

The Effects of The War on University Education of Lebanese Females^(☆)

Again and again, Lebanon is seen through the spectrum of the war. How did this war affect its demography, its economy, its social structure and most of all its educational status.

Even under the crippling influence of violent shelling and street battles, Lebanon is known for its progressive instinct for survival. The survival of women and men alike, their ability to cope and move on has amazed the world including the Lebanese people themselves.

The effects of the war on university education of Lebanese females, is among the main concerns of scholars and social associations trying to examine post-war society. Consequently, Dr. Aisha Harb Zureik⁽¹⁾ conducted a field survey on the subject, which was sponsored by the Lebanese Family Planning Association. The survey is based on interviews with 100 female university students attending various branches of the Lebanese University, the Arab University, the American University of Beirut, Beirut University College and St. Joseph University. The sample respondents are residents of Beirut and its suburbs. Here are the initial observations of Dr. Zureik.

According to Dr. Zureik, two variables affect enrollment of Lebanese females in the universities: (1) economic/financial cost of education, (2) safety against sudden war activities. Together these variables determine the females choice of a university.

Hence, twenty five percent of the sample chose the university on the basis of proximity to home irrespective of the major/field of study. However, other findings in the same survey, do not confirm this observation. Although sixty percent or more of the female students sampled in the different universities live near campus, sixty seven percent of the total sample said they are enrolled in the major they are interested in.

Furthermore, seventy five percent of the sample are residents of Beirut, keeping in mind that the main branches and campuses of these universities are Beirut-

based. Consequently, this sample bias does not allow for definite conclusions correlating location with enrollment.

Still, on the basis of these data, Dr. Zureik suggests that branching of the universities lead to an increase in female enrollment at the university level. She adds, on the other hand, that this branching lead to a sectarian, territorial and ideological homogeneity of student bodies unlike the pre-war mixture.

The effect of the war on parents' attitudes towards educating their daughters is interesting but also needs more quantification. Interviews conducted by Dr. Zureik reveal the parents feel that it is more urgent to give their daughter a university degree than it is for their son, because a financially rewarding occupation can sustain a man and his future family even in the absence of higher education. However, a university degree for the daughter is essential for three reasons: it offers better work-opportunities, it offers qualifications for a 'better' husband and a degree acts as a tool a girl can use to secure a better future (should her marriage fail or should she remain single). Such attitudes suggest quite a turn in events. However, the validity and reliability of the data is questionable because the number and the status of the interviewees (mother or father) are not specified. It would be interesting to conduct more in-depth interviews on this matter.

According to Dr. Zureik, the financial factor plays an important role in the education of Lebanese females. Hence, twenty two percent (of the female students sample) are of the upper class, sixty seven percent are of the middle class and eleven percent are of the lower income bracket. The latter group have full/time or part/time jobs in order to secure tuition. Many attend the Lebanese University because it is free of charge. It would seem that economic difficulties do not force the females out of the university. Instead it allows and motivates them to work in order to manage tuition fees or other related expenses.

Dr. Zureik's survey offers interesting initial observations about females' aspirations and access to a universi-

ty degree. The ratio of female to male university students is quite high, i.e. above fifty five percent in various faculties of the Lebanese University and above forty four percent at the American University of Beirut. (time scale: 1986-1990).

In summary, Dr. Zureik's survey offers significant food for thought and future research on the issue of female university education. Many of these initial findings are ambiguous. Therefore, more in-depth research is essential to confirm the suggested trend towards higher education among Lebanese women.

One thing seems to be evident: Lebanese females have access to a university education. The restrictions and limitations caused by the war are important intervening variables but not crippling. On the other hand, it would seem that the economic crisis (created by the war) has been a catalyzer for higher education of the Lebanese woman since education is seen as a financial asset •



(☆) Dr. Aisha Harb Zureik, *In'ikasad Al-Harb Aala Al-Tahsil Al-Jami'i (the Effects of the War on University Education)*, Beirut: 9th Conference for Evaluating the Conditions of Lebanese Women, 10 and 11 December 1990, Family Planning Association.

(1) Dr. Aisha Harb Zureik is a Professor of Education at the Lebanese University.