



## **An analysis of the contribution of women in Abu Dhabi**

Khaddouj Abu Baker Abdulla \*

Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi, UAE – [kaabdullah@scad.gov.abudhabi](mailto:kaabdullah@scad.gov.abudhabi)

Thumna Al Rashedi

Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi, UAE – [tsalrashdi@scad.gov.abudhabi](mailto:tsalrashdi@scad.gov.abudhabi)

Saleh Almansouri

Statistics Centre Abu Dhabi, UAE – [smalmansoori@scad.gov.abudhabi](mailto:smalmansoori@scad.gov.abudhabi)

### **Abstract**

This paper describes how Statistics Centre – Abu Dhabi (SCAD) is paying special attention to the Statistics related to women in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. This attention is in line with the attention the government of Abu Dhabi and key decision makers pay to the role Emirati women play in all aspects of society. Women's empowerment is increasingly becoming a major objective of the government. In this regard, 28th August has been announced as “Women’s Day”. In response to the government’s particular interest in women's empowerment, and as a part of its commitment to meet stakeholders’ and customer needs, SCAD has produced an encompassing publication presenting official statistics on women and their contribution to the society, economy and workforce, using administrative data obtained through collaboration with other Abu Dhabi Government Entities (ADGEs) and data from SCAD field surveys. The publication is entitled “Al Mar’a Al Emaratya Bain Al Ams Wa Al Yaum” (Arabic for UAE Women: Past and Present). SCAD is also playing an important role providing consultancy services to the committee responsible for the design and launch of the “Women Strategy in the UAE”.

The Emirati woman has had many achievements at the Abu Dhabi Emirate, United Arab Emirates (UAE), regional and international levels. She has reached the highest decision-making positions, entered the university as a student and a professor, graduated from postgraduate studies. She has become minister, judge, doctor, engineer and ambassador. The high importance of human development in Abu Dhabi Emirate has had a positive influence on women by improving the quality of education, health, housing, and social welfare.

Efforts made to enhance Abu Dhabi Emirate development show results in key indicators for women's progress. The literacy rate in Abu Dhabi among Emirati women has increased more than five times in less than fifty years. The number of Emirati female students enrolled in higher education has doubled in the recent decade. The gender ratio of enrolments shows that more than twice as many Emirati women as Emirati men are enrolled in higher education. The participation of Abu Dhabi women in the labour force increased over four decades from just 2% to more than 30%, and the majority of employed Emirati women are working in highly skilled and professional occupations.

In Abu Dhabi Emirate official statistics tables by both gender and citizenship show clear evidence of the progress and rapid improvement in the status of Emirati women in Abu Dhabi.

**Keywords:** SCAD; Females; progress; UAE; Society; Administrative Data.

## **1. Introduction:**

Demographic statistics analyses of women often focus on the strife, challenges and difficulties of women (BIIP 2012, Islah 2018 and Marinari 2019). Reports of the success and progress of women are less common. In many countries international migrants account for more than half of the population change (Lee 2011). In these countries with a large dynamic and fluctuating non-citizen population, the female citizen population may be better measure of their characteristics and trends. Statistics on the long-term more permanent resident population of female citizens is often difficult to find.

In this paper we use comprehensive statistics from SCAD to analyse how the official statistics show evidence of Emirati women's progress. The progress of Emirati women in Families, Health, Education, Work and decision making is shown. The results show a rapid change and improvement in the status of Emirati women in Abu Dhabi. We conclude that in Abu Dhabi statistics showing change over time for the Emirati women can be easily found because SCAD routinely collect and disseminate statistics by both gender and citizenship.

The SCAD is responsible for the collection, classification, storage, analysis and dissemination of official statistics covering social, demographic, economic, environmental and cultural indicators. Our vision is leadership and innovation in statistics.

