

# DISABILITY IN THE ARAB WORLD: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITHIN CULTURE

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**Abstract:** The phenomena of disabilities in the Arab world can be viewed from various perspectives, considering historical times, epistemological programmes and theoretical models. This article is a theoretical review and comparative data analysis of the problems regarding the evolution of attitudes and current concept of disability and theoretical assumptions of caring for disabled people in the Arab world. Content of the theoretical part of the paper includes reasons for caring for disabled Arabs, including: analysis of human orientation aspects, social orientation, equality of opportunity and principles of democracy orientation and human development orientation. In the second part of the article the authors discuss empirical comparative data related to disability in the Arab world as: various causes of congenital or acquired disabilities, including culturally bounded causes of disabilities in Arab world, related to marriages in close families and marriages of underage girls. The paper illustrates key aspects of conceptualization of disabilities in the Arab countries and gives comparative analysis of the latest data on the situation of children with disabilities in education sectors and adults in the labor market. This part of comparative analysis broadly refers to the primary data from the Arab countries published as research report in 2018 by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. The report is entitled "Disability in the Arab Region".

**Keywords:** social sciences, culture, Arab world, disabilities, education, comparative analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

Disability is a phenomenon that accompanies humanity from the earliest stages of civilization development regardless of the region of the world in which it appeared. There is a current data indicating that Neanderthal living in Cro-Magnon in 28 000 B.C. had type of neurofibromatosis (Charlier et al. 2018) an autosomal, genetic condition resulting in various health problems and disabilities, including cognitive development. On this example of inherited disability we can try to figure out many of our ancestors around the world with disabilities, from ancient times, the Middle Ages, up to the present days, who by being born with signs of congenital disability or acquiring it during life cycle, provoked humanity to respond to these phenomena. According to anthropologist Douglas (2002), there is a universal model of the relationship of any culture to disability or, as the author called it, an *anomaly*. The authors of this article want to highlight that this universal model in cultures is also a model of the process of adapting to disability on macro-cultural and micro-cultural plans, which can be seen as a continuum from mainstream, local communities to families (Borowska-Beszta, 2017; 2018). Douglas (2002) pointed out five universal patterns of the attitude of cultures to *anomalies*:

- The first pattern, indicated assumes *interpretation* of anomaly, from the moment it occurred, e.g. in the birth of a child with deformities. According to Douglas (2002), cultural interpretation is based on the intellectual classification of anomalies as a special phenomenon, followed by various types of cultural activities.
- The second pattern, is *physical control* over the anomaly and determine its' framework, defining the correctness. Douglas (2002) believes that in particular cultures with internalized ontological concepts (regarding the nature of a given phenomenon) all anomalies will generate control activities on the part of culture.
- The universal third pattern of cultural attitude towards anomalies is connected with *avoiding* it.

- In the fourth pattern, cultures treat and perceive anomaly as a form of *danger*
- The fifth pattern is an activity towards acquiring anomalies and *using it for the benefit* of one's own culture (Douglas 2002, Borowska-Beszta 2017; 2018).

Against this background of the universal model of approach to *anomalies*, the authors of the article consider the phenomena of disabilities in the Arab world, trying to analyze the theoretical and comparative empirical data in the context of concept indicated by Douglas (2002).

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE VIEW TOWARDS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN ARAB WORLD

From ancient times in various regions of the world people with disabilities have suffered from abuse, negligence and ridicule. Greeks philosophers, among others Plato indicated that the person with disability is considered to be harmful to his ideal state. Moreover, Aristotle advised the parents not to raise a children with disabilities (Borowska-Beszta 2012). Hence, the persons with especially any visually recognizable disabilities were not allowed to learn, develop autonomy or marry, because this would inevitably weaken the state. Other societies in historical perspective and in different ancient cultures have also implemented various ways to interpret the disability phenomena and develop their attitudes to disabilities and to people with disabilities, unfortunately oppressive and humiliating them (Borowska-Beszta 2012; Kulbaka 2012).

Thinking of Arab world, Ibrahim and Ismail (2018) mention after Guvercin (2008) the wrong perceptions of disabled people as a factor influencing societal attitudes, leading to exclusion, mistreated, and deprivation of their rights to equal opportunities in education, employment, and social inclusion. Mourad and Walid (2008) write that currently, regardless of the positive characteristics of those with disabilities, abled-bodied individuals tend to believe that disabled people are not mature ones, and they lack essential things. Under this assumption, abled-bodied people practice different forms of discrimination, intolerance and use stigmatizing labels in their daily communication styles. The authors find that people without any disabilities do not understand or consider the

effects of these negative communication styles and stigmatizing on people with disabilities, but also on their parents, and especially mothers as well. This in turn influences the methods of education, care and protection the parents they use (Mourad and Walid 2008).

The authors continue, that Arab societal view of people with disabilities, without reference to a specific group since the dawn of history, was fraught with confusion, misunderstanding, doubt and despair. The reason for this confusion was the ancient man's misunderstanding of the real causes of disability, as there was doubt because of the ambiguity surrounding the main causes, the inability to deal with disabled people with disabilities their psychological, social, behavioral and emotional disorders. The Arab societies felt despair because disability required special care. The duties of these societies were to provide appropriate conditions for each case. At that time, the ancient man did not have what he could do to keep harm away from himself and others (Mourad and Walid, 2007a).

Accordingly, these societies saw and named the *stigma* of disability. Stigmatization and oppression was marked by inferiority, neglect, contempt, abuse and negligence on the forehead of those with disabilities, as if this society punished them for a sin they did not commit, and besieged them in successive circles of educational, psychological and social hostage, without providing them with demands of liberation from this human oppression and contempt, and their right of self-determination remains suspended until further notice (Mourad and Walid, 2007 b).

The Arab world has begun to change its view towards people with disabilities gradually after 1965 according to the following basic assumptions:

- The need to re-examine the issue of disability, by addressing them from *social defense* point of view of in the face of disability, with a comprehensive view of disability in terms of circumstances and social factors leading to it. The society should confront these circumstances seriously which ends with the rehabilitation of those with difficulties (Mourad and Walid 2006).

- It is necessary to start from the premise that the integrated, capable and effective human being is the *basic model* that we hope to achieve. Any disability reduces this basic human being *model*. Any attempt to integrate those with disabilities with the society again under the principles of social justice and equal opportunities constitutes the essence of fundamental human rights (Mourad and Walid 2007 b).
- The need to pay attention to the *future dimension* of the disabled people's case in terms of potential development in the size of the problem and the social impacts that may result from it (Mourad and Walid 2008).
- The need to adopt and formulate the most *flexible strategies* to cope with the potential social impacts resulting from the size of the problem in the future to fit with the overall national strategy (Mourad and Walid 2007 a).
- From human, social, religious and economic points of view because any failure to care for people with disabilities leads them to become more anxious and frustrated, which is reflected in the negative effects on society and human investment (Mourad and Walid 2010).
- The tremendous progress in concepts and methods of thinking that have led to changing the attitudes of the society towards people with disabilities in a manner that helps the abled-bodied to reconsider them and their sense of humanness, their rights to life hoping to integrate them fully into society. This has been achieved in the era of information technology, which has contributed to the change of society's attitudes towards the adoption of modern scientific techniques, whether in medical, educational or physiological measurements, and the screening of people with disabilities on a sound scientific basis (Mourad and Walid 2010).
- The world has recently turned to disability as a potential energy that seeks to meet its needs and qualifies it for human development to the greatest extent possible (Mourad and Walid, 2007 b).

