

Opening new vistas for UAE women

They are young, fearless, intelligent, highly eloquent in English and full of ambition. They cannot even wait to adorn the overall, go to the fields, put their hands on a rig and feel the grease in their fingers.

This is the general impression that ADNOC News had developed after interviewing some of the first batch of women students who joined the Petroleum Institute this fall to pursue engineering disciplines.

"We don't mind working in the fields. Working in the fields is not as hard as raising a family," was the fitting answer from Sara al Ammari, a petroleum engineering student, on answering a question of whether she would be willing to work in the oil fields.

Stressing this finding was also Mrs. Enaam Hunaini, Coordinator of the Petroleum Institute's women's program, who expressed

her delight: "You know what? This is our first experience with females. We are so worried so scared I feel like hugging them, cuddling them. Keeping them under my wings all the time but they don't want this. They want to fly, they want to start, they want just to shoot and go ahead and fulfill their dream...they want to prove themselves. We have this power in the females so why not use it."

All of them over enthusiastic to talk to ADNOC News, the women students expressed their pride and happiness in breaking new grounds for the UAE women for being the first women to be trained to join the oil industry as

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John Herlihy, Foundation Director, and Ms. Inaam Hunaini, Coordinator of Women Program, with some of the students

petrochemical engineers.

"I am very proud, pleased and excited about what lies ahead for us," said Sara Al Ammari, adding: "I am also glad that we are the first women that are tested by the country to be qualified in the petroleum industry. This is the first step towards a bright future. I am also delighted that the society's perspective on viewing things have changed lately to the better.

On why she chose petroleum engineering, Sara said: "I find it the most interesting and I like it. Its also a very rare major that you might not find in any other institute in the UAE. It is also feminine in a way because it doesn't involve a lot of manual and practical work. I like being challenged and I want to prove my abilities in it."

Khadija Al Hashemi, a chemical engineering student, said she was aware about the opportunities the PI could offer to her because her brother was already studying in it.

"I have heard about the PI because my

brother is in the men campus and being a student in the PI is really good opportunity because we are going to be provided with guaranteed jobs after graduation," she said, stressing that not only they are going to get guaranteed jobs "but also the PI is going to graduate really successful engineers in the future so it is a big opportunity for us UAE women to join the PI."

Working in the fields

Regarding her choice for chemical engineering, Khadija said: "It is interesting and I can work in many faculties not just in ADNOC I can also work as a pharmacist," adding that she didn't mind to work in the field because it would give her the opportunity to learn and see the fields in the UAE.

However, Shamma Ahmed Al Shehi, a petroleum engineering student, said it would be unique to see UAE women working in the fields.

"I think we will be working in office but for



Sumaia Al Shaiba



Alia Al Suwaidi



Israa Al Hoosani

sure there are times when we will need to visit the fields for work. I am into petroleum engineering. It is unique for women in the UAE society to be working in the fields.

But Sara Al Ammari was emphatic about women's ability to work in the fields.

"We don't mind working in the fields. Working in the fields is not as hard as raising a family or bringing a family," she said.

With a youthful ambition for adventure, Somay Al Shaiba, petroleum engineering, expressed her enthusiasm for going to the fields: "I would like to add something. It will be fun and a new experience to us as women to go to the fields. And doesn't matter whether we dig or do other kinds of things, it will be a challenge for us and we have to prove ourselves."

Israa Al Hoosani, Electrical engineering, said that she envisioned herself working mostly in a factory but emphasized her determination to mettle in the fields as well: "It will be mainly in the factory not the field. I chose to be an engineer for this purpose. I love dealing with facts and numbers. I think working in the fields will be very challenging for us and I think I can prove myself in this area more than sitting in an office."

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Family support

On the family's role and support for their choices, they all expressed their delight at their families' positive attitude towards their career.

"Our families are totally with us in this decision and have encouraged us in a way because this kind of field is very rare for women. I am talking here about the petroleum field. Students who graduated 2 or 3 years ago are envying us because we have the chance to join the PI and some of them changed their university just to join the PI and I got motivated because of my brother who graduated with the first batch from the PI."

Alya Al Suwaidi, chemical engineering, said: "My family and friends supported me and they are very proud of me because I joined the PI. They believe that women are half of the society and they want me to challenge myself and prove myself in the society."

Interaction with men campus

On the perception of the faculty to them and their interaction with the male students, they said working closely with male students would be motivational and would add and ele



Shamma Al Shehhi



Sara Al Ammari



Khadija Al Hashimi

ment of positive competition.

"The teachers have welcomed us and they were very supportive and encouraged us through out the way," said Sara Al-Ammari, adding, " they always compare between us and the male students and say that we are better than them."

"We didn't have any interaction with them until now but we want to interact with them because sooner or later we will be working with them. I think if it was up to us as students, we all don't mind but the parents might have a little concern."

Commenting on the possibility of studying in a co-educational atmosphere, Somaya said: "It will be a more encouraging and motivational system. You can compare yourself with the boys and have a competition with them. It creates a very challenging atmosphere. It can also motivate boys to study harder."

