

A Study on Sociocultural Features among Turkish and Iraqi Women

Salih Mahdi ADAI¹ & Bushra Ni'ma RASHID²

Keywords

Turkish women,
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Abstract

Turkey and Iraq are characterized by a multiplicity of religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity. Women's status in society is one of the most arguable topics in Turkey and Iraq. To build a secure and prosperous society, women's empowerment is one of the most important instruments. Traditionally, women are expected to be more dependent, relational, submissive, caring, and emotional in these countries. The development of women's self-cognition, the formation of their outlook on life, and the orientation of their values are influenced by the specific social-cultural aspects in which they live. This study provides insights into different sociocultural features among Turkish and Iraqi women. It describes family types, religious beliefs, social interactions, marriage, education, and employment. In addition, it also covers some of the cultural and traditional practices followed by women. The social relations, challenges and conflicts women face in these societies need to be studied. It is concluded that culture plays a vital role in such features; in addition, the sample's traditions have their influence and impact at women's discrimination, appointing, and roles.

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1. Introduction

The Middle East is marked by a wide range of religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic variety, which is exacerbated by hegemonic forces that divide people by class, tradition, and legacy, resulting in a rich heterogeneity in the area (Gerged et al., 2018). The Middle East includes Iraq and Turkey. Iraq is bordered on the east by Iran and on the north by Turkey. Iraq has a population of more than 39 million people. Iraqi women account for half of the country's overall population. According to the World Bank's Collection of Development Indicators, women made up 50.63 percent of Turkey's total population (more than 85 million) in 2020. In 2017, Iraq was placed 121st out of 188 nations on the United Nations Human Development Index, and 123rd on the United Nations Gender Inequality Index. There is around 58.71 percent of people below the age of 24 in the United States. (11,736, 897 males and 11,217, 392 females). Relationships between the two nations have been tense since late 2011. Both nations have a strong historical and cultural connection. Iran and Turkey have strong economic and commercial ties. However,

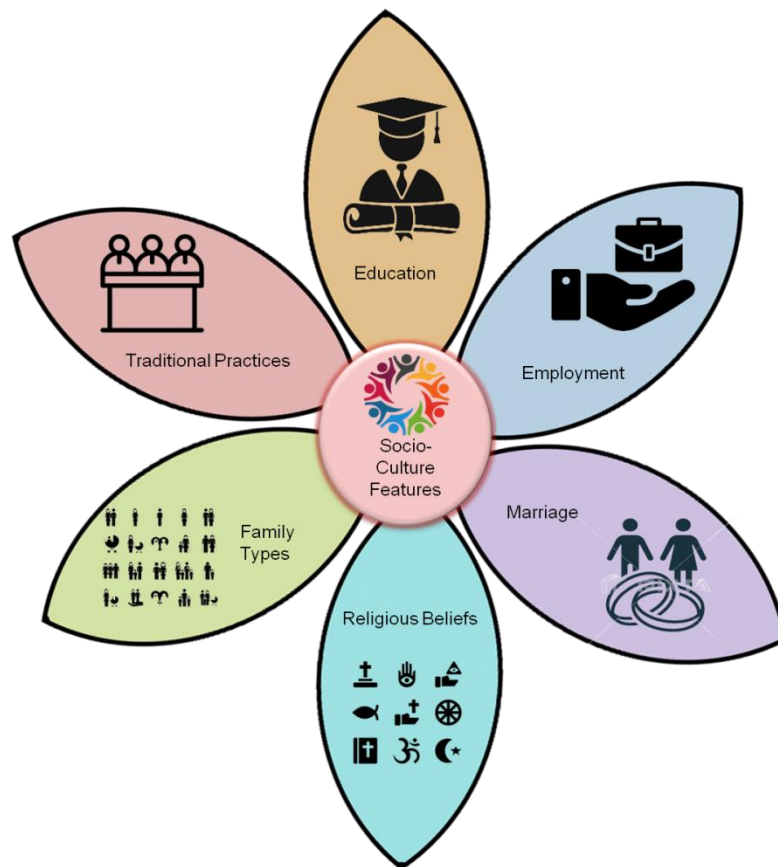
¹ ORCID: 0000-0002-4568-8967. Prof. Dr., salih_mehdi71@yahoo.com