## REASONS FOR CARING OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN ARAB WORLD

### ▪ HUMAN ORIENTATION

Attention to persons with disabilities was one of the priorities of the Arab Labor Organization since its establishment in 1965 until the Arab Labor Convention No. (17) of the year 1993. Over the years before 60s, the many negative events that the people of disabilities passed through cannot be denied. People viewed them as "bad omens", sources of disasters and symbols of the sins committed by their parents. This view led to their rejection and displacement by society. However, in recent times, they are cared of but this requires the solidarity of society with all its members and institutions to help and provide them with different approaches to psychotherapy to mitigate the psychological and social effects they face. From a human perspective people with disabilities have the same rights as people without disabilities (Mourad and Walid 2007 b).

### ▪ SOCIAL ORIENTATION

The family, which has been currently transformed in 90s from a large extended family into a small nuclear family, faces many difficulties and hardships because of its disabled child because as he /she is in a constant need for more care, especially if he is stigmatized as an *idiot*. The family suffers a lot because of:

- The sense of guilt as they assume full responsibility for having disabled child.
- Parents lack of experience in dealing with their disabled child (the difficulty of understanding the world of disability). So in order to reduce the family burdens, it has become necessary for the community as a whole to be concerned with this child's problems that in fact negatively affect him/her.

Specialists have called for the establishing specialized educational institutions where these children raised and cared of, thus alleviating some of the psychological and social burdens suffered by their families (Mourad and Walid 2008).

### ▪ EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY AND PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY ORIENTATION

Equality of opportunity and principles of democracy among the members of society must be achieved. It was therefore necessary to give the members of the group of people with disabilities the opportunity to be educated and trained with full participation in public life, in order to lead a normal life, hopefully they will not be dependent on society. People with disabilities, like other abled-bodied people of their age, were born with the capacities to develop capacities, metaphorically speaking, even in those deeply hidden (Mourad and Walid 2010).

### ▪ HUMAN DEVELOPMENT ORIENTATION

Investment should be directed to human capital, as it is invaluable. People with disabilities represent a significant part of this capital, so it is necessary to benefit from it in the light of the available means after qualifying those who can work and increase economic income. This is important and the Arab societies need to promote people with disabilities' rights, so they could be *agents of change* for sustained socio-economic development and security. In this case, we can succeed in helping them achieve psychological and social adaptation on the one hand, and human investment on the other (Mourad and Walid 2007c).

## ARAB UNDERSTANDING OF DISABILITY

From psychological and scientific point of view disability is "a state in which the individual is unable to or has a difficulty in performing one or more types of physical or intellectual activities for ordinary individuals who are equal in age, gender or social role and are essential to daily life such as movement, sports activity, economic and intellectual work. Thus, this state of disability impairs the performance of the role imposed on him /her by age and gender, social and culture considerations in his community"(Farrag 2003, 14).

Disability is defined as "a mental, or physical injury that causes harm to human development physically and mentally and may affect his/her psychological, educational and training state. By comparison, the physical and mental functions of

the disabled person less than their peers of the same age. The disability may be one or several in the same person and may cause partial or complete impairment. It may also be primary from birth or secondary to other causes such as meningitis or various episodes such as car accidents"(Mourad and Walid 2010, 35).

Disabled child is someone who has a disorder that limits his/her ability or prevents him/her from performing functions and roles expected from his/her age independently.

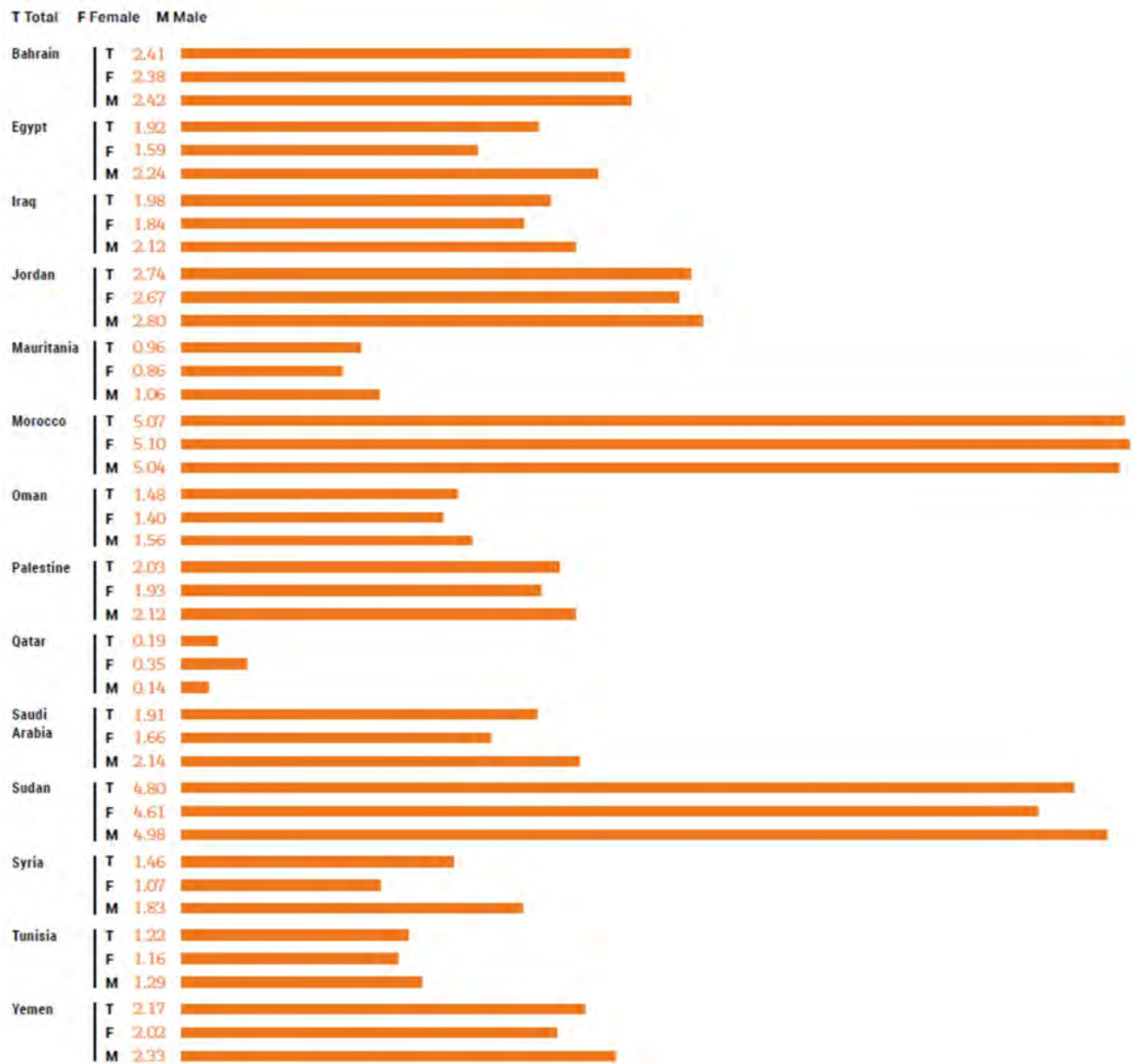
El Khatib (2012) writes, that disability is not a disease but a significant deviation or delay in growth which is considered to be normal in terms of physical, sensory, behavioral, linguistic or educational needs resulting from individual needs. These needs require the provision of special services, non-traditional opportunities for growth, learning, the use of modified tools and methods to be implemented at an individual level. In the language of learning, disability is a condition that restricts academic performance, making learning in the classroom and in ordinary educational methods difficult. Nevertheless, the educational definition of disability is only one of many others. Medical definitions are based on precise and measurable parameters such as visual impairment or loss of consciousness. There are also social definitions that are focused on constraints imposed by disability as well as occupational definitions that emphasize changes in the world of work. It is concluded that the Arab researchers regard disability as a term that covers disability and restricted participation in daily life activities. Disability is a problem in the body's function or structure, causing reduction in activity. It is a difficulty faced by the individual in the implementation of a task or work. Disability is

therefore a complex phenomenon, reflecting the interaction between the person's personality and the characteristics of the society in which he/ she lives.

