

Research paper

## Gendered Proverbs in the Eyes of Jordanians: Are They Still Alive?

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines Jordanians' perceptions of gendered proverbs in today's society. It tests whether there are any significant differences in their perceptions based on age, gender, educational level, and marital status. The study includes 40 Jordanian proverbs that were systematically selected based on their gendered implications. 267 Jordanians were requested to rate each proverb on a 5-point Likert scale, indicating their agreement or disagreement with the gender stereotypes portrayed. The analysis reveals that proverbs supporting women received the highest agreement while proverbs opposing women received the lowest. This suggests awareness of gender discrimination and a call for gender equality in Jordan. Factors such as gender, marital status, and education significantly influenced perceptions of proverbs in Jordan. However, age did not show significant differences. The article concludes that societal factors, cultural norms and personal experiences play a crucial role in shaping how Jordanians perceive and accept gendered proverbs in contemporary times, with a shift towards more gender-equal views emerging in Jordanian society.

**Keywords:** gender discrimination and language, sociolinguistics in Jordan, proverbs, stereotypes

This article examines the dynamics of gender norms and stereotypes in Jordanian culture. It seeks to explore Jordanians' perceptions and acceptance of Jordanian gendered proverbs in the contemporary times. It also attempts to investigate how these perceptions differ based on key demographic variables such as age, gender, educational level, and marital status. These perceptions are expected to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes and promote a more inclusive and equal society.

### Background of the Study

Gendered proverbs across languages and cultures often reflect and reinforce traditional gender discrimination, with men being viewed as strong, dominant, and authoritative while women being depicted as subordinate, unreliable and restricted to household duties. This proposal is well supported by a growing number of studies on gendered proverbs that consistently reveal a pattern of gender bias, where proverbs preserve societal norms, limiting women's roles and promoting stereotypes across a variety of languages and cultures (Scheffers, 2026; Emre, 2026).

According to Rasul (2015), English and Urdu proverbs characterise women as submissive, weak, inferior, talkative and troublemakers. Korean and Romanian proverbs describe them as disobedient, morally wicked and thought to be characterised by temperamental mood swings (Buja, 2018). Similarly, Awngi (Ethiopia) proverbs emphasise the negative representation of women. They are viewed as incapable in the household, inferior in

holding power, stubborn, greedy, selfish, destructive, passive and lazy. While women are often portrayed as a source of danger leading to disaster, Spanish and French proverbs also depict them as the weaker gender, in contrast to the emphasis on men's power, control, and superiority (Lomotey & Chachu, 2020).

In Standard Arabic proverbs, Jendeya (2023) posits that women are often depicted as unfocused and ill-natured. Moroccan proverbs demonstrate that women are shown as untrustworthy, useless and cunning (Ennaji, 2008). Women are also viewed as subordinate and marginal, and their place in society is often limited to domestic roles and caretaking responsibilities in Iraqi proverbs (Al-Zubaidi, 2019). In analysing Egyptian proverbs, Zainurrahmah (2022) reveals that gender is associated with the patriarchal system highlighting the importance of males' authority and dominance within the family structure over females. In the same area, Altohami (2023) finds that Egyptian proverbs portray women as part of a non-dominant group with less power and lower social status. In Jordanian proverbs, Al-Amad (2006) indicates that women are perceived as unintelligent, unwise and unreliable. They are also excluded from decision-making processes (Riziq & Khalil, 2023).

The image of women in proverbs is presented in a variety of roles, including those of daughters, wives, mothers, mothers in law, stepmothers and childless women. As wives, they are associated with the devil in several Korean, Romanian (Buja, 2018) and Jordanian proverbs (Riziq and Khalil, 2023) to symbolise their cunning characters in enslaving others. See the below Jordanian proverb.

- (1) ʔi- nniṣwa:n ʔi-ḥba:l ʔibli:s  
 'Women are the devil's gateway'. (Riziq & Khalil, 2023, p.7)

In Jordanian proverbs, a wife who does not have a boy child is perceived as undervalued and often subjected to societal pressure and discrimination (Al-Amad, 2006). In Nepalese proverbs, a wife is viewed as a primarily childbearing machine whose main purpose is to give birth to a son but not a daughter. This traditional view reflects the patriarchal nature of societies, where their value is often tied to their ability to bear boy children for continuing the family lineage and ensuring the survival of the household (Bishwakarma, 2020) as shown in the proverb below.

- (2) Dhilo hos, choro hos.  
 'Let it be late but let it be a son'. (Bishwakarma, 2020, p110)

Women as stepmothers, mothers-in-law and childless women are also viewed negatively in proverbs. As stepmothers, they receive a bad reputation in proverbs around the world. This can be illustrated in the following Pakistani and Iraqi proverbs, respectively.

- (3) lóogi ma~yéi dut neé wáai  
 'From a stepmother no milk will come'. (Degener, 2022, p.14)

- (4) mart ʔil ʔab ma: tinḥab  
 'The stepmother cannot be liked'. (Al-Zubaidi, 2019, p.74)

As mothers-in-law, they are regarded as overbearing, exercising their power as leaders over their daughter's husband or their son's wife (Riziq and Khalil, 2023).

- (5) ʔil kay bi-nna:r wala ʔimha bi -ddar  
 'To be set on fire is fitter than an overbearing mother-in-law' (Riziq & Khalil, 2023, p.7)

In Arabic proverbs, childlessness is considered a female's fault, without questioning the male's fertility (Ennaji, 2008; Mumali, 2021; Riziq and Khalil, 2023). In Jordanian proverbs, a childless woman is considered a seemingly insurmountable barrier to one of the primary functions of marriage, which suggest divorce as an option available to a husband of a childless woman (Riziq and Khalil, 2023). Likewise, she is described as a visitor in the house, who is expected to leave as long as she does not bear children in Moroccan culture (Mumali, 2021). The following Moroccan proverb indicates that a childless woman has no sense of existence.