² Corresponding Author. ORCID: 0000-0002-2620-850X. Assist. Prof. Dr., Bosh1969bosh@yahoo.com, Bushra.nima@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq

there are significant social and cultural distinctions between these nations. Socio-cultural values are a collection of values, beliefs, traditions, and behaviors that define a society. These values influence how we handle risk, how we see jobs, how we think about money, and how we imagine a perfect existence (Van Bommel, 2020; Zhang, 2021).

Culture is described as the beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors that are carried through generations, as well as knowledge, art, traditions, customs, talents, and other such skills and habits that humans acquire as members of a community. Morals, traditions, and conventions are all key factors in shaping culture. Individuals' lives are influenced by societal values, attitudes, beliefs, and actions. Religious beliefs, it was said, are not only an individual but also collective phenomena that play a significant part in the stability and balance of social systems. Health and illness are also cultural ideas that vary depending on society. Women's engagement in cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts and developmental processes are influenced by factors such as family connections, peer groups, academic institutions, workplaces, sports events, and so on (Schoon and Heckhausen, 2019). Different socio-cultural features of a society are depicted in figure 1.

Figure 1: Various Socio-Cultural Features of Society (As Adopted from Schoon and Heckhausen, 2019)



The progress of a country is inextricably linked to the development of its women. Women's economic empowerment & financial inclusion have been recognised by leading organisations including the International Monetary Funds, the Organization for Economic Co - Operation, and the World Bank. Women's rights have been supported by the ICESCR (International Covenant on Economic, Social, & Cultural Rights), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CSW (Commission on the Status of Women), & SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), which were all adopted by all UN Member States in 2015. Governments from all across the globe have pledged to support and promote women's rights. States are required to endeavour to guarantee that economic, societal, and cultural rights included in the covenant such the right to work and a reasonable standard of life are granted to men and women on an equal basis in accordance with the 1996 ICESCR (Ozturk, 2018; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk & Trojszczak, 2022). Women and girls must be empowered and gender equality achieved as part of the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable development Agenda agreed upon by all UN Members States in 2015 (Agarwal, 2018). Government research shows that the well-being of a country depends on the equality of women.

In Turkey and Iraq, the status of women in society is one of the most contentious issues. The people of Iraq have suffered from economic stagnation and restricted access to key services as a result of wars, sanctions, and conflicts throughout the previous several decades (Altok and Tosun, 2020). Iraqi women and girls have suffered as a result of a decade-long conflict, as well as years of sanctions and invasions. Women and girls in Iraq had more access to education, healthcare, and work from the 1960s through the 1980s, but their situation started to worsen dramatically after the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). Social relations women have and the challenges and conflicts they face in the society must be studied to implement women's welfare actions by the government in Turkey and Iraq (Doyle, 2018). Hence, this paper is focused on the study of several socio-cultural features prevalent among Turkish and Iraqi women.

2. Socio-Cultural Features among Turkish and Iraqi Women

The socio-cultural features such as family types, religious beliefs, employment, education, marriage, and traditional practices among Turkish and Iraqi women are investigated in this section.

2.1. Family Types

Families are viewed as the "fundamental unit of social structure and socioeconomic activity" in Turkey and Iraq. This difference needs to be established since families in Turkey & Iraq experience different challenges. Household types were categorized based on the economic independence of women in the family. To the extent that women aren't recognized as unique people, these kinds demonstrate how little respect they receive in society compared to males. One of the things that distinguish a woman from a man is her level of participation and voice in the family's decision-making process. Women in rural Turkey and Iraq do not have a separate existence outside of the family, and family members, especially women, do not recognize their disadvantaged status in society. Families in the city

are split by their differences. Men and patriarchy dominate conventional families, in which no decisions are made together, with little independence for women either. In addition, she is unable to do anything about it since she lacks the competence. This is the most prevalent family structure in Turkey (Kaynak et al., 2017).

