



Covid-19 survey in Qatar points to high levels of awareness

The majority of Qatari nationals and white-collar and blue-collar expatriates are well aware of the novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19), according to a survey carried out by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (Sesri), at Qatar University (QU). Sesri, a social scientific survey research initiative of QU, surveyed 2,131 individuals from the three categories between March 12 and 14 about the Covid-19 outbreak.

The survey was based on a nationally representative sample interviewed by telephone in 10 different languages. The respondents comprised 726 Qatari nationals, 750 resident white-collar and 655 blue-collar expatriates aged 18 and older. As many as 97% of Qatari nationals, 94% of white-collar and 87% of blue-collar workers said they have heard or read some or a lot about the Covid-19 outbreak.

Qatari nationals (84%) and white-collar expatriate workers (79%) were more likely to say that they have heard or read a lot about Covid-19 as compared to blue-collar expatriate workers (56%).

Television, Twitter, Facebook, and word of mouth are the most frequently mentioned main sources of information about the Covid-19 pandemic.

For Qataris, television (31%) and Twitter (18%) are the most mentioned main sources of information, while for white-collar expatriates, television (23%) and Facebook (20%) are the main sources of information.

Facebook (31%) and word of mouth (23%) are mentioned the main sources of information about Covid-19 outbreak for blue-collar expatriates. Other sources of information for respondents include other social media platforms, newspapers, and the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH).

In general, women reported higher levels of concern about a possible widespread outbreak of Covid-19 in Qatar, and even more so about the possibility that they or their family members might contract the virus

The majority of Qatari national and white-collar and blue-collar expatriates are concerned about the negative impacts of Covid-19.

Qatari nationals (62%), white-collar (71%) and blue-collar expatriates (74%) in large numbers said they are either very or somewhat concerned that Covid-19 will have a negative impact on the economy of Qatar. Blue-collar expatriates (46%) are significantly more likely to be very concerned, as compared to white-collar expatriates (36%) and Qatari nationals (28%). Overall, Qataris are least likely to be concerned about the negative impact of Covid-19 on the economy of Qatar.

All respondents were also asked about their level of concern about a possible widespread outbreak of Covid-19 in Qatar. Nearly two-thirds of all respondents reported being somewhat or very concerned (62% for Qataris; 65% for white-collar expatriates; and 68% for blue-collar expatriates).

Once again, blue-collar expatriates (40%) were more likely to be very concerned as compared to Qataris (31%) and white-collar workers (33%).

With regard to the respondents' level of concern about themselves or someone in their family falling sick due to Covid-19, all groups expressed concerns (67% of Qataris, 73% of white-collar expatriates, and 67% of blue-collar expatriates). Overall, Qatari nationals (76%) were more likely to be somewhat or very concerned in comparison

to blue-collar expatriates (67%). In general, women reported higher levels of concern about a possible widespread outbreak of Covid-19 in Qatar, and even more so about the possibility that they or their family members might contract the virus. Similarly, younger respondents were more

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likely to be concerned about the negative impact of Covid-19 on the economy of Qatar, its widespread outbreak, and the possibility of themselves or their family members contracting the virus.

While blue-collar expatriates said they know less about Covid-19, they expressed more concern about its effects on the economy and about the potential for an outbreak.

This suggests that their lack of access/exposure to information may be driving their concern, and that providing more accurate information might reduce their level of worry.

Washing hands regularly and

using hand sanitisers are the most mentioned precautionary measures taken by all respondents to protect themselves and their families against Covid-19.

While all groups of respondents mentioned washing hands regularly and using hand sanitisers, blue-collar workers were more likely to mention washing hands regularly as a precautionary measure (84%), as compared to white-collar workers (76%) and Qataris (67%).

However, blue-collar workers (46%) were least likely to report using hand sanitisers as a precautionary measure (vs 68% for Qataris and 62% for white-collar expatriates). This is, presumably, because they have less access to hand sanitisers.

