

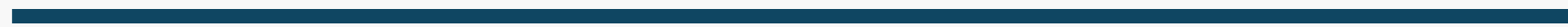


Misperceived Social Norms: Women Working Outside the Home in Saudi Arabia

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Jarkko Schaad



Content

- Paper's Background
- Research Design
- Key Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion



Content

● **Paper's Background**

● Research Design

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Paper's Background

Objective

Misperception of social norms and pluristic ignorance are widely acknowledged phenomenons in different areas of social networks, whether it be nations, associations or companies. Which has been investigated and investigated already a lot.

First time mentioned in:

Katz, Daniel, Floyd H. Allport, and Margaret B. Jenness. 1931. "Students' Attitudes: A Report of the Syracuse University Reaction Study"

Addressing that most white Americans significantly overestimated the support for racial segregation among other whites:

O'Gorman, Hubert J. 1975. "Pluralistic Ignorance and White Estimates of White Support for Racial Segregation."

Similar to this paper, with Kuwait students opinion about women working outside of home:

González, Alessandra L. 2013. "Islamic Feminism in Kuwait: The Politics and Paradoxes"

While previous research documented the existence and examples of pluralistic ignorance, this paper provides experimental evidence demonstrating that correcting these misperceptions has a causal impact on real-world economic behavior.



Content

- Paper's Background
- **Research Design - Main experiment**
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Main experiment

Purpose

- Test if correcting beliefs about peer support increases men's willingness to support their wives working.

Stage 1 Part 1 - Survey & Beliefs

Each man completes a private online survey:

- Shares his own opinion on WWOH
- Guesses how many of the 29 others in the room also support WWOH
- This reveals that many men support WWOH