The heritage of Turkey reveals that women were considered gifts and may be traded or sold. Women's equality in education, clothing standards, civil rights, and political rights were all granted to Turkish women following the establishment of the Turkish Empire, as were international women's rights agreements such as the 1948 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights. However, none of this was possible in practice since they were all manifestations of the so-called patriarchal order, and this oppressive state only grew more entrenched intellectually with the rise of monotheistic religions in Turkish politics (Adar, 2021; Yavuz and Ozturk, 2019).

Turkey is undergoing a cultural shift away from conventional gender roles toward more egalitarian ones, especially among the country's more educated citizens. As a general rule, males are supposed to be more self-reliant, autonomous, and egotistical, while women are believed to be more submissive, compassionate, and emotional. According to the findings of a recent study, Turkish women are both more individuated as well as more connected to each other than their male counterparts. Turkish women may be moving toward greater autonomy and individuation, but they still have a strong need to be part of a group. A patrilineal structure defined by functionally extended families has been replaced in Turkey and Iraq by an urbanized structure that comprises functionally composite nuclear families (Tulek et al., 2020; Nashmi, and Mehdi , 2022).

Kurdish Iraqi women's social problem is illustrated by the fact that 73% of women who attempt self-immolation are aged 14 to 30 years old, according to information supplied by the Director of a Violence against Women monitor (the Ministry of Interior-Kurdistan Region, Iraq) (Mirlashari et al., 2017). Young women in the Kurdistan area are more likely to commit suicide than other groups of people to better comprehend the situation, and find trends, capacities, and chances for fixing this problem; immediate action is thus recommended (Yousif et al., 2021). Several Iraqi women are self-immolating owing to marriage and family conflict, which includes physical and mental health issues as well as economic and social situations in a male-dominated culture (Cleary et al., 2021). In modern Turkey and Iraq, respect for one's elders is a highly prized cultural trait. As a result, individuals work hard to improve and protect their reputation in the name of their in-group. Family members in Turkey still practice "honor murders" to discipline women suspected of illicit behavior, either by murdering them or compelling them to take their own lives (Uskul and Cross, 2019).

2.2. Religious Beliefs

Iraq is split ethnographically into Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and Assyrians; religiously, into Muslims and Christians; and (Muslim) sectarianly, into Sunnis and Shias. Arab Muslim Shias (55–60 percent), Arab Muslim Sunnis (20–25 percent), and Kurds (18–20 percent) are the three most numerous groups.

Approximately 96% of the country is Muslim, according to Minority Rights Group International. Iraqi social and political dynamics have also been affected by tribal, class, and urban/rural divisions (Saouli, 2019; Al-Juboury and Saedi, 2018). According to Bobov and Capik (2020), around the age of 30, women develop a lifestyle by comprehending religious views. Turkey's secular outlook and considerable economic, political, and cultural ties with the West set it apart from other Middle Eastern cultural contexts. There is a wide range of religious & gender-role attitudes in Turkey and Iraq, as well as differing degrees of educational achievement and professional accomplishment among the population (Tedeschi et al., 2017).

In Turkey, things are a little bit different. In this secular society where Sharia Law is forbidden, women are fighting for the right to wear headscarves. Women have been denied admission to institutions and government workers have been sacked, demoted, or moved for refusing to remove their headscarves. In pictures for driver's licenses, women are not allowed to wear headscarves (a similar case is ongoing in the United States). Journalists and writers who advocate for the spread of Islam have been subjected to legal action. Thus, in this nation, the headscarf has become the one of the topics of Turkey's most controversial fights as the country tries to join the European Union and the worldwide economy. The disagreement left the nation striving to combine increased democratic freedom with retaining a secular state in a region of rising Islamic influence. As a result, in Islamic nations, the fight for and against women's rights continues (Sechzer, 2019).