- (6) l-mra bla ulad bjal l-xema bla utad.  
 'A childless woman is like a tent without any support pillars' (Ennaji, 2008, p.176)

As daughters, they are the cause of their parents' sadness and disappointment in Jordanian proverbs (Al-Amad, 2006; Riziq and Khalil, 2023). Awngi proverbs reflect that giving birth to a girl is like giving birth to a problem while giving birth to a boy is symbol of reputation (Gebeyehu, 2019).

- (7) እምቤታድሳብቕለኹና ካሜኒ ስቴ  
 'A horse which wants to die at its early age bears a female'. (Gebeyehu, 2019, p.483)

Iraqi proverbs also provide good examples that assert the preference for male children over female ones (Al-Zubaidi, 2019).

- (8) walad madʒnu:n wala hurrat ʒa:tu:n  
 'An insane boy but not a shrewd girl'. (Al-Zubaidi, 2019, p.80)

Despite the general negativity associated with proverbs about women, some proverbs portray them positively. In German proverbs, wives are shown as strong women when it comes to their responsibilities at home (Rakhimova et al., 2019). Russian and Ukrainian proverbs also emphasise the wife's position as the head of the household, particularly after her husband's death (Romanova et al., 2019). Wives are also portrayed positively in

Jordanian proverbs; they are not only assigned the role of housewives with housekeeping abilities but also fill their house with love, peace and comfort (Riziq & Khalil, 2023).

(9) *i- zzalama dzanna w- il mara: banna*

'Heaven is a man, and a woman is a family-builder'. (Riziq & Khalil, 2023, p. 6)

Women in the role of mothers have been valued in several proverbs. Gebeyehu (2019) reveals that women's social status as mothers is quite high in Awngi proverbs. They are often seen as caring and kind in Pakistan (Degener, 2022). In German culture, they are seen to play the dominant role in homes because they take care of children and build them up by giving them confidence, support and self-worth (Rakhimova et al., 2019). In Swahili proverbs, they are valued and described as powerful and worthy of respect (Dzahene-Quarshie and Omari, 2021).

(10) *Mtu mamaye ni Mungu wake wa pili.*

'Mother is one's second God'. (Dzahene-Quarshie & Omari, 2021, p.139)

As is clear, the previous studies on proverbs highlight the dichotomy in societal perceptions of women, portraying them negatively in certain roles as daughters, wives, mothers in law, stepmothers and childless women while simultaneously valuing their roles as mothers and caregivers. This conflicting image perpetuated by these proverbs may contribute to the persistence of gender discrimination and inequality. Such proverbs can undermine efforts to achieve true gender equality. Therefore, we believe, it is crucial to critically examine and challenge the validity of such proverbs in today's society.

## The Present Study

While some people may argue that gendered proverbs are outdated and no longer relevant in modern society, it is important to analyse Jordanians' perceptions of these proverbs, specifically to examine how demographic variables such as gender, marital status, and education influence these perceptions. The study aims to identify patterns of agreement or disagreement with proverbs that support or oppose women and men. In addition, it is crucial to continue challenging harmful stereotypes to create a more equitable and inclusive world for all individuals.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that the perceptions of individuals regarding gender roles, characteristics and stereotypes embodied in proverbs have been untapped by scholars across languages and cultures (Shishakly, 2025; Orozco Donneys et al., 2024; Abreu, 2026). By examining how Jordanians accept or reject these proverbs today, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how gendered proverbs are perceived in contemporary Jordanian society. Furthermore, this research contributes to the existing literature on cross-cultural perceptions of gender by highlighting the unique cultural context of Jordan and presenting a fresh perspective on the intersection of tradition and modernity.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The study involved 267 Jordanians, including both males and females, from various age groups, marital statuses and educational backgrounds. The participants were selected through a systematic sampling method to ensure representativeness and diversity in terms of gender, age, education, and marital status. This method involves carefully selecting Jordanian participants at regular intervals to portray the characteristics of the broader population. **Table 1** provides demographic characteristics of the study participants.

Regarding gender, 85 (31.84%) were males, and 182 (68.16%) were females. This distribution indicates that the majority of the participants were females. In terms of the marital status, among the participants, 70 (26.22%) were single, 156 (58.43%) were married, 20 (7.49%) were divorced, and 21 (7.87%) were widows. For age groups, 77 participants (28.84%) fell into the 18-31 years age group, 136 (50.94%) were in the 32-51 years age group, and 54 (20.22%) were in the category of 52 years or older. The largest age group was 32-51 years, followed by 18-31 years, then 52 years or older, respectively. With regard to the level of education, 24 participants (8.99%) were less educated, 173 (64.79%) held a Bachelor's degree, and 70 (26.22%) had pursued higher studies. The majority of participants had at least a Bachelor's degree.

### Material and procedures

An online questionnaire was designed to gather data on Jordanian's perspectives towards gendered proverbs. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part was intended to elicit demographic information about each participant such as gender, age, education and marital status. The second part contained a compiled list of 40 proverbs which were selected based on their thematic relevance to gendered roles, characteristics, and values in Jordanian society. They were primarily collected from five books, viz., *Jordanian Folk Proverbs* by Al-Amad (1978), *Ma'lama for the Jordanian Heritage* by Al-Azizi (2012), *Spoken Folk Proverbs in Jordan* by Al Zugul and Al Abood

(2018), Vernacular Folk Proverbs and Sayings in Jordan by Milhim (2020) and Arab Popular Proverbs (through a Jordanian Lens) by Farghal (2021). Some examples of proverbs were also suggested from everyday conversations.

