

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
THE ENGAGEMENT OF LEBANESE FEMALE EMPLOYEES
IN HUMANITARIAN WORK

by
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Employee engagement (EE) is defined as a state where the employee is connecting with the organization, creating an emotional bond, giving and performing beyond the call of duty to achieve goals for the organization. In the constantly changing globalized world, the traditional employment relationship has been profoundly transformed into a more profound psychological relationship in which there is a higher need to understand how employees are encouraged to behave positively and engage in giving extra needed discretionary efforts. Inequality between genders and gender-based discrimination remain in the Arab region, where patriarchal gender structures are widespread. To get full engagement from employees of both genders it is important for women and men to perceive a sense of fairness with regards to how they are treated especially by their managers and in comparison to their counterparts. In many refugee hosting countries such as Lebanon, local women are a particularly crucial element in the workforce that helps in improving the lives of displaced people by working with humanitarian NGOs. I conducted open-ended, semi-structured face-to-face interviews with fifteen Lebanese female humanitarian aid workers to examine how they perceive and experience their roles in this work context considering the fact that perceptions impact their levels of engagement. The results showed that humanitarian NGOs invest substantially in leadership and communication policies and practices that foster engagement in their workforces. The study also provided organizations of all sizes and types guidelines for understanding EE and for designing and implementing effective engagement initiatives to reap the benefits of an engaged workforce.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is characterized by a traditional family system in which husband and wife follow a clear division of labor, where the husband is active in the market and the wife is mostly responsible for child raising and household work (UNDP, 2009). The influence of tribal and familial systems in the region, the strength of family ties, along with the imprint of sociocultural and patriarchal norms and practices, indirectly or sometimes even directly, endorse gender segregation in the workforce (UNDP, 2009; Karam & Afiouni, 2014). Many scholars have addressed the issue of patriarchal family in the Middle East such as Kandiyoti (1988) who defined the patriarchal family as a kinship-based unit in which members have clearly defined roles based on age and gender (Kandiyoti, 1988).

Indeed, generally speaking, in the Arab Middle Eastern countries patriarchal gender structures are widespread and intimately integrated across various socio-economic and other macrolevel institutions (Karam & Jamali, 2014; Karam & Afiouni, 2014). Therefore, with Arab governments' attempts to adjust their economies and survive in the newly open market, the integration of ideas involving female participation and empowerment becomes paramount to consider when setting new development strategies striving for greater market orientation and trade liberalization (Omair, 2010). Also, with the demands on employers to reduce costs, to acquire, and retain the best young talents along with keeping engagement up at the same time, engaging employees is now more important than ever (CIPD, 2012; Robinson, 2015). As a consequence, the

question of work conditions in general, and those specific to women's employment in particular, are closely tied to the nature of the adjusted policies that were implemented by these Arab countries and organizations within these countries to attain growth in the economy and to face global competitiveness (Omair, 2010).

Attention to gender is thus indispensable to understand the ongoing evolution of the labor market in the Arab region. Correspondingly, the new trends that have emerged in the constantly changing globalized world such as risk taking, speed and change, innovation, and networking, among others (Stander & Rothmann, 2010), profoundly transformed and reshaped the traditional employment relationship into a more profound psychological relationship in which there is a higher need to understand how employees are encouraged to behave positively and engage in giving extra needed discretionary efforts (Johnson, 2011). Therefore, organizations have to prepare ways to acquire, develop and retain male as well as female talent in order for them to gain, compete, and maintain their place in the market in the race for global business (Jauhari, Sehgal & Sehgal, 2013). One important consideration is the level of employee engagement and the ways by which to increase the level of engagement at work. Due to economic meltdown all companies are focusing on enhancing their human resources strategies for cutting cost. On the one hand, employees are now looking for jobs that are worthwhile and could motivate them and on the other hand, organizations are more than ever before looking for employees who are willing to go the extra mile trying to reach a win-win solution that could help them meet their needs as well as those of their employees (Bengtsson, 2016).

In our technological era, products can be copied but the quality of the workforce employed, the passion and dedication of employees make them an asset that is nearly

impossible to replicate and the primary source of competitive advantage for organizations (Spreitzer & Porath, 2012). Organizations must identify the need to decrease employee turnover, retain and engage their employees. Employees could always be tempted by similar or higher offers elsewhere whether in the public, non-profit or the private sector and that is why organizations have to build ways to engage employees. Some suggest that EE is considered as a key way for companies to combat and fight turnover (Stander & Rothmann, 2010), and to raise motivation (Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees & Gatenby, 2013).

The term “employee engagement” has been used for almost two decades and especially in the management and human resource management field (Hobel, 2006; Alima & Faizuniah, 2017; Simon et al., 2015). Also, throughout the years, the concept of employee engagement has gained interest across academic and practitioner literatures and the pool of publications studying the concept, its outcomes, and its influential factors is constantly growing (Lewis, Thomas & Bradley, 2012). Employee engagement is defined as a state where the employee does not only deliver on the job but also a state where he/she is connecting with the organization, creating an emotional bond, and where he/she gives and performs beyond the call of duty to achieve goals for the organization (Jauhari et al., 2013).

A. The Problem

Although women have made important strides and advances in catching up with men in the workplace, inequality between genders and gender-based discrimination remain in many countries, which could negatively impact the engagement of female employees at work (Chalofsky & Krishna, 2009, Karam & Afiouni, 2014). In fact, the

low labor force participation of women in the MENA region generally and in Lebanon in particular (UNDP, 2011; World Economic Forum, 2014), has been long recognized and debated in the literature (Kandiyoti, 1988), and female economic participation in the Middle East is reputed to be among the lowest in the world (World Economic Forum, 2017-2018) because of restrictive constitutional rights and restraining labor laws (Karam & Afiouni, 2014). This low participation is apparent across industries and public sectors and moreover with these low labor force participation figures within the context of patriarchal institutional structures, the issue of the engagement of female employees becomes an important problem to explore further.

There are many sectors in Lebanon where local women are employed; but a particularly vibrant sector is the “third sector” otherwise referred to as the Civil Society/ Non-Governmental Sector (MEDEA Institute, December 2011). The “third sector” is a thriving sector in Lebanon (MEDEA Institute, December 2011) and it is one of the most active in the Middle East. In fact, civil society in Lebanon has always been flourishing and very active and its development in Lebanon must be understood through two characteristics of the country: the confessional diversity and the state weakness, since with the public’s general distrust of political parties and the weakness of the state’s institutions, more is expected from civil society (MEDEA Institute, December 2011). The latest data received from the official records of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities shows that as of April 2014, there are 8311 registered Civil Society Organizations, (COS) in addition to a number of loosely organized groups (Beyond Reform & Development, & European Union & Transtec, 2015). Also, 93% of Civil Society Organizations in Lebanon are formally registered as non-governmental non-profit organizations and 62% of CSOs are working at the national level, while 38% are

community-based (Beyond Reform & Development, & European Union & Transtec, 2015). Besides, CSOs in Lebanon are active in a variety of sectors; the sectors with the highest coverage are: social development, health, education, human rights and environment, while the sectors with the least coverage are: municipal services, urban planning, judicial development, technology and entrepreneurship.

Moreover, across the Middle East and North Africa, the mass movements and uprisings of citizens demanding reforms and political change have refocused the attention of international organizations on the role of civil society and non-state actors (Beyond Reform & Development, & European Union & Transtec. Mapping Civil Society Organizations in Lebanon, 2015). In recent decades, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations have gained increasing legitimacy and influence worldwide. It is now unquestioned that they have a major role to play in tackling our societies' numerous issues.

As the Syrian crisis continues, Lebanon is disproportionately suffering the negative impacts that fall on the region, hosting today the highest number of refugees globally (CRC & SCL, December 2014). Refugees are migrants who are forced to relocate outside their countries of origin due to war or persecution (Young & Chan, 2015). The massive influx of refugees from Syria has affected all the neighboring countries especially Lebanon, on the economic, social, educational, security and political levels, but the impact of the humanitarian situation on affected displaced people, especially women and youth in the country, has not been documented or broadly addressed due to funding problems and capacity limitations (UNFPA, 2014). This humanitarian deteriorated setting exacerbates basic needs for social services and protection services because without access to such services, women and youth

vulnerability increases, putting them at higher risks of enduring, neglect, exploitation, abuse and violence, deprived of any kind of support or coping mechanisms. Five years into the Syrian conflict, the mass influx of refugees has overwhelmed the systems of many hosting Arab countries like Jordan and especially Lebanon, which made it even harder for women and girls to receive the support and help they need, the education and protection they deserve, and thus many displaced live in poverty, exacerbating domestic violence, child marriage and child labor in hosting countries (OCHA, 2015). With the lack of capability to resettle refugees in countries where the support system is sufficiently robust, many women refugees continue to struggle with gender stereotypes and discriminatory laws that inhibit their participation in political and public life (OCHA, 2015).

With this recent political turbulence in the region and the eruption of war in neighboring Syria the number of third sector organizations focusing on serving the influx of refugees into Lebanon has created a surge in employment opportunities that many Lebanese have taken up. In this context, our interest is focusing not on the women refugees, but rather on the female civil society and NGO employees who serve refugees. Indeed, in many hosting countries like in Lebanon, local women are a particularly crucial element in the workforce that help in improving the lives of displaced people by working with humanitarian NGOs. Women are recruited in the different NGOs expanding their work in response to the refugee influx from Syria, building a humanitarian response and resilience programming focusing on Child Protection and Gender-Based Violence among other humanitarian and development sectors (Mercy Corps, 2016). Women are thus recruited to work on the field along with men colleagues

and provide services to the dispersed populations in order to improve the status of refugees and ensure they live in dignity.

My interest is on these local Lebanese women employees and more specifically on studying their levels of engagement in this work context of Non-Governmental Organizations that provide direct assistance to conflict-affected populations (refugees, internally-displaced people and host communities in conflict areas of the world). This study aims at studying Employee Engagement and at measuring the levels of engagement of women employees within NGOs, and thus serves as a platform for management, determining where management interventions could be implemented at an organization to increase the overall level of employee engagement. The aim is to study how these local female employees perceive their roles in the field and in the society, and how this in turn, affects their levels of engagement and the quality of the service provision overall. Specifically, this study seeks to explore and understand the different aspects of the work life of female employees at Non-Governmental Organizations who deal with men from different backgrounds and statuses, not only within the organization, but also outside of it, during their work on the field with refugees, in different regions of Lebanon. The study examines the experiences of Lebanese female employees, their wellbeing, and the factors that affect their work and/or hinder their roles, at one NGO, and how these experiences shape their levels of engagement, as well as it explores the conditions under which female employees work, and their normative, affective and continuance commitment at work (Padhi & Panda, 2015; Macey & Schneider, 2008). By studying their experiences, I want to better understand if there are any specific gender dynamics in response to humanitarian crises that could affect the levels of employee engagement.

In this study, I looked at the aspects of a work life, such as the meaningfulness of tasks within the role, and/or the feelings towards the role, and/or individual perceived experiences, and/or individual performance levels, and/or the amount of effort given by employees and their levels of motivation and dedication, and/or the level of employee satisfaction with aspects such as working environment, co-workers, and management.