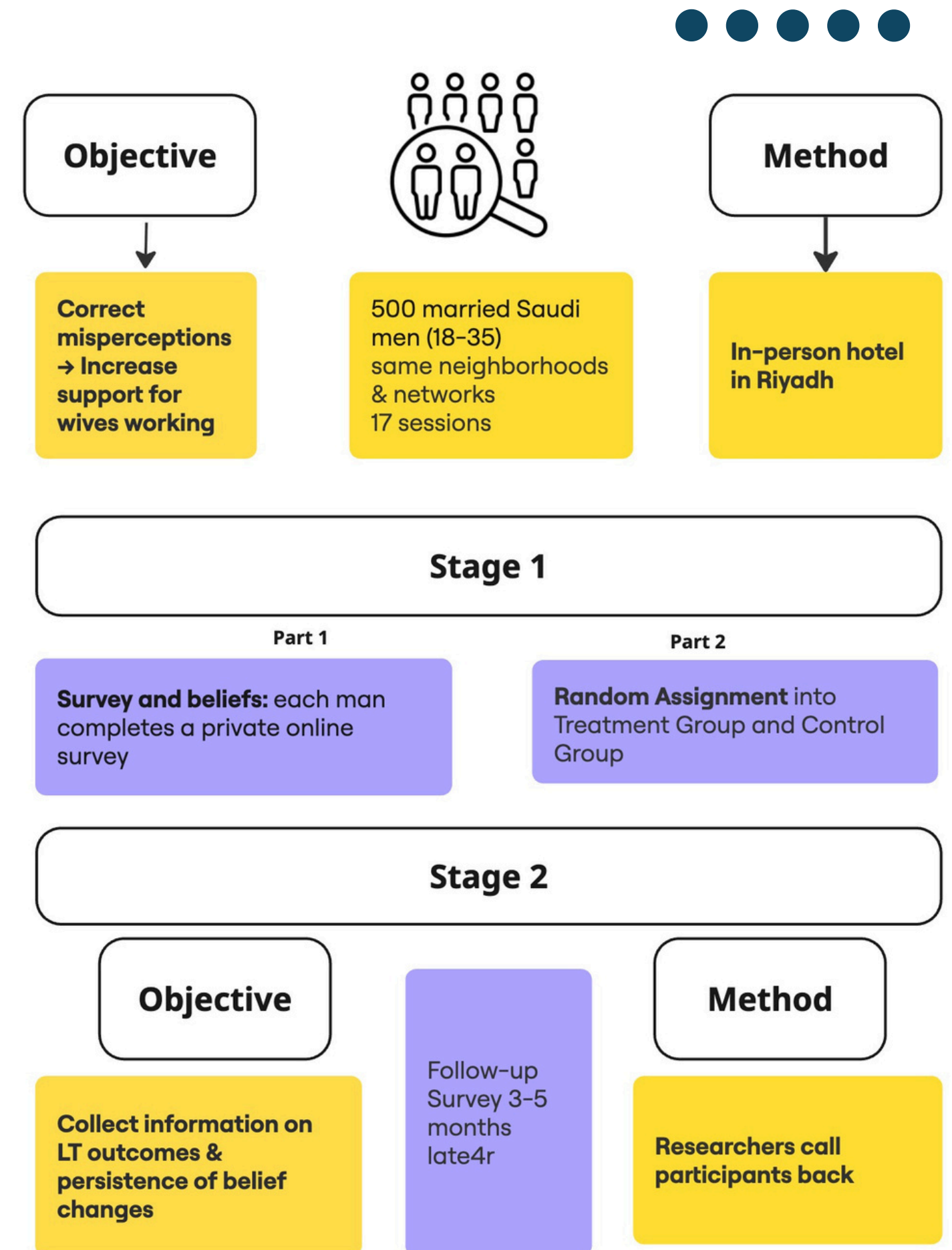
Stage 1 Part 2 - Random Assignment

- Treatment group: shown the true percentage of supporters in the room
- Control group: not shown anything

Stage 2 - Follow-Up Survey

Researchers call participants back and ask

