



## NEIGHBORS

# Covid impact on family life in Gulf region highlighted

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on families and children in the Gulf region was the focus of the most recent discussion organised by the Programme for Social Policy and Evaluation Research (Prosper) at the College of Public Policy (CPP), Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU).

As part of the Covid-19 Webinar Series and held in collaboration with the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman, and the Faculty of Social Sciences, Kuwait University, the event brought together experts from the Gulf region to discuss the results of the wide-ranging international Covid-19 Family Life Study, led by Dr Anis Ben Brik, associate professor at CPP and founding director of Prosper.

The cross-cultural research study has examined the challenges faced by parents and children in 72 countries, including the Arab Gulf countries, during the pandemic.

During the webinar, Dr Ben Brik discussed the key findings pertaining to Gulf countries with three of his international research team members: Dr Humoud Alqashan, dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Kuwait University;

Dr Said Aldhafri, professor and director of the Social Observatory Research Programme at Sultan Qaboos University; and Dr Sarah Almalki, vice dean of Development, Jazan University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

With the support of regional partners, data was collected from the six Gulf countries through an electronic questionnaire.

The overall findings of the study indicate that Gulf families were resilient to the pandemic and were able to develop protective factors and adapt positively to the Covid-19 crisis. However, the study indicated a very slight decline in the level of parent-children relationships amid the pandemic.

In addition, data shows symptoms of moderate levels of depression and stress and very severe levels of anxiety among parents in the Gulf region, with higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress in mothers compared to fathers.

The data has also shown that mothers in the Gulf region continue to bear the full burden of childcare amid the pandemic due to the continued low participation of fathers in childcare work.

Pertaining to spousal relationships, the data showed a slight improvement

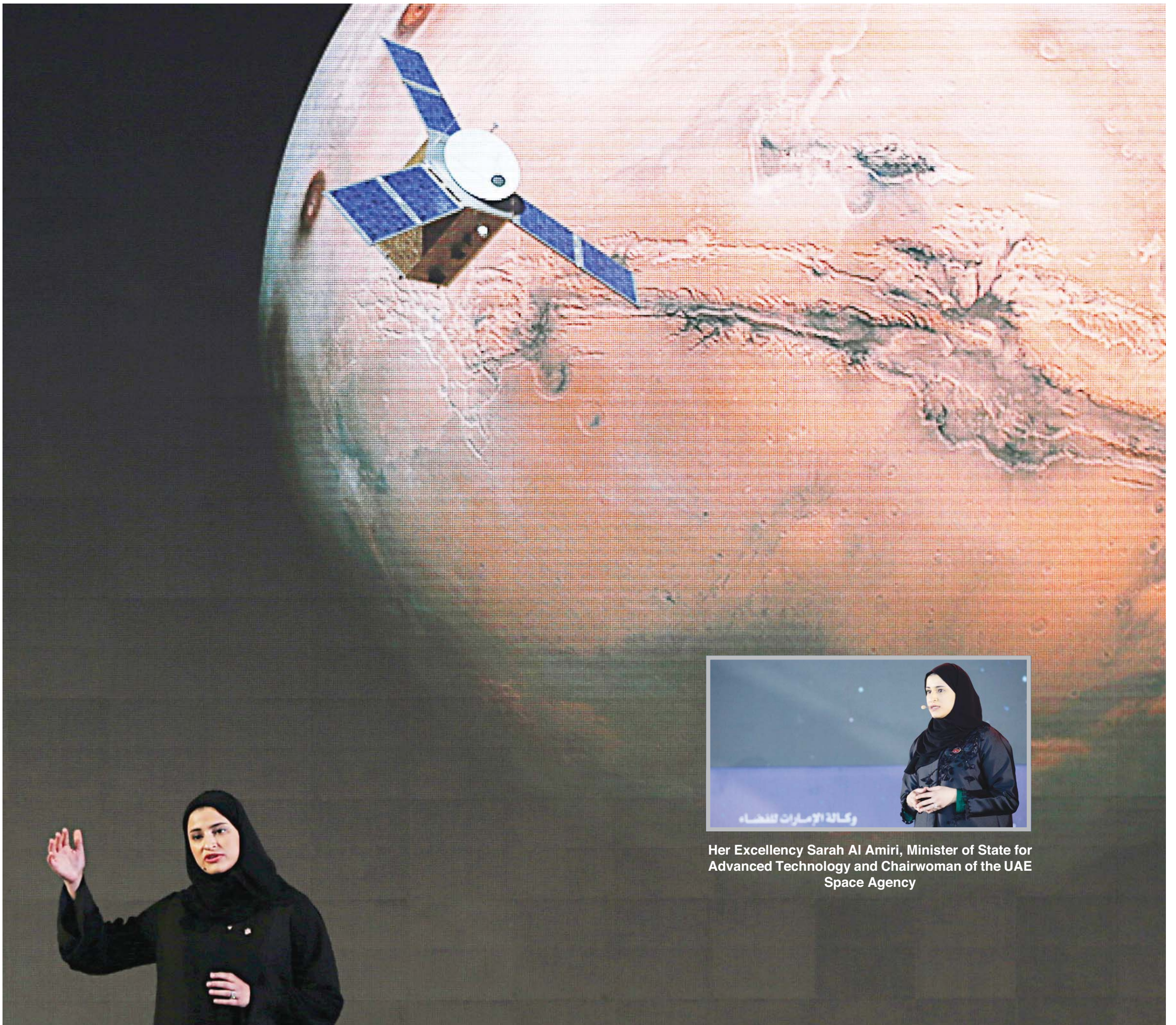
in the level of marital satisfaction during the pandemic.