B. The Purpose and the Need for this Study

Conducting an empirical study to explore the relationship between engagement and gender in the workforce in Lebanon is important for several reasons. This study is significant, for example, in light of the evidence that a more diverse workforce is beneficial for organizations and companies in general. A diverse workforce could lead to diverse external links with the community, which can be used for easier access to resources such as wider knowledge or a bigger client satisfaction (Badal & Harter, 2014). In Arab Middle Eastern countries and more specifically in Lebanon, where the imprint of patriarchal norms and practices endorse gender segregation (Karam & Jamali, 2014; Karam & Afiouni, 2014; UNDP, 2009; Freedom House, 2015), the integration of women at the organization may improve the quality of services the organization aims to offer such as reducing poverty and unemployment or even consolidating democracy (McKinsey & Company, 2017). Female employees should feel worthwhile and as valued as their male counterparts in a region and a society governed by a masculine culture. Therefore, new strategies that any organization could adopt to engage women will not only help the organization itself, but will also help in addressing women's empowerment generally by potentially increasing the participation and representation of women in public life and the labor force (KAFA, 2013). By implementing guidelines to

create a thriving and engaged female workforce, organizations set the stage with an essential requirement for the acceleration, modernization, and substantial effectiveness of the organization. This research is also important because it can maybe motivate women to recognize their skills and the traits within themselves that can help create an effective organizational change required in the humanitarian field that serves diverse communities and therefore it should be representative of all the population to truly meet and serve its needs.

Understanding employee engagement in a general sense is essential for any sector-public or private- because it could help organizations and managers better understand the kind of strategies or organizational cultural norms, and behaviors that could help them build an engaged workforce and help them reinforce the engagement levels of their employees (Neal, Finlay, Catana & Catana, 2007). Moreover, understanding employee engagement could also help managers and organizations attract new employees, build a popular prosperous reputation in the competitive market and construct a successful future (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Further, understanding the differences in levels of engagement with regards to gender could also help leaders in organizations understand the similarities and differences in employee concerns and therefore to devise managerial or administrative strategies to help address these concerns (Neal et al., 2007). This is important to help all employees become engaged and therefore in order to contribute to the success of the organization. especially in the context of NGO work becausein this field, funding is often tied to success rates, which means that when levels of disengagement are high, the humanitarian organization risks losing funding from donors.

More broadly, the context of our study- Lebanon- makes the exploration of female employees engagement even more fundamental due to the fact that this country (and the Arab Middle East generally) is ranked among the worst in the world in term of gender rights and equality (World Economic Forum, 2017). Institutional forces tied to socioeconomic, demographic and religious factors as well as the persistence of a patriarchal family unit continuously reinforces and perpetuated significant constraints on women's mobility and employment (Afiouni & Karam, 2014).

According to the Freedom in the World 2015 Report conducted by Freedom House, ratings in the Middle East and North Africa are in fact the worst in the world (Freedom House, 2015). Moreover, according to the 2017 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index Report, Lebanon ranked 137th out of 144 countries just before Saudi Arabia (BlomInvest Bank 2017, World Economic Forum 2017). Also, the region is characterized with the presence of gender ideologies that are rooted in the patriarchal norms that subjugate women in favor of male dominance in terms of decision-making and economic and political freedoms. These norms lead to gender segregation in society, as well as in the workplace and at home (Karam & Afiouni, 2014). In fact, the Human Development Report posits that Arab countries are characterized by an ingrained male dominance and prevailing patriarchal practices and patterns that restrict the opportunities of Arab women on many levels (UNDP, 2009). Nowhere in the Arab World do women enjoy complete equal rights or opportunities with men, since the situation varies from one country to another (Karam & Afiouni, 2014).

Lebanon is particularly interesting as a national context because it forms an unusual paradox. In fact, Lebanon is considered the most westernized country in the Arab world (Neal et al., 2005). That being said, it is more reprehensible for Lebanon to

have constraints and restrictions on the right of women than any other country in the region (Neal et al., 2007, World Bank, 2009). However, Lebanon constitutes a patriarchal society faring badly on indices of female labor force participation rates and has a lasting conservative orientation toward women and restrictive laws that impede the roles, rights, and responsibilities of Lebanese women in the society (Neal et al., 2007, World Bank, 2009). Also, Lebanon is particularly interesting because of gender-based discriminations regarding women's political and civil rights, regarding also personal status laws along with penal law discriminations (Khalaf, 2010, Human Rights Watch, 2015, World Economic Forum 2017). These embedded legislative, cultural, and religious frameworks compose barriers that prevent women from exercising their complete political, civil, legal and economic rights (Khalaf, 2010).

Additionally, employee engagement in general and the link between employee engagement and gender differences are relatively under-explored in the Arab academic and practitioner literature. Studies done on women at work in the Arab Middle Eastern, and in Lebanon, mostly focus on the underrepresentation of women in managerial positions, on the occupational gendered-based segregation, and on the conceptions of "glass ceiling" (Omair, 2010). In other words, studies tend to focus on gender gaps in wages and on the barriers women face in their hiring, in their promotions to hierarchical top levels, in their performance-evaluations and in their career advancements (Afiouni & Karam, 2014; Afiouni, Karam & El-Hajj, 2014) and few focus on the women's levels of engagement and on the factors that impact their levels of engagement especially in the humanitarian sector that has expanded in the recent years and where women deal with diverse populations of different sexes and backgrounds. Also, studies tend to focus on the conflicts that women encounter between their work life on one side and their

family roles on the other (Omair, 2010; Afiouni, Karam & El-Hajj, 2014), along with studies that research female career choices that are anchored towards gender-congruent professions such as health, education and social sectors because of strongly gendered predominant structures in the region (Karam & Jamali, 2013, Karam & Afiouni, 2014). Little data has been gathered concerning the levels of engagement of women in the Non-Governmental Organizations in the Arab Middle East.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The notion of employee engagement has attracted business and consultancy firms since the 1990s and has been gaining considerable interest since then in the wider academic field and literature (Welch, 2011). To date, there are several definitions of employee engagement from practitioner and academic literatures. For the current thesis, I adopt the employee engagement definition of Welch (2011): Employee engagement can be understood as cognitive, emotional, and physical role performance characterized by absorption, dedication, and vigor and dependent upon the psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and availability (Welch, 2011, p. 335).

A. Related Concepts of EE in the Literature

Employee engagement overlaps with other concepts especially when applied in organizational settings. Engagement has been compared with other behavioral constructs such as job involvement, job commitment, job satisfaction and/or organization-citizenship-behavior. Employee engagement is different from job involvement because the latter consists of only the cognitive dimension whereas engagement is a multi-dimensional concept involving also emotions and behavioral aspects (Saks, 2006). Satisfaction and engagement are different constructs and engagement goes beyond simple satisfaction since satisfied employees don't necessarily have strong emotions of determination and loyalty to the organization besides satisfaction focuses on the employee whereas engagement is a two-way process that also focuses on the success of the organization as a whole (Alvi et al., 2014; Macey &

Schneider, 2008). Besides, employee engagement should not be mistaken to job commitment that is only attitudinal because engagement is deeper and more dynamic and implies a complete immersion and absorption of the employee (Saks, 2006; Alfes et al., 2013). Engagement also contains many elements of organization citizenship behavior (OCB) but by no means a perfect match with it since OCB is more related to the employee's character and agreeableness that he displays in any organization (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

B. Specific Models of Employee Engagement

Many researchers have tried to identify factors that can lead to employee engagement and developed models that help map the processes and factors that increase employee engagement. I will review a selection of models briefly next.

1. Penna's Hierarchy of Engagement Model (2007)

Penna model of hierarchy of engagement asserts that the more you go up in hierarchy the more engagement increases (Bhatla, 2011). The model is a pyramid formed of five layers and each layer represents engagement factors at the top of the pyramid figures the meaningfulness dimension of Kahn. The more the organization satisfies the intrinsic and extrinsic factors combined, the more the organization becomes attractive to new employees and engages its existing ones (Bhatla, 2011).

2. Robinson et al.'s Value-Engagement Model (2004)

In the model of the drivers of employee engagement of Robinson, Perryman and Hayday (2004), the authors stress on the importance of feeling valued and involved as a

key driver of engagement (Bhatla, 2011). The model disposes several elements that fall under the umbrella of feeling valued and involved and that affect the extent to which the employee feels valued and involved and hence, engaged.

3. Maslach et al.'s Burnout-Antithesis Approach (2001)

Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001) developed a model of engagement that situates it as the opposite of Burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). This asserts that an employee can develop a positive experience of engagement and a negative experience of burnout where burnout is defined as a psychological syndrome that involves a “prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach & Leiter, 2008, p.498). There are three dimensions that are interrelated on this relationship continuum, which are Exhaustion-Energy, Cynicism-Involvement, and Inefficacy-Efficacy (Maslach & Leiter, 2008).

4. Schaufeli et al.'s Three-Dimensional Approach (2002)

Schaufeli et al.'s model of employee engagement consists of three main dimensions, which are vigor, dedication and absorption and according to them engaged employees have high levels of energy are devoted, proud, and happy at work and are less likely to leave their jobs (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

5. Saks' Multidimensional Approach (2006)

Saks (2006) demonstrated that engagement could be experienced emotionally and cognitively and manifested behaviorally (Saks, 2006). Saks (2006) believes that when employees receive higher levels of organizational support they are more likely to

be engaged in their jobs and in the organization as a whole (Saks, 2006). Employees view their relationships with their organizations as an exchange of tangible and intangible resources, so they reciprocate the support and the assistance they receive from their organizations (Saks, 2006).

6. Kahn's Need-Satisfying Approach (1990)

In Kahn's model of employee engagement, employees live three kinds of states including meaningfulness (i.e., sense of self-worth, sense of being useful and a sense of being valued), which is experienced when the employee receives pleasure and satisfaction from work and he/she enjoys and believes in what he/she does and feels valued for doing it, and when he/she feels that they are contributing meaningfully to their jobs but also to their organization and to the society as a whole (Kahn, 1990), safety (i.e., social elements, management style, organizational norms) and availability (i.e., individual discretions) which is experienced when the employee is emotionally committed to the organization and wants to invest and put extra discretionary efforts to further the organization's interests (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Kahn 1990). Engaged employees are the ones who believe that their work offers them greater meaning, the ones who feel psychological safety at work, and the ones who are highly psychologically available (Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2011). In this study I will be using Kahn's model.

Various models related to employee engagement have been presented in the section above highlighting the factors that keep employees highly motivated and engaged. The various models suggest that dealing with employee engagement means

successfully handling and managing the feelings, emotions, and psychological state of minds of the employees as engaged employees are described to have a positive attitude and self-commitment to deliver better outcomes for the organization. I will tackle the possible positive and negative outcomes of the concept to understand its importance and the need to implement it closely in any organization, but I will rather focus on the antecedents/factors/drivers of EE to identify those that shape the levels of engagement of female employees at the selected NGO.