- Did your wife apply for a job outside the home?
- Did she have a job interview?
- Would you sign her up for driving lessons?



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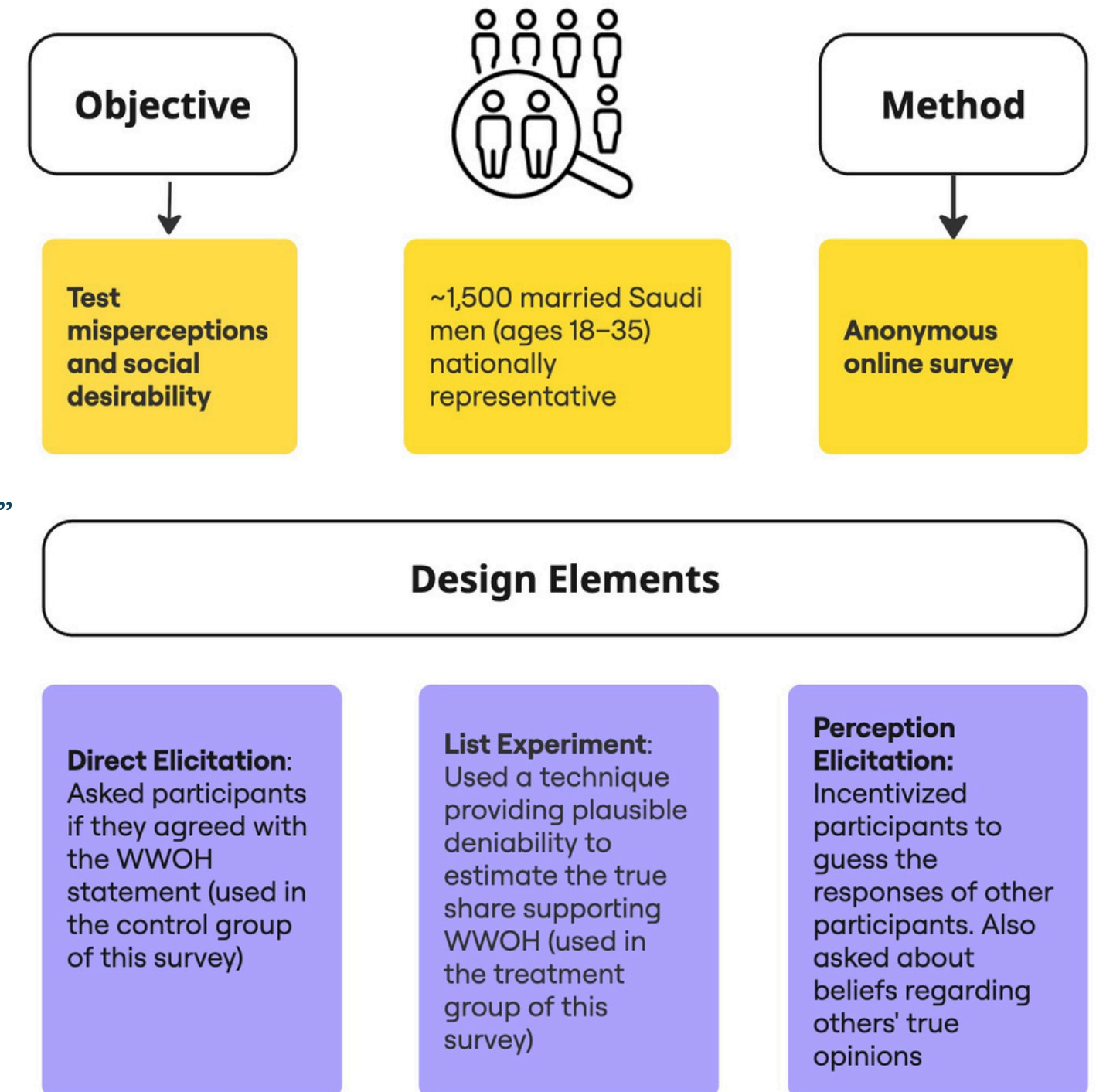
First National Survey

