

Political Role of Nursing in kingdom of Bahrain

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Abstract

Women in Bahrain have not historically been given equal rights to their male counterparts (Wang, Lindenfors, Sundström, Jansson, & Lindberg, 2012). While recent decades have seen an increase in the areas in which equality for females is being improved, such initiatives have not reached the level of ensuring the ability of women to contribute meaningfully to the Bahraini community outside of the home (Moghadam, 2016). This has created a situation in which women, even those with high levels of education, are unable to fully reach their potential to have meaningful impact on the country (Moghadam, Explaining divergent outcomes of the Arab Spring: The significance of gender and women's mobilizations, 2016). This is particularly true in the area of nursing, where women have traditionally been able to pursue education and find meaningful employment in both healthcare and child care. Bahraini women have pursued educational opportunities in nursing, some as far as earning advanced degrees, and have been able to work up to management roles in the nursing community (Hatem, 2018). This has, however, generally been the extent of the ability of a woman to grow in her professional role.

1- Introduction

Women to achieve to their fullest potential has a dampening effect on women and girls in the Bahraini community (Paxton & Hughes, 2015). Leadership roles beyond day-to-day management have been out of reach of most nurses, and only one woman has successfully entered the area of politics in a role capable of influencing outcomes in the Kingdom (Rørbæk, 2016). This initiative seeks to change outcomes for women by providing education to the population as to the benefits of women in political positions of influence and to help the Kingdom appreciate the contributions women can make not only to nursing but to the entire Kingdom.

2- Strategic Approach

Changing the situation for women in Bahrain must start with an initiative designed to change the perceptions not only of the males in power but also of the women in the nursing community who have come to accept their limited professional roles (Eid, 2018). This initiative is designed to create a task force bringing together the most influential minds in the Kingdom to work together and change the ways in which women participate in policy creation, decision making, and the path of health care and child care for nurses in the Middle East. The work and the associated initiative will, over time, help to change the ways in which women's rights are regarded as well as the potential women and young girls are able to see in their own future. The initiative, entitled Access for All, consists of the convening of a special task force in Bahrain designed to bring together influential individuals from a variety of organizations who can work together to shift the perception of educated women and their ability to participate fully in the political landscape of Bahrain. The initiative aims to convene a work group consisting of NHRA-BAHRAIN, the Ministry of Health, officials from nursing universities, and decision makers from the Bahrain Higher Education Council. The work will consist of collaborative discussion and decisions driven by the council to create change that will shift the futures of women and girls throughout the Kingdom. The initiative is intended to produce policy changes that will be implemented by nursing universities in Bahrain. The schools, empowered by decisions made and backed by the council, will shift their courses of study to include additional classwork in nursing leadership, government, policy, and change management that can be used by female nurses as they seek to make change in their future professional lives (McClendon, Hackett, Potančoková, Stonawski, & Skirbekk, 2018). Nurses of the future who possess such formal education would then be qualified to participate in the political landscape of the Kingdom. The current generation of nurses may not be able to fully participate in the political landscape but it is expected that by changing perceptions of the current generation, future generations of women in the Kingdom – as well as the entire population – will benefit and find greater equality (Paxton & Hughes, 2015). This initiative seeks to create a “bigger picture” understanding of the needs of all individuals living in Bahrain, both male and female, and to shape the future of health care and innovation in the Kingdom. Access for All intends to place some of the decision making power with regard to the future of health care in Bahrain in the hands of the women who provide that care.

3- Implementation

The universities and their female students are important stakeholders in the implementation of the initiative as they must implement new courses that women will be required to take to earn their degrees and participate in advanced leadership roles in nursing and health care (McClendon, Hackett, Potančoková, Stonawski, & Skirbekk,

2018). Everyone must understand and accept the shift of responsibility allowing women to more fully achieve equality and to participate in politics in a way they have previously not been allowed (Khamis & Mili, 2018). This means that every member of the Kingdom must begin to accept that women will be exercising knowledge and power and they must come to respect the ability of women to participate in ways similar to that of their male counterparts. The core group working on the initiative then collaborated with university personnel on the creation of coursework that would prepare women nurses for advanced leadership roles. Current nurses were not given the opportunity to participate in such educational opportunities and therefore lack the expertise their successors will hold. This change to the educational system does not produce immediate changes in the political influence of current women but will stand to enable changes for years to come. All women in Bahrain were indirectly reached by the changes made to the perceptions of women's abilities and their fitness for leadership roles. Thousands of students were impacted directly through changes to educational programs that permit them to more fully exercise their expertise. The changes necessary require not only policy shifts but mental model shifts that will require continued education and support from many areas, including politics, health care, and human rights advocacy groups (Moghadam, *Empowering Women After the Arab Spring*, 2016).

4- Impact and Sustainability

The main outcomes resulting from this initiative were the changes to nursing education programs at the university level to include leadership courses and the shifts in mental models of those responsible for inclusion of women nurses in positions of political influence and power that can effect change over the short and long term. Changes in the educational programs for nurses are the most immediate and observable changes coming out of the initiative. These changes include coursework that was previously not part of the scope of nursing education because women did not have a need to exercise leadership beyond the management level. Including changes at the university level to include the types of skills necessary to be effective leaders and policymakers ensures that women are provided the skills and abilities to effect change when the leadership roles are offered to them. These changes are immediate and while they have not yet produced a great increase in the number of women holding such positions, they have provided a pipeline through which more prepared women will emerge. There is now the possibility for young women to perceive themselves as leaders in nursing and to aspire to greater heights. This increases the outlook of women and their perspectives on their futures.

5- Finally

One human interest story from a beneficiary that can be shared is that of a young girl looking toward her future and considering whether or not to enter a profession. She had previously considered teaching, but was reconsidering entering the nursing profession because she had heard that women could hold positions of influence in nursing. This young woman intended to pursue a path that allowed her to fully utilize her knowledge and skills because she cares to do so for her community. She is therefore likely to choose nursing over teaching as a result. However, because the vision of equality is just and the global community is pressing for gender equality, it is likely that this initiative or one very similar to it will continue into the future (Green & Witte, 2017). Allowing change in small amounts in nursing may be acceptable to small segments of the country but for women across Bahrain to truly be allowed to participate in leadership, innovation, and change in the health care system

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