#### PREVALENCE OF DISABILITY

According to the report of Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA 2018), disability prevalence rates in the Arab region are lower than 2 per cent in eight out of 14 countries, and as low as 0.2 per cent in Qatar and 1 per cent in Mauritania. Morocco and Sudan have the highest prevalence rates at 5.1 per cent and 4.8 per cent, respectively (see Figure 1.). These rates appear quite low compared to those in other regions. This may in part result from the fact that the Arab populations are relatively young and therefore less likely to have disabilities (ESCWA 2018). In most Arab countries, the prevalence rates are higher among men than among women (Figure 1. ESCWA 2018). Age plays a great role in disability prevalence rates. Disability is positively correlated with ageing: the rate starts to increase around middle age and rises sharply for older persons (Figure 2. ESCWA 2018). In all countries, disability prevalence stays below 3 per cent for persons aged 25-44 years, and generally under 5 per cent for ages 45-64 years, except for Morocco where it reaches 8.7 per cent among this group. The rate then rises drastically among those aged 65 years and above. For example, in Oman, the disability prevalence rate rises from 2.8 per cent for those aged 45-64 years to 15.8 per cent for those aged 65 and older, an almost six fold increase. In Yemen, similarly, the rate climbs from 3.5 per cent to 20 per cent between these age groups.

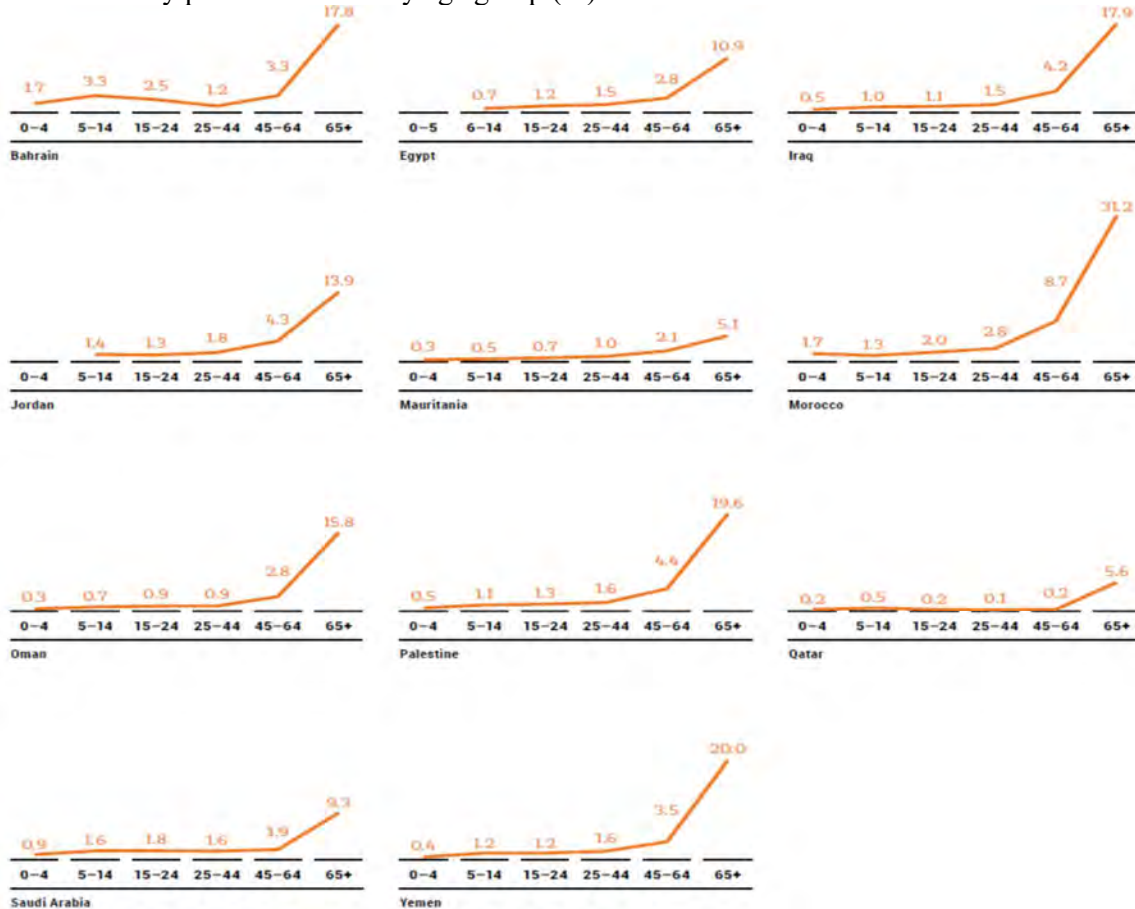
Figure 1. Disability prevalence rates in countries across the region (different years) total and female/male (%)<sup>2</sup>



Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2018). *Disability in the Arab Region 2018*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1. Beirut, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> All charts and diagrams used in analysis and included in this article were primarily published in research report entitled *Disability in the Arab region* (2018) of Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). The usage of all charts contains full references to the primary source with respect to detailed requirements of ESCWA.

Figure 2. Disability prevalence rates by age group (%)



Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2018). *Disability in the Arab Region 2018*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1. Beirut, p. 17.

## CAUSES OF DISABILITY

In seven Arab countries (i.e. Bahrain, Iraq, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Yemen), there are three disability causes, namely, congenital, illness and accident. Whereas additional causes are used by some countries but not by others. Iraq and Palestine have allowed more than one disability cause per person (ESCWA, 2018). Illness is the most common cause of disability in all countries except Oman, where congenital causes are most prevalent. The proportion of disabilities caused by illness ranges between 26.4 per cent in Oman and 41.8 per cent in Mauritania (ESCWA 2018).

The proportion of disabilities attributed to congenital causes ranges between 23.4 per cent in Palestine and 34.7 per cent in Saudi Arabia. The

ratio for ageing, which is included as a category by Iraq, Oman, Palestine and Yemen, is between 21.2 per cent (Palestine) and 31.8 per cent. The proportion of disabilities attributed to congenital causes ranges between 23.4 per cent in Palestine and 34.7 per cent in Saudi Arabia (Oman) (ESCWA, 2018). Four countries (i.e. Iraq, Bahrain, Palestine and Saudi Arabia) include birth-related causes.

