**Female Death On Campus Sparks Saudi Fury**

February 7, 2014

Times of Israel

http://www.timesofisrael.com/female-death-on-campus-sparks-saudi-fury/#ixzz2sfBljz1N

Thousands of Saudis vented their anger online over a report Thursday that staff at a Riyadh university had barred male paramedics from entering a women’s-only campus to assist a student who had suffered a heart attack and later died.

The Okaz newspaper said administrators at the King Saud University impeded efforts by the paramedics to save the student’s life because of rules banning men from being onsite. According to the paper, the incident took place on Wednesday and the university staff took an hour before allowing the paramedics in.

However, the university’s rector, Badran Al-Omar, denied the report, saying there was no hesitation in letting the paramedics in. He said the university did all it could to save the life of the student, who was identified as Amna Bawazeer.

Al-Omar told The Associated Press that after the incident, he met Bawazeer’s father who told him his daughter had heart problems. The rector said Bawazeer suffered a heart attack and collapsed suddenly on the campus on Wednesday.

Her death sparked a debate on Twitter by Saudis who created a hashtag to talk about the incident. In the debate, many Saudis said the kingdom’s strictly enforced rules governing the segregation of the sexes were to blame for the delay in helping Bawazeer.

Saudi Arabia follows a strict interpretation of Islam. Sexes are segregated in schools and almost all Saudi universities. Women also have separate seating areas and often separate entrances in “family” sections of restaurants and cafes where single males are not allowed. The kingdom’s top cleric has warned against the mixing of the genders, saying it poses a threat to female chastity and society.

In a shocking tragedy in 2002, a fire broke out at a girl’s school in Mecca, killing 15 students. Rights groups reported that religious police would not allow the girls to escape because they were not wearing headscarves or abayas, a traditional loose black cloak that covers the female body from the neck down.

While religious police denied they blocked girls from fleeing and a government inquiry found the school was ill-equipped to handle emergencies, the incident led to the overhaul of women’s education. Colleges for women had been under the purview of the Department of Religious Guidance and clerics, but after the fire it was placed under the Education Ministry, which oversees male education.

Following Wednesday’s incident, professors at King Saud University also demanded an investigation.

“We need management who can make quick decisions without thinking of what the family will say or what culture will say,” said Professor Aziza Youssef.

One staff member who witnessed the situation said paramedics were not called immediately. She said they were also not given immediate permission to enter the campus and that it appeared that the female dean of the university and the female dean of the college of social studies panicked. The staff member spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution from university management.

Al-Omar said the staff called campus health officials within minutes of Bawazeer collapsing and that about 25 minutes later they called paramedics.

“They called the ambulance at 12:35 p.m. and ambulance staff was there by 12:45 p.m. and entered immediately. There was no barring them at all. They entered from a side door,” he said.