It is safe to assume that women's living situations in Turkey & Iraq are tougher than men's, and they are subjected to societal pressures. Women who are subjected to this kind of oppression and whose aspirations, goals, and desires are neglected may feel justified in turning to alternate methods of finding meaning in their life, such as adopting paranormal beliefs (Ayar et al., 2022). The paranormal beliefs pertain to ideas, forces, and occurrences that are beyond human comprehension, beyond science's capacity to explain, and that originate for unknown and incomprehensible causes. Women across the board held greater paranormal beliefs than males (Wilson, 2018).

In Turkish society, a sense of belonging is passed down through generations via traditions including beliefs, language, culture, and art. Many historic and cultural traditions in Turkish society including weddings, guest-hosting, and holiday celebrations, enable women to interact. Turkish culture is characterized by strong social ties and individuals who are constantly communicating with one another. Turkish and Iraqi ladies are known for passively accepting their illnesses and completely depending on God (Ahmadi et al., 2019).

In Iraqi and Turkish traditions, marriage carries a great deal of responsibility for both partners. Maintaining the marital relationship, caring for the family/children, and the requirement of meeting their demands may drive married people to spend less time on numerous hobbies and interests. Having a household, taking care of elderly relatives, and raising children and witnessing their development into full human beings are all viewed as more significant than ones personal life in Turkish and Iraqi culture. This life goal may cause parents to overlook their children's hobbies, curiosity, and even themselves as individuals. Iraq has one of the highest

rates of child marriage, despite the overall decline in the practice in the Middle East (Hossieni, 2021). In Turkey, child marriages should account for at least 30–35 percent of all weddings. Turkey has one child marriage for every third marriage, according to this data. As a result, preventing child weddings in Iraq & Turkey is a pressing issue that must be addressed immediately (Duran and Tepehan, 2019). In both Turkey and Iraq, child marriage is the result of a complex chain of interwoven social, economic, and religious factors, as well as a lack of educational opportunity and the country's long history of violence and instability (Watson, 2021).

2.3. Education

Higher-educated women and married people with similar educational backgrounds are much less likely to be victims of domestic abuse. There are some ways in which education may empower women, such as increasing their self-confidence, allowing them to better compete for jobs, and increasing their income (Sen and Bolsoy, 2017). According to Global Gender Gap Report (2019), the female literacy rate is 93.6 % and the male literacy rate is 98.8% in Turkey. In Turkey, there is still a problem with the education and continuation of females at all levels of school. In rural places, this problem is much more acute. Males have a literacy rate of 1.6 percent, while females have an illiteracy rate of 8.5 percent in Turkey in 2016, which would be 5.1 percent overall. There is 19.1 percent of the population aged 25 or older who have graduated from high school or college, with men accounting for 23.2 percent and women accounting for 15 percent. 16.5 percent of the population has earned a bachelor's or higher degree, with men accounting for 18.8 percent of this total and women accounting for 14.2 percent. Because of the way their families and societies are set up, girls are more prone than boys to engage in this sort of behavior. The process of societal transformation, on the other hand, might take years. Girls are not sent to school because of regulations, including such 8 years of obligatory education, which are broken in their face (Baltagi et al., 2019; Cin and Karlidağ-Dennis, 2021).

High school graduates earned an average of 16,124 Turkish Liras (TL) per year in 2015, but women who had not completed any education earned an average of 8,528 TL per year in 2015 (Tekkas and Betrus, 2020). Despite Iraq's progress in reducing gender disparities in basic health and education, it has been argued that these gains have not yet been reflected in the economic and political engagement of women. The combination of Iraq's economic system and its conservative culture has resulted in lower education levels & lower rates of labor force participation among Iraqi women. Iraqi women rely heavily on their spouses for their financial well-being (Ucal and Gunay, 2019; Ghanim, 2019).