## **2. Methodology:**

SCAD provides important statistical documentation of the remarkable development achievements by Emirati women in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in various areas of society. This is accomplished by the Abu Dhabi governments support for the collection, processing, cleaning, analysis and dissemination of statistics.

This paper shows examples of how Emirati women's progress has been measured with official statistics. Statistics on Emirati women has been compiled using multiple sources of data:

- Administrative data obtained through collaboration with other ADGEs;
- Censuses of Population and Housing; and
- SCAD field surveys, such as the annual Labour Force Survey.

The UAE constitution guarantees its full rights to social freedom, equality between men and women, and the same legal right to education and employment. Based on the firm belief in the vital role played by Emirati women in promoting comprehensive development, our leadership has paid great attention through long-term plans and programs. Women's issues have long been at the forefront of the Abu Dhabi government's agendas, which are empowering women to occupy their rightful place in society.

In this paper we use comprehensive statistics from SCAD to analyse how the official statistics show evidence of Emirati women progress.

## **3. Result:**

## Emirati Women in the Population and Families

Traditionally, women have always been the backbone of family life and the social structure of the Abu Dhabi Emirate maintaining the Islamic heritage and national culture.

The study and analysis of women in the population, and in the families, is an essential step for the planning, policy-making and development programs to provide job opportunities and to provide services, such as education, health, housing and other daily necessities. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to identify the demographic facts.

The Emirati women's in Abu Dhabi Emirate has had a remarkable development. The Emirati women population has grown 55 times since 1960 until mid-year 2016, reaching 268,903 from 4,853 in 1960. The age distribution of Emirati women is characterised by a large proportion in younger ages, with 38.1% children (under the age of 15 years), while 59.6% are of working age (15-64 years). As for geographical distribution, Abu Dhabi Region attracts more than half of Emirati women (54.3%), while the Dhafra Region is only home to 4.5% of the Emirati women, and with a significant proportion living in the Al Ain Region (42.2%).

As for marriage rates, the average rate of marriage for female citizens at the emirate level was 11.6 marriages per 1,000 females in 2017. The general marriage rate was 18.7 marriages per 1000 females 15 years and over. The refined marriage rate was 42.6 marriages per 100 unmarried females aged 15 and over. The median age at the first marriage of Emirati women has gradually increased and reached 24.2 years in 2017.

Fertility among Emirati women remained high in an international comparison. The general fertility rate was 113.7 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 49 years in 2017. The total fertility rate was 3.7 children per women aged 15 to 49 years in 2017.

The Family Development Foundation was established in 2006, and acts in cooperation with local and federal entities and specialised NGOs for the promotion of the holistic development of families, women and children, and to develop means and mechanisms to more effectively integrate public work and social welfare, and to coordinate with relevant domestic and international organisations and experts to exchange information and expertise. The Family Development Foundation is a rather unique institution in UAE only, and it operates through an extensive network of branches to achieve its goals.

## Emirati Women and their Health

As a result of the health progress witnessed by the emirate and the significant decrease in mortality, the median age of Emiratis increased from 15.5 years in 1975 to 20.3 years in 2017. This was reflected in the increase in life expectancy at birth for female citizens, which reached 80.2 years in 2017.

A vision of a healthier Abu Dhabi has been reflected in significant investment to significantly develop the healthcare capacity to meet its current and future healthcare demands. Since the end of 2010 there has been a 17% average annual growth in the number of licensed clinicians and 12% growth in the number of licensed facilities. Although the current healthcare capacity can meet the demand from Emirati women, there are currently 10 hospitals under construction, which are more than 50% complete, providing more than 1,000 additional hospital beds, ensuring that healthcare can meet future demands.

## Emirati Women and Education

Efforts made to enhance Abu Dhabi Emirate development show results in key indicators for women's progress. The literacy rate in Abu Dhabi among Emirati women (10 years and above) increased from 10.7% in 1970 to 94.9% in 2016. The number of Emirati female students enrolled in higher education

increased from 16,619 in 2008 to 28,821 in 2017. The gender ratio of female students in higher education reached 206.6 females per 100 male students in 2017.

