



## Investigating the Concept of “Woman” in the Iraqi Context

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### Abstract:

The definition of the word “woman” is the start point at research that investigates the concept of “woman”. According to dictionary definitions of both the Merriam-Webster and the Cambridge dictionaries, a “woman” is “an adult female person”(“Woman,” n.d.) and “an adult female human being”(“Woman,” n.d.) respectively. However, the concept of woman has been investigated from different perspectives as reviewed in this paper. This research paper, nevertheless, attempts at investigating the “woman” concept in the Iraqi context in particular through a case study that is built on responses from a sample of the society. The paper adopts a feminist qualitative method that is enhanced with statistical analysis of data which makes it a mixed method paper. It is known that the Iraqi society is an eastern society that has Islam as the source of legislation. Based on that, the study poses a number of questions (as presented in Appendix 1) which lead to a concept of “woman” within the Iraqi context. The current research is meant to be the first step in formulating a holistic understanding of the concept of “woman” in the Iraqi context and trying to find the tendency formulating this concept whether it be religious, liberal, ... etc. . Respondents to the survey are all Iraqis to guarantee the Iraqi context of the research. Results of the case study are discussed at the end of the paper.

**Key words:** case study, “woman” concept, Iraqi context



## Introduction

“Woman” as a concept is made up of all the societal and cultural ideas, beliefs and standards that shape and determine the role, traits, qualities, and behavior expected of and distinct in a woman in a given society. It includes the conventional relational patterns, stereotypes and tendencies that influence people’s attitudes toward women. Such a concept is deeply rooted in the dynamics of history, culture, religion, and society, and changes over time and across cultural boundaries. The fact that this paper investigates the concept of woman rather than the meaning of woman is due to the fact that concepts of the same item or entity differs based on personal perspective. Hence, the current study surveys the personal perspective of woman in the Iraqi society; referred to herein as the Iraqi context. The current study investigates the concept of woman in a case study fulfilled through a questionnaire that covers questions related to different aspects of the concept of woman such as woman independence and freedom, gender role and gender relations, the female body, woman autonomy leadership as manifestation of agency.

The above questionnaire (Appendix 1) is complemented by the questions of the interview that enhance the validity of the study that they focus on the same focus points of the survey. Five respondents of the survey sample (2 men, and 3 women) are interviewed with the following, semi-structured interview:

### Interview Questions:

1. Do you think that the nature of women's work and their role in the family and society is affected by the nature of their female body?
2. Do you think that there is a difference in the view of both men and women on the issue of women's independence and their performance in leadership roles at home or work? How?
3. What do you think is the source of Iraqi society perception of woman with regards to her role in the family and society? Is it religious, cultural, political, or multi-facet?
4. How do you explain the relationship between women and men in terms of social, cultural, and political tasks and roles that women perform?

### Significance of study

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it is a case study applied for the first time as far as the researchers know, in the Iraqi society with focus on the academic society to find out how the concept of woman is depicted in the

Iraqi context. It adds to the significance of this study that it is unique in applying case study to investigate how the concept of woman is perceived per specific societies.

### Objectives of the Study

The current research aims to investigate the concept of women in the context of Iraqi society by investigating the following:

- How Iraqis view the role of women in the family and society
- How Iraqis view women's relationship with men
- How Iraqis view women's freedom and independence
- What roles can women play as females, from the point of view of Iraqis?
- The source of Iraqis perception of the woman concept.

### Literature Review

The topic of the current study is relatively new and has not been thoroughly investigated in different contexts. The most prominent studies in this concern are those by Sister Prudence and by Jinan Al-Tamimi. According to Sister Prudence in three volumes that are finally compressed in one synthetic volume, she traces the concept of woman from the philosophy of Aristotle to present time where she reaches into an understanding of the concept of woman in the western societies. The concept of woman which Sister Prudence reaches indicates that women are biologically and intellectually inferior to men in the Aristotelian philosophy which extended through the Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. - A.D. 1250. This period is heavily influenced by Aristotelian philosophy. Women, then, were perceived as acquiring certain virtues and capacities that suit their roles within the household and society. Women, in general were considered subordinate to men. However, they were also believed to have unique roles and possibility for moral and intellectual development.(Allen, 2024) Then, during the Early Humanist Reformation, 1250-1500 women were seen as having essential worth, intelligence, and agency, which challenges the Aristotelian beliefs of their being inferior. (Ibid) finally, the concept of woman continues to advance towards the present times with a growing identification of women as equal partners to men.(Ibid) In summary, “Allen draws on four "communities of discourse"—Academic, Humanist, Religious, and Satirical—as she traces several recurring strands of sex and gender identity from the Renaissance to the present”(Bomberger, 2016)