About half of Qataris (49%) and white-collar expatriates (54%) and slightly less than half blue-collar expatriates (42%) also mentioned avoiding public places such as malls, mosques, and shopping centers. Similarly, 50% of Qataris, 40% of white-collar and 39% of blue-collar expatriates said they avoid public gatherings including majlis, weddings, funerals, and Friday prayers.

Interestingly, nearly two-thirds of blue-collar expatriates (66%) said they use protective masks as compared 29% of white-collar expatriates and 13% of Qataris.

Blue-collar expatriates, due to the nature of their living and workplace environment, are more likely to interact with crowds of people. Other precautionary measures implemented by the respondents include avoiding handshakes, kissing on the forehead, nose, and cheeks.

Sesri director Prof Hassan al-Sayed said such surveys inform policy and decision-makers about the public's feedback and helps in mitigating this pandemic.

Qatar sends swift medical aid to Iran



Qatar, represented by Qatar Fund for Development and Qatar Airways, sent the second shipment of urgent medical aid to Iran to fight the spread of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) epidemic. The shipment, which weighs 7 tonnes, contains medical equipment and supplies, including masks, sterilisers, and medical disinfectants. The first shipment, which was transported on March 13, included 6 tonnes of medical equipment and supplies. Iran has reported one of the highest coronavirus deaths and infections in the Middle East.

Sri Lankan Airlines issues advisory

Sri Lankan Airlines Doha office has advised passengers holding tickets between March 22 and 29 to contact the ticketing channel (travel agent/Internet booking site) from where they have purchased the same.

Passengers can contact the airline on telephone numbers 44441217, 44360286, 44446345, 44322628, e-mail: doh.res@srilankan.com, or 24-hour global call centre on +94117771979 for any queries. The airline has discouraged

passengers from visiting its city office counter because of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak. Sri Lankan Airlines' regional branches at Industrial Area and Al Khor are temporarily closed, according to a statement.



Digital tools are an alternative for similar circumstances in the future.

Doha Debates tackles gender equality

Gender equality has been placed in the spotlight by Qatar Foundation's Doha Debates, as experts argued for and against quotas in an event at Education City that showed how coronavirus precautions are no barrier to global dialogue.

With the worldwide novel coronavirus disease (Covid-19) outbreak leading to social gatherings being scaled back, the debate at Northwestern University in Qatar – held to coincide with International Women's Day – was held without an in-person audience. Instead, students and other viewers from Brazil and Turkey to Japan used social media to contribute, comment, and question speakers.

Moderator Ghida Fakhry opened the show by explaining that experts estimate it will be another century before the gender gap is closed, and that this raises the question of whether gender quotas would accelerate change, or if they would be ineffective or even demeaning. Randa Abdel-Fattah, a novelist, lawyer and human rights advocate from Australia, called for gender quotas that also accounted for intersectionality – arguing that both gender and racial inequalities must be disrupted, and a complex issue like gender inequality cannot be solved by looking through a limited lens.

Illustrating the need for intersectionality, Abdel-Fattah said that of the 19,000 university professors in the UK, around 4,000 are white women – and just 25 are black women. "Gender inequality clearly impacts on women, but some more than others," she said, urging listeners to envision new and revolutionary forms of leadership and teaching.

"White women enjoy racial privilege even as they fight sexism, and by defining women as a single axis of oppression, we further entrench ourselves in racism. We need gender quotas to pursue a radical redistribution of this

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power dynamic." Ayishat Akanbi, a cultural commentator, artist and stylist, said quotas could be a strong short-term solution, but the real goal must be to create a society where they are not needed.

"If we don't like gender quotas, as many of us do not, we have to be active in building a world where they are unnecessary," she said, adding that quotas are likely to cause tension if people think colleagues are "a tick on a diversity checklist."

Gender equality must not be relegated only to boardrooms and academia, Akanbi said, "because otherwise we care more about power than we do equality." And she stressed her case that while quotas may sometimes work, a more holistic approach that includes a radical reorganisation of society and a serious rethinking of traditional gender roles is needed.