C. The Antecedents and Outcomes of Employee Engagement

1. Antecedents of Employee Engagement

a. Perceived Support

A supportive work environment is a significant factor that shapes the engagement level of an employee and it is divided into employee-coworkers relationship and employee-management relationship. When employees feel part of a team and a supportive one, they would directly find greater meaning in their work and consequently their engagement level is expected to be elevated (Anitha, 2014). Moreover, employee engagement is a direct reflection of how employees feel about their relationship with their supervisors and thus the quality of this relationship is a critical driver of engagement as it determines whether or not the employee is going to choose to stay at his/her job or leave and find another one. The better the level of support given by management and the flatter the organization, the better the engagement of employees (Karanges et al., 2014).

b. Wellbeing

A notable and prominent benefit of employee engagement is employee health and happiness. Employee wellbeing is a universal criterion that enhances employee engagement (Tinline & Crowe, 2010) and it is an important variable in determining employees' engagement as well as it is a primary consideration for how organizations can achieve competitive advantage (Albrecht, 2012). Job enjoyment, positive energy and excitement are indicative of employee wellbeing. In situations where organizations incorporate all the needed factors to foster the health and wellbeing of employees, the latter are more likely to develop a greater connection with their organization and are more likely to develop strong engagement to the purpose of the organization (Gray, 2014).

c. Internal Communication

The methods of communication whether formal or informal used by an organization have a large impact on the engagement of its workforce and have a prominent role in affecting engagement levels of the employees within the organization (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). An organization, which employs an open-book policy where information is shared freely and which creates a transparent, trustful, appreciative, and participative environment where communication and interactions occur regularly, is more likely to engage its employees who consequently become willing to work above and beyond the call of duty and devote themselves for the success of the organization (Kahn, 1990).

d. Gender

Distinctions have emerged across countries where some researches consider demographics a significant predictor of employee engagement whereas other researches don't. However, the agreed upon fact is that demographic variables such as gender, even if they produce differences among diverse groups of employees, have not been found to be sole predictors of levels of engagement (CIPD, 2006). Gender differences have been found in the level of emotional engagement of women versus men. For women the results suggest that the difference is related to the practices and procedures that support their daily working lives while for men higher levels of engagement tend to be linked to work targets and financial profit and when they perceive positively the implemented long-term strategies and objectives of the organization (Insync Surveys, 2009).

Engagement is most importantly driven from the top; only a high-empowerment organization generates engagement feelings that in turn generate engagement behaviors and fuel higher levels of business performance and improvements in productivity. Therefore, employee engagement is highly affected by staff wellbeing, by a supportive work environment and by an organization that coaches its employees for success, setting clear goals, communicating well-defined missions and providing open and honest feedback, proper care, and appreciation. Supportive work environment, workplace wellbeing, and an internal communication, are factors that contribute to Kahn's three psychological conditions of employee engagement namely meaningfulness, safety and availability, and these factors are considered as valid determinants of employee engagement in general (Anitha, 2014; Carter & Baghurst, 2014). In consequence to what was previously said, in this research, wellbeing,

perceived support, and internal communication are the selected variables to study and measure the engagement of Lebanese female employees.

2. Outcomes of Employee Engagement

The employee engagement literature suggests that there are important positive and negative outcomes of high levels of employee engagement (EE) that directly affect the employee him/herself or the organization in which he/she works. We will review the most salient next.

a. Positive Individual and Organizational Outcomes of EE

Engaged employees are considered to be one of the most valuable assets of the organization (Anitha, 2014), and the key to any organization's success and competitiveness (Kataria, Rastogi & Garg, 2013). Employee engagement enhances the organization's adaptability and flexibility and further helps the organization gain competitive advantage in the market (Anitha, 2014) as well as it leads to higher levels of productivity, profitability, business growth, financial performance, customer satisfaction, decreased levels of turnover, and to a better organizational reputation, (Jauhari et al., 2013), (Saks, 2006), (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Employee engagement does not only bring positive contributions for the organization itself but it also brings each of them personal fulfillment (Kataria et al., 2013). Engaged employees experience positive emotions that lead to positive activities, such as a helping behavior, compassion, and happiness, which in turn increase the satisfaction of employees, their enjoyment of the work, their loyalty, and their pride of working at the organization (Kataria et al., 2013). They work harder, and are more committed to the organization

and are more likely to engage in discretionary efforts to aid the organization reach success (Clifford, 2010). Engaged employees feel that their workload is manageable and sustainable and due to their solid relationships with their colleagues and supervisors, engaged employees feel comfortable and at ease at work (Jauhari et al., 2013).

As we have seen employee engagement is surely bringing positive outcomes both to the employee and the organization and this holds true across all sectors (CIPD, 2012). Employee engagement is a crucial element in any organization's strategy in both private, non-profit, and public sectors.

b .Negative Individual and Organizational Outcomes of EE

The dark side of employee engagement is an important issue in organizations because it has drastic effects on the employee as an individual, his/her performance as well as on the organization, its reputation and overall financial results. Although emotions at work could create meaningful experiences on a daily basis but engaged employees must manage their own emotions because emotional engagement in the workplace can have repercussions on employees as well as on organizations leading to the intensification of work, which in turn leads to workaholism and to feelings of burnout or disengagement (Kahn, 1990). Excessive immersion at work, workaholism, disengagement, and burnout, lead to negative emotions in the individual such as stress, anxiety, depression, lower levels of self-esteem and wellbeing, and also to physical illness (Hazelton, 2014). What's more, individuals experiencing burnout, affect others, transmit their negative behavior to their colleagues, and increase personal conflict among peers (Clifford, 2010). Disengaged employees negatively impact the management direction of the organization and hinder the practices that could enhance

the supportive environment in the organization, team-work, and internal communication which in turn lead to a decreased level of productivity and profitability of the organization (Adsit, 1996).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This thesis aims to empirically explore the experiences of Lebanese female employees at the selected non-governmental organization and to more specifically identify the possible barriers that women face due to masculine Lebanese culture and whether there are drivers of engagement that are particularly crucial to engage a female workforce. It aims at exploring the existence of Kahn's three dimensions in Lebanese female employees at the organization through assessing the presence of the mentioned factors and experiential conditions. Accordingly, my thesis aims to understand the following:

1. What are the perceived experiences of Lebanese female employees at the organization? What are some of the possible barriers and/or advantages that women experience on field at work?
2. What are some of the conditions and the key factors (positive and negative) perceived to impact the engagement of female employees at work?

A. Research Design

Qualitative methodology is the most appropriate to address these types of research aims and objectives (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Qualitative research methods are aligned with a constructivist worldview in which researchers generate meaning through observation (Boblin et al., 2013; da Costa et al., 2016). A directive qualitative content analysis approach was used in this study. Hsieh & Shannon (2005) defined qualitative

content analysis as “a research method for the subjectivist interpretation of text and data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. The goal of content analysis is to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study and its purpose is to organize and elicit meaning from the data collected and draw realistic conclusions from it. Text data could be obtained from narrative responses, open-ended survey questions, interviews, focus groups, observations, or print media (Hsieh & Shannon 2005).

In this study, open-ended, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were used to explore employee engagement within the construct of gender. Semi-structured, in-depth, probing interviews are the most vital method in order to explore the variety, complexity, depth, and richness of the experiences of female employees (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and to explore most importantly, the significance of the meanings generated by these experiences. This kind of interviews seeking open-ended dialogue and conversations enable the interviewer to navigate the interview and steer the interviewees through the research questions while at the same time giving them the freedom to discuss the subjective issues that they believe are relevant to their own situations (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). This is significant to ensure rich qualitative data. Qualitative researchers select a semi-structured interview format to increase the flexibility while still maintaining a standard protocol (Boblin et al., 2013; Goldberg & Allen, 2015). Using semi structured interviews did allow me to probe more deeply into the responses of the participants, where I was able to ask them during the interview process, to expand or explain some of their answers which helped me in collecting additional details and richer data. The interviews helped me in measuring the levels of engagement of women employees by studying the effects that work life and stress have on participants’

Efficiency. The interviews helped at measuring the wellbeing of female employees as well as the dynamics of leadership at the organization, like the extent to which female employees feel at ease, consider they have support, and approve of the internal communication interactions. To explore the experiences of Lebanese female employees and the overall high level of participant engagement among those I interviewed is to understand whether the organization is providing the three key psychological conditions of engagement: meaningfulness, safety and availability (Kahn, 1990).

That being said, the research is descriptive, exploratory and interpretative and it focuses on exploring the way Lebanese female employees understand their particular specific social and professional context more than it is concerned with theoretical generalizations. The thesis was designed to provide rich, in-depth, and qualitative data, especially that limited research focus on the chosen topic, which added to the limited body of research and could eventually be used as a basis for further studies.

B. Data Collection & Demographics

1. Demographics

The sample population consisted of fifteen female employees from two different branches in two different cities of Lebanon of one Non-Governmental Organization. The fifteen participants were self-selected after authorization and in collaboration with the NGO. The reason I chose branches from two different cities of Lebanon is to ensure demographic and geographical diversity. When conducting the interviews, I did not want to explore demographics as predictors of levels of engagement, as some respondents may become concerned by having to answer a large number of demographic questions, thinking or feeling that this could compromise their

confidentiality and perceiving the questions as an invasion of privacy. The demographics actually collected are presented in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1. Educational Background of Participants.

Participants	Age	Education
P1	27	Law
P2	31	Translation
P3	32	Social worker
P4	32	accounting
P5	20	Event management
P6	28	Pedagogie
P7	25	Business
P8	28	Sociology +Masters in Management
P9	26	economics
P10	34	psychology
P11	29	Political science
P12	29	Political science
P13	30	Accounting
P14	26	Psychology
P15	27	Sociology

Table 2. Age of Participants.

Age or Age range	Number of times	Percentage
20	1	7%
25-26	1+2 = 3	20%
27	2	13%
28	1	13%
29	3	13%
30s [30-31-32-34]	1+1+2+1 = 5	33%
20s [20-24-26-27-28-29]	1+1+2+2+1+3 = 10	67%

2. Data Collection

I scheduled a meeting with the HR Manager and handed him/her a formal letter in which the research topic and purpose are explained and in which also a permission to conduct the research is requested. Once the study was approved, a memorandum informing Lebanese female employees at the selected branches about the possibility to participate in the research was circulated at the selected organization via a general email from the HR department. Based on this memorandum containing an invitation to participate in this research, Lebanese female employees were free to volunteer to sign up for the study.

In each branch, all Lebanese female employees who wanted to participate in the research study contacted the primary researcher directly on the number/or email mentioned in the circulated memorandum. It should be noted that the length of service/working contract was not taken into consideration nor was their specific roles at work. Moreover, the personal familial status of the participants was also not taken into consideration, which means that we were not recruiting based on marital or parental status. Ideally a minimum of fifteen self-selected female personnel will be interviewed from each branch with a grand total of thirty local Lebanese female personnel maximum. Also, in case the number of volunteers in every selected branch exceeds fifteen female employees, the first ones to register will be selected. However, only fifteen participants from two different branches of the NGO registered and were interviewed.

