement.

Limitations, implications and scope for future research

The study has various limitations: first, the sample populations for the study were limited to Emirati female employees who were working in the public organizations based in the Abu Dhabi region, the capital of UAE. Thus, future research needs to encompass samples of the various public sectors from other Emirates, to determine whether the results of this study relate to all Emirati females working in public sector organizations, and to determine the applicability of these concepts to the private sector. It is suggested to conduct future research that will focus on the role of university education in regards to inculcation of a positive perception toward the prospective workplace. Also, future research should replicate this study in the context of other organizations in the GCC to ensure greater variance in the variables.

In addition, this study focused on individual-level characteristics and therefore did not include organizational-level variables. Further studies might consider variables that differ among organizations (i.e. size, management structure, industry, etc.) to explore intervening effects of these variables. It is suggested that this study be extended to different work categories and to different emirates to gain a better understanding of QoWL's impact on localization. Finally, a comparative study of Emirati females and males working in both the public and private sector is also suggested.

Conclusion

This study examined the QoWL of Emirati women employed in various public sector organizations in the UAE and its influence on job satisfaction and turnover intention. The authors hypothesized that QoWL positively impacts job satisfaction, that job satisfaction in turn reduces turnover intention, and that QoWL has a direct relationship with reduction of turnover intention. In addition, turnover intention is also directly impacted by QoWL. The results supported these hypotheses with statistically significant results observed. These findings have been verified in prior research (Surienty *et al.*, 2014) as important factors in sustained competitive advantage and achieving organizational excellence.

It is suggested that public sector employers should formulate policies that will address female employees' requirements in relation to employee well-being including balancing socio-familial and work priorities, career development and advancement, workplace engagement, and other related factors. Employers are advised to conduct regular surveys to assess QoWL to identify misalignments between employee expectations and organizational environments, job requirements and managerial behavior.

The current research stresses that the importance in understanding how Emirati female employees perceive and categorize themselves as a valuable part of the workplace and the importance of enhancing their sense of belongingness and engagement with their organization. Gaining a better understanding of the factors that influence Emirati employees' decisions to either stay or leave an organization will help to support the localization strategy and will help public sector employers to more successfully retain female staff.

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Further reading

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Appendix

QoWL of Emirati women

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Measurement constructs	Questions
CapacityA	I have autonomy (decision making opportunity) at work
CapacityB	I feel that my job has a significant contribution in my organization's performance
CapacityC	I can perform different tasks related to my expertise at the workplace
CapacityD	My performance appraisal is satisfactory
CapacityE	I feel satisfied with the responsibilities given to me at work
OppsA	I have professional growth opportunity at my workplace
OppsB	I am happy with the job trainings provided to me
OppsC	The frequency of resigning at my workplace is low
OppsD	My company provides financial assistance in my further education
RemunA	I am happy with my current remuneration that my company provides for my participation
RemunB	I feel satisfied with my remuneration, when I compare it with my colleagues' remuneration
RemunC	I am satisfied with the extra benefits that company offers me (Medical, Housing, Travel, etc.)
RespectA	My company respects the rights of the workers
RespectB	I am given freedom of expression (opportunity to give my opinions) at work
RespectC	I am satisfied with the norms and rules at my work
RespectD	I feel my individuality is respected at work
SocIntA	Discrimination (social, religious, racial, sexual etc.) is very low at my work
SocIntB	The relationship with my colleagues and bosses are satisfactory
SocIntC	My teams and colleagues are committed to the job assigned
SocIntD	My ideas and initiatives are valued by my colleagues and bosses
SocRelA	I feel proud to work in my current workplace
SocRelB	I feel happy about the image my company have in society
SocRelC	My company contributes a lot to the society
SocRelD	I feel satisfied with the quality of the undertaken projects by my company
SocRelE	I am satisfied with the way my company treats its employees
WorkConA	I am satisfied with my weekly working hours
WorkConB	I am satisfied with my work load (quantity of work)
WorkConC	I feel satisfied with the technologies my company provides me for working
WorkConD	I feel that I have great working conditions at my workplace
WorkInfA	My family life is influenced by my professional commitments
WorkInfB	I am satisfied with the influence of work on my possibility of leisure
WorkInfC	I am satisfied with my work and rest schedule
JobSatA	I feel fairly satisfied with my present job
JobSatB	Most days I am enthusiastic about my work
JobSatC	Each day at work seems like it will never end
JobSatD	I find real enjoyment in my work
JobSatE	I consider my job to be rather unpleasant

Table AI.
Measurement items

About the authors

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