Purpose

- Test whether the misperceptions found in the experiment also exist nationwide
- Check for social desirability bias using a List Experiment

Design Elements

- **Direct Elicitation**
 - direct question: “Do you support women working outside the home?”
- **List Experiment**
 - Control: list of neutral statements
 - Treatment: same list + WWOH statement
 - Participants report how many (not which) they agree with
 - → Give a more honest estimate.
- **Perception Elicitation**
 - Participants guess how others would respond



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Second National Survey

Purpose

- Investigate whether lack of communication explains misperceptions about support for WWOH

Design Elements

- Collected own opinions and guesses about others' views on WWOH

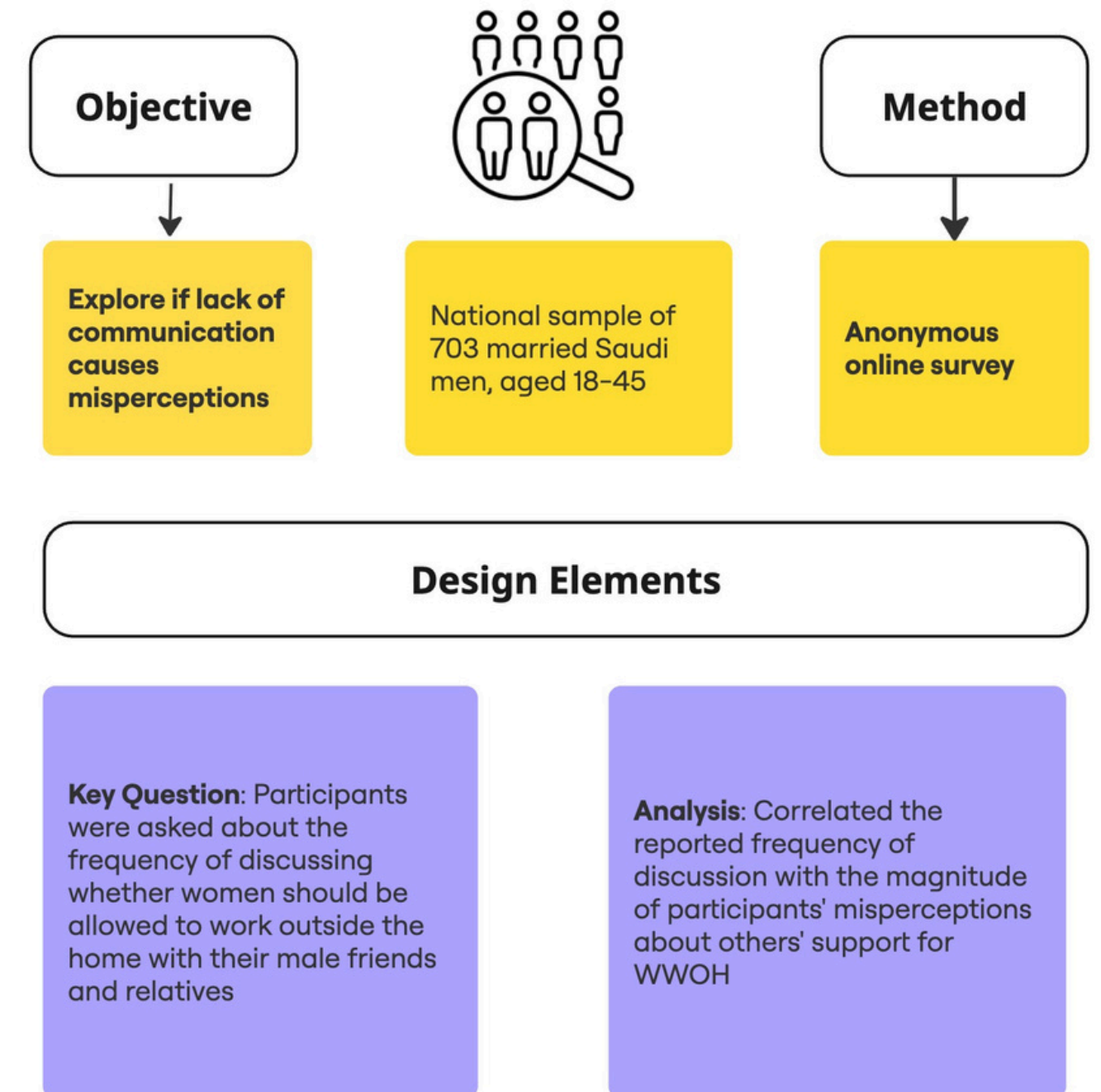
Questions

How often do you talk about women working with male friends/relatives?

- Options: Very often, often, sometimes, rarely, very rarely
- Measured how discussion frequency is related to misperception size

Outcomes measured:

- A strong negative correlation observed: less frequent discussion is associated with larger misperceptions



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- **Research Design - Surveyor Recruiter Experiment**
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Surveyor Recruiter Experiment