C. Data Coding and Analysis

The fifteen semi-structured open-ended interviews were conducted in person, audio recorded, transcribed, and coded. After interviewing and transcribing the recordings, I coded. Hsieh & Shannon (2005) argue that the goal of a directed approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework of a certain theory. I have used a directed content analysis approach and I retested existing data in a new context (humanitarian work). I have started with preconceived categories derived from prior relevant theory or literature (the three conditions of Kahn's Model). Kahn's model served as a preexisting theory that helped me select three variables of interest which helped me in formulating my research questions, the interview questions, and initial coding categories.

During the coding process, I read and reviewed the data and transcripts carefully and fragmented the data, then connected and categorized the data and ideas that came forward during the process so as to compare and identify emerging themes and commonalities. In fact, interviews could generate different open-ended answers so it was necessary to store all the responses in a relevant table in an accessible form to fulfill the purpose of the study and the reason I conducted the interviews. In more details, I coded each question separately. For each question, I compiled the answers of all the fifteen participants in a table with quotes underlining relevant words and phrases, which helped me in identifying similarities, commonalities and differences, pinpointing patterns or themes within the data(Appendix D). Then, in another table, again for each question, and depending on trends and frequency of answers, I organized the answers and grouped them in themes and subthemes. I then proceeded to the calculation of percentages of information that was classified into the same category. All of this work

facilitated the organization of the research and provided me with multiple ways to compare and synthesize the data. This method gave me greater visibility and together with the transcribing, added transparency to the research process (QSR International, 2015). For example, the responses to question 3, which asks participants to tell a story that illustrates one of the most rewarding periods for them at work, were grouped as presented in Table 3. I reviewed all transcripts carefully and highlighted all text and quotes that appeared to describe leadership and communication policies together with the wellbeing of the employees and that fall under one of Kahn’s psychological conditions for engagement, which are meaningfulness, safety and availability. After coding and examining the data, I compiled the answers into subcategories when needed. I compared the extent to which the answers of the participants were supportive of Kahn’s Model and how much these participants are engaged at work at the selected NGO. In the discussion section, I have summarized how the study validated Kahn’s model but also I have refined, extended and added new perspectives to the theory.

Table 3. Coding Example.

Theme	Subtheme	Percentage
Personal & Skill Development	Building capacities	3 = 20%
	Improvement	2 = 13%
	Gained confidence	1 = 7%
	Perceived self differently	1 = 7%
	Gained value of self	2 = 13%
	Know the value of my experiences	1 = 7%
	Growth when serving people in need	4 = 27%
Education	Theory & practice linked	1 = 7%
	Theory & practice not linked	1 = 7%
Personal Achievement	accomplishing life goals	6 = 40%
Professional Achievement	dealing with challenges and achieving work goals	6 = 40%

D. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were taken into account in this research when dealing with the human subjects/participants. To avoid any potential concern, the interviews were conducted face-to-face with the co-investigator in a private room (a conference room, the office of the participant, a private area where no one can see or hear what is being said) at the work premises of the selected organization. The estimated time to complete the interview was scheduled to approximately 40 minutes.

When the researcher conducting the interviews met with the participants, she provided them with information about the study and its purpose and explained that the research will be used to fulfill the partial requirements of the Masters program in Public Administration at the American University of Beirut, in conferences, and in publications. The researcher explained to the participants that they will be asked generic questions about women in the working field based on their experience. The researcher also explained in details to each participant the potential benefits that are expected to follow from the study and that her participation does not involve any physical or emotional risk. The researcher conducting the interviews explained to the participants that the NGO is not at all involved in conducting the study but it is only responsible for giving the initial permission to conduct the research. The researcher also explained to the participants that refusal to participate or the decision to withdraw from the study at any time will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled and specified that their refusal or withdrawal will not affect their past, current or future relationship with AUB/AUBMC.

Confidentiality was protected at all times and this was explained to the participants immediately before, during and after the interview process. All participants

were given the Oral Informed Consent form to read carefully and ask any question. Each participant either provided consent to participate or else withdrew at that time. If the participant agreed to participate, she let the researcher tick the relevant consent boxes.

When the participant approved to be recorded, the interviews were recorded using a password-protected electronic device, and their names were not recorded during the interview process rather an alphanumerical code was allocated to the recorded data that was transcribed only by the co-investigator who was conducting the interviews. Additionally, all codes and recorded data were kept in a password-protected device that can only be accessed by the researcher who conducted the interviews so the recorded answers were kept confidential and only the researcher who conducted the interviews knows who the participants are and the specific answers per individual. The transcriptions were shared with the personal investigator. The audiotapes were deleted directly after the researcher finished transcribing. The collected data will also be destroyed responsibly after the required retention period (usually three years following the termination of the study). However, when the participant chose not to be audiotaped, the researcher conducting the interview did not record it and extensive notes were taken instead where the researcher wrote down all the valuable information for the study.

The privacy of the participants' answers and their confidentiality will be reserved in all published written or oral data that result from this study and will not be used in reports or published papers, so all reports generated from the study remained anonymous and when quoting, only pseudonyms were used. In fact only information that doesn't identify the participant or that cannot be traced to them in any way was eventually used. The Oral Informed Consent Form is presented in Appendix B.

Besides, the interview questions were carefully thought through, none of which place the participants at risk (Appendix C).

CHAPTER 4

MAIN RESULTS OF STUDY

In Kahn's model of Employee Engagement, employees live three kinds of states including meaningfulness (i.e., sense of self-worth, sense of being useful and a sense of being valued), safety (i.e., social elements, management style, organizational norms) and availability (i.e., individual discretions) (Kahn, 1990). For this study, and based on the three dimensions of Kahn's Model (1990), I selected three key factors that contribute to the engagement of employees, which are perceived support, internal communication and wellbeing. In the presentation of results, I will explore the data along Kahn's three dimensions thereby assessing the presence of the above mentioned factors and experiential conditions.

I will proceed by first presenting the results for each dimension, by studying the answers of the fifteen participants to each question. Then I examine the impact that each dimension has on each employee's level of engagement, in an attempt to understand how the job characteristics and perceived conditions could contribute or detract from employee engagement, and further, in order to identify the benefits that our three key variables in particular, generate on the employees' productivity, performance and wellbeing.

A. Demographics

The demographic profile shows the age of the respondents. It was found that out of the 15 respondents who participated in this study, only one was less than 25 years of age, nine respondents were between 25 and 29 and five respondents belonged to the

30s. The demographic characteristic also shows the educational qualification of the respondents. All of the respondents work at this International Organization, have a graduate degree or above. In this study, the qualification of the respondents did not place them in higher positions but rather their work experience was much more taken into account, and the recruitment at the NGO also varied according to their type of work, whether it is office or field work.

Furthermore, in this study, it was found that the gender of the respondents did not seem to be related to the level of employee engagement. This finding is consistent with findings perceived in prior researches Mani (2011) and Ariani (2013) where authors have reported that there is no significant difference in the mean value of employee engagement across gender. In fact, the agreed upon fact is that demographic variables, such as gender, even if they produce differences among diverse groups of employees, cannot alone be predictors of levels of engagement (CIPD, 2006).

B. Meaningfulness

According to Kahn (1990), meaningfulness is a feeling that one is receiving a return on one's investment of oneself in one's work. Employees experience meaningfulness when they feel worthwhile, useful, and valuable. In references to question 2 (ref. Appendix C), most of the participants confirmed that in the humanitarian field being a woman is particularly convenient and beneficial, and only 20% of the respondents believed that it is not related to gender: P2: "*A female is smooth, she is capable of being a moderator. She has a character that is tolerant. She knows how to be patient*". Also, P13: "*there are women who are veiled so it is easier for a*

woman to enter homes in field work, and connect with females”; P1: *“My presence as a female employee help abused or violated women to talk about their problems”*.

Overall, most of the participants explained that they chose this job because of the mission of the organization(question 1) as they have always wanted to help others (53% of the participants), and other interviewees explained that they were appealed by this job as it lets them apply firsthand what they have studied at university, which will eventually have a positive impact on these employees levels of engagement because employees who feel that they are contributing meaningfully to their jobs, to their organization, and to the society as a whole, tend to be more engaged (Kahn, 1990).

However, the interviews showed that not all employees believe in the mission of the organization and that some of them actually got their job for other reasons, which include choosing this particular job because it is near their homes and families: P12: *“I did not want to go to Beirut and I wanted to stay near my home my parents and my family in Tripoli and this is why I searched for work here in our area”*; or avoiding unemployment since P7: *“the rate of unemployment in the country is high”*. It is important to note in that context, that unemployment has been rising sharply in the world as a result of the global economic crisis in 2008, especially in Lebanon, where the unemployment rate almost doubled post-2011 to reach 20% (BlomInvest Bank, 2018). According to the ILO’s latest estimates, unemployment in Lebanon stood at an average of 9% in the period from 1990-2010. The Lebanese labor force totaled approximately 1.5 M individuals out of a population of 4.3M. Thus, around 138000 persons were unemployed in all of Lebanon. According to the ILO in collaboration with the United Nation’s Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Lebanon’s unemployment rate doubled to approximately 18-20% post-2011 (BlomInvest Bank, 2018). Furthermore,

some of the participants based their choice of career on the scarcity and lack of choices for women in particular considering that *“women’s opportunities or pool of jobs is limited to some jobs like teaching or social work among other jobs where women are much more present than men”* (P8); P9: *“I chose the humanitarian field because it was available and it pays well”*. These participants who cannot see the connection between their job and both their life goals and the overall mission of the organization, are more likely to be prone to experience disengagement because according to Kahn (1990), the belief in what one is doing, feeling valued, and feeling worthwhile, all lead to having engaged employees who are willing to go the extra length in order for them to continuously improve and present quality work.

Additionally, to measure the extent to which female employees at the selected NGO live the state of meaningfulness as described by Kahn (1990), I measured how much employees feel valued at the organization especially that the “Business of Engagement: Improving Productivity through People” report found that 5% of workers would be happier if they receive more recognition in the workplace. I asked participants if they have received recognition for doing their job well (Question 5) and 80% of the respondents confirmed that their contribution is appreciated, thus indicating that staff in this organization felt that they were receiving a return on the investment of themselves into their job tasks, which leads to higher levels of engagement, because the higher the sense of worth employees feel, and the more their contributions are appreciated, the more they are engaged (Ariani, 2013). Only 20% answered “yes but not always”.

