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Since the publication of *East of Mecca*, it's been my honor to be invited to many books clubs, women's groups, and other author events. The question I have been asked more than any other is, "Haven't things improved for women in Saudi Arabia since the late 1980's when you were living there?" The simple and tragic answer is, "No." Circumstances have worsened for Saudi women—and for Muslim women and girls worldwide. Because of culturally sanctioned honor violence and radical Islamic terrorist groups, gender apartheid against women has reached epic proportions.

The following are facts about women in Saudi Arabia.

- Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world that prohibits women from driving. – “*World Report 2012: Saudi Arabia*” *Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2011*
- Under the Saudi guardianship system, women are treated as minors as well as forbidden from travel, studying or working without permission from male guardians –“*World Report 2012: Saudi Arabia*” *Human Rights Watch (HRW), 2011*
- Under Saudi law, all females must have a male guardian, typically a father, brother or husband. The guardian has duties to, and rights over, the woman in many aspects of civic life. - *Ertürk, Yakin (14 April 2009). Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences: Mission to Saudi Arabia. United Nations.*
- Women's freedom of movement is very limited in Saudi Arabia. They are not supposed to leave their houses or their local neighborhood without the permission of their male guardian. - "*Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Citizenship and Justice*". *Freedom House. 2005. p. 262*
- Traditionally, women's clothing must not reveal anything about her body. It is supposed to be thick, opaque, and loose. It should not resemble the clothing of men (or non-Muslims). In Saudi Arabia and some other Arab states, all of the body is expected to be covered except the hands and eyes. - "*Conditions of Muslim woman's hijab*". *Islam Q&A. 3 October 2008. Retrieved 2 June 2008.*
- There are no laws defining the minimum age for marriage in Saudi Arabia. Most religious authorities have justified the marriage of girls as young as 9 and boys as young as 15. However, they believe a father can marry off his daughter at any age. - *Gender Equality in Saudi Arabia*". *Retrieved 21 September 2010.*

For more current information on global violence against women and girls, I recommend:

A Call to Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power. A book by President Jimmy Carter. Simon & Schuster, 2014

Honor Diaries: Culture is No Excuse for Abuse. A documentary written and produced by Paula Kweskin available in DVD or to download. Also see the *Honor Diaries* page on FaceBook.

Google the following terms: female genital mutilation, gender apartheid, honor violence, honor killings, sharia law