

The Hierarchy of Authority Based on Kinship, Age, and Gender in the Extended Family in the Arab Gulf States

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Abstract:

Almost all aspects of life in the Arab Gulf States, including family, have been touched by rapid, unstoppable social change. However, certain aspects of the family remain intact. That is, although the nuclear family, has in the past few decades tended to replace the extended form of family structure, family still plays a powerful role in the life of men and women in the Arab Gulf states.

Family still shows a high degree of unity, purpose, and integration among its members. Although the number of people living in the same household is shrinking, the connection among them remains strong, and the value system that governs the extended family is still in action. Also, the hierarchy of authority and relations based on kinship still exists and plays a major role in individuals' lives. The patriarchal social system, where males in the family have the ultimate authority and decision-making power in the household, has been not impacted by the rapid social change. Children bear their fathers' names, and adult women such wives, mothers, sisters, and aunts are subject to the authority of males such as fathers, husbands, brothers, and uncles.

This paper discusses the social and economic foundations of the hierarchy of authority in the Arab Gulf states' extended families. Further, the paper explores the factors that determine social positions, roles, and expectations associated with family members, especially women, based on age, gender, and kinship.

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