C. Safety

There were four questions relating to notions of safety (Questions 6, 7, 8 & 9) that were posed to the participants, Overall, the responses suggest that the environment at the organization is favorable for safety, in the sense where, in general, employees feel that they have support, they are taken seriously, and they have good relations with men at work. Kahn (1990) describes safety as a key psychological condition where employees feel a sense of safety in climates of openness and support, and when they feel connected to others. Safety occurs in environments where individuals are free to express themselves without fear of negative consequences, and in settings where the boundaries are clear and organizational norms are known (Kahn, 1990). Concerning whether participants felt hesitant to speak their minds, the answers would indicate that employees felt valued and taken seriously, and made useful contributions to the organization (33% disapproved and disagreed with this statement), P3: *“I did not face this until now. In general we say everything that happens with us”; at this organization there are more women than men so sometimes men talk and we label them it does not apply to women only”*. However, at some other point we sense that the statement put forward is true with 67% of the respondents agreeing that they felt hesitant either because of generalization and stereotyping where men are perceived to be smarter than women, or where talkative women are considered strong women who are not appreciated and immediately negatively labeled: P1: *“Usually I always speak up. I see it in my personal life, in my society, when they start labeling you, as in the village they told my fiancée when he proposed don’t approach her she is a very strong woman”*. 33% of the 67 chose not to share their ideas to avoid criticism of their male peers: P9: *“I don’t communicate my opinion it’s okay I am fine sometimes to keep it to myself and*

avoid whatever opinions or criticism or laughs”, P12: “the female employees on my team sometimes they prefer not to talk in front of their male colleagues and they come give me an idea on the side”

On the “Employee Engagement” scale used in this study, question 7 asked participants about their relationships with men at the organization; Responses were very positive where 100% stated that they have good relations with men at work: P2: *“I believe that some things men could do it better than women; I don’t see it as discrimination”*; P6: *“Very good relationship as male officers and managers are very nice”*. However, only 67% of the female respondents considered that men at work did not treat women differently and 40% believed they were treated differently. Among those who believed they were treated differently, the reasons varied but the most recurrent is because of men’s mentalities thinking they are superior to women (13%) and because of deeply rooted stereotyping (20%): P1: *“She has big breasts and a beautiful body she will be looked at no matter what she wears”*. P7: *“Some consider themselves superior for just being men. Some are smart and don’t differentiate between a woman and a man. They focus on competencies. Some abuse their position. All of them flirt in some way or another. Even if it’s a joke in other countries such jokes are considered verbal harassment”*.

Concerning whether participants perceive that they are treated equally to their male counterparts when it comes to the load of work, advice, responsibilities and evaluation (Question 8), responses were very positive. Indeed, 100% (15 participants) believe that men and women are equal at the organization because it is an INGO that has strict standards and all employees respect the code of conduct: P7: *“We have international policies and men are obliged to respect women. And all employees are*

supposed to respect each other and no discrimination is tolerated” and P1: “In this organization there is no discrimination. The mentality of a person who works in an NGO is not the mentality of a private sector. Even if the person has the mentality but the person is obliged to abandon it because he works at an INGO [...].I have never experienced it. I have never seen inequality”. Another participant also confirmed the equality between men and women: P13: “We are equal of course”. However, it is highly intriguing that 20% believed they are unequal because of deeply rooted gender-biased mentalities of the employee himself on an individual level: P9: “When it comes to human exchange and human relations it all depends on the character of each and how he has been raised and the way each person thinks and the background and environment and values and principles are very very important. So on this level I don’t believe we are equal because some men really think less of us women”; P7: “Maybe some people until now differentiate between men and women. From their way of being, behave, they don’t show it but the way they look at a woman is from above. Superior. Like we are inferior like no matter what you have done no matter how much you have worked at the end you have to go back home to your parents or husband. Honestly they shock me”. Moreover, if we look closely, these individual mentalities inevitably extend at the organizational level, where according to some employees external factors and stereotypes could also unconsciously influence and affect the decisions of the organization, like for example the NGO constantly hires “men only” at the financial department: P15: “Also sometimes I think that the organization has a bias towards being more likely to hire men for financial positions as if they are smarter”.

Also for measuring Kahn’s Safety component I asked participants to tell me who they would turn to whenever they need help (Question 9). The highest percentage of

participants (n=9) 60% turned to the Project Manager for help. Moreover, and what is appealing is that 33% of the participants equally turn to their direct Manager as they do to their colleagues: P1: *“The person in concern who is the authority who could help me in what I need. I go to the authority who can help me”*; P2: *“At work I tell my line manager. She is a woman. Not because she is a woman but because we are friends”*; P10: *I turn to my supervisor or my manager when I need help”*. This indicates that employees at this NGO feel as though they are supported by management, and feel a connection to their superiors.

D. Availability

Kahn describes Availability as the sense of possessing the physical emotional and psychological resources necessary to invest oneself in one's role at work. The wellbeing variable falls under this psychological condition of Kahn in which the wellbeing of workers means the presence of positive feelings in the worker that should result in personal growth and in happier and more productive workers (Harter, J. K & Schmidt, F. L. & Keyes, C. L. M., 2003). In this study, I studied the perceptions of the participants towards their agency, trying to understand whether they felt that it provided them with the moral, psychological and physiological tools they needed to do their jobs (Question 10 using a scale of 1 to 5). Again, the overall response was positive in the sense that 56% (number of times 4 was answered) of employees said they agreed at least slightly with the statement, indicating that the study agency was providing the tools and resources the staff perceived they needed to do their jobs, thus leaving them more likely to engage in their designated roles. 67% of the participants felt optimistic and inspired to meet their goals, and felt they could deal well with the problems they

encounter at work. Also, 53% stated that they always have energy to spare. This data shows that the agency seemed concerned about the welfare of its employees; if we go back to the wellbeing definition I have used for the study (Harter, J. K & Schmidt, F. L. & Keyes, C. L. M., 2003), these positive feelings generated by the agency will eventually lead to higher levels of engagement of employees and higher productivity for the organization. The question of the wellbeing of employees, especially female employees will be further discussed and more profoundly in the next section.

Also, for measuring the extent of which the organization is helping employees live this psychological state of Kahn (1990) and be fully invested and available, I gave the female employees I interviewed the chance to name three things they would change at the organization if given the chance, and most of the participants said they would prefer if they did not have office hours but rather task oriented schedules (Question 11): P1: *"I don't like time restrictions I am against it. I am with the principle of task deliveries, work plan, targets and deadlines but not office hours. this does not apply only for women but for all employees"*; P14: *"Be more flexible towards work time such as work for tasks not hours ."* Actually, the "Business of Engagement: Improving Productivity through People" report found that long hours formed a primary complaint for employees when asked about what they would change at the organization. We will analyze later in this paper how life and work balance is an important factor that could affect, and has particularly an important impact on the levels of engagement of female employees at work.

Moreover, to measure Kahn's Availability dimension, we asked our participants whether they would recommend a woman to be employed by the agency or enter the humanitarian field (Question 12). The response was positive, but it was not field related

because participants recommended women to work in general, whether in the humanitarian field or in any other field she would like to choose.

In the previous section I presented the main results of the study relating to each question. The findings showed most importantly that the levels of engagement of employees depended on different variables that are mostly controlled by Management. These include, for example, the extent to which employees feel valued and worthwhile (i.e., connection between the job, life goals and mission of the organization), and the amount of support they receive (i.e., connection with their superiors), and their wellbeing. In the next section, I will go further in analyzing these key findings and their implications on female employee engagement in particular, and on employee engagement in general for future studies of the phenomenon.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS ON MAIN FINDINGS

After outlining the results of the interviews, presenting, and examining them in detail in the previous section, I will now proceed by foregrounding some of the study's implications for practice, as well as later I will also highlight some of the directions for future research that stem from my study. The effects of the major operating variables on the engagement of employees and the performance of the organization are explained and various implications for general application in different agencies and sectors are discussed.

Overall, the results of the study indicated that Employee Engagement should be at the forefront of every sector, in social work, and in policy implementation, as well as in private sectors. The results also indicated that there is a positive relationship between wellbeing, leadership practices, perceived support, and internal communication and high levels of employee engagement, and identified the benefits that the three key variables in particular, generate on the employees' productivity, performance, and wellbeing. This study supported Kahn's theory but also extended and refined it as it identified other primary driving forces for employee engagement especially for the female workforce, such as career growth and opportunities, and work-life balance (Wesley & Krishnan, 2013).

A. The Most Valuable Asset in All Sectors

The results from this study not only contributed to the limited empirical research on the topic of Employee Engagement, but its particularity is that it also provided information about levels of engagement among female employees and in a human services organization. Since Employee Engagement is understood to be a critical component of successful organizational outcomes, it fundamentally needs to be closely examined in the fields where organizations are held increasingly more accountable for outcomes, and funding is often tied to success rates, which means that when levels of disengagement are high, the humanitarian organization risks to close down projects and lose funding from donors. Moreover, we could deduce that engaged employees are the most fundamental component in the equation of reaching positive outcomes and achieving the goals set by an organization, and employees should thus be treated as the most valuable asset any organization possesses, and should also remain the focus of upper management. In fact, Kahn's (1990) model of engagement states that not only are there key psychological conditions related to engagement, but that those conditions are, to some degree, within the control of the management of an agency.

The aforementioned scores (in the previous section) from this study indicate that the management staff of the studied agency may be making a positive contribution to the engagement of their workers. Further, this study found that perceived manager/supervisor support along with perceived support from colleagues and family, positively affect the levels of employee engagement, which is consistent with the findings of earlier studies like Kahn (1990) or Rasheed, Khan and Ramzan (2013) that there is a positive significant relationship between engaged employees and perceived support.

An important implication from these findings is that the agency should continue to invest in its leadership framework and dynamics in an effort to maintain high staff engagement levels. Directing resources toward this objective would appear to be an effective investment for this NGO and any other organization. The outcome of this study will thus help in empowering organizations at the management level and in training them to be effective leaders towards their employees (men and women equally).

Most importantly, we could deduce that Employee Engagement should be at the forefront of every sector, in social work, and in policy implementation, as well as in private sectors, especially that it has been asserted that differences between sector strategies to engage employees don't exist, and that the underlying principles and initiatives are mostly similar across sectors (Alefs et al. 2010, p.12; Jones & Sambrook, 2016, p.8), although some distinctions still appear when it comes to organizations taking into consideration their own context and developing initiatives that reflect their environments, needs, and circumstances (Alefs et al. 2010). This means that the observations we made in the study of the selected NGO for each of the three psychological states of Kahn (1990) could also be extended and observed in any other organization in any other sector, such as the public sector. For example, considering the meaningfulness dimension of Kahn (1990), public sector organizations and institutions need to focus on employee engagement to help employees find personal meaning and pride and values in their work life in a context of rooted corruption, in order to increase their compliance with organizational objectives and policy frameworks that encouraged them to place the public before themselves. There is a need for future research on the subject because the public sector is poorly explored in Lebanon - although it could provide employment to all categories of workers-, and especially that

employee engagement strategies are crucial and fundamental “needs” for the survival of the sector because without engagement, better services, better customer satisfaction, and citizenship behaviors could not be provided nor accomplished at any cost.

B. Career Advancement Prerogative and Work-life Balance Prerogative

In the interviews, I asked the participants about their career opportunities and work-life balance, and women responded that a lack of career advancement and professional development opportunities, and a certain balance between their personal and professional lives, meant that they will eventually consider leaving their jobs like many already did, or preview taking the decision in the near future.

On one hand, the study showed that the organization proactively ensured men and women have equal opportunities to progress and that women have access to senior roles, but the problem of career advancement is due to the structure of the organization itself. Structural barriers that lead male and female employees to the conclusion of helplessness must thus be covered by organizations, studied, and considered as a major factor of disengagement for women as equally as for men: One of the respondents said that *“the hierarchy in the organization is difficult to break and you know that it is hard to get promoted”*.

