

Research to elucidate why women academics fall off track

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Women who are well-educated, with PhDs from the most prestigious universities, often fail to make promotion in the Middle East according to three professors of the Suliman S. Olayan School of Business. Charlotte Karam, PhD, Lama Moussawi, PhD, and Fida Afiouni, PhD, intend to perform a study exploring this phenomenon.

The research project, which will be called “The Current Status of Academic Women in the Middle East: Scientific Analysis for Human Resource Policy Development,” will span two years and will attempt to uncover why it is that these women often fail to meet competitive career requirements.

The research will undergo three phases and follow the constructivist approach, which “avoids preexisting assumptions about which factors affect these women as presented in the Western-based research literature, instead focusing on uncovering the local realities of these women and their advancement in academia in the Middle East.” The findings can then be used to shape policy-making at the national and university levels.

Current research literature on the status of women in higher education is dominated by a Western perspective. The question remains, then: What about the rest of the world? A preliminary review of the available literature shows that there is a very limited body of knowledge about the status of women in academia in the Middle East.

The project will seek to uncover the point of view of active participants in academia, and will attempt to document the voices and experiences of women PhD holders in the Middle East. The findings of the research process will elucidate what it is that pushes these women off track.

The project will also document success stories and uncover the factors behind them.

Karam, Moussawi, and Afiouni hope that once the results are tallied and analyzed, “bridges will be built between generations of academic women.” One of the long-term goals of the project is to foster mentoring for younger females, as well as rally support for female academics in the Middle East.