Purpose

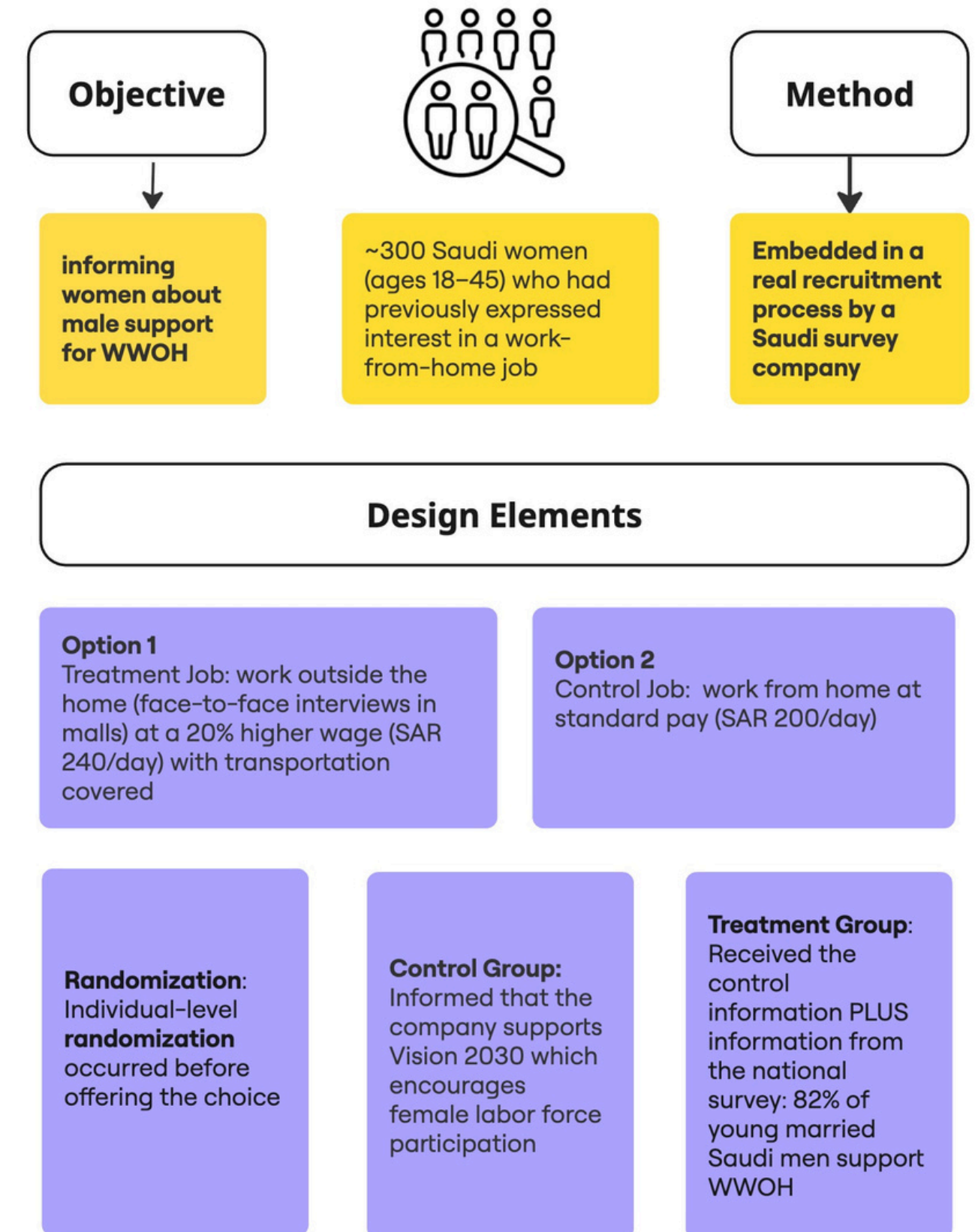
- See if informing women about high male support for WWOH leads them to be more willing to choose and show up for jobs outside the home.

Design Elements

- Women received a follow-up call offering two job options:
 - Control job: work-from-home (standard pay)
 - Treatment job: work outside the home (20% higher pay + transport)
- Randomization before the call:
 - Control group: told company supports Vision 2030 (female labor participation)
 - Treatment group: was told that + "82% of young Saudi men support WWOH"

Outcomes measured:

- Job choice: Did the woman choose the outside-home job?
- Job attendance: Did she show up for the outside-home job?



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Key Results



Experiment	Sample	Key Findings
Main Experiment (October 9, 2017)	500 married Saudi men (18–35) ▾	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 87% supported WWOH- 75% underestimated peer support- Treatment group: 32% signed up wives for job app vs. 23.5% in control group (+8.5 p.p.)
Follow-Up (3–5 months later) (January 10, 2018)	Same as above ▾	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Wives in treatment group were more likely to apply for jobs (16% vs. 6%, +10 p.p.)- More likely to attend interviews (6% vs. 1%, +5 p.p.)- Treatment group: signed up wives for driving lessons 76.4% vs 65.2%.
First National Survey (February 15, 2018)	~1,500 married Saudi men (18–35) ▾	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 82% supported WWOH- 92% underestimated others' support (avg. gap: 25 p.p.)- List experiment confirmed no major social desirability bias
Second National Survey (January and February 2020)	703 married Saudi men (18–45) ▾	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- 84% supported WWOH- 82% underestimated others' support- Less discussion correlated with larger misperceptions (40% gap vs. 4% with frequent discussion)
Surveyor Recruitment Experiment (January and February 2020)	~300 Saudi women (18–45) ▾	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Informed group: 33% chose outside-home job vs. 18% in control (+15 p.p.)- Attendance: 27% vs. 15% (+12 p.p.)