In a different context Jinan Al-Tamimi, an Arab Muslim academic faculty (2009) (التميمي،) analyzes how the concept of women in Islam has evolved



through the ages. From the Qur'anic text she attempts defining the role, rights, and duties of women, to the different interpretations of these texts over time. Tamimi reviews the impact of social, cultural, and political factors on this development, as well as the role of women in social and religious life in different eras. In her book "The Concept of Women between the Text of the Revelation and the Interpretation of the Commentators" by Jinan Al-Tamimi (Ibid), examples of deep analyses may be found in the following:

1- The effect of social context on the interpretation of interpreters of the holy Quran where Al-Tamimi highlights how the social context in different times affected the interpretation of Qur'anic texts concerning women, such as, cultural, economic and political aspects which may have an effect on the way the role of women and their rights are interpreted.

2- The Status of Women in the Early Islamic Society is presented by Al-Tamimi through historical models that showcase how women played a vital role in the ancient Islamic society and contributed to science, culture, economics, and politics.

3- The development of the perception of the role of women from Qur'anic understanding is discussed by Al-Tamimi in a rigorous analysis of the stages through which the understanding of women and their role changed in the light of Qur'anic texts, starting from the period of revelation to the interpretations of later interpreters. She also involved the impact of the social and cultural context on this analysis.

From the above, it is clear how Al-Tamimi provide a deep detailed analysis of the concept of woman in the holy Quran in comparison with how this is perceived throughout ages since the revelation of the Quran.

In a different more international perspective, Natalie Stoljar deconstructs and challenges essentialist notions of womanhood in her essay "Essence, Identity, and the Concept of Woman". (Stoljar, 1995.) She aims to reach and extended redefined concept of woman. The concept of woman she targets is a more comprehensive, empowering, and inclusive of the complexities and variety of women's lives and experiences. Stoljar stresses the significance of identifying and evaluating women's agency, independence, and autonomy in shaping their identities. In line with the argument by Stoljar comes that of Fulfer who also believes that essentialism have imposed limits and stereotyping on the concept of woman. Like Stoljar, Fulfer in her study "The Concept of "Woman": Feminism after the Essentialism Critique" (Fulfer, 2008) calls for

a more flued and inclusive understanding and definition to the concept of woman.

### Methods

Description of the research methodology, including research design, participants, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.

It should be mentioned that the current study as a case-study that investigates phenomenon in its actual background, wins the advantage of overcoming the lack of real setting in empirical studies on one hand. On the other hand, it builds conclusion on solid statistics rather than relying solely on subjective qualitative analysis. Nonetheless, qualitative analysis appears in the current study to enhance validity of the research. The participants in the current study are selected randomly as sample of the Iraqi setting in different ages, marital status, scientific achievement, and sex.

It should be noted that the questionnaire released through the google form survey was in Arabic language due to the fact that Iraqis speak Arabic as mother tongue where the sample targeted is barely expected to communicate using English being a foreign language. The interview, thus, was conducted using Arabic. The researchers then, as bilingual scholars, have translated the results and questions for presentation in the research paper.