2.4. Employment

The biggest issue today is employment inequalities in the gender realm materially because, in the case of unemployed women, they cannot create a life that is separate from the family and cannot have economic independence. Therefore, they cannot be at the same level as men in the family in terms of decision-making, cooperation, social life, etc. There is an existence of gender discrimination in the labor market in Turkey. Despite formal legal protection, societal structures and cultural norms might stand in the way of achieving true gender parity. Though

each country's history is unique, the region's diversified civilizations and religious and political leaders have created patriarchal cultures that limit women's economic and political engagement. The advancement of women's rights has always been intertwined with their ability to participate in the formal economy (Hendriks, 2019; Althalathini et al., 2021; Oswald, 2023).

Gender-based prejudices, legal and policy restrictions, as well as societal expectations and behaviors, continue to impede women's equality. Some households in Turkey and Iraq still do not allow women to leave the house alone. Another aspect of women's capacity to work and learn in an environment with people of the opposite gender is socio-religious. When it comes to women, international agreements such as the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women are seen as incompatible with national laws, customs and religions (Blaker, 2020; Gunes and Ezikoglu, 2022; Caterina, 2018).

In Turkey and Iraq, women's work and occupational standing are highly stratified. Among working married women, just one-third have jobs and many of those employed are unpaid laborers, such as those who work for free in a family business or farm (Gedikli, 2014). New initiatives, such as universal public education, have helped increase female employment in Turkey's cities, but women in rural areas, particularly in Eastern Turkey, have significantly fewer work alternatives. Women from Kurdish and Arabic backgrounds who live in eastern Turkey face particular challenges since they are unable to communicate effectively in Turkish (Ozbay, 1995). Consequently, the patriarchal traditions and ideals of their families still exert influence over these women's lives, leaving them susceptible to assault (Gul and Schuster, 2020).

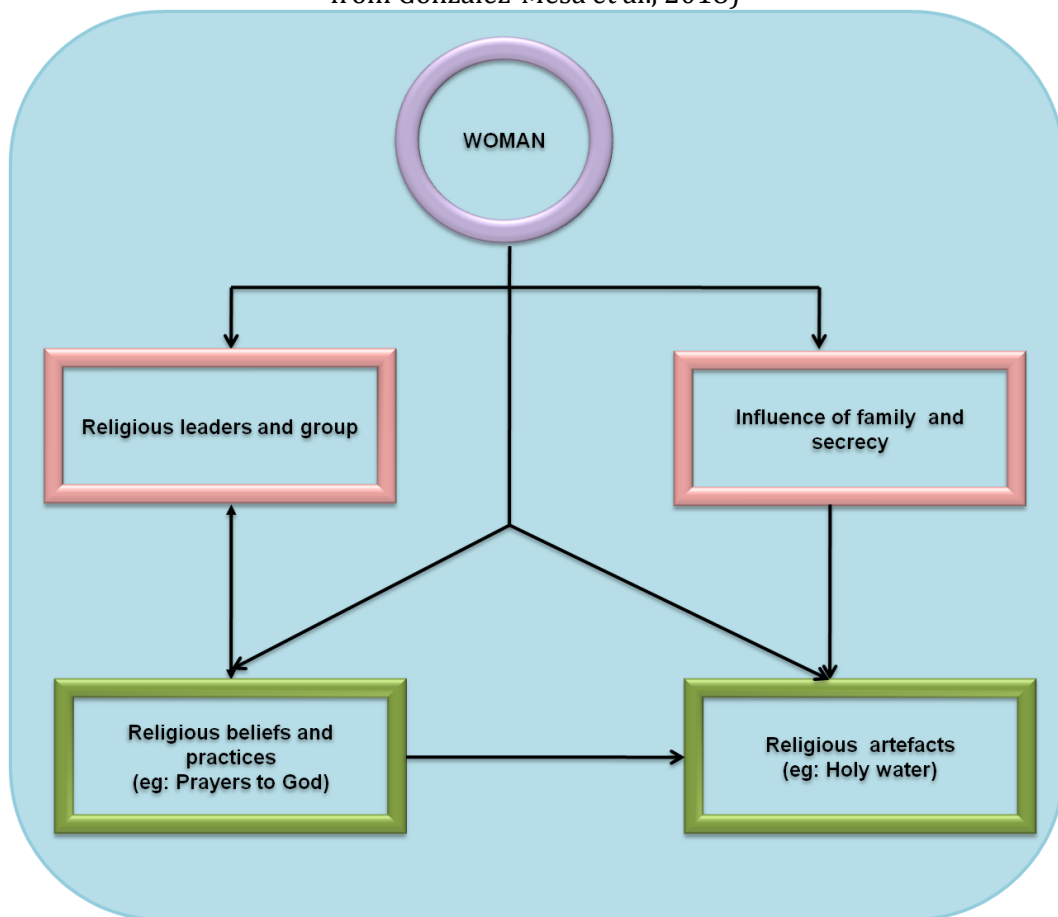
2.5. Traditional Practices during Pregnancy