Education is a cornerstone of the development process, which in essence is based on an integrated set of benefits that positively impact both individuals and society. It contributes to the creation of the creative potential that leads to the desired progress and prosperity. It is the catalyst for the creation of solutions to emerging problems, and the optimal way to define the future path and to absorb the existing elements to shape a bright future.

The Emirati education desired goal is reflected in the upgrading of educational outputs to keep pace with the highest international standards adopted. Abu Dhabi Emirate has achieved qualitative leapfrogging in the eradication of illiteracy, especially among females. It is the leading country in the proportion of educated female citizens compared to the total population. It has a pioneering educational experience that best reflects the requirements of the labour market. This contributes to the advancement of economic development.

The number of national students by gender in public and private schools shows evidence of gender equality in Abu Dhabi Emirate schools. The number of national students for the academic year 2016/17 reached 165,631 students, 49.8% of whom are females. Women attend government schools at a higher rate than in private schools. In public schools, female students accounted for 67.2% of the total female students in the Emirate, 53.0% of them in public schools.

The total number of teachers is 4,379, of whom 3,941 (90.0%) are female, with the absolute majority (99.1%) working in public schools.

As a result of intensive efforts and interest in education, literacy rates among Emirati women (10 years and over) increased steadily to reach 94.9% in 2016. In contrast, illiteracy among Emirati women continued to decline over the years to 5.1% in 2016 from 89.8% in 1970.

The advancement of women in the field of higher education has not been immune to their advancement in all areas of life. The UAE has been keen to expand higher education in all subject fields in order to provide research and employment. The number of female students enrolled in higher education increased from 16,619 in 2008 to 28,821 in 2017, Average annual growth during that period reached 8.2%. It should be noted here that Emirati females enrolled in higher education reached 206.6 females per 100 Emirati students in 2017.

Emirati women have achieved outstanding progress in education. Emirati women account for over 70 percent of university graduates.

### Emirati Women Working and Participating in the Labour Force

The government's vision for Emirati women, understanding the importance for women to contribute to the development process of the Emirate, is to provide them with the necessary tools to achieve professional excellence. The priorities set by the government enables Emirati women better education, and to work in the public and private sectors. All careers should be open to Emirati women.

Efforts made to enhance Abu Dhabi Emirate development show results in key indicators for women's progress. The participation of Abu Dhabi women in the labour force increased between 1975 and 2017 from 2.2% to 30.2%. The majority of employed Emirati women are in professional occupations (52.8%).

Hard work is the cornerstone in the existence of diverse human civilisations. Considering that women constitute half of the society, it is important to expand the prospects of Emirati women's participation in the work force and in multiple areas and disciplines.

"Nothing pleased me more than seeing Emirati women take their role in society and achieve their rightful place. Nothing should stand in the way of its progress. Women, like men, have the right to choose the highest positions, commensurate with their abilities and qualifications. "

The late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, may Allah have mercy on him

To have a meaningful and productive work is a human purpose and a social duty in life. Therefore, all countries seek to secure employment opportunities for all members of society, according to their qualifications and potential. Work guarantees a decent life for the inhabitants and for the society. Since women are half of society, they are men's partners in work and construction. In this sense, our wise leadership pays great attention to securing all means of women's work in order to preserve their dignity and religion without affecting the welfare and progress of their homes and children.

We note that the proportion of female UAE citizens out of the total UAE citizens' labour force in Abu Dhabi Emirate rose significantly between 1975 and 2017 from 2.2% to 35.3%. The proportion of female citizens employed among the total number of employed citizens rose from 2.2% to 30.2% between 1975 and 2017, respectively.

The majority of female citizens work as managers and professionals (52.8%), and with the largest proportion in the activities of public administration, defence and social security (42.9%). This is also reflected in that the public sector accounted for 83.6% of female employees in 2017.

