

## Betty Friedan

The feminist writer *Betty Friedan* says at least one result of the women's movement — changes in divorce laws — backfired. «There is a false illusion of equality in current divorce proceedings,» *Friedan* said at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association in New York. She said the laws enacted in the past 15 years were «male models for equality...that penalize women.»

*(International Herald Tribune, September 5, 1986)*

## Female Education in Kuwait

Kuwait university admitted 2,581 students in the 1986/87 year. Of these, 2,148 were locals and 1,017 were women. More than 1,480 will be studying science.

*(MEED, August 9, 1986)*

## Overuse of 2 Birth Procedures Found in U.S. Studies

Two major medical studies published Thursday provide strong new evidence that two childbirth procedures — electronic fetal monitoring and cesarean delivery — are being overused.

A study of nearly 35,000 births in Dallas found that routine use of continuous electronic monitoring of the fetal heart rate, a practice in many American hospitals, led to a «small but significant increase» in cesarean-section deliveries but to no major improvement in the health of babies born there, doctors at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center reported.

A separate study of more than 65,000 births at four New York hospitals found that private physicians performed «significantly more» cesarean deliveries than doctors treating patients in hospital clinics, without «demonstrably improving» the outcome for most babies, said researchers from the State University of New York.

Both groups, in studies published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, suggested that overuse of medical interventions during childbirth may stem, at least in part, from obstetricians' concerns about potential malpractice suits.

Cesarean deliveries have jumped from 5 percent of all U.S. births in 1970 to 21.1 percent in 1984, according to the National

Center for Health Statistics. It said the rate in 1981 was 18 percent, well above the 12 percent in Denmark, 11 percent in France and 9 percent in England and Wales.

Since the early 1970s, use of electronic monitoring also has grown rapidly. It is now routine in many institutions for most obstetrical patients.

The monitoring charts the fetal heartbeat and a woman's contractions continuously, using equipment attached externally to the woman's abdomen or internally through the vagina to the infant's scalp. The information is intended to provide a warning of fetal distress during labor.

Electronic fetal monitoring initially was used mostly for patients known to be at higher risk of birth complications, such as women with labor problems, high blood pressure or diabetes, or who are carrying twins. Despite scientific debate over the benefits, many physicians and hospitals shifted toward the new technology for all labors.

In 1978, it was estimated that at least two-thirds of all pregnancies in the United States were electronically monitored during labor. The new study, believed to be the largest to measure the effect of electronic monitoring, suggests that monitoring may not be needed in most pregnancies.

«It clearly indicates that the policy of monitoring all women did not improve the pregnancy results,» *Dr. Kenneth J. Leveno* said in an interview Wednesday.

During a three-year period at Dallas's Parkland Memorial Hospital, *Dr. Leveno* and his staff alternated monthly between a policy of monitoring all women and one of «selective monitoring».

With selective monitoring, slightly more than one-third of the pregnancies were considered high-risk and were given continuous electronic fetal monitoring. The rest were monitored by nurses, who checked babies' heartbeats at least every 30 minutes with special stethoscopes.

*Dr. Leveno* reported that infant death rates did not differ significantly between the two groups. Nor were there differences in the other indicators of fetal problems, such as breathing difficulties, admission to intensive care and seizures.

Cesarean rates increased slightly, however, from 10 percent for first-time, cesareans among the selective monitoring group to 11 percent in the universal group.

A large study of cesarean sections at New York hospitals found that 10.7 percent of clinic patients had their first cesarean and 6.4 percent had repeat surgery, compared with 13.2 percent and 8.2 percent, respectively, for private patients. But the private pa-

tients' babies generally did not fare any better, said *Dr. Roberta Haynes de Regt*, director of obstetrics at City Hospital Center in Elmhurst.

*(International Herald Tribune, September 5, 1986)*

### Amendments to the Arab Civil Status Law

In a report written by *Sana Attiyeh* to the *Jordan Times*, the amendments to the Arab Civil Status Law is being discussed. In this report, *Miss Rihab Qadumi*, an active lawyer and a legal consultant for the Business and Professional Women's Club Consulting Office for Women, explains women's rights under the present Jordanian civil status law and Islamic Sharia and the suggested amendments concerning marriage and divorce.

The committee of the Business and Professional Women's Club has submitted suggestions for amendments to the committee of the civil status draft law. This were up for discussion at the Arab ministers of justice conference held in Casablanca, Morocco, between April 14-18.

#### Suggested amendments

*Miss Qadumi* spoke about some of the propositions given to the Jordanian civil status draft law committee. She says: «We suggest that for marriage, a man must be less than 20 years older than the woman and that medical examinations must be performed to prove lack of serious illnesses or diseases in both the man and the woman.»

Concerning working wives, *Miss Qadumi* says they should not necessarily have permission from their husbands to work. «There are cases where husbands disappear and desert their wives and they are left with no money to support themselves or the children. In such circumstances, we suggest a charity box for such women to be put up in the courts or anywhere else. But when the husband is traced, he must pay back the funds. Concerning a man who divorces his wife for no valid reason, instead of him supporting her for only one year as is the present law, the time should be increased to five years,» she said.

Some of the proposed amendments were suggested by *Miss Qadumi* in view of personal cases on which she has worked. She suggests: «If the husband is addicted to alcohol, drugs, or gambling, the wife should be entitled to divorce him. Also, there are cases when the man divorces for no reason, the woman is not allowed to stay in the house if it is rented, because usually the rent is under the husband's name. Here, a woman should be allowed to stay in the house for at least one year to give her time

to find other shelter. Also, it is common that a man can really pressure his wife until she relinquishes all her rights in order to divorce. After the divorce, she realizes that she needs her rights again. We suggest that such women should at least be granted their second dowry, even if under moments of pressure she relinquishes her rights.»

#### Second wives

In situations where the husband wants to marry another woman, which he is entitled to, several suggestions of conditions have been given to the amendment committee. There should be valid reasons why the man wants to marry another; he should be able to financially support more than one wife and both women must be informed that the man is either already married or that he is to marry another.

*Miss Qadumi* believes that these proposals will hopefully be seriously considered by the Arab justice ministers when amending the unified draft Arab civil status law, because she says all are within the limits of the Shari'a. She adds: «If any of these suggestions are included in the draft law, then we as women have participated in the amendment of laws that personally concern us.»

*(Jordan Times, April 20, 1986)*

### Challenges Facing Arab Women in the Next Decade

The Arab Women Solidarity Association (AWSA) held a three-day conference (1-3 September 1986) in Cairo, Egypt on the «Challenges Facing Arab Women in the Next Decade». The objectives of the conference were:

— To determine the causes behind the deterioration of Arab women's status in the last decade; and the dynamics of change.

— To formulate outlines of strategies on how Arab Women can resist and confront such deterioration.

— To carry on the recommendations of Nairobi's conference according to Arab women's needs and specific problems.

This conference contributed to the process of consciousness-raising and policy formulation which would enhance the integration of women.

During the conference a series of topics were discussed dealing with the various challenges/problems that are likely to face Arab women in the next decade. The topics of the conference were:

- The political challenges
- The economic challenges
- The socio-cultural challenges.