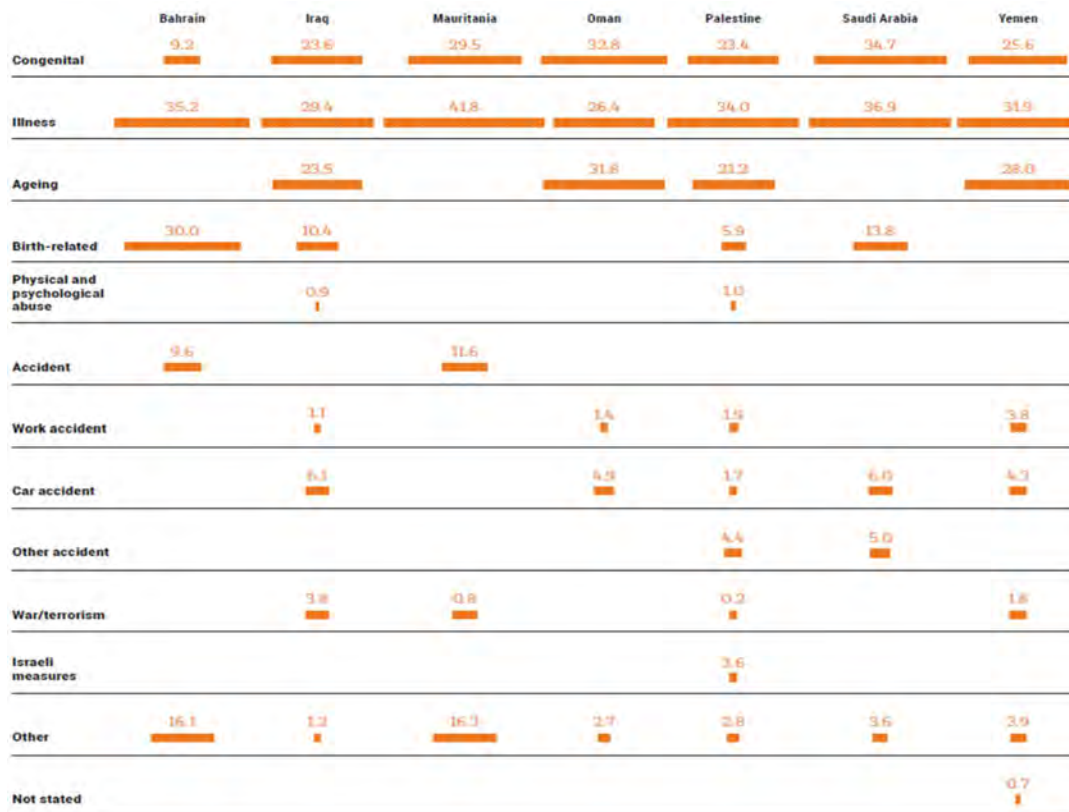
Nevertheless, the prevalence diverges considerably: in Palestine only 5.9 per cent of disabilities are birth-related whereas the proportion in Bahrain is five times higher at 30 per cent.

Accident is another cause of disability in Arab world. Car accidents are the most common form of disability-causing accidents. Iraq, Oman, Palestine and Yemen are affected by “work accident” or “car accident.” Saudi Arabia only has “car accident” and “other accident.” Physical and psychological

abuse is included in Iraq and Palestine and accounts for 1 per cent of disabilities. Some countries, namely, Iraq, Palestine, Mauritania and Yemen, have a category called “war/terrorism” which causes between 0.2 percent (Palestine) and 3.8 percent (Iraq) of all disabilities. 3.6 per cent of disabilities in Palestine are due to “Israeli

measures”. There are other causes in Bahrain and Mauritania which account for 16 per cent of disabilities. According to ESCWA (2018), Yemen, finally, has a category labelled “non-stated” which accounts for less than 1 per cent of disabilities (see Figure 3.).

Figure 3. Causes of disability as percentage of total



Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2018). *Disability in the Arab Region 2018*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1. Beirut, p. 24.

#### MARRIAGES IN THE CLOSE FAMILY – CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGE

Among social factors that cause disability what is called Marriage in the close family (consanguineous marriage). Consanguinity or marriage is a type of close relationship between a man and woman who are related by blood. Consanguineous marriage is defined by human geneticists as the unions of second cousins (fourth degree relatives) or closer relatives (Fariba et al. 2014). We find that this phenomenon spread wide-

ly from ancient times in a large proportion, especially among the Bedouin and rural people.

This phenomenon has many social, economic and religious considerations, and the associated habits and traditions reflected on the behavior of individuals as they tend to choose their life partners from close relatives (i.e. cousins), although some researchers came to the agreement that consanguinity is the most common risk factor for congenital anomalies (Tariq and Rabeeb 2008).

It has been proven that off-springs of consanguineous parents are at higher risk for



perinatal and postnatal mortality and morbidity, stillbirth, low birth weight, preterm labor, childhood mortality, and lower IQ level (Fariba et al. 2014). There is a growing evidence that supports the association between parent's consanguinity and complex, multi-factorial adult diseases in off-springs including Alzheimer's disease, hypertension, cardio-vascular disease, stroke, cancers, depression, asthma, gout, epilepsy, osteoporosis, and peptic ulcer (Fariba et al. 2014). Although consanguinity is declined dramatically in many of western communities is still prevalent in parts of Middle-East, North Africa, and West Asia (Hamamy et al. 2011).

#### EARLY MARRIAGE PHENOMENON

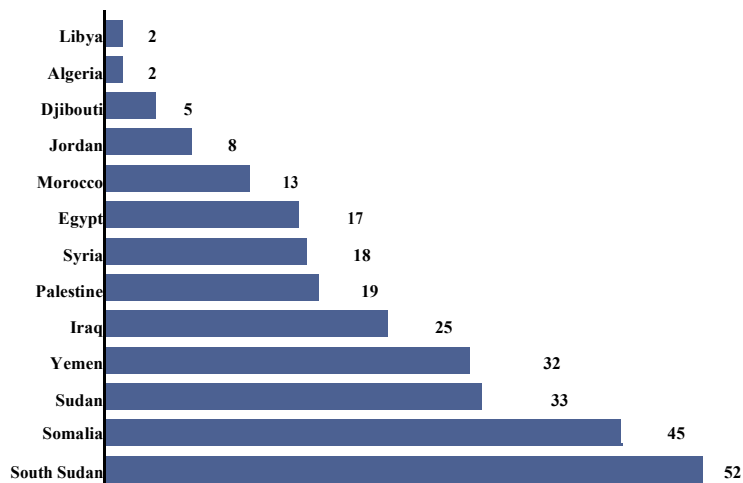
Another social factor that causes disability is early marriage phenomenon. In the Arab region, one in seven girls marries before her 18th birthday (United Nations Population Fund 2012). In the Arab region, the highest rates of child marriage are seen in the poorest countries —Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and South Sudan—where annual per capita incomes in 2011 were less than USD 2,000. One-third or more of the girls in these countries marry before their 18th birthday (see Figure 4). At the other end of the spectrum, child marriage is rare in Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya. Egypt—the most

populous Arab country—is home to the largest number of child brides in the region (Farzaneh, Roudi-Fahimi, Shaimaa and Ibrahim 2013).

It is one of the prevalent phenomena in the Arab Muslim society, especially for females. This phenomenon is related to many values, customs, concepts, social and economic conditions, which result in the young mother (before her 18th birthday) having children before her biological and psychological maturity. Additionally, her reproductive health is incomplete and thus she gives birth to weak, undernourished and immature children, vulnerable to disability. The mother is still unable to assume the responsibility of motherhood and she lacks awareness of health, psychological and educational principles in the upbringing of her children.

The problem is compounded by the trend to increase the number of births to compensate for the loss of children due to high proportion of Infant mortality and short periods of time between successive births, which increases the likelihood of disability among children and the severe vulnerability of the mother (Tariq and Rabeeb 2008). Families who marry off their daughters at such a young age may believe that it is in the girls' best interest, not realizing that they are violating their daughters' human rights (Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Shaimaa Ibrahim 2013).