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Discussion - KSA

Country specifics

- Women ≈ 49% of population; majority under 35
- GDP ≈ \$1.1 trillion USD – Diversification needs female talent
- Population ≈ 35 million (2023 est.), with youth (under 30) ≈ 63%
- Approximately 49% of women are of working age (15+)
- Saudi Arabia ranked #1 globally for reforms on women's economic inclusion (World Bank, 2020)
- Women's participation in the private sector outpaces government (861K vs. 609K)
- Women in leadership: Ambassadors, deputy ministers, military roles
- Most common sectors: Retail, Construction, Health & Social Work
 - WWOH sectors

Key Facts: KSA Women Workforce (2022) *

- Labor force participation: ↑ to 36% (Q4 2022)
- Employment: ↑ to 1.47 million women (↑ 20% YoY)
- Unemployment: ↓ to 15.4%
- Education: Women = ~50% of university students
- Freelance boom: 961,000+ certificates in 2021

Structural Reform & Vision 2030

- Major legal reforms: women can now marry, travel, and register events without guardian approval
- Legal & policy reforms: More autonomy, protection from harassment
- Vision 2030: Women's inclusion = national development priority
- Vision 2030 was announced in 2016, with clear goals to increase female workforce participation (WWOH study was conducted in 2107)

* Source: Saudi Women Report 2022:

chrome-extension://efaidnbmninnbpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.stats.gov.sa/documents/20117/2435259/Saudi_Women%27s_Report_2022_EN.pdf/263b768d-8d75-4358-99a3-380eb1a0b97d?t=1734055310839

Discussion - Validity

Connection to proximate drivers of growth

- Incentives for Innovation with empowering women
 - "Empowering women and youth remain two key pillars to achieving sustainable growth"
- Economic growth can be held back by invisible, mistaken beliefs about social acceptability. These beliefs depress labor utilization and innovation, but are malleable — and correcting them can activate unused growth potential.

Cultural Persistence

- Cultural traits often persist across generations, even after economic or legal conditions change.
- This persistence can be inertial (passed down uncritically) or reinforced by institutions (laws, religion, media, etc.).
- Empower the next generation to make different choices without backlash

Solow Growth Model

- More workers raise total output but may lower output per worker until capital adjusts ==> income per capita decreases.
- L goes up
- $Y = F(K, L)$ total output increases
- SR: capital dilution (more workers for same capital)
- LR: the economy reaches a new steady state with more workers and more capital, and higher total output.
- More women working makes the economy bigger, but not faster-growing in the LR without technology growth.
- Helps close the labor wedge, using talent that was underutilized due to social barriers.

Discussion - Limitations

Sample

- Urban, young, educated men from big cities Riyadh, Jeddah - not fully representative of all Saudi population (≠ rural: not taken into account).
- Reforms: broader policy shifts post-2018 may also explain employment gains
 - Attributing all employment outcomes to the experiment alone
- Behaviour: more job applications ≠ guaranteed employment or long-term job retention
 - Assuming behaviour change = economic empowerment.
- Social pressure: Survey responses may reflect social desirability, not deep belief change
 - behaviour change was modest and still affected by external constraints

What the study doesn't show

- Short-term intervention, long-term claims - effects may fade without reinforcement
- No direct input from women - focus is on men's beliefs and decisions
- Spillover effects unknown - unclear if norms shifted beyond treated individuals
- Narrow labor outcomes - does not track job quality, wages, or career growth
- Context-specific - results may not apply to other countries or cultures
- Possible other drivers. For example, national programs to boost contribution of women in labour market

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Conclusion

- **Correcting Misperceptions Works:** Simply informing men about actual support for women working outside the home (WWOH) significantly shifts labor supply decisions.
- **Pluralistic Ignorance is Powerful:** Misperceived norms can strongly shape behavior, even when societal support exists.
- **Lasting Impact:** Belief corrections persist for months, showing long-term potential for changing attitudes and behavior.
- **Policy Potential:** Low-cost norm-correction interventions can reduce labor market barriers where culture, not law, constrains female participation.



Thank you