### Results and Discussion

The results achieved in the current study are explained in the statistical analysis tables below. the survey results are as follows:

**Table One : Overall Scale** المقياس الكلي

Percentage Weight الوزن المئوي	Standard Deviation الانحراف المعياري	Weighted mean المرجح	5ت	4ت	3ت	2ت	1ت	Frequency and ratio تكرار ونسبة	Questions of the survey	Questions No. الفقرة
0.93	0.67	4.65	345	117	3	11	3	فك	The woman is the basis of family cohesion and compassion	Q 2
			0.72	0.24	0.01	0.02	0.01	نر		
0.93	0.62	4.64	329	137	4	7	2	فك	Women have the same right to access sources of knowledge and study as men	Q5
			0.69	0.29	0.01	0.01	0.00	نر		
0.91	0.74	4.56	316	137	8	15	3	فك	It is the responsibility of women to maintain the purity of offspring and promote moral values in children.	Q3
			0.66	0.29	0.02	0.03	0.01	نر		
0.90	0.64	4.51	271	193	8	4	3	فك	(And among His signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may find tranquility in them, and He placed between you affection and mercy.)[Al-Rum: 21] It means that God created the spouses in a state of complementarity and not the dominance of one over the other.	Q22
			0.57	0.40	0.02	0.01	0.01	نر		



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**والمنعقد تحت شعار**  
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0.88	0.73	4.38	235	207	22	14	1	كف	Violence against women is not limited to physical violence, but goes beyond that to the psychological and social aspect and more	Q19
			0.49	0.43	0.05	0.03	0.00	نر		
0.87	0.75	4.33	213	230	20	12	4	كف	(Men are the guardians of women by what Allah has favored each other and by what they have spent from their wealth) [Women: 34] It means that the man is obliged to provide everything that the woman needs according to his male structure, the strongest and most able to work.	Q21
			0.44	0.48	0.04	0.03	0.01	نر		
0.85	0.84	4.25	202	228	18	27	4	كف	I believe in justice between men and women, but not absolute equality between them.	Q12
			0.42	0.48	0.04	0.06	0.01	نر		
0.84	0.88	4.19	189	238	17	26	9	كف	In a marital relationship, a woman and a man are partners under the marriage contract	Q8
			0.39	0.50	0.04	0.05	0.02	نر		
0.83	0.99	4.16	223	161	54	33	8	كف	While a man must be morally committed and not be drawn into whims and desires, a woman has no right to justify a man's failure as a reason for lack of moral commitment on her part	Q4
			0.47	0.34	0.11	0.07	0.02	نر		
0.83	0.96	4.16	199	214	19	38	9	كف	The role of both men and women in society is related to the nature of their creation as a male or female and the tasks that their body can perform	Q1
			0.42	0.45	0.04	0.08	0.02	نر		
0.83	1.08	4.14	231	162	13	67	6	كف	Women have complete freedom to expend of their own sources of income and men (husband, father, brother, son) are not entitled to control they handle the money they have as personal possession.	Q6
			0.48	0.34	0.03	0.14	0.01	نر		
0.79	0.98	3.94	139	238	48	42	12	كف	Women may contribute to exposing themselves to violence by subjecting themselves to unjustified surgeries or wearing uncomfortable things to impress the opposite sex.	Q20
			0.29	0.50	0.10	0.09	0.03	نر		
0.77	0.96	3.86	117	247	51	59	5	كف	Many men in the work environment are provoked by the presence of strong women who treat men in the workplace as a human being who compete and deal with them on the principle of competence	Q17
			0.24	0.52	0.11	0.12	0.01	نر		
0.74	1.02	3.70	103	215	83	69	9	كف	Women are the worst enemy of women's success in the cultural, social and work fields	Q18
			0.22	0.45	0.17	0.14	0.02	نر		
0.74	1.05	3.68	103	223	60	84	9	كف	Conservative women face difficulty in the work environment with the patriarchal dominant view	Q16
			0.22	0.47	0.13	0.18	0.02	نر		
0.72	1.12	3.58	101	199	73	89	17	كف	Women are better able than men to understand complex relationships in the social fabric of society and adapt the family to cope with them	Q14
			0.21	0.42	0.15	0.19	0.04	نر		



