

Participation of Women in the Profession of Judges in Lebanon

In another interview, we approached Judge Dr. Mohamad Ali Chekhaibe as a Professor of Law in the Judge Institute. We asked him to share with us some of his observations about women in the profession of judges in Lebanon. We also asked him to describe the behavior of female students in his classrooms at the Judge Institute. His remarks were rather encouraging.

The Female Students Are More Brilliant Than Their Male Colleagues At The Judge Institute

- Q.** Is there what you might consider a significant number of women:
- (a) As Student-Judges. (b) As Active Judges. (c) As members of the legislative body: both lawyers and Judges?
- A. (a) Yes there is a very significant number of female student judges. In the Judge Institute, more than 1/3 of my students are female.
- A. (b) Unfortunately, the number of active female judges is not significant. Up until now, we have not had a prominent female judge. The number was increasing significantly in the 70s, before the war. The war may have affected this trend. Furthermore, judges are usually appointed to locations away from the city in the earlier phase of their careers. This makes it difficult for women to commute especially during the war. So you see, the situation in Lebanon does not allow us to draw an accurate conclusion about the participation of women in the profession.
- A. (c) The number of female lawyers and judges is very significant. However, the strange thing about it is that women lawyers work three, four or five years. Then they get married, work for another two years and all of a sudden they disappear.
- Q.** Do you detect any discrepancy between the number of female student and the number of active female judges.
- A. Fewer females practice their profession as judges than those who study it.
- Q.** In which areas of the law do Lebanese women judges have the greatest tendency to participate?
- A. It is not up to the judge to choose his area of

speciality. He/she is appointed to a territory in which all areas of the law are covered. With seniority judges are gradually promoted to the city courts and appointed to specific areas. Up until now, areas of speciality for women have not appeared in the profession. The same applies to women lawyers.

- Q.** What is, in general, the age group of female student-judges compared to their male colleagues?
- A. Between 25 and 30 for women and a bit older for the males.
- Q.** Do clients tend to state a sex-preference for the judge presiding over their cases?
- A. Clients do not choose their judges. The judge is appointed by the State. I don't think that women are discriminated against in this respect.
- Q.** What are some of the difficulties that female judges face in the course of their education and career?
- A. The main difficulty is in being appointed to remote rural areas. It is even more difficult in the present situation of the country.
- Q.** Do your female students speak up in class as much as their male colleagues?
- A. Usually, the girls are more reserved, but they are also more brilliant and more attentive than the boys. Academically they ask just as many and even more questions than the boys. Unlike the boys they don't speak up just for a laugh. It is within the feminine nature.
- Q.** What is your advice to females who are part of the legislative body?
- A. It is a difficult job. But I ask them to broaden and expand their general knowledge as much as they can. They should not limit themselves only to the law. After all, one must be a total human being in order to deal fairly and be just to other human beings.
- Q.** Some literature on women propose that participation breeds influence and consequently produces change and equality. Others say that changes are needed in order to allow women to participate more, and to participate more effectively. In your opinion which theory is true?
- A. She must participate first. She has to be an active member of the syndicates. Demands are not enough without actual participation. She must get in there in order to get her rights.