On the other hand, the workplace structure and culture appear to be favorable for the engagement of the female participants, but another appealing theme to be considered is balancing work and life responsibilities. In fact, dealing with Employee Engagement, concerns handling the complex feelings, emotions, and psychological state of minds of the employees. While engaged employees have a positive attitude and self-commitment to deliver better outcomes for the success of the organization, an imbalance in the

‘effort-reward’ or ‘work-life’ would essentially generate higher stress among the employees that may result in burnout and further staff turnover in the organization (Bhatnagar & Shankar, 2010). This applies especially in situations where women are married and more specifically when they have children, as balancing between their personal and professional commitments is signaled to be a highly important challenge. This is why, some participants emphasized on the need for a female worker to have good support structures (husband, parents, family, domestic and childcare help), and on the idea that every female worker needs to understand that there are sacrifices to make and that she cannot arrive home drained of her energy because her family is as important as her career. Indeed, work-family balance was pinpointed as an extremely important component for female employees to experience a higher quality of life and invest substantial time in their combines work and family roles. The lack of work-life balance could form an important barrier in work life. This applies especially for female employees as they are seen as more expensive than male employees since they need to have maternity leaves and will “eventually “prioritize” their personal lives to the expense of their professional lives”. Further, in difficult economic conditions like today, some organizational leaders expect their employees to work extra hours and place the organization first, on all occasions, putting their lives on hold. In such conditions, employees feel obligated to work extra hours to appear productive and to eventually avoid being victims of downsizing. This is much more difficult on women who are constantly required to prove themselves, whereas men are automatically assumed to be capable, and much more difficult on women, in the sense that women are “expected” to balance their “work” at home with their job and office hours. These difficult conditions

could stress employees, and more particularly female employees, could also harm their wellbeing, and affect their productivity as they feel coerced to be on the job.

In light of the above, organizations could implement supportive work-life policies because the results indicate that perceived job flexibility is one factor that is positively related to improved work-family balance, which may enhance employee engagement and which may in return lead to higher expectations for employees, especially women, to remain with the organization (Hill et al., 2001; Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003).

C. The Wellbeing Prerogative

In the history of literature, Motowidlo, Packard, and Manning (1986) reported that stress leads to a decrease in cognitive and motivational elements of employee performance, such as concentration, perseverance and adaptability. In fact, occupational stress has been linked to numerous negative consequences for employees and employers, as it is linked to anxiety, fatigue, increased absenteeism, and disengagement (Simon & Amarakoon, 2015). Organizations must thus protect the health and wellbeing of their employees and further establish and build a culture that is dedicated to the overall wellbeing and happiness of the workers. This would lead to higher levels of engagement in employees helping them become more competitive on the long term and in return, organizations would see higher levels of productivity.

In general, affirming what has been deduced above, to reduce levels of stress, organizations should provide their employees with the support they need in their work life, and that by providing them with the right resources. Resources vary as they could be physiological conditions of work, but also moral ones like establishing a supportive

work environment, workplace wellbeing and an open system that values communication, honesty and transparency; that being said, organizations must ensure that leaders and managers are supportive, initiate conversations with their employees, make sure that their employees are aware of the organizational direction and they live up to its values, and should also ensure that their employees understand how the work they do fits into the overall goals of the organization. Also, an organization must ensure that each employee feels valued at the organization and perceives that his/her work is being appreciated, well evaluated, and properly rewarded (Simon and Amarakoon, 2015; Frith, 2017).

D. Humanitarian Workers' Wellbeing

On another note, humanitarian aid workers specifically are exposed to high levels of stress and it is the organization's duty to protect their wellbeing to keep them productive and engaged. Humanitarian workers are exposed to high levels of stress, work load, anxiety, misery and depression. We cannot assume that they are permanently affected and that their psychological wellbeing is compromised, but we believe that due to the impact of the psychosocial variables they have to confront and deal with daily, longitudinal studies are needed to examine changes in their behavior and stress levels over time.

Managing stress in humanitarian employees is an integral management priority as it will lead the organization to achieve its field objectives but also will allow the protection of the staff and the communities they work with. Engaged humanitarian workers who are passionate about what they are doing may be compelled to disregard their own wellbeing in order to help and give all their energies to the most

vulnerable and do their job perfectly. Humanitarian organizations should implement the right strategies and take the necessary measures in order to ensure that employees are managing their stress, and protecting their wellbeing and health. Humanitarian workers could easily experience job dissatisfaction and disengagement if they don't effectively manage their stress. Furthermore, employees who work on-site and in highly impoverished areas are the most exposed to stress and to experience burnout. However, organizations expect more from these employees because they work in a difficult situation and they inevitably need to achieve targets, which lead them to be more compelled to work longer hours to achieve targets, which could harm their own wellbeing. Also, recently, the issue of humanitarian aid workers being exposed to risks of abuse, harassment and human rights violations was raised. Humanitarian workers are exposed to a plethora of stressors including exposure to human rights atrocities, violations, and violence. Many scandals and stories have been documented where humanitarian aid workers whose job is to reach out to and help vulnerable people, end up being victims of the same cruelties. Most research into aid work have been carried out for expatriate workers in countries other than their own, so if they face such crisis, they are sent back to their home country to receive proper assistance and medical help. However, questions were raised to treat situations where the aid personnel are nationals who work in their own country. In such situations, those workers, victims of cruelties, are unable to leave, and thus require a different kind of support to deal with such critical abusive and violent situations.

Consequently, if organizations don't take the necessary measures on all levels to ensure the wellbeing of their employees and to encourage them to relieve the stress associated with their jobs, then there is a higher probability that these workers will

experience dissatisfaction and even burnout, and they will eventually be less efficient at their jobs. This will not only lead to a decrease in the productivity of the organization but if the latter does not meet its targets and achieve its goals it will also lose a big part of its credibility and this could affect its reputation. This applies to all organizations but is even more critical in NGOs, because whenever the non-governmental organization does not meet its targets, it will have to face the donors and could lose funding.

Stress is intrinsic to humanitarian aid work. Staff stress will affect the ability of the organization to provide its services to those vulnerable and impacted populations because workers who are affected by stress are less likely to be productive and deliver their assigned tasks. However, stress could be prevented or lessened and its effects on the individual could be mitigated by undertaking actions that minimize the risk of adverse consequences for employees. Every organization must review its guidelines and adopt good practices to manage staff stress and mitigate the effects of stress, to permanently be able to screen and assess the ability of workers to cope with the anticipated stressors of an assignment. The organization should thus ensure that its employees receive appropriate trainings and provides culturally appropriate, emotional and practical support on an ongoing basis, to help its employees deal with the stresses of humanitarian field work. NGOs must design and establish coping strategies for national as well as international aid employees to protect them and keep them engaged. If an organization lacks practical means to protect local and international aid workers' mental health, it is not only putting its employees at risk, but also its reputation, and overall productivity. Every organization must open up avenues for further research to deal better with this dangerous critical issue.

E. Limitations

Due to the dominant hegemonic culture within the Lebanese society, the main limitation that this thesis will have is the stigma of being labeled as a feminist. A research conducted by women and about women could be considered as a feminist research, which consequently labels the research subjects as feminists, which may or may not be the case, but which would inescapably affect the image of women in the workforce. This could deter participants from sharing their true opinions or maybe from participating. In fact, during the interviews, it took some time before the participants opened up and I felt that at first they wanted to mention only the positive but reassuring the participants regarding confidentiality and secrecy minimized the situation and built the level of trust that is necessary to enable women to express their true perceptions and share their experiences. It should be noted that most of the respondents refused to record the interview and preferred that I take notes.

The second limitation concerns the quality of data by the interviewer. In fact, the quality of data depends on the ability of the interviewer. Some people need to be trained to have the ability to conduct an interview and gather data well. The likelihood of developing those skills before conducting the interviews is low. Distance between the researcher and the participants can form a barrier (Davies & Dodd, 2002). Additionally, there are concerns that the interviewers can lead the respondents to make responses and conclusions that they might not do otherwise since the exchange is framed and the conversation is constrained by the context of the research (Davies & Dodd, 2002). I was the one conducting the interviews and I had to practice before going, alone, and with the Principal Investigator who gave me remarks and advice. Rigor requires a sense of “responsibility, accountability, partiality, and subjectivity within the research” (Davies

& Dodd, 2002). Rigor requires an acknowledgment of an inevitable partial subjectivity and an awareness of the fact that no research is value-free. Also, in answering the probe questions some participants might get cues to answer in a certain way or agree with the questions to please in some way the researcher. The researcher could never be totally impartial, objective and disinterested. The small pool of participants might increase the influence of the investigator's personal values and attitudes on the findings (Davies & Dodd, 2002). However, the length of time spent on the interview reduces bias. Besides, another type of subjectivity is that of the women who volunteered to be part of this research since they could have chosen to participate because of a particular interest and could inevitably possess their own bias regarding the issues put forward. Moreover, the use of a qualitative directed content analysis approach relies on the researcher's reading and own interpretation of texts and places profound emphasis on researcher's bias as it could lead the researcher to agree or find evidence that is supportive rather than non-supportive of a theory, but respecting the coding process could reduce the tendency to do that. I think that the small number of participants was a limitation because I had only fifteen volunteers. Although I would have liked to recruit more to provide a broader scope of voices, the current sample provided rich data nonetheless. Having said that however, I was hoping that when I started interviewing the participants, others would be interested and would volunteer, but unfortunately this was not the case. Additionally, when I asked informally one of the participants of the reason behind the low number of volunteers at the NGO, she mentioned that probably it is because they are overwhelmed with work. I did not want to pressure any of the participants or the female workers at the organization so I did not dwell on the subject. A fourth limitation refers to the fact that the findings cannot be claimed as relevant with different subjects and indicative of all

female employees. Knowledge produced might not generalize to other people or other settings. However, the research focuses on providing rich life experiences that help the researcher explore the subjects in relation to the debate of gender and engagement.

F. Conclusion

Employee engagement has gained in the recent years a great deal of interest across sectors around the world. The concept's origin could be linked to the simple aspiration of any employer who has the desire to find the right possible ways to increase his employees' motivation and get them to be more committed to the job and to the organization. The present study has empirically examined the impact of multiple factors that influence employee engagement, founding that a favorable psychological climate at the workplace, correct leadership, and stress management are positively correlated to the engagement of employees, and thus to the smooth functioning of the organization, its performance, and more particularly to customer satisfaction.