Figure 4. Percentage of Women Ages 20 to 24 Who Married Before Their 18th Birthday



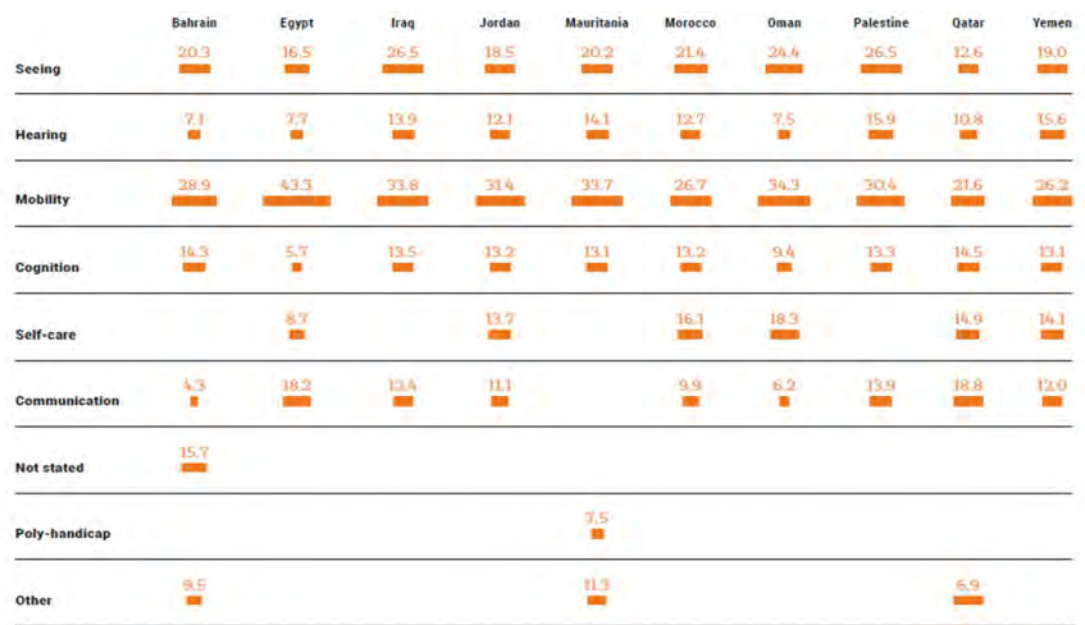
Sources: Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Shaimaa Ibrahim, 2013.

## TYPES OF DISABILITIES IN ARAB COUNTRIES

Seeing and hearing impairment, mobility, cognition, self-care and communication are the most common types of disability in Arab countries (Figure 5). Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, Qatar, Sudan and Yemen—have allowed for multiple disability types per person, meaning that the total number of disability instances in these countries is higher than the total number of persons with disabilities (ESCWA, 2018). Disabilities related to mobility are the most common type in all countries. In Egypt, they account for as much as 43.3 per cent of all disabilities, whereas Qatar has the lowest proportion at 21.6 per cent. Disabilities pertaining to hearing make up between 10.8 and 15.9 per cent of the total in all countries apart from Bahrain and Egypt, where the respective shares are 7.1 and 7.7

per cent. Cognitive disabilities amount to 5.7 per cent of disabilities in Egypt, 9.4 per cent in Oman and between 13.1 and 14.5 per cent in all other countries. As for communication difficulties, the spread is even more considerable. In Bahrain, this form of disability represents a mere 4.3 per cent of total disabilities—less than one fourth of the proportion in Qatar, at 18.8 per cent. The proportions relating to self-care are similarly divergent, spanning between 8.7 per cent in Egypt and 18.3 per cent in Oman. For Qatar, Bahrain and Mauritania, there is a residual category for “other” disabilities, which in the three countries account for 6.9, 9.5 and 11.3 per cent respectively. Bahrain has a category called “not stated” which makes up 15.7 per cent of all disabilities, whereas Mauritania has one for “poly-handicap” at 7.5 per cent (ESCWA 2018).

Figure 5. Types of disabilities as percentage of total



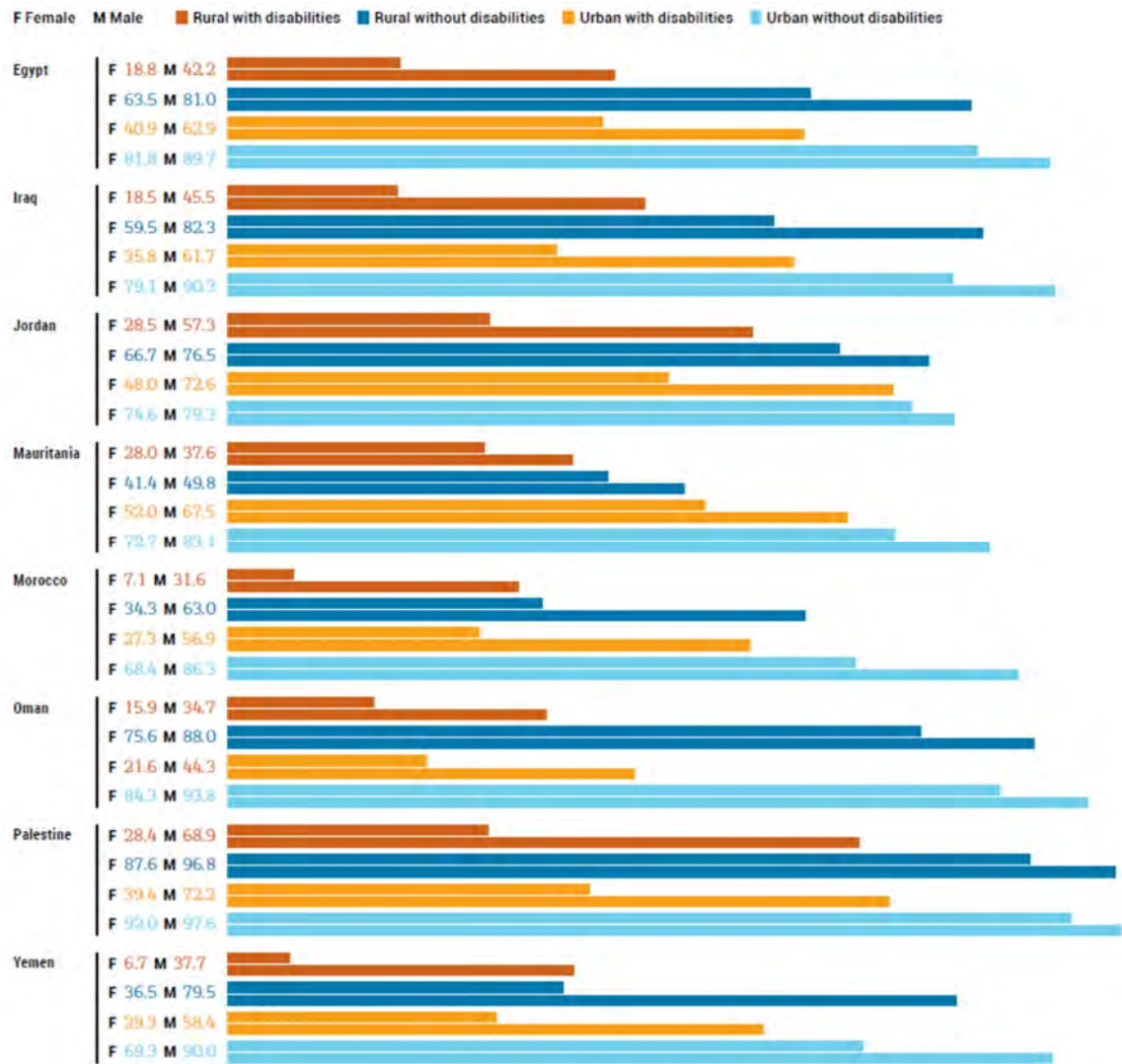
Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2018). *Disability in the Arab Region 2018*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1. Beirut, p. 21.

## EDUCATION IN ARAB COUNTRIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

According to Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA, 2018), the rate of literacy, in the Arab region, for persons with disabilities is not equal to that for persons without disabilities. Moreover, gender and location have a word to say, as they are negatively correlated with

literacy. As shown in figure 6, females with disabilities in rural areas have the lowest rates. On the other hand, men without disabilities in urban areas, are in all countries the most literate group. Females with disabilities in urban areas have the second lowest literacy rate, and males with disabilities in rural areas the third lowest (ESCWA, 2018).