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0.72	1.19	3.58	117	183	60	98	21	كف	Women have higher social maturity than men in terms of social ties and the impact of social relations inside and outside the family	Q13
			0.24	0.38	0.13	0.20	0.04	نر		
0.69	1.09	3.44	74	184	129	63	29	كف	Employers and power holders support working women who do not mind showing female submission in front of them	Q15
			0.15	0.38	0.27	0.13	0.06	نر		
0.64	1.34	3.18	82	174	37	122	64	كف	The woman for the man is one of the pleasures of the worldly life	Q7
			0.17	0.36	0.08	0.25	0.13	نر		
0.61	1.33	3.04	78	149	20	180	52	كف	A woman going out to work has lost a lot of her femininity, health, and actual entitlements	Q11
			0.16	0.31	0.04	0.38	0.11	نر		
0.56	1.19	2.79	45	122	42	227	43	كف	Women work outside home made them competitors to men, which contributed to weakening the sound structure of society.	Q10
			0.09	0.25	0.09	0.47	0.09	نر		
0.54	1.23	2.70	45	112	39	218	65	كف	The woman leaving household for the sake of jobs have negatively affected the woman herself	Q9
			0.09	0.23	0.08	0.46	0.14	نر		
0.78	0.97	3.88	Total الكلي							

The table above shows that out of 22 questions, only four are blow 3.40 as weighted average which indicates that 18 out of 22 questions are answered with (strongly agree, or, agree) where the highest average goes to the questions that identifies with the hypothesis of the current study proposing that the concept of woman regarding her position and role within family is perceived as a female mother of the family who has an essential role in preserving the integrity and cohesion of the family. Still high in average but less than the above are the questions related to gender relations and gender role within family structure. Average of agreement with the questions of the current study become lower, though still tends towards agreement when it comes to power relations, gender roles, and autonomy which shows that the concept of woman in the Iraqi context is still positive of her female active role in these aspects. The four lowest averages are still above disagreement, which suggests an indefinite perception of the woman concept in the aspects of woman work and her role. It also proposes a paradigm shift in the concept of women with regards to her role as a working member of society.

**Table 2: Normative Standard to Judge Scale paragraphs**

السلم المعياري للحكم على فقرات المقياس

Judgement Level مستوى الحكم	Percentile weights الأوزان المئوية	weighted Mediums الأوساط المرجحة	No
I strongly disagree لا اتفق بشدة	%36-%20	1,79 – 1	1
I don't agree لا اتفق	%52 - %36	2,59 -1,80	2
I don't know. لا اعلم	%68 - %52	3,39 -2,60	3
I Agree اتفق	%84 - %68	4,19 -3,40	4
I strongly agree اتفق بشدة	%100 - %84	5 – 4,20	5

The table above presents the legend utilized to define results presented in table1 where the pentatonic scale used is weighted.

**Table 3: The difference between males and females**

الفرق بين الذكور والاناث

Statistical Significance الدلالة الإحصائية	القيمة		Standard deviation الانحراف المعياري	Arithmetic mean الوسط الحسابي	Degree of Freedom درجة الحرية	Sample العينة	Group المجموعة
	Tabular الجدولية	Calculated المحسوبة					
Non-function غير دالة	1.96	0.965	7.97	85.73	477	168	Males ذكور
			8.39	84.98		311	Females اناث

Table 3 shows that there is a nonsignificant difference in the perception of men and women in the Iraqi society regarding the concept of woman. Utilizing T-Test assisted in reaching the arithmetic mean and thus, the standard deviation of the male/female ratio of the sample of study.

**Table 4: Difference by age**  
الفرق حسب العمر

Statistical Significance الدلالة الإحصائية	Missed Value القيمة الفائية		Average sum of squares متوسط مجموع المربعات	Degree of Freedom درجة الحرية	Sum of Squares مجموع المربعات	Contrast source. مصدر التباين
	Tabular الجدولية	Calculated المحسوبة				
Non-function غير دالة	3.00	2.334	152.991	2	305.982	Among Groups بين المجموعات
			65.536	476	31195.13	Inside groups داخل المجموعات
				478	31501.11	Total المجموع

Similar to table 3, Table 4 indicates nonsignificant difference in the concept of woman among the age groups of the Iraqi context through the sample of research.