Having children is a huge part of who we are as a society, especially in the United States. Numerous practices dating back to ancient times continue to be employed today, particularly in the lead-up to and throughout childbirth. Pregnant women in Turkey & Iraq are protected by a wide range of traditional rituals. (Altuntug et al., 2018) in the Turkish city of Konya, we looked at some of its traditional postpartum mother care traditions. To provide better health care, health practitioners must be aware of the cultural beliefs & practices of the people they serve. Social and cultural factors influence delivery in addition to its physiological effects on a woman. During pregnancy and postpartum, different societies have different cultural views on nutrition, exercise, relaxation, parenting, and interpersonal relationships. Some of the traditional practices are wrapping puerperant women's abdomen, not leaving puerperant women alone at home, leaving Quran, onion, garlic, and sewing needles near the puerperant and baby. The 20th & 40th days of pregnancy are celebrated by certain puerperant women. Pregnant women are not allowed to go out of the home their religious beliefs and practices affect their health & well significantly. Expectant and laboring women often display and utilize religious artefacts to demonstrate their beliefs (Aziato et al., 2016). Figure 2 shows a pregnant woman surrounded by religious memorabilia. Religious artefacts like holy water & blessed olive oil are of little significance. During pregnancy, some Turkish & Iraqi women prefer to use them (Zeyneloglu and Kisa, 2018; Al-Waili and Khudha, 2018).

With 59 newborns per 1,000 females, Iraq has one of the region's highest rates of adolescent pregnancy (World, 2015). Most people who don't utilize contraceptives & family planning (FP) techniques do so because of social norms and expectations.' Many people have unfavorable opinions about various forms of contraception. Women's access to FP services is hampered by patriarchal views. Women often cited their husbands' opposition to contraception as a cause for not using it. Iraqi women, on the other hand, did not cite religion as a major roadblock. Barriers to FP are exacerbated by cultural attitudes and practices (Soin et al., 2020; Alan et al., 2019).

The health of both the mother and the kid might be significantly impacted by some behaviors. Consequently, it is necessary to increase awareness about this issue and to debate and promote constructive as well as harmful habits and attitudes (González-Mesa et al., 2018).

Figure 2: Religious Beliefs and Practices during Pregnancy among Women (As Adopted from González-Mesa et al., 2018)



3. Conclusion

The rites and practices of other faiths can be adopted and executed by groups connected with other religions in Turkey & Iraq, which have historically housed numerous communities with varying religious and philosophical affiliations. This study provides detailed insights into different socio-cultural features among Turkish and Iraqi women. This study depicts the family patterns, marriage, religious beliefs, educational level, and employment challenges faced by them. Some of the traditional practices followed by Turkish and Iraqi women during pregnancy are explained in this study. Though the government reduced the gender gap in these countries, still some of the women are uneducated and interdependent. Hence governmental and non-governmental initiatives must provide awareness to illiterate Turkish and Iraqi women for the development of the countries.

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