Figure 6. Percentage of the population aged 15 and above who are literate

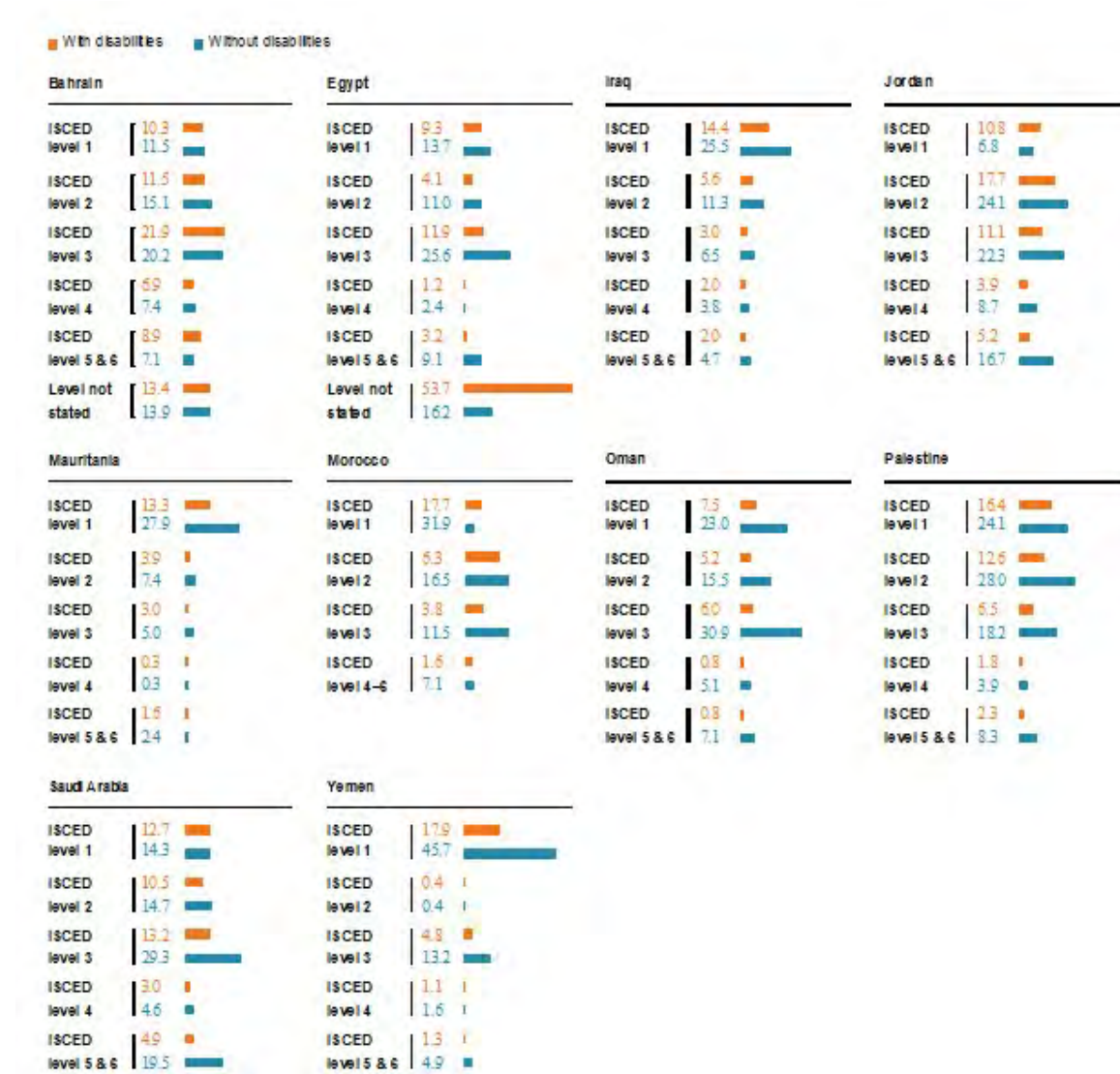


Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2018). *Disability in the Arab Region 2018*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1. Beirut, p. 35.

Concerning educational attainment, persons with disabilities in the Arab region (as shown in Figure 7.) are significantly less likely than persons without disabilities to have attained any form of education. In Jordan, for instance, the rate of persons without disabilities having attained ISCED level 1 or higher (78.6 per cent) is only 1.6 times higher than the rate among persons with disabilities (48.7 per cent). In Palestine for in-

stance, the proportion of persons without disabilities who have attained any form of education (82.5 per cent) is 2.1 times higher than the proportion of persons without disabilities having done so (39.6 per cent), but the proportion of attainment at ISCED levels 5 or 6 is 3.6 times higher among persons without disabilities (8.3 per cent) than among persons with disabilities (2.3 per cent) (ESCWA 2018).

Figure 7. Educational attainment (%)

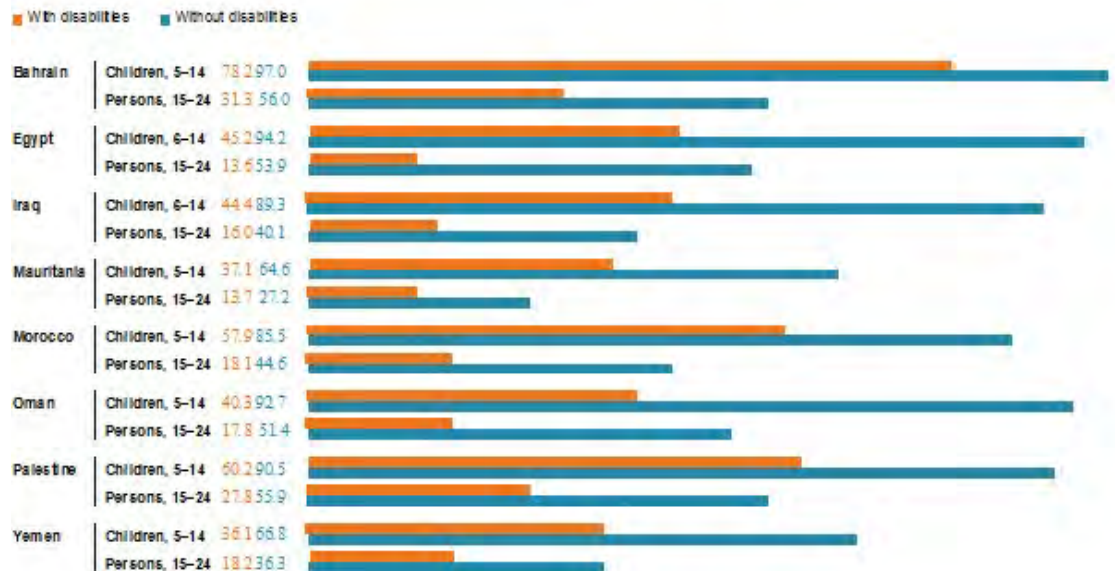


Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2018). *Disability in the Arab Region 2018*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1. Beirut, p.36.

As for school attendance, persons with disabilities encounter a multitude of barriers to schooling. The attendance of persons with disabilities, according to Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA 2018), remains strikingly lower than that of persons without disabilities. There is a significant drop in school attendance from ages 5-14 years to 15-24 years, persons with disabilities are particularly underrepresented among students aged 15-24, indicating a higher dropout rate and

lower level of higher educational attainment. In Egypt, for example, the attendance rate for persons with disabilities is 3.3 times higher in the younger age span (45.2 per cent) than in the older one (13.6 per cent). Among persons without disabilities, meanwhile, the attendance rate is only 1.7 times higher in the younger age span (94.2 per cent) than in the older (53.9 per cent) (ESCWA, 2018) (Figure 8.).