Among children, the study indicated that anxiety is skyrocketing amid the pandemic and the toll was particularly striking among adolescents.

In this group, over 40% reported symptoms of high levels of anxiety. In addition, the study showed that the pandemic has affected children's ability to concentrate and deal with others, and their behavioural and emotional abilities.

The majority of study participants indicated strong support for family friendly policies and family strengthening programmes such as marital education and parenting programmes, and mental health programmes for children and adolescents, as well as support for flexible working policies for caring for children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Dr Ben Brik said, "The wide-reaching data gathered through the Covid-19 Family Life Study has highlighted the challenges faced by families and children due to the pandemic and how policymakers can respond through policies and interventions that will strengthen Gulf families, with its vital role in meeting our wider societal and global development goals."



Her Excellency Sarah Al Amiri, Minister of State for Advanced Technology and Chairwoman of the UAE Space Agency

### Pick joins 'innovators' category

# Al Amiri among Time '21 list of influential people

Her Excellency Sarah Al Amiri, Minister of State for Advanced Technology and Chairwoman of the UAE Space Agency, has been named as one of Time's 2021 list of the Next 100 Most Influential People in the World for successfully leading the UAE's Hope Probe into Mars' orbit, in the first-ever Arab interplanetary mission.

The 2021 Time100 Next list, which celebrates 100 emerging leaders who are shaping the future of entertainment, health, political and business among other fields, named Al Amiri for her widely-celebrated role in the historic arrival of the Hope Probe to the Red Planet's orbit that placed the UAE as the first Arab nation and the fifth in the world to reach Mars on Tuesday, Feb 9.

Leading the UAE's rapidly-growing space sector in her early 30s, Al Amiri joins 54 women in Time100 Next list whose prominent roles in bringing hope to their communities are celebrated amid the worldwide disruption caused by the outbreak of COVID-19.

Al Amiri joined the 'innovators' category in this year's list for heading the sustainable Hope Probe that was manufactured and developed six years, in half the duration and cost of conventional Mars missions, to benefit humanity with new Mars data.

As the deputy project manager and science lead of the Emirates Mars Mission, Al Amiri headed the team, of whom 80 percent are women, through the challenging journey of building and launching the first Arab spacecraft in col-

laboration with international universities. The team, under her leadership and guidance, defied the rising challenge of successfully launching the probe from Japan in July 20, 2020, amid the COVID-19 outbreak that posed closures to international airports and ports.

In addition to her work in sending the Arab world's first spacecraft to Mars, Al Amiri is now ahead of bigger missions: to lead ambitious space and technology projects that contribute to the UAE's bigger goal in establishing a knowledge-based economy. A lunar mission in 2024 and plans to build a human settlement on Mars by 2117 are among the ambitious projects that await the young minister who's looking to promote research and development to create new industries as part of her role.

On her selection, Al Amiri tweeted, "Thanks to @TIME for naming me on their 100 Next list, it's a mark of recognition I accept on behalf of the entire Emirates Mars Mission team, many of whom deserve the accolade a great deal more than I."

#### Wearing many hats

Since she graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Engineering from the American University of Sharjah (AUS) in 2009, Al Amiri joined the Mohammed bin Rashid Space Center — then called the Emirates Institution for Advanced Science and Technology (EIAST) — as a program engineer for two years.

She took part in building the UAE's first two satellites - DubaiSat-1 and

DubaiSat-2, and the first entirely Emirati-made KhalifaSat.

In 2014, she led the establishment of the Advanced Aerial Systems Program, where she championed development efforts on a prototype High Altitude Pseudo-Satellite. The project resulted in a successful 24-hour flight of the unmanned vehicle, which recorded the highest altitude of any aircraft over UAE airspace.

Al Amiri obtained her Master's Degree in computer engineering in 2014 from AUS, while heading the Space Science section at Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Center, where she set up the research and development unit.

She has been holding several responsibilities as the Chairwoman of the Emirates Scientists Council, Chairwoman of the Fourth Industrial Revolution Council and Chairwoman of the Dubai Future Academy Board of Trustees.

In 2017, she became the country's first Minister of State for Advanced Sciences, a title that later changed in the latest cabinet reshuffle in August 2020 to the Minister of State for Advanced Technology. She was also then named the Chairwoman of the UAE Space Agency.

In 2015, the World Economic Forum honored her as one of its 50 Young Scientists for her contributions to science, technology and engineering.

She was also invited by the World Economic Forum to speak at Davos 2019 and became the first Emirati citizen to speak at an international TED event in 2017.

editor's choice