**Table 5: Difference by marital status**  
الفرق حسب الحالة الاجتماعية

Statistical Significance الدلالة الإحصائية	Missed Value القيمة الفائية		Average sum of squares متوسط مجموع المربعات	Degree of Freedom درجة الحرية	Sum of Squares مجموع المربعات	Contrast source. مصدر التباين
	Tabular الجدولية	Calculated المحسوبة				
Non-function غير دالة	2.6	1.1707	112.002	3	336.007	Among Groups بين المجموعات
			65.611	475	31165.1	Inside groups داخل المجموعات
				478	31501.11	Total المجموع

Table 5 above confirms another nonsignificant difference in the concept of woman among the different marital status groups. The consistency in perspective across the different groups (male/female, age groups, marital status groups) suggest strongly that the Iraqi society unites around the woman as the nuclear of the family where the family still celebrates importance in the Iraqi context. The woman concept then in the Iraqi context implies that



women are strong partners to men in building the family while she takes the essential role of morally and socially preserving that family. Gender relations then is reflected in a conservative manner with close comprehension of Islamic insight to the man/woman (male/female) relationship.

### Conclusion

Research in the concept of woman has almost always been theoretical with focus on the philosophical phenomenon. Despite the rigorous investigation into aspects such as power relation, gender relations, female body, autonomy and agency, studies remained within the philosophical arena. The current study ventured into a fieldwork concerning the concept of woman that formulates the concept of woman in the Iraqi context as identified by Iraqi people. The analysis of survey of the current study provided a clear idea as of how Iraqis see “woman”. It is interesting how Iraqis: men and women; young, middle aged, and old; unmarried, married, and divorced still identify a highly similar concept of woman.

Gender role of woman as the cornerstone of the family and the moral conserver is so clear and dearly held by the sample surveyed. Gender relation in the Iraqi context celebrates woman as a respected equal human partner, yet a supporter and delicate female well maintained by men in the family. As for power relations, it is clear that the Iraqi society finds woman capable of and responsible for the spiritual power that holds people together and provide strength and solidarity. The uncertainty creeps into the concept of woman when concepts such as autonomy and employability is investigated. Thus, it seems that the concept of woman is clearly defined in the Iraqi contexts within family and social exchange but is vulnerable when is examined in work environment.

Based on the above findings, it is recommended that a more rigorous investigation into the woman concept at work environment. On the other hand, more variations may be tested while investigating the concept of woman and her role.

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### استقصاء مفهوم المرأة في سياق المجتمع العراقي Investigating the Concept of "Woman" in the Iraqi Context

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#### مستخلص البحث:

ان تعريف مفردة " امرأة " هو نقطة البداية في البحث الذي يبحث في مفهوم " المرأة ". وفقا لتعريفات القاموس لكل من قواميس Merriam-Webster و Cambridge ، فإن " المرأة " هي "أنثى بالغة " و " أنثى إنسانة بالغة. ومع ذلك ، فقد تم التحقيق في مفهوم المرأة من وجهات نظر مختلفة كما هو موضح في هذه الورقة. ومع ذلك، تحاول هذه الورقة البحثية التحقيق في مفهوم " المرأة " في السياق العراقي على وجه الخصوص من خلال دراسة حالة مبنية على ردود عينة من المجتمع. تتبنى الورقة الطريقة الكمية في التحليل معززة بالنقد النسوي النوع. من المعروف أن المجتمع العراقي هو مجتمع شرقي يكون فيه الإسلام مصدرا للتشريع. وبناء على ذلك، تطرح الدراسة عددا من الأسئلة (كما هو معروض في الملحق 1 ) تؤدي إلى مفهوم " المرأة " في السياق العراقي. يهدف البحث الحالي إلى أن يكون الخطوة الأولى في صياغة فهم شمولي لمفهوم " المرأة " في السياق العراقي ومحاولة إيجاد الاتجاه الذي يصوغ هذا المفهوم سواء كان دينيا أو ليبراليا أو ... الخ. جميع المشاركين في الاستطلاع هم عراقيون لضمان السياق العراقي للبحث. وتناقش نتائج دراسة الحالة في نهاية الورقة. الكلمات المفتاحية: دراسة حالة، مفهوم " المرأة"، السياق العراقي.