American writer and scholar Christina Hoff Sommers strongly opposed gender quotas, claiming they are demeaning to women and gender equality must happen organically, and saying there is no evidence that they work. In

less prosperous non-democratic societies, she said, quotas "are doing actual harm" because they pull talented women "out of mainstream society, where they are desperately needed, into the government" where she claimed they are forced to be silent, creating a veneer of equality. She cited the example of Rwanda, contending that the fact more than 60% of the parliament is made up of women actually works against them.

"In everything we do, we must treat individuals as individuals, not as tokens," she said. "Quotas are ineffective, harmful and send the wrong message to women, and although there is no fixed solution to gender inequality, progress will come out of free expression and discourse."

Dr Govinda Clayton, the debate's connector, encouraged the speakers to find some agreement among their positions, explaining that one point of consensus was that nobody thought gender quotas are "a panacea that would resolve the deeper inequalities we have." This led to Akanbi saying that quotas might be beneficial

in areas such as national governments, but there is a need to think about the reasons for social imbalances that might not be due to discrimination.

However, Hoff Sommers, while agreeing that not all discrepancies in society are due to discrimination, said there are better ways to achieve diversity and equality than through quotas, and that change must happen organically for it to be effective.

But Abdel-Fattah claimed that although the beginnings of a quota system might be seen as tokenistic, the onus should shift to why there is overrepresentation rather than underrepresentation, saying: "This isn't about evil men versus good women; it's about structures that need to be challenged and overturned."

After the opening statements, Akanbi's middle-ground position received the most votes, with almost 41% of the total. By the end of the debate, the positions had shifted, with Hoff Sommers' anti-quota position receiving 41% of the vote, Abdel-Fattah's pro-quota position receiving 32% and Akanbi's stance receiving 27%.

Online learning handy in crisis situations, says HBKU student

As classroom teaching has been suspended, universities and schools are increasingly making use of online learning to continue teaching-learning process all across Qatar.

Several students such as Sharifa Ahen, a first-year Juris Doctor student, at the College of Law at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) are more than one week into their distance learning experience. When Ahen received news of the discontinuation of all in-class learning, her disappointment was quite evident but now, that perception has changed.

"Online learning tools are not entirely new to me because online submissions are a core requirement of our law courses. But what was new to me is having to consistently use these tools remotely and co-ordinate with many users simultaneously," said Ahen. Along with eight other members of her Juris Doctor class, Ahen regularly convenes to deliberate on legal cases. The Constitutional Law, Legal Writing II, International Law and Property Law courses they attend are geared towards developing their instinct for approaching legal problems and gaining dif-

ferent perspectives. All courses have gone ahead as planned now that instruction has shifted online.

"I've learned to navigate the benefits and complexities of the online learning experience. I have had to shift my mindset from one that is more accustomed to skills such as being perceptive and able to read body language cues, to placing more emphasis on becoming an active listener. In the absence of physical interactions or visible responses, we've had to rely on and improve our anticipatory reactions and clarity in our communication."

A huge source of frustration for Ahen was the cancellation of the Vis international commercial arbitration moot court competition, scheduled for April 2020 in Vienna, Austria. The competition was the highlight of her academic year and Ahen, along with her teammates, trained on a weekly basis in anticipation of this event since October 2019.

"On the international front, there's a form of resilience made evident by global efforts to ensure continuity despite the circumstances. We knew that too when we were offered an opportunity to participate in the com-

petition via online conferencing. And despite it all, I was also able to partake in the Vis Middle East Pre-Moot in Bahrain just because it had shifted entirely online. Before then, the blockade would have made our visas near impossible to acquire."

For Ahen, unusual circumstances can present a learning curve for everyone involved. "There is a silver lining in everything if you look for it. As lawyers, we will be expected to handle situations like these in the future, where contracts may be abruptly terminated or public circulars need to be drafted."

Ahen believes digital tools are an alternative for similar circumstances in the future. "Although I don't believe online learning can permanently replace in-class learning, I do think it is a necessary alternative considering the current situation. It also allows for possible future flexibility once things go back to normal. Online learning allows for remote attendance in exceptional situations, which is especially relevant to our student body. What is happening today has clearly laid the foundation for contingency measures in the future," she added.