**Table 1**

*Demographic characteristics of the participants*

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	85	31.84%
	Female	182	68.16%
Marital status	Single	70	26.22%
	Married	156	58.43%
	Divorced	20	7.49%
	Widow	21	7.87%
Age	18-31 years	77	28.84%
	32-51	136	50.94%
	52 and more	54	20.22%
Level of education	Uneducated	24	8.99%
	Bachelor's Degree	173	64.79%
	Higher Studies	70	26.22%

The questionnaire first asked the participants to fill in their demographic information. Following this, a 5-point Likert scale was employed to rate their agreement with each gendered proverb, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree without any time limits. In this part, the participants were particularly requested to evaluate the proverbs based on their relevance and credibility in modern society. This procedure aims to examine the extent to which these gendered proverbs remain influential in contemporary times. Notably, the questionnaire was reviewed by a jury of three professors in the field of linguistics and gender studies for their feedback and comments. Following their recommendations, only those proverbs that were familiar and easy to understand were included while unfamiliar and difficult to understand ones were excluded from the study.

**Data analysis**

For ease of statistical analysis and presentation, the selected gendered proverbs were classified into four main categories: proverbs supporting women, proverbs opposing women, proverbs supporting men and proverbs opposing men. This classification provides a balanced representation of societal beliefs and values and allows for a comprehensive examination of gender roles and stereotypes within the proverbs. The participants' responses were analysed using SPSS to determine any patterns or correlations between demographic factors and the participants' perception of gendered proverbs. In this sense, multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to quantify the extent of the observed differences and determine their statistical significance in relation to the demographic variables. Particularly, Cronbach's Alpha is used to assess the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire. A Between-Subjects Effects test was utilised in the correlation analysis to explore how demographic factors such as gender, marital status, age and education influenced participants' perceptions of gendered proverbs. Pearson correlation was also used to analyse the relationships between different categories of proverbs.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Reliability**

**Table 2** provides valuable insights into the internal consistency and reliability of different proverb categories as assessed by Cronbach's Alpha statistics. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire since it measures the internal consistency of items within each category of proverbs. This statistic provides confidence in the reliability of participants' ratings and the validity of the analysis. According to **Table 2**, the 7 proverbs supporting women demonstrate a moderate level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.7. The 6 proverbs supporting men also exhibit a moderate level of internal consistency, similar to the proverbs supporting women. However, the proverbs opposing women, comprising 22 proverbs, demonstrates a relatively high level of internal consistency of a value of 0.894 indicating a strong reliability within this category, implying consistent measurement of this category of proverbs. The 5 proverbs against men show the lowest level of consistency (0.584). The overall Cronbach's alpha for all 40 proverbs, regardless of category stands out with a

remarkably high level of consistency and reliability (0.925), indicating that, as a whole, these proverbs are highly consistent in measuring a similar concept or idea.

**Table 2**

*Cronbach's Alpha statistics*

Variables	Number of proverbs	Cronbach's Alpha
Proverbs supporting women	7	0.731
Proverbs opposing women	22	0.894
Proverbs supporting men	6	0.650
Proverbs opposing men	5	0.584
Total	40	0.925

**Participants' perception of Jordanian gendered proverbs**

**Table 3** provides the means and standard deviations for all participants' opinions or beliefs across all categories of proverbs. The overall mean score for all proverbs is in the moderate range, indicating that, on average, participants have mixed opinions regarding these proverbs, with a relatively low standard deviation, suggesting a fair amount of agreement among participants.

**Table 3**

*Mean and std. deviation by proverbs categories*

Proverbs' categories	Mean	Std. Deviation	Degree
Proverbs supporting women	3.88	0.66	High
Proverbs supporting men	3.56	0.69	Moderate
Proverbs opposing men	3.18	0.74	Moderate
Proverbs opposing women	2.68	0.64	Moderate
Total	3.3245	0.56652	Moderate

The table shows that proverbs supporting women in Jordan have the highest level of acceptance among the participants, with a mean score of 3.88. This finding suggests that Jordanians generally hold positive attitudes towards proverbs that empower and uplift women. Conversely, proverbs against women received the lowest level of acceptance (2.68), highlighting the need for promoting gender equality and challenging all negative stereotypes against women in Jordanian society. In addition, proverbs related to men have moderate levels of agreement, as indicated by their means (3.56 and 3.18). The results here demonstrate that participants generally have stronger opinions about proverbs related to women compared to those related to men.

**Participants' perception of proverbs supporting women**

**Table 4** presents the participants' degree of agreement of proverbs supporting women. The majority of participants showed that proverbs supporting women are highly acceptable, with an average rating of 3.80. This result implies that Jordanians tend to have a positive satisfaction with these proverbs. The low standard deviation (0.66) indicates that the participants' satisfaction ratings are relatively close to the mean, indicating a relatively homogeneous set of opinions.

**Table 4**

*Mean and Std. deviation of estimates on proverbs supporting women*

No.	Proverbs supporting women	Mean	Std. deviation	Degree
1	<i>ʔalf ʔein tibki wala ʔein ʔimmi tidmaʔ</i> 'A thousand eyes may weep, but not a mother's eye'.	4.490	.8143	High
2	<i>ʔilli ma ʔilo ʔim ha:lo yyim</i> 'One who has no mother should grieve for himself'.	4.352	.9356	High
3	<i>ʔabo ʔil bana:t ʔayil ʔala- kta:fo: hasana:t</i> 'A father of daughters carries virtues on his shoulders'.	4.282	.8684	High
4	<i>ʔundur lil ʔum wi idʔanwaʔ bintha</i> 'Look at the mother before marrying her daughter'.	3.701	1.1459	High
5	<i>ʔil binit li-mli:ba: wala ssabi li ʔdi:ba:</i> 'Better a good girl than a scandalous boy'.	3.640	1.2828	Moderate
6	<i>ʔilli ma: ʔilba bnayya mi:n yisgi:ba -l mayya?</i> 'Who will water a mother that does not have a daughter?'	3.592	1.2216	Moderate
7	<i>ʔilli ma: wara:h niswa:n ma bada: biʔayyil ʔaleh</i> 'He who has no women behind him, no one cries for him'.	3.105	1.1969	Moderate
	Total	3.80	.66	High

The first two proverbs received the highest mean scores of 4.49 and 4.35 among the proverbs in this category. This indicates that Jordanians viewed this proverb very positively. More specifically, these proverbs highlight the deep emotional connection and significance of mothers in our lives.