Figure 8. School attendance (%)



Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2018). *Disability in the Arab Region 2018*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1. Beirut, p. 38.

#### PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE LABOUR FORCE IN ARAB COUNTRIES

##### ▪ UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The UAE provides for equal and fair employment opportunities to Emiratis of determination (disabilities). Two laws protect employment rights of citizens of determination. They are: Federal Law No. 29 of 2006 Concerning the Rights of People with Special Needs and Dubai Government Law No. 2 of 2014. The federal law stipulates that UAE nationals with special needs have the right to work and occupy public positions. Article 16 of the law provides: UAE nationals with special needs have the right to work and hold public office. Their special needs shall not be a barrier for their nomination and selection for a job. Special needs should be taken into account while testing the candidate's competency for the work.

The law issued by Dubai Government protects the rights of citizens with special needs in the emirate of Dubai. The UAE has also ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This way, the UAE strives to empower and promote the social

inclusion of all. (UAE <https://www.government.ae/en/information-and-services/jobs/employment-of-people-with-special-needs>).

##### ▪ BAHRAIN

Bahrain joined the Arab Convention on the Employment and Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons No. 17 of 1993 by virtue of Decree-Law No. 3 of 1996. It also acceded to the International Labor Convention No. 159 of 1983 concerning vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, since the Emiri Decree No. 17 of 1999 was issued, emphasizing the care and protection of people with disabilities and their rights. The Bahraini Labor Law in the private sector includes a special organization for those with disabilities, provides the necessary legal protection. The Ministry of Labor pays great attention to include people with disabilities in the labor market. Private sector companies and institutions are committed to employ a percentage. The Ministry of Labor has taken some steps to activate, encourage and apply this law, by calculating the employment of disabled persons, within the proportion of Bahrainis (Cultural forum for people with special needs 2005).

- OMAN

The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for the employment of persons with disabilities through:

- Forming a committee headed by the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Manpower to follow up the issue through the Joint Working Group with the Ministry of Manpower to search for suitable jobs for persons with disabilities in the private sector according to their qualifications, physical and mental abilities.
- 56 persons with disabilities were employed in 2008 - 2009. The number of employees reached 110. In 2010 97 persons with disabilities were employed in private sector institutions.
- The private sector is committed to allocate 2% of employment for persons with disabilities according to the Omani Labor Law and the Law for the Care and Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons.
- Allocating at least 1% of the total number of jobs to persons with disabilities in accordance with the decision of the Civil Service Council No. 1/2009.
- A special committee was set up for the rehabilitation, training and employment of persons with disabilities under the chairmanship of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Manpower for Vocational Training and Technical Education.
- Opening public vocational training centers to accept persons with disabilities starting from the training year 2010/2011 (<https://qanoon.om/p/2008/rd2008063> ).

- JORDAN

Article (25), Law No. (20) for the Year 2017, Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act states:

- No person may be excluded from employment or from training on the basis of, or because of disability. Disability in itself should not be considered a barrier for preventing candidacy for holding or assuming a position or job and for retaining

such position or job and attaining promotions therein.

- It is forbidden for announcements of employment or job vacancies or forms related to candidacy or occupancy thereof to include provisions on the need to be free from disability.
- Both of the Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training Corporation will, each according to their area of competence and in coordination with the Council, execute the following:
  - Include into the policies, strategies, plans, and programs of work, technical and vocational education and training and related curricula measures that will guarantee the inclusion of persons with disabilities, and will secure utilization thereof on an equal basis with others.
  - Prepare the curricula and services extended within the vocational training programs and provide such services in formats accessible to persons with disabilities in a manner that enables them to benefit from such programs and services.
  - Refrain from excluding persons with disabilities from training in any profession after accommodations have been made because of disability.
- Both government and non-government authorities will provide reasonable accommodation to enable persons with disabilities to carry out their job or tasks and to retain their jobs and attain promotions therein.
- Without undermining work or job requirements related to educational or professional qualifications, government and non-government organizations with at least (25) employees and workers and no more than (50) employees each pledge to hire at least one employee with disabilities to fill out one of its vacancies. In the event that there are more than (50) employees hired by these organizations, (4%) of the relevant vacancies should be assigned to

persons with disabilities, according to a decision made by the Ministry of Labor (The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan 2017).

#### ▪ SAUDI ARABIA

The Labour Code Law was legislated in the year 1969 and focuses mainly on labour rights and on detailed vocational rehabilitation for people with disabilities. The Regulation of Rehabilitation Programme No. 1355 looks towards establishing a rehabilitation programme with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Social Affairs so as to prepare persons with disabilities for employment generation in the country along with providing information about types of services and employment available to persons with disabilities (Al-Lamki 2007). The Labour and Workmen Law of the year 1969 seeks to generate employment opportunities for people with disabilities by establishing and organising institutions responsible for the provision of vocational training services to individuals with disability/disabilities. It promotes the employment of persons with disabilities in Article 54 of the written law. The Legislation of Disability was passed in 1987 focused on important provisions and guaranteed people with disabilities equal rights to those of other people in society which also include employment. The Disability Code was passed in the year 2000 by the Saudi government and seeks to ensure that people with disabilities have access to free and proper medical, psychological, social, educational, and employment opportunities through rehabilitation services and public agencies (Daliah Alkhoulhi 2015)

#### ▪ QATAR

As stated in Article (5):

A minimum of 2 per cent of the total number of job opportunities with the competent authorities shall be allocated for Special Needs Persons holding the certificates or ID cards referred to in Article 4. Such appointment shall be in accordance with the capabilities and qualifications of the people with special needs based on the nomination of the Council, in coordination with the competent authorities. Each private sector employer employing more than twenty-five (25) persons shall undertake that 2 per cent or at least one person

of their workforce shall comprise Special Needs Persons, and such employment to be subject to the written consent of the Council. In all cases, subject to the written consent of the Council, the appointment on the above jobs may not be from non-special needs persons, except in the case of lack of the proper qualifications to fill in the required post (Law No. 2 of 2004 in respect of People with Special Needs).

#### ▪ TUNISIA

Law n° 2016-41 dated 16 May 2016, amending the orientation law n° 2005-83 dated 15 August 2005, relating to the promotion and protection of disabled persons.

Art. 30—Any enterprise or establishment public or private normally employing between 50 and 99 workers, is required to reserve at least a working post to disabled persons. Any enterprise or establishment public or private normally employing 100 persons and more, is required to reserve a rate of at least 2% of the working posts to disabled persons. The same rate is reserved at least in the granting of professional authorizations by the ministries, the public establishments, the local and regional authorities and the professional organizations. The implementation of the recruitment of the disabled persons is carried out within the same deadlines of other (<http://www.legislation.tn>).