She said women students do better in education because women spend more time at home, thus getting more time to study.

"Of course girls are better because in our tradition and society we tend to spend more time at home than boys so we have more time to study. Girls are more caring while boys have

this laid back attitude. Girls are more studios," she added.

Khadijah Al Hashimi attributed women's success to the job market which demands women to give their utmost in order to get a job.

"Women are more enthusiastic and devote more time for studying in order to achieve high grades so that they can have better opportunities for jobs after they graduate. But men can get jobs even when they graduate from high school," she said.

On the condition of the PI and whether they wanted to see any improvement, they said that the PI had surpassed their expectations and that it was offering them everything they needed.

"It is perfect and the career programs are nice, they take good care of us and the staff are very caring and supportive. The Equipment and facilities we use are top and the job opportunities are excellent," said Alia Al Suwaidi, expressing her gratitude to ADNOC and the PI for giving what she described as "this great opportunity to women."

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Mrs Enaam Hunaini, Coordinator of the Petroleum Institute's women's program

Mrs. Enaam Hunaini: **Women power**

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Mrs Enaam Hunaini, Coordinator of the Petroleum Institute's women's program, said that the PI women students were aware of the great responsibility they had for being prepared as the first UAE women engineers to work in the oil industry.

"I am sure we will succeed," she said in a separate interview with ADNOC News, adding "because the girls want to prove to themselves first, to their families and to whole male society that they can make it."

Expressing her pride in being involved with

such a pioneering program, she said: "As one of the girls said I feel like raising those engineers is more challenging than raising my own children. I see my two daughters in them. I am very proud and happy with them. If I ever had the chance to choose my childrens' future I



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What was your feeling when you saw the first women students joining the PI?

I felt very proud and happy. We always hear women staying at home, avoiding photographs and not sharing in the activities in public. This

always made me upset because the society consists of both males and females and you can not separate them.

How enthusiastic are the girls?

Well you know because it is our first experience with females we are so worried, so scared



We still look at the society as an old conservative one but I think there is a big improvement. These girls don't mind working with men. I know some do mind but the majority doesn't

and I feel like I am hugging them, cuddling them and Keeping them under my wings all the time but they don't want this. They want to fly, they want just to shoot and go ahead and fulfill their dream as you heard they say. They want to prove themselves. We have this power of the females so why don't we use it. "

These women will be future women engineers in a very conservative society; do you think they will work in the fields?

As I told you we are more worried and I thought they might not been keen going to the field. But I was wrong. I will give you an example. They were supposed to go on a field trip to one of the gas and oil fields. When we told them that they should wear jeans and shirts and no Abayas, I was surprised they were ready to do so. We still look at the society as an old conservative one but I think there is a big improvement. These girls don't mind working with men. I know some do mind but the majority doesn't.

Why girls do better in education than boys?

Girls are more studious. It is because if a

man doesn't excel in his studies as the girls have already mentioned he can still get a job. He can prove himself and he has more chances and opportunities but ladies are not offered as many jobs as men so they have to work harder. They don't want to settle for lesser jobs. And to be honest to excel in the PI needs hard work from both men and women.

How long will it take to have a co-education system?

I don't think it will happen soon but may be some time in the future. May be the girls are ready but we are not. Starting transportation for them was a tough job. Women need door to door transportation, they cant meet at a certain stations like the men. Now they are asking for a hostel. They want to have dorms and we are not ready for it yet.

I can see you are optimistic about the success of this experiement?

Of course we will succeed because the girls want to prove to themselves first and then to their families and the male society that they can do it. I liked it when one of the girls, Sara,



said that working as an engineer in the fields is not as challenging as raising a family. So again for me raising those engineers is more challenging than raising my own children. I see my two daughters in them. I am very proud and happy for them. If I ever had the opportunity to choose my children's future I will surely bring them here.

What about their parents?

We met with the parents and made it clear to them that they are living in a very safe environment and that they will be informed of any interaction that the girls have with the male students. We won't do it without their approval. The girls are very energetic. They are asking about activities like camping, boat racing, developing a newsletter, joining the student council.

Will you give them these extra curriculum activities?

Yes I will fight for them and will do my best because I think they are right. This is the best age. I studied in a co-educational environment and this is the best age of a student's life.

Where did u study?

I did my studies in Lebanon and then continued it in America. I majored in education and studied English literature as a minor area. I believe that parents should raise their child male and female in the proper way, teach them what is right and what is wrong and then take the back seat to observe them find their way. It is just like a seed. You water it, take care of it and make sure that everything is fine and after that you just leave it.

I always discuss things with my children, from my experience with my parents where their no was non negotiable. I cannot apply that to my children. If my children refuse to accept something, I sit with them and explain to them why I said No, hence my principle is "say no and discuss."

Would you like to add something?

I would like to thank his Excellency and whoever initiated this idea. I also appreciate their support.



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