- (11) *ʔalf ʕein tibki wala ʕein ʔimmi tidmaʕ*  
‘A thousand eyes may weep, but not a mother’s eye’.
- (12) *ʔilli ma ʔilo ʔim ha:lo yʔim*  
‘One who has no mother should grieve for himself’.

The proverb in 11 emphasises the idea that even a thousand eyes may shed tears, but none can compare to the tears shed by a mother. In the same vein, the proverbial expression in 12 conveys the notion that those who do not have a mother in their life may experience a sense of loneliness or emptiness. In addition, the low standard deviation in these proverbs suggests that there was relatively little variability in the responses, signifying a strong consensus among participants regarding the high regard for maternal emotions. The findings here are well supported by these studies valuing mothers and their crucial role in the household (Gebeyehu, 2019; Rakhimova et al., 2019; Dzahene-Quarshie & Omari, 2021; Degener, 2022)

On the other hand, the last two proverbs in the table received a moderately positive mean score from the participants. Nevertheless, the relatively high standard deviation suggests that there was more variability in the responses compared to the above-mentioned proverbs. This indicates that participants had mixed opinions about the importance of women’s presence in one’s life.

- (13) *ʔilli ma: wara: niswa:n ma hada: biʕayyit ʕaleh*  
‘He who has no women behind him, no one cries for him’.

The proverb in 13 implies the importance of women’s presence and support in one’s life. It highlights the compassionate and nurturing nature of women, suggesting that their absence may result in a lack of emotional support during difficult times. This proverb serves as a reminder to value and appreciate the role that women play in providing comfort and empathy.

- (14) *ʔilli ma: ʔilha bnayya mi:n yisgi:ha -l mayyaʔ*  
‘Who will water a mother that does not have a daughter?’

In 14, the proverb demonstrates that daughters play a crucial role in providing care and support to their parents. The participants’ responses to this proverb were moderately positive, with a slightly lower standard deviation compared to the proverb in 13. This suggests that there was a relatively higher level of agreement among participants regarding the significance of daughters in one’s life and their role in fulfilling familial responsibilities.

### Participants’ perception of proverbs opposing women

Table 5 provides insights into Jordanian’s perceptions of the proverbs that are against women. It shows the mean and standard deviations of their opinions regarding these proverbs and their degree of agreement. It is evident from the moderate mean scores and standard deviations of the majority of proverbs in this category that the Jordanian participants have differing perspectives on these proverbs. The average rating for all proverbs opposing women is also in the moderate range. This suggests that participants’ perceptions of these proverbs are not strongly negative or positive but rather fall somewhere in between. Below are a further analysis of the specific proverbs and their corresponding ratings to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ attitudes towards the proverbs in this category.

**Table 5**  
*Mean and Std. deviation of estimates on proverbs opposing women*

No.	Proverbs opposing women	Mean	Std. deviation	Degree
1	<i>ʕay -l ʕagrabha ʕarsjtha wil gabir</i> ‘Like a scorpion, its sting leads to death’.	3.67	1.083	Moderate
2	<i>ʔilli ma bidlo yʕanwiz binto biyalli mabirha</i> ‘Whoever doesn’t want to marry off his daughter should increase her dowry’.	3.52	1.263	Moderate
3	<i>ʔiglih il ʕarra ʕala timba btiʕlaʕ il binit la ʔimba</i> ‘Like a mother, like a daughter’.	3.41	1.115	Moderate
4	<i>la taʕti sirrak la hurmeb</i> ‘Don’t share your secret with your wife’.	3.33	1.306	Moderate
5	<i>ʔuxʕub la bintak wala tuʕʕub la ʔibnak</i> ‘Seek a husband for your daughter, but don’t seek a wife for your son’.	3.26	1.162	Moderate
6	<i>ʕatabha ʕala ʔabilha min gillit ʕagilha</i> ‘The family of a wife is blamed due to her lack of intelligence’.	3.14	1.108	Moderate