G. Recommendations

In light of the above, improving employee engagement is a powerful tool to improve individual performance and organizational productivity. Every organization (private, public or civil society) could follow a set of underlying recommendations to engage employees and could later mold and develop them or new ones to reflect its own environment, needs and circumstances. The results of this study indicated that there is a positive relationship between wellbeing, leadership practices, perceived support, and internal communication and high levels of employee engagement. The study results support that the level of employee engagement relies mainly on effective

leadership practices, support and recognition, clarity in communication and a healthy work environment. This supports Kahn's model and previous theories of the literature review. This study also identified other primary driving forces for employee engagement such as career growth and opportunities, and work-life balance (Wesley & Krishnan, 2013). This study supported Kahn's theory but also extended and refined it. Overall, to improve engagement, it is recommended for any organization and not only the study agency to:

- Assess the levels of engagement of its employees through periodic surveys;
- Provide effective leadership to ensure that every department is highly performing and is achieving the ultimate goal and mission of the organization;
- Set clear strategies, goals and expectations;
- Constantly repeat and honor core values;
- Create a positive climate, an inclusive work environment, and an open honest communication setting and provide strong support;
- Ensure that employees' voices are being heard and that employees believe that their opinions count;
- Design ways to solicit opinions and innovative ideas;
- Provide regular feedback and evaluation and recognize and reward high performance and hold poor performers accountable;
- Regularly train and develop employees;
- Include flexible work arrangements (flexible timings, part-timing, work from home);
- Provide opportunities for career growth

Furthermore, organizations should understand that employees are the most important asset and every organization should implement the right horizontal and vertical strategies and policies to manage the physical and psychological problems that employees might encounter. For example, an organization could implement a stress management program or periodic training, and invest its money on such worthy programs as they could help retain, renew, refresh and protect employees.

Every organization should implement a policy on effective stress management where stress management techniques should be taught so that workers can consistently deal with stress as they experience it. Furthermore, every humanitarian organization should on one hand establish methods to help employees recognize the signs of their stress, and the stress of their fellow workers, and help them take action whenever needed, and on another hand, it should train managers to prompt their teams or one concerned member of the team into a stress management program. Finally, I would suggest that, every organization could also establish a culture of stress relief where it could for example plan workshops and trainings on the subject or encourage physical exercise, meditation, and other spiritual activities, relaxation techniques, and breathing exercises on a daily purpose; initiating such activities can be quite effective for employees who cannot take time off work or go on vacation for extended periods of time. The subject of stress management must be prevailed by every organization and the latter must assist its workers in managing their stress.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER

December 2016

To whom it may concern,

Ms. Chantal Bassim, a master's candidate in the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at the American University of Beirut (AUB), is writing a thesis entitled: *Employee Engagement: The Engagement of Lebanese Female Employees*. Her thesis, which has been undertaken in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Public Administration, seeks to explore the key factors that impact the levels of engagement of Lebanese female employees in the humanitarian sector as well as any potential barriers that they might face in this line of work.

To complete her thesis, Ms. Bassim would like to conduct semi-structured interviews with thirty Lebanese female employees. Based on this, we are requesting your permission to engage in this study and would like to seek advice on how to proceed with contacting potential interview subjects so that we comply with your organization's policies and procedures.

If you agree to support this research, we would hope that you will be willing to send all local female employees in the organization's North and Beirut Branches, either via a general email from the HR department or distributed by a junior HR assistant, a memorandum explaining the study, notifying them that your organization has approved the study and that there is a possibility to volunteer to participate in the research. Based on this memorandum containing an invitation to participate in this research, Lebanese female employees will be free to volunteer to sign up for the study. In each branch, all Lebanese female employees who want to participate in the research study would contact the researcher on the number mentioned in the circulated memorandum. Ideally a minimum of fifteen self-selected female personnel will be interviewed from each branch with a grand total of thirty local Lebanese female personnel maximum. If the number of volunteers in every selected branch exceeds five female employees, the first ones to

register will be selected. It should be noted that the length of service/working contract will not be taken into consideration nor their specific roles performed. Moreover, the personal familial status of the participants is not taken into consideration, which means that it does not matter if women are married or single, with or without children.

To avoid any potential concern, the interviews will be conducted face-to-face with the co-investigator in a private room (a conference room, the office of the participant, a private area chosen by the participant where she feels comfortable and no one can see or hear what is said) at the work premises of the NGO's branch.

As principal investigator for this study, and as the thesis advisor of Ms. Bassim, we would like to request your approval for this study. As per the requirements of AUB's Institutional Review Board, attached for your review is the Oral Informed Consent Forms that would be read, explained and presented to all potential interview participants.

The results of the study could be of benefit to the organization in that it will provide insights about the similarities and differences in employee concerns in regards to gender and therefore help the NGO develop better managerial or administrative strategies that address the diverse concerns of female and male employees and eventually contribute to the success of the organization. Additionally, the results of the study may provide insights concerning the extent to which the organization is perceived by its female employees as a gender-sensitive institution.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me through e-mail at ck16@aub.edu.lb or at 01-374374 Ext. 3764 and at 03-326031 and Chantal Bassim, who can be reached at cpb01@mail.aub.edu or at 76-767603. For further inquiries, you can contact the Institutional Review Board of the American University of Beirut at irb@aub.edu.lb and 01-350000 ext.5445.

Regards,

Dr. Charlotte Karam
Olayan School of Business,
American University of Beirut
Riad El Solh, 1107 2020
Beirut, Lebanon
Ck16@aub.edu.lb

APPENDIX B

ORAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Engagement of Female Employees in Lebanon

Principal Investigator: Dr. Charlotte Karam

Student Investigator: Chantal Philippe Bassim

We are asking you to participate in a research study.

This research is under the supervision of the Primary Investigator Dr. Charlotte Karam, who can be reached at ck16@aub.edu.lb or at 03-326031 and 01-374374 ext. 3764. Her office is located at the AUB campus, Olayan School of Business.

For further inquiries you can contact the Institutional Review Board of the University at irb@aub.edu.lb and 01-350000 ext. 5445.

Please read the information below and feel free to ask any question that you may have. This research is about the engagement of employees and more particularly about the engagement of Lebanese female employees and the factors that impact their engagement at work. You are invited to give information that will be valuable contribution to this research.

A. BASIC INFORMATION

Our study attempts to give voice to Lebanese women, acting as agents of change, with regards to their experiences working in a patriarchal society. We want to explore the possible barriers that female employees face due to masculine culture as well as to explore whether there is an emerging female advantage in working with refugees. To do so, we aim to conduct interviews with Lebanese female employees in order to explore the variety, complexity, depth, and richness of their experiences and to explore most importantly, the significance of the meanings generated by these experiences.

We are now at the second phase of the study where we are interviewing Lebanese female employees. As a research participant, you will be asked some questions and can answer and discuss them with the interviewer. The questions revolve around your personal experience in the working field.

The selected organization is not at all involved in conducting the study but it is only responsible for giving us the initial permission to conduct the research and be in contact with you.

1. In this study, you will answer generic interview questions, about female employees in Lebanon, based on your work experience.
2. The estimated time to complete the interview is approximately 40 minutes.
3. The research is being conducted with the goal of receiving thesis credits towards graduation.
4. The data collected by this study will be used to explore the relationship between engagement and gender in Lebanon.
5. The data will also be used to write peer-reviewed journal articles and conference presentations.

B. POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

The benefit of our endeavors would be to better understand how women themselves perceive and experience their role in the work field and the society since their perceptions impact their levels of engagement and the quality of the service they provide over all. This study will also allow us to explore the factors that impact their engagement levels, and the possible barriers that they face due to a patriarchal culture. The research will help public organizations –as much as private and nonprofit organizations- understand the similarities and differences in employee concerns with regards to gender and therefore help them in developing managerial or administrative strategies that address their diverse concerns and eventually contribute to the success of the organization.

C. POTENTIAL DISCOMFORT AND RISKS:

Your participation in this research does not involve any physical or emotional risk. In fact, this study involves minimal risk, because you will be asked for personal information anonymously and only if you agree to participate in this research.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

Your participation is entirely confidential. To ensure the confidentiality and the secrecy of your responses, your name and other identifying information will not be attached to your answers.

Before the interview starts, the researcher conducting the interview will ask for your permission to record the interview. If you approve, the researcher conducting the interviews will tick the consent box and the interview will be recorded using a password –protected electronic device; your name will not be recorded during the interview process rather an alphanumeric code will be allocated to the recorded data that will be transcribed only by the co-investigator who will be conducting the interviews. Additionally, all codes and recorded data will be kept in a password-protected computer that can only be accessed by the researcher conducting the interviews so the recorded answers will be kept confidential and only the researcher conducting the interviews will know who you are and the specific answers per individual. The transcriptions will be shared with the personal investigator. The researcher conducting the interviews will delete the recordings as soon as she finishes transcribing the data. Only the aggregated data (which will have no identifiers) collected and accumulated from the conducted interviews will be shared. The collected data will also be destroyed responsibly after the required retention period (usually three years following the termination of the study). However, if you choose not to be audiotaped, the researcher conducting the interview will not record it and extensive notes will be taken instead where the researcher will write down all the valuable information for the study.

The records of this study will be monitored and may be audited by the AUB Institutional Review Board who is responsible of guarantying that confidentiality is protected at all costs in order to keep all study participants safe. The privacy of your answers and your confidentiality will be reserved in all published and written data that result from this study and will not be used in reports or published papers. Only information that don't identify you or that cannot be traced to you in any way will eventually be used.

E. PERMISSION TO QUOTE FROM THE INTERVIEW

The researcher conducting the interview will ask for your permission to quote anonymously any of your statements when applicable. If you approve, the researcher conducting the interviews will tick the consent box that you could find at the end of this form. However, if you refuse, the researcher cannot quote from your interview. If we may wish to use in this research quotes from the interview, we will use a pseudonym to keep on protecting your identity and respecting the privacy of the organization.

F. WITHDRAWAL FROM THE PROJECT:

The participation in this research project should be/and is completely voluntary. Your participation is entirely anonymous. The selected organization is not at all involved in conducting the study but it is only responsible for giving us the initial permission to conduct the research and be in contact with you. Besides, your decision to withdraw from the research will not involve any penalty. You have the complete right to withdraw your consent or discontinue your participation at any time for any reason. Refusal to participate or the decision to withdraw from the study at any time will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled and furthermore, your refusal or withdrawal of the study will not affect your past, current, or future relationship with AUB/AUBMC in any way.

G. CONTACT INFORMATION

1. If you have any question or concern about the research you may contact me at 76-767603, or on my email at **cpb01@mail.aub.edu or you could contact the Principal Investigator (anonymously if you want) at 03-326031 and 01-374374 ext. 3764.**
2. If you have any question, concern or complaint about your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact the following office at AUB: Social & Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board 01-374374 ext. 5445 or **irb@aub.edu.lb.**

Please read carefully this informed consent, take your time, and decide.

By agreeing to let me start the interview, you consent to participate voluntarily to this research project and you agree to the following: You have had the time to understand the purpose of the study and it was explained to you in details along with the procedures used, as well as the potential risks and benefits of your participation.

- I consent to participate in your study
- I consent to audio tape my interview
- I consent to let you quote from my interview

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did you choose humanitarian fieldwork as a line of work?
2. What do you think is the mission or purpose of the organization?
 - a. How do you, as a female worker, contribute to accomplish this mission? (Probe: Do you feel that women are particularly useful in this domain?)
3. Can you tell me a story, which illustrates one of the most rewarding periods for you at work?
4. Can you tell me a story, which illustrates one of the most challenging episodes you faced from the day you started working up until today?
5. Do you feel that your contribution is appreciated? In what ways is appreciation expressed (or shown) to you and from whom?
6. Research on women in the workplace, has previously documented that women are cautious or apprehensive when sharing their opinions or objections openly. Many times they feel reluctant about making suggestions or disagreeing or criticizing because they worry that doing so will lead to conflicts with others or will lead others to perceive them as too forceful or having negative qualities. Is this an experience that you had or have seen other women have?
Can you give a related example about you or other women colleagues?
7. Describe your interaction with men at work (Probe: colleagues, senior officers, supervisors, superiors, refugees, random men). Could you think of an example where men have treated you differently?