#### Emirati Women and Power and decision-making

The traditional role of Emirati women has changed over the last two generations. The Abu Dhabi society has changed in many ways allowing Emirati women to create a bridge between the traditional and the modern, without sacrificing the heritage and culture that defines this society's identity.

Emirati women participate actively in the political sphere through representation in the Abu Dhabi Emirate government bodies and UAE Federal National Council (FNC).

Emirati women proved their worth and demonstrated their right to be present in various aspects of practical life. Creativity was a constant source of their passion for excellence. Emirati women have penetrated areas and sectors that have been limited to men for a long period of time, and have achieved tremendous achievements in this regard during a record period. The UAE is currently full of women leaders with deep knowledge. This stems from the fact that the UAE society is more open minded and more understanding of the principle of women's work. Statistics show that Emirati women and their active involvement in the labour market is a fundamental element of economic development in the UAE.

The government views the empowerment of women as crucial and wish to see women to more visibly contribute in the political arena. This is shown by the role played by women in the FNC elections of December 2006. Through the elections, Emirati women demonstrated their ability to move into the national political arena and compete as equals with men. Female candidates ran effective campaigns with issues ranging from health and social welfare to education and jobs.

"While women made up 17.7 percent of the Electoral College, 63 of the 452 candidates who contested the polls were women. The voter turnout among women was also extremely high across the UAE. Interaction with women ahead of the elections revealed that many of them were keen to participate because they were setting precedents for women's political participation in the future.

Dr Amal Al Qubaisi was the first woman in the UAE's history to win a seat on the FNC, elected by the Abu Dhabi Electoral College. In order to ensure fair representation, the government nominated eight other women across the remaining six emirates to the 40-member FNC, which translates into a 22.5 percent share of the seats – way above the Arab world average of 9.3 percent and the world average of

17 percent. This affirmative action from government agreements specifically relating to women and children, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an international benchmark for high standards of non-discrimination. The UAE is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination." (MoFNCA, 2008)

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion:**

The statistics show clear evidence of the progress of Emirati women in Abu Dhabi. The women also have more success than men in some walks of life in the Emirati society.

One of the most amazing findings is the very rapid change and improvement in the status of Emirati women in Abu Dhabi. Like the structural development of Abu Dhabi has been faster than many other parts of the world, so has the progress of Emirati women in Abu Dhabi.

In Abu Dhabi it is easy to find statistics showing change over time for the Emirati women. In Abu Dhabi statistics is routinely collected and disseminated by both gender and citizenship. In Abu Dhabi Emirate official statistics tables, data items are generally identifiable as for women and citizens of UAE. This practise of presenting tables showing if the statistics refers to citizens or non-citizens allows for easy identification of Emirati women as opposed to all women living in Abu Dhabi Emirate.

As government policy seeks further improvements in the contribution of women in Abu Dhabi, so are the ambitions of the statistical system of Abu Dhabi also seeking further improvements for collection and dissemination of statistics on Emirati women.

#### **References:**

Bureau of International Information Programs (BIIP), United States Department of State (2012). Global Women's Issues: Women in the World Today, extended version.  
<https://opentextbc.ca/womenintheworld/>

Islah, J (2018). Palestinian Women's Activism: Nationalism, Secularism, Islamism

Lee, R.D. (2011). The outlook for population growth. In *Science* (pp. 569–573).

Mairinari, M. et. al. (2019). A Nation of Immigrants Reconsidered: US Society in an Age of Restriction, 1924-1965

Statistics Centre - Abu Dhabi. (2018). Emirati Women: Past and Present.

United Arab Emirates Ministry of State for Federal National Council Affairs (MoFNCA). (2008). Women in the United Arab Emirates: A Portrait of Progress.

United Nations Statistics Division. (2015). The World's Women 2015 Trends and Statistics.  
<https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worldswomen.html>.