**Table 5 (continue)**

No.	Proverbs opposing women	Mean	Std. deviation	Degree
7	<i>hamm-l bana:t lal mama:t</i> 'Girl's burden continues until death'.	3.04	1.422	Moderate
8	<i>ʔabu: ʕali biʕraʕ w ʔum ʕali biʕlaʕ</i> 'Ali's father sows, and Ali's mother uproots'.	2.92	1.130	Moderate
9	<i>ʔirrdʕa:l ʔa:bat wi ʕitta:t sa:bat</i> 'Men are away, so women can play'.	2.88	1.275	Moderate
10	<i>ʕa:r i-nnisa: ba:gi</i> 'The disgrace of women remains'.	2.87	1.220	Moderate
11	<i>ʔalla ʔaʕʕi -l harayir ʔarayir</i> 'May Allah grant sons to women'.	2.83	1.136	Moderate
12	<i>ʔi-nniswa:n ʔi-bba:l ʔibli:s</i> 'Women are the devil's gateway'.	2.77	1.231	Moderate
13	<i>ʔibin ʔibnak ʔilak w ʔibin bintak la ʔe:rak</i> 'Your son's son is yours, but your daughter's son is not'.	2.55	1.208	Moderate
14	<i>ʔasʕad ʕo:ʕ ʕo:ʕ il ʕarsa</i> 'The husband of the mute woman is the happiest'.	2.49	1.155	Moderate
15	<i>ʕaʕara bidu:n ʕamar gatiʕba hala:l</i> 'A fruitless tree is cut down lawfully'.	2.48	1.182	Moderate
16	<i>illi biʕa:wir- il mara mara</i> 'He who consults a woman is a woman'.	2.16	1.048	Low
17	<i>ʔin ma:t ʔaʕu:k ʔinkasar ʕabrak w ʔin ma:tat ʔuytak ʔinsatar ʕardak</i> 'If your brother dies, your back is broken, and if your sister dies, your honour is saved'.	2.14	1.202	Low
18	<i>il mara ʕe:rba la ʕo:ʕba w ʕarba la ʔabilba</i> 'A woman is at her best for her husband and at her worst for her family'.	2.07	1.078	Low
19	<i>ʔilli bitmu:t nliyto: min busun niyyto:</i> 'He whose daughter dies; their legacy is in their good intentions'.	2.02	1.011	Low
20	<i>ʔum-l bana:t makru:ba</i> 'The mother of daughters is disliked'.	1.94	.950	Low
21	<i>ʔuyò -l ʔarmali wi- ddbak ʕale:ba w ʕi:l min ʕe:bitba wi ʕrif ʕale:ba</i> 'Marry the widow and take advantage of her. Take her money and spend it'.	1.89	.917	Low
22	<i>ʔiða bitdallil ʔibnak binfaʕak w ʔiða bitdallil bintak bitfaʕak</i> 'If you spoil your son, he will benefit you, but if you spoil your daughter, she will disgrace you'.	1.64	.830	Low
Total		2.7	.64	Moderate

(15) *zay -l ʕagraba garsitha wil gabir*

'Like the scorpion, its sting leads to death'

Proverb 15 suggests that a woman's actions or words can have long-lasting consequences. Just like a scorpion's sting, which continues to affect its victim until death. This proverb puts stress on the cunning character that women possess, even beyond their physical presence (Ennaji, 2008; Riziq and Khalil, 2023). This proverb received a relatively mean score of 3.67, which is a moderate level of acceptance among the participants. The standard deviation of 1.083 suggests that there was some variability in the ratings given. This means that while some respondents may have strongly agreed with the proverb, others may have strongly disagreed. The variability in ratings could be connected to cultural differences, personal beliefs, or individual's personal experiences with women. It highlights the complexity and diversity of opinions surrounding gender stereotypes and the influence they have on societal attitudes.

(16) *ʔiða bitdallil ʔibnak binfaʕak w ʔiða bitdallil bintak bitfaʕak*

'If you spoil your son, he will benefit you, but if you spoil your daughter, she will disgrace you'.

The proverb in 16, sheds light on the unequal treatment of children based on their gender and the patriarchal nature of many societies. While sons are often seen as more valuable and deserving of special treatment, daughters are expected to cause scandal and disgrace the family through unsuitable conduct. This can be evidenced in the findings of studies conducted on family proverbs (Riziq and Khalil, 2023). However, as shown in table 4, this proverb has the lowest mean score of 1.64 among the proverbs in this category. suggesting that, on average, participants rated this proverb less favourably compared to others in the dataset. The relatively low standard deviation implies that the majority of participants had a similar perception of the meaning and value of this proverb. The result here reflects Jordanians' awareness of gender discrimination and highlights the need for fair and respectful behaviour towards both sons and daughters.

**Participants’ perception of proverbs that appear to support men**

Table 6 shows the mean and standard deviations of the participants’ perception regarding a set of proverbs that are associated with men and their degree of acceptance. Proverbs 1 to 3 have relatively high mean scores and moderate standard deviations, indicating that participants generally agree with or are convinced by these proverbs. Proverbs 4 to 6 have lower mean scores and higher standard deviations, suggesting more diverse opinions among participants.

**Table 6**  
Mean and std. deviation of estimates on proverbs supporting men

No.	Proverbs supporting men	Mean	Std. deviation	Degree
1	<i>haða iffibil min ða:k -il ʔasad</i> ‘Like a father, like a son’.	3.97	1.026	High
2	<i>il faras min ʔayyalba wi- l mara min riðza:lba</i> ‘Horses are known by their riders, and women by their men’.	3.81	1.109	High
3	<i>i-rridʒal sanadi:q maqfu:li</i> ‘Men are closed boxes’.	3.74	1.124	High
4	<i>ʔixta:r ʒo:ðtak bsamʕak la bibasarak</i> ‘Choose your wife by your hearing, not by your sight’.	3.52	1.037	Moderate
5	<i>ʔilli biʔu:l ʕanba dʒo:zba ya ʕo:ra biʕabu- nna:s bi:ba- il-ko:ra</i> ‘When a wife is insulted by her husband, she becomes a laughingstock among people’.	3.30	1.276	Moderate
6	<i>i-rridʒal lw biðʒi:b faħmi huwwa bil be:t raħmi</i> ‘A man (in the family), though may be a bit of black charcoal, is a blessing’.	3.01	1.264	Moderate
Total		3.6	.69	Moderate

(17) *haða iffibil min ða:k -il ʔasad*  
‘Like a father, like a son.’

The proverb in 17 received the highest mean score (3.97), indicating a high level of agreement among participants. In this metaphorical proverb, a father is identified as a lion and a son is depicted as cub. The proverb demonstrates that the behaviour or physical appearance of a son are similar to those of his father and suggests that sons often inherit certain qualities and tendencies from their fathers.