#### ▪ EGYPT

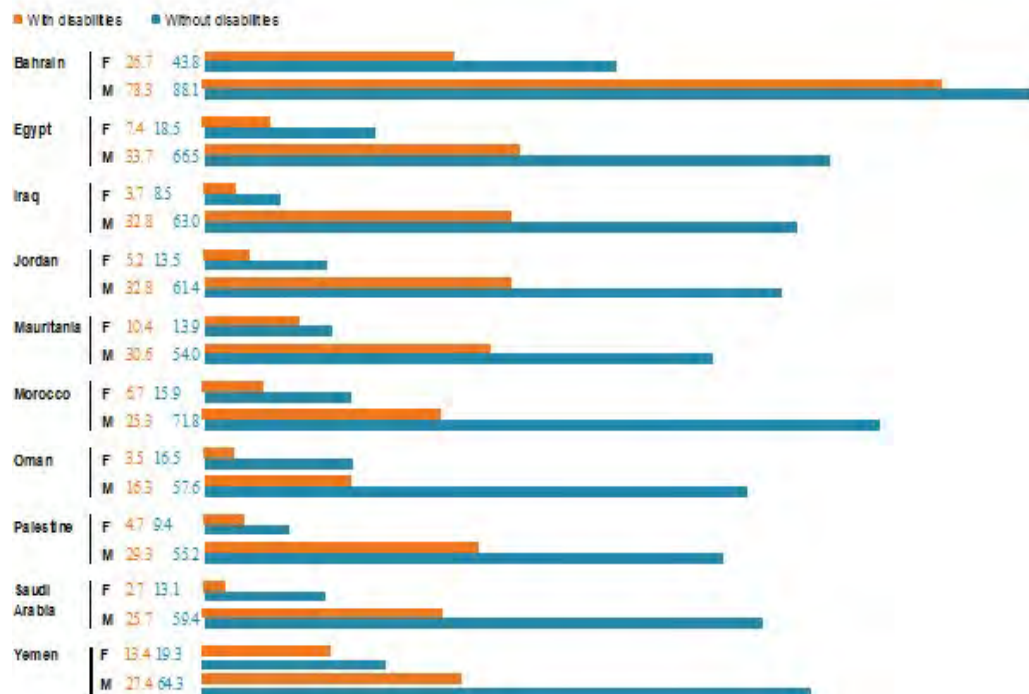
In Chapter Two: The Right to Work, in the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 10 of 2018, Article 20: "The State shall guarantee the right of persons with disabilities to equal opportunities for employment commensurate with their educational qualifications and vocational training. It also undertakes not to subject them to any form of forced or compulsory labor. The State must also protect them in fair working conditions, seek to open their labor markets at home and abroad, and enhance their employment opportunities through direct entrepreneurship, comprehensive development activities and projects in the light of the social policies of the State. The State is also committed to providing adequate safety and facilitation arrangements for persons with disabilities in the workplace, ensuring

enjoying and practicing their labour and trade union rights, enabling them to have effective access to technical and vocational guidance programs, employment services, vocational and continuing training and prohibiting any discrimination or denial of any benefits or Rights on the basis of disability in employment, type of employment, promotions or remuneration and accessories (Egypt: Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities No. 10 of 2018)

Despite these legislations, the employment rate for persons with disabilities, as reported by Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA, 2018), is no higher than 14 per cent for women and 34 per cent for men, and often much lower than that (Figure 9.). Non-employment among people with disabilities is due to two reasons: economic inactivity and unemployment *per se*. The rate of economic inactivity among women with disabilities, compared to women without disabilities, is above 84 per cent in all countries for which data are available, reaching 95.4 per cent in Iraq (Figure 10. ESCWA 2018). Among men with disabilities, compared to men without disabilities, the rate of economic inactivity

varies between 50 and 70 per cent, apart from in Oman where it stands at 76.1 per cent. In Morocco, notably, the rate of economic inactivity is 3.9 times higher among men with disabilities (69.1 per cent) than among men without disabilities (17.9 per cent; ESCWA 2018). An unemployment, on the other hand, is higher among persons with disabilities of both genders (Figure 11.). The most extreme differences are in Saudi Arabia, where the unemployment rate for women with disabilities (75.3 per cent) is 2.3 times higher than the rate for women without disabilities (32.8 per cent), and the rate for men with disabilities (48.6 per cent) 4.2 times higher than the rate for men without disabilities (11.5 per cent, ESCWA 2018). Yemen has the lowest unemployment rates for women as well as for men with disabilities (5.8 and 13.7 per cent). The female rate, notably, is less than half of the one for women without disabilities (12.6 per cent). The rate for men with disabilities, meanwhile, is only marginally higher than the one for men without disabilities (12.9 per cent, ESCWA 2018).

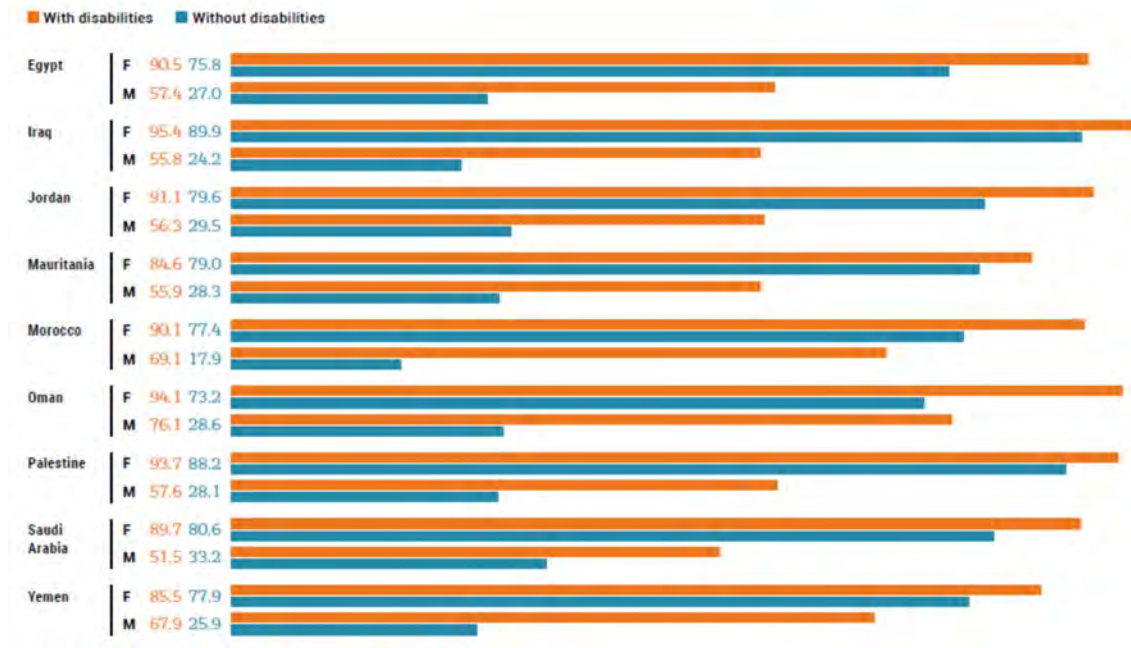
Figure 9. Employment rate among the population aged 15–64 (%)



Source: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). Disability in the Arab region. 2018, p. 41.



Figure 10. Economic inactivity rate among the population aged 15–64 (%)



Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2018). *Disability in the Arab Region 2018*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1. Beirut, p. 42.

Figure 11. Unemployment rates among the population aged 15 and above (%)



Source: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (2018). *Disability in the Arab Region 2018*, E/ESCWA/SDD/2018/1. Beirut, p. 43.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, the authors lead a theoretical and comparative analysis of data and results from empirical research on disability phenomena in Arab countries, published in the ECSWA report of 2018. The above theoretical and comparative analysis does not exhaust the topic but is rather the initiation of exploration, indicating important issues for broader analyzes in subsequent publications. What can be seen in the data and results of comparative research is that contemporary disability concepts and attitude to disability phenomena in the Arab worlds have been subject of evolution, analogous to the other countries of the world or Western culture on a metaphorical continuum from various form of discrimination of people with disabilities to acceptance and gradual steps towards inclusion meant as fifth pattern of attitudes towards disabilities in cultures, indicated by Douglas (2002). Nowadays, the Arab countries analyzed in the paper took care of the protection of the education law and the rights to work of people with disabilities. Even so, can be seen in the primary data and results in charts, access to education and its completion is significantly lower for disabled students compared to non-disabled students in Arab countries. As well as to work access of Arabs with disabilities is also lower than for non-disabled persons. Additionally the data revealed gender differences, to the detriment of employment of women with disabilities in particular countries from the Arab world.

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