- a. Do you think they believe in your abilities in doing the work they do? Did your interactions change over time?
8. In what ways are men and women equal or unequal at the organization? For example, when it comes to scope and roles designated, evaluation, and advising load etc.
9. In case you need help who is the first person you turn to and why?

Psychological wellbeing

10. The wellbeing of workers means the presence of positive feelings in the worker that should result in personal growth and happier and more productive workers (Harter, J. K & Schmidt, F. L. & Keyes, C. L. M., 2003).

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1-5 scale below please indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number in the box preceding that item.

1= None of the time

2= Rarely

3= Some of the time

4= Often

5= All of the time

I am happy with my ability to perform daily living activities.

I feel optimistic and inspired to meet my goals at work.

I have been feeling confident

I have been dealing with problems well

I have had energy to spare

Elaborate your answers and tell me a little bit about your wellbeing if you like.

Advanced

11. List three top ways that you would change or introduce a new rule in the organization to make women's work better?

12. Would you recommend a new female candidate to enter this domain?
 - a. If you could give her three pieces of advice what would they be?

APPENDIX D

EXCERPTS – ANSWERS

Question 6: Are women hesitant to speak in public to avoid being labeled or categorized?

P#	Reason by Category	Statement
1	No at Work Yes in Society	<i>Usually I always speak up + I see it in my personal life. In my society. When they start labeling you. They told my fiancée when he proposed, in the village they told him don't approach her she is a very strong woman.</i>
2	Yes	<i>Yes I have seen it. In a dialogue, and always someone is abusing the talkative female. So I know I might be attacked the same way so I always choose my words and I try to make people confident and relaxed.</i>
3	No at Work	<i>At all. At this organization there are more women than men. Sometimes men talk and we label him it does not apply to women also.</i>
4	Yes	<i>I sometimes stop myself from saying what crosses my mind. Yes you are right.</i>
5	Yes	<i>I am a very timid person. I don't speak up. I don't give my opinions and I don't like to share my opinions. If it is someone I know I could share but if there are people I don't know I would rather not share. Usually what I have noticed is that all girls and women are mostly like me</i>
6	No at Work	<i>I did not face this until now. In general we say everything that happens with us.</i>
7	Yes	<i>Of course! It happened to me! They always make you feel that men are smarter than women. Anyway, I feel intimidated to express ideas sometimes, I sometimes have super smart questions but I keep them to myself because im scared of being criticized idont know why. I know why. Because everytime they explain something to you and a male colleague they look at your male colleague. Always a male colleague is considered before a female colleague. Bizarre yes?.</i>
8	Yes	<i>I think women are hesitant yes. Sometimes we worry what others would think about us. A very strong woman is not very much appreciated or very admired. sometimes I back down from saying it in front of everyone in an assembly for example in front of older men or in front of men stated as very smart with the reputation of being super intelligent I get intimidated maybe ashamed I don't know but I know I wouldn't think about that in front of women even if they are more experienced or older. But be careful listen I always end up saying it, say what I think, but I change the way I</i>

		<i>say it, I think about my words.. yes.. that's it. Oh and I am sure no I know it is the case of most women.</i>
9	Yes	<i>It is a fact I believe it yes. I many times feel reluctant you know? Like even to my brother sometimes I don't want him "yebkhaane" in front of our friends when we go out and here also I don't like them to criticize my opinion. Ok I don't communicate my opinion its okay I am fine sometimes to keep it to myself and avoid euh avoid whatever opinions or criticism or laughs</i>
10	No at Work	<i>I have not experienced this problem in my workplace. Female workers that I've encountered did not have any difficulty in expressing or sharing openly their opinions or objections.</i>
11	Yes	<i>it is how we are raised you know? Let your dad or your uncle speak the dad the manly figure when he speaks we have to listen or shut up.. right? So I think it comes along with us at school then at work..</i>
12	Yes at Work	<i>the female employees on my team sometimes they prefer not to talk in front of their male colleagues and they come give me an idea on the side whereas men are motivated in the meeting for example and they express their ideas in a very straight forward clear way you get me? That during the meeting.</i>
13	Yes	<i>Yes I agree. Women are always checked with a microscope. ? Or I don't know how much they affect women as for me no I don't really care and it's a generalization to say a woman talks a lot or she does not know how to drive or anything and this could affect the level of confidence of this woman.</i>
14	Yes	<i>I have noticed this about my boss, she's a female, where people give more respect to her male subordinates. but this applies on me I feel hesitant talking I say "lachu fhemete ? lachu chu bade bhal chaghle ana a besmaa w" (I say why, why what do I want from this I listen) and when there is also something flagrant very obvious that is wrong or something like that I would object you know ? My boss talks and speaks up of course (hahhaa) but she lets the male do the talking somehow it feels or I feel that it comforts her she knows it will go smoothly when the male is around.</i>
15	No	<i>6. Of course no I don't think that a woman should be scared to talk or to defend herself and no matter what the reason is she shouldn't hesitate and there is a way every person should adopt when talking whether he is a man or a woman if you scream or talk in an impolite manner in the situation of course you loose and no one takes you seriously you understand? Each person should maintain his calm and can thus say whatever he wants. And it is a woman's fault if she doesn't persevere or pursue or ask for her rights</i>

Question 7: Describe your interaction with men at work; Could you think of an example where men have treated you differently? Do you think they believe in your abilities in doing the work they do? Did your interactions change over time?

P#	Reason by Category	Statement
1	Good Relation: Yes	<i>Yes.</i>
	Treat you Differently: Yes	<i>Listen as you see me I am not a woman who has a beautiful body so personally I don't get harassed (she laughs), but other female employees yes they do. She has big breasts and a beautiful body she will be looked at no matter what she wears.</i>
	Believe in Your Abilities: Yes	<i>I have never felt this discrimination that I cannot do and achieve like men.</i>
2	Treat you Differently: No	<i>I believe that some things men could do it better than women. Not because of sexism but because each has a perspective. It does not affect me if men say I am better then you each has an opinion and it does not affect me personally.</i>
	Believe in Your Abilities: Yes	<i>I believe that some things men could do it better than women. I don't see it as discrimination</i>
3	Good Relation: Yes	<i>I have good relationships with men. My line manager is a man.</i>
4	Treat you Differently: No	<i>no at all on the contrary .</i>
	Believe in Your Abilities: Yes	<i>I am the only woman in the team and they are older than me and older professionally I mean and they have never doubted my abilities.</i>
5	Treat you Differently: No	<i>We have international policies and men are obliged to respect women. And all employees are supposed to respect each other and no discrimination is tolerated.</i>
	Believe in Your Abilities: Yes	<i>Do they doubt your abilities? Never.</i>
6	Good Relation: Yes	<i>Very good relationship. officers and managers are very nice.</i>
	Treat you Differently: Yes	<i>Maybe some people until now differentiate between men and women. From their way of being, behave, they don't show it but the way they look at a woman is from above. Superior. Like we are inferior like no matter what you have done no matter how much you have worked at the end you have to go back home to your parents or husband. Honestly they shock me</i>
	Believe in Your Abilities: Yes	<i>We never doubt each others.</i>

7	Treat you Differently: Yes&No	<i>Some consider themselves superior for just being men. Some are smart and don't differentiate between a woman and a man. They focus on competencies. Some abuse their position. All of them flirt in some way or another. Even if it's a joke in other countries such jokes are considered verbal harassment.</i>
	Believe in Your Abilities: Yes&No	<i>Some consider themselves superior for just being men. Some are smart and don't differentiate between a woman and a man. They focus on competencies.</i>
8	Good Relation: Yes	<i>I have a good relation. We are all colleagues. They are fun and they know their limits</i>
	Treat you Differently: Yes	<i>They make fun sometimes some of the men that "rouhe ndabe aal bet " " lezim tetbkhilna hone mich tnazre alayna" "go stay home" "you should cook for us not give us lessons" stuff like that they are funny they say them to laugh they don't really mean them but this tells about the mentalities in the society. This tells about the back back back thoughts in the minds of the men.</i>
9	Good Relation: Yes	<i>It is good on a daily basis yes of course</i>
	Treat you Differently: No	<i>We have our differences. It is normal I have different opinions than other female colleagues not exclusive to men only</i>
	Believe in Your Abilities: No	<i>Yes well I think they always insinuate that women don't have their abilities "not because they are not as smart maybe they are but because they have other worries and priorities like first giving birth then raising their children and not losing their husbands"</i>
10	Good Relation: Yes	<i>My interactions with them were good since the beginning and got even better with time.</i>
	Treat you Differently: No&Yes	<i>My experience with men colleagues, officers, supervisors does not include any difference in the way they treated me. As my experience with men beneficiaries, I have noticed some hesitation in the first meetings. But it was not difficult to gain their trust very quickly and work with them.</i>
	Believe in Your Abilities: Yes	<i>Yes I think they believe in my abilities in doing the same work they do.</i>
11	Good Relation: Yes	<i>we have a great relation, we are all the same as employees</i>
	Treat you Differently: No	<i>and whenever we don't have a great relation it is because of our differences maybe the way we are raised you know just two characters it is either they bond or they don't click at all it could be two men.. or two women you know.</i>
12	Treat you Differently: No	<i>No no this is not in the picture here in this organization. The role of a woman is the same as a man and the position is the criteria to make the woman shine not the gender of the employee a woman or a man you know?</i>
13	Good Relation: Yes	<i>Good relations, never problems yes we are all friends here no problems.</i>

	Treat you Differently: Yes	<i>Different I told you when they tell you that because you are a woman you talk a lot you understand they already have this idea in their minds this is how we are raised this is the society normal even me sometimes if someone who works for you and he stole something I directly ask is he Syrian? Or if she work than of course she is not Lebanese you know? We are born and raised on this and we never see that it is something very wrong.</i>
14	Treat you Differently: No	<i>Honestly there is a code of conduct of INGOs especially so discrimination no never had that problem</i>
	Believe in Your Abilities: Yes&No	<i>Yes I was not taken seriously when I first started because I was young and female but as I started collaborating I felt how people people took me more seriously so it is my competencies that let me not my gender it was harder with me was as a woman.</i>
15	Good Relation: Yes	<i>7. I have a good relation of course with my team I am responsible for two girls and two guys</i>
	Believe in Your Abilities: Yes	<i>Why wouldn't they trust my abilities no of course yes every person has his position and there is a clear scope of work and a job description that is clear and every person should respect the others and of course every person should respect his senior of course.</i>
	Treat you Differently: No	<i>and I have never made a difference between them or I have never felt the difference at all and not even them have felt it anyway</i>

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