(18) *i-rridʒal lw biðʒi:b faħmi huwwa bil be:t raħmi*  
‘A man (in the family), though may be a bit of black charcoal, is a blessing’.

The proverb in 18 highlights the traditional gender roles and expectations placed on men. It highlights that men’s mere presence brings a sense of compassion and protection to the household, regardless of their actions or contributions. As shown in Table 6, this proverb received the lowest mean rating of 3.01, indicating a moderate level of agreement. This finding implies that while some individuals may still hold onto traditional beliefs about gender roles, there is a growing recognition and acceptance of the need for more equitable and balanced relationships within the household.

**Participants’ perception of proverbs that are seen to oppose men**

Table 7 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of participants’ attitudes towards a set of proverbs that are arguably against men or derogatory, and their degree of acceptance.

As is clear, proverbs 1 and 2 have relatively high mean scores and moderate standard deviations, indicating that participants generally agree with these proverbs. Proverbs 3 to 5 have lower average scores and higher standard deviations, suggesting more diverse opinions regarding these proverbs. The average rating for all proverbs opposing men is also in the moderate range, indicating that, on average, participants generally have conflicting beliefs or opinions about these proverbs.

**Table 7**

*Mean and std. deviation of estimates on proverbs opposing men*

No.	Proverbs opposing men	Mean	Std. deviation	Degree
1	<i>rabat i-rrdʒal il ʕizz wil he:ba w gaʕdat i-rrdʒal ma: tʕa:f il ʕe:ba</i> ‘Men of honour and dignity have departed, and men without shame have remained’.	3.74	1.064	High
2	<i>ʔilli maʕa: flu:so binit i-ssulta:n ʕaru:so</i> ‘Whoever has money, the daughter of the sultan is his bride’.	3.68	1.174	High
3	<i>ya mʔa:mni l- rrdʒal ya mʔa:mni lil mayy fi: il ʕirba:l</i> ‘Trusting men is like securing water in a sieve’.	3.41	1.297	Moderate
4	<i>i-rrdʒal ʕind il ha:ʕa niswa:n</i> ‘Men, when in need, act like women’.	2.60	1.180	Moderate
5	<i>i-rrdʒal ma: biʕi:bo ʕe:r ʕʒe:bto:</i> ‘A man is only criticised for his wealth’.	2.43	1.333	Moderate
Total		3.177	.7433	Moderate

(19) *rahat i-rrdʒal il ʕizz wil he:ba w gaʕdat i-rrdʒal ma: tʕa:f il ʕe:ba*

‘Men of honour and dignity have departed, and men without shame have remained’.

This proverb demonstrates that when men of honour and dignity are absent, those who lack integrity and fearlessness take their place. This proverb highlights that the absence of honourable men can lead to a decline in moral values and a weakening of societal norms. This proverb received the highest level of acceptance in this category among the participants. It reflects that Jordanian society is witnessing a shift towards men who lack shame for their actions, which indicates that the traditional notions of masculinity are diminishing in Jordanian society. It suggests a shift in societal norms and challenges the idea of what it means to be a ‘real man’ in today’s world.

(20) *i-rrdʒal ma: biʕi:bo ʕe:r ʕʒe:bto*

‘A man is only criticised for his wealth’.

In 20, the proverb highlights the importance of financial stability and the role it plays in defining a man’s character. It received a moderate mean score with a relatively high standard deviation confirming more variability in the responses. This result emphasises the importance of a person’s character rather than their material possessions and suggests that true value lies in one’s integrity and moral qualities, rather than external factors such as wealth or possessions.

**The significance of statistical mean differences**

***The significance of statistical mean differences attributed to gender***

Table 8 below presents the mean scores for each proverb category by gender. Across all proverb categories, the total mean score for both genders combined falls in the moderate range, indicating a moderate level of agreement. Male participants generally have higher mean scores than female participants in all proverb categories. In other words, male participants tend to express stronger agreement with the proverbs. This gender difference in mean scores suggests that males may have a stronger inclination towards traditional beliefs and values represented by the proverbs. When it comes to specific proverb categories, there are differences in agreement between male and female participants.

**Table 8**

*The significance of statistical mean differences attributed to gender*

Gender	With women	Against women	With men	Against men	Total
Male	3.82	2.97	3.71	3.09	3.40
Female	3.91	2.55	3.49	3.22	3.29
Total	3.88	2.68	3.56	3.18	3.32

As shown in the table, there are gender differences in the perception of proverbs, with females generally being more in agreement with proverbs supporting women and males being more accepting of proverbs supporting men. This finding demonstrates that cultural beliefs and gender stereotypes may influence individuals’ interpretation and acceptance of proverbs.

***The significance of statistical mean differences attributed to marital status***

The mean scores for each proverb category broken down by marital status are displayed in Table 9. Widows tend to have higher mean scores across all categories compared to other marital statuses. Likewise, single and

married participants also have higher mean scores while divorced participants have slightly lower mean scores. The overall mean score for all proverbs, however, is in the moderate level for all marital statuses, indicating a moderate level of agreement. The higher mean scores received by the group of widows may be connected to similar cultural or demographic characteristics shared between the participants of the group. In actuality, widows may exhibit more agreement with the proverbs due to shared experiences, emotions, or cultural norms related to their status.

