

## **The Influence of the Visual and the Direct Physical Accessibility on the Sense of Control of Saudi Women in the Home Environment**

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**Abstract :** The importance of providing employed mothers with the right physical environment inside the home is not an easy task, especially when the culture is involved. This study examines the typical Saudi home as a personal, emotional, social and cultural setting, especially on the interactions between the physical design and perceived control of working mothers. However, owing to the scarcity of published literature on Saudi homes, American employed mothers were included in the study to provide a baseline. With the ongoing transformations in women's role in Saudi Arabia, there is a perception that traditional home designs may not afford the appropriate sense of control inside the home. Saudi Arabia has numerous interacting layers of socio-cultural-religious forces that affect residential design, and understanding the moderating role of the Saudi home is vital to the ongoing national policy transition on women. The study investigated one narrow, albeit critical, influence of home design on ones sense of control – direct visual and physical accessibility between sets of rooms. Ten subjects, five Saudis and five American, examined visual and physical access between 171 room sets, and provided qualitative responses on how each access influences their sense of control. Three main themes emerged, with potential effects on control: 1- Openness, 2- Proximity, and 3- Separation. Data suggest that although the Saudi home is a substantially more complex setting than the American ones, a class of spaces that can be termed as 'Neutral Rooms' serving as cultural separators may represent the ideal solution for optimizing sense of control, without ignoring cultural-religious traditions, during the transition of the Saudi women.

**Keywords :** direct physical accessibility, home environment, sense of control, visual accessibility, working mothers

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