

Public sector jobs keep women away

Prevent them from pursuing business ideas

- By Samihah Zaman, Staff Reporter
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Abu Dhabi: Cultural barriers and the lure of a public sector job are the key factors preventing female entrepreneurship in the UAE, an entrepreneurship expert said in the capital yesterday.

The high pay and shorter hours as well as cultural pre-conceptions which deem travel unsafe for women, were preventing women in the country from pursuing their business ideas, said Dr Halah Al Sokari, advisor at the Khalifa Fund, said.

"Given that nearly half the population of Abu Dhabi is female, we need to tackle these cultural and occupational barriers to female entrepreneurial participation," Dr Al Sokari said.

She was speaking at a workshop which focused on increasing both Emirati and expatriate female entrepreneurship in the UAE.

Currently, despite UAE having the highest female education enrolment rate worldwide, women are 20 times less likely than their male counterparts to start up a business.

Dr Al Sokari recommended that young girls needed to be provided with positive role models who encouraged innovation.

Young population

"The country has a very young population, with 65 per cent of people below the age of 24. So, if teachers at the school level encourage their students to be creative, women are more likely to innovate on their own when older," she explained.

In addition, currently working women needed to be innovative within their current jobs in order to generate more enterprise, Dr Al Sokari said.

"Most business owners around the world have previous employment experience, and many women also run a business while themselves being employed. So if women use creative ideas to solve problems and foster growth at their own workplaces, they can come up with ideas to develop an enterprise of their own," she added. Shaikha Al Muhairi, an Emirati homemaker in her 40s, who was present at the workshop, said that

knowledge of financial management and access to adequate capital had prevented her from opening up her own teacher training institute in the past,

"There are cultural barriers to female entrepreneurship, but individual constraints like inadequate finance also need to be tackled in more effective ways," the Shaikha added.

BOX STORY

- UAE female workforce participation
- 66 per cent of government workforce women
- 22.5 per cent of Federal National Council women
- 4 women cabinet ministers
- 4 women fighter pilots

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