**Table 9**

*The significance of statistical mean differences attributed to marital status*

Marital status	With women	Against women	With men	Against men	Total
Single	3.86	2.54	3.36	3.13	3.22
Married	3.89	2.77	3.65	3.18	3.37
Divorced	3.73	2.38	3.26	3.15	3.13
Widow	4.03	2.78	3.77	3.33	3.48
Total	3.88	2.68	3.56	3.18	3.32

***The significance of statistical mean differences attributed to age***

**Table 10** provides the mean scores for the participants’ beliefs in different proverb categories by age groups. All age groups have moderate levels of agreement as indicated by the overall mean scores for all proverbs. Participants aged 52 and above tend to have higher mean scores across all proverb categories compared to younger age groups. It may be the case that older individuals have accumulated more life experiences and have been exposed to a broader range of situations and circumstances. This greater life experience can result in a deeper understanding of proverbs and a higher degree of agreement with their messages.

**Table 10**

*The significance of statistical mean differences attributed to age*

Age	With women	Against women	With men	Against men	Total
18-31 years	3.85	2.65	3.54	3.17	3.30
32-51	3.88	2.70	3.52	3.17	3.32
52 and more	3.92	2.70	3.68	3.20	3.38
Total	3.88	2.68	3.56	3.18	3.32

***The significance of statistical mean differences attributed to educational level***

The mean scores for the opinions of participants in the various proverb categories, classified by the level of education, are shown in **Table 11**. All educational levels have moderate levels of agreement, as indicated by the overall average rating for all proverbs. Participants with lower educational levels tend to have higher mean scores, indicating higher levels of agreement, across all proverb categories compared to participants with a Bachelor’s degree and those with higher studies. It can be noticed that less educated individuals may have grown up in environments where these proverbs were more commonly used and valued. As a result, they may have a stronger connection to an agreement with these proverbs due to cultural familiarity. However, more educated individuals may have received formal education that emphasises critical analysis, and questioning of traditional beliefs, which might result in lower agreement.

**Table 11**

*The significance of statistical mean differences attributed to educational level*

Educational level	With women	Against women	With men	Against men	Total
Uneducated	3.96	2.88	3.88	3.40	3.53
Bachelor’s degree	3.92	2.70	3.53	3.22	3.34
Higher studies	3.76	2.58	3.50	2.99	3.21
Total	3.88	2.68	3.56	3.18	3.32

**Correlation analysis**

To assess the impact of the different independent variables (i.e., gender, marital status, age, and educational level) on the participants’ perceptions and acceptance of Jordanian gendered proverbs (i.e., dependent variables),

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects are conducted. This statistical analysis allows researchers to compare the mean scores of different groups and to determine if these differences are statistically significant. It is important to note that the significance levels (p-values) are critical for interpreting the results. A low p-value (typically below 0.05) suggests a statistically significant relationship while a higher p-value indicates that the relationship is not statistically significant.

**Table 12** presents the result of the relationships between the independent variables and their impact on the dependent variables represented by various categories related to these proverbs. The statistical analysis revealed that the gender variable seems to have a significant effect on perceptions of these gendered proverbs. More specifically, the category of proverbs against women has a highly significant F-statistic ( $F = 30.157$ ) with a very low p-value (Sig. = 0.000). This suggests that the negative stereotypes associated with women in proverbs are more strongly ingrained and have a greater impact on perceptions. In the same vein, proverbs supporting men received a low p-value (Sig. = 0.025). The result here proves that there are significant differences in perceptions of proverbs between genders. The other categories related to gender (with women and against men) do not show statistically significant differences in perceptions. The marital status variable also demonstrates some significant differences in perceptions of gendered proverbs. Precisely, the against women category has a statistically significant F-statistic ( $F = 3.134$ ) with a p-value of 0.026. This suggests that marital status may impact perceptions of proverbs against women. The category of proverbs supporting men in marital status is also significant ( $F = 4.601$ , Sig. = 0.004), indicating differences in perceptions related to proverbs with men. The age variable does not show statistically significant differences in perceptions across any of the categories related to gendered proverbs. It may be the case that age may not play a significant role in shaping perceptions of gendered proverbs. The educational level variable shows some indications of potential impact. The categories of proverbs opposing men and women have significant F-statistics with p-values of 0.054 and 0.037, respectively. This suggests that there may be differences in perceptions related to proverbs against women and men based on educational level.

**Table 13** presents result of a correlation analysis between different variables related to gendered proverbs. The Pearson Correlation coefficient is used to measure the relationship between these variables and make predictions based on the observed data. These correlations indicate that participants who tend to agree with proverbs supporting women are also more likely to agree with proverbs against women, proverbs supporting men and proverbs against men. The findings reveal that the highest correlation is observed between with women proverbs and the overall mean score for all proverbs suggesting that individuals who hold certain gender-related beliefs are likely to hold similar beliefs across all proverb categories.

**Table 12**

*Tests of between-subjects effects*

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Gender	With women	.198	1	.198	.446	.505
	Against women	10.862	1	10.862	30.157	.000
	With men	2.210	1	2.210	5.080	.025
	Against men	.563	1	.563	1.024	.312
	Total	.804	1	.804	2.581	.109
Marital status	With women	.716	3	.239	.537	.657
	Against women	3.386	3	1.129	3.134	.026
	With men	6.005	3	2.002	4.601	.004
	Against men	.369	3	.123	.224	.880
	Total	1.848	3	.616	1.977	.118
Age	With women	.109	2	.055	.123	.884
	Against women	.052	2	.026	.072	.930
	With men	1.055	2	.527	1.212	.299
	Against men	.081	2	.041	.074	.929
	Total	.033	2	.016	.052	.949
Educational level	With women	1.216	2	.608	1.369	.256
	Against women	2.132	2	1.066	2.960	.054
	With men	1.765	2	.883	2.028	.134
	Against men	3.655	2	1.828	3.327	.037
	Total	1.820	2	.910	2.920	.056

**Table 13**  
*Correlation between proverb categories*

		With women	Against women	With men	Against men	Total
With women	Pearson Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
Against women	Pearson Correlation	.511**				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	267	267	267	267	267
With men	Pearson Correlation	.554**	.680**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
Against men	Pearson Correlation	.618**	.601**	.525**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
Total	Pearson Correlation	.808**	.836**	.830**	.838**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), indicating strong associations between these proverb categories. There is a statistically significant positive correlation of 0.554 between ‘with women’ and ‘with men’ categories. There is also a statistically significant positive correlation of 0.601 between ‘against women’ and ‘against men’ categories. Further, there is a statistically significant positive correlation of 0.511 between ‘with women’ and ‘against women’ and a significant positive correlation of 0.525 between with men and ‘against men’. Additionally, there is a statistically significant positive correlation of 0.808 between ‘with women’ and the average of all pro-statements, and a correlation of 0.836 between ‘against women’ and the average of all pro-statements.

These results suggest the presence of positive relationships between the mentioned variables, which may reflect specific attitudes towards women and men. The analysis shows that these relationships are not simply random interpretations and have statistical significance.

**DISCUSSION**

The study’s findings highlight that Jordanian’s perceptions of gendered proverbs vary and are shaped by a mix of personal experiences, cultural traditions, and changing social values (Novianti et al., 2023). Proverbs that support women, particularly those valuing the role of mothers, are widely appreciated. On the contrary, proverbs with negative description of women received mixed opinions, which reveals a tension between traditional beliefs and a growing awareness of gender equality. This shift suggests that traditional ideas about gender are gradually being critically challenged in today’s society. Similarly, proverbs about men show a combination of support for traditional male roles and a growing tendency to question rigid gender expectations. This finding indicates that traditional gender roles still hold influence, yet there is a considerable shift towards more balanced perspectives, especially among younger and more educated individuals.

The study also showed that people’s perceptions varied based on their demographic information. For instance, men and older participants tended to agree more with traditional gender roles while women and younger participants were more likely to challenge them. Widows showed a stronger agreement across different proverbs, which may reflect their unique life experiences and the societal pressures they face. These variations indicate that cultural and life experiences shape how individuals engage with and interpret gendered proverbs. In this sense, the analysis demonstrates that opinions on gender roles are not homogenous but are influenced by a variety of personal factors.

Overall, the findings show that there is an attempt to maintain a balance between respecting cultural traditions and supporting more inclusive attitudes. The moderate levels of agreement with both traditional and progressive views demonstrate that change can be slow, yet there is a tendency towards more equal perspectives, even if some people are still holding on to the old views.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The present study aimed to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and promote inclusivity in the field of gender studies. It examined Jordanian’s perceptions and attitudes towards proverbs throughout the following variables: gender, age, education and marital status. The study utilised a questionnaire that consisted of proverbs related to gender roles and stereotypes in Jordanian culture. 267 participants were requested to rate their level of acceptance with each proverb on a Likert scale. The analysis of the study generally showed that the overall mean

score for all proverbs is in the moderate level, which indicates that Jordanian participants have diverse opinions regarding Jordanian gendered proverbs. This implies that participants' perspectives vary based on their life experiences, with some continuing to uphold traditional values while others are more open to changing perspectives on gender roles.

Upon a careful investigation of the gendered proverbs in Jordan, the analysis revealed that Jordanian participants showed more agreement with proverbs that supported women than with those that supported men while proverbs that opposed women received the lowest level of agreement when compared to those that opposed men. These findings suggest that Jordanian society may have a stronger inclination towards empowering women highlighting the need for promoting gender equality and challenging traditional gender roles.

When testing the impact of the independent variables (i.e., gender, age, marital status and the level of education) on the respondents' perceptions and acceptance of Jordanian gendered proverbs, the statistical analysis revealed that gender, marital status and educational level seem to have significant effects on perception of these gendered proverbs. To demonstrate, the category of proverbs opposing women has a highly significant effect in perception of proverbs between participants with different gender, marital status and level of education. However, age, does not exhibit statistically significant differences in perception across the categories of proverbs. These results are attributed to the complex interplay between cultural norms and societal factors in shaping perceptions towards gender roles and values in Jordanian society. Looking forward, the findings can inform efforts to promote gender equality in Jordan by emphasising the value of challenging and revising traditional gendered expressions in language.

The findings contribute significantly to the existing literature on individual differences in their perception of gendered proverbs (Brown et al., 2022). Nevertheless, further research could explore the underlying reasons behind these attitudes and their implications for gender equality in Jordan. Moreover, investigating the potential reasons behind gender differences in their perceptions could offer deeper understanding into the cultural and psychological factors influencing these perceptions. On a wider domain, this area of research should be investigated across languages and cultures to shed light on the variations in interpretations and understandings of gendered proverbs.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. The sample size was relatively small, and the reliance on self-reported data via questionnaire may have introduced biases. Future research could expand the sample size and involve mixed approaches such as qualitative interviews or focus group discussion to obtain a better understanding of individuals' perceptions of gendered proverbs.

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## **Ethical statement**

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study.
- Cultural sensitivity: The study was designed to respect Jordanian cultural norms. It focused on selecting proverbs that reflect diverse viewpoints and avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes.
- Avoiding stereotypes: The language used was neutral and non-judgmental. It allows participants to freely express their views without reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

## **Competing interests**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## **Author contributions**

Conceptualization, H.K.; methodology, D.R.; validation, D.R.; formal analysis, H.K. and D.R.; investigation, D.R.; resources, H.K. and D.R.; data curation, H.K. and D.R.; writing- original draft preparation, D.R.; writing-review and editing, H.K. and D.R.; visualization, D.R.; supervision, D.R.; project administration, D.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

## **Data availability**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

## AI disclosure

No AI tools were used to generate or interpret the findings of the study. AI was only used to support language editing and proofreading. The authors take full responsibility for the originality and accuracy of research.

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