

ATTITUDES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARD WORKING WOMEN IN JORDAN⁽¹⁾

Dr. Barhoum's study opens with a review of the development of women's education and employment in Jordan. More women are educated and an increasing percentage continue into higher education, hence into higher ranking jobs. Inflation is a consideration here as everywhere. Despite the historic traditional role of women, their added income is welcomed and is frequently the means of further education for the next generation.

The female labor force is still low: 16% of the whole; but it is slowly increasing. Traditional female roles are still pursued because they are more acceptable to traditional families. On the other hand, the role of women in development is recognized by both government officials and social and economic planners. For the first time in the country's history, women were given the right to vote in the 1974 Parliamentary Act. In 1980, a woman was appointed as minister of social affairs. Since 1965, the amount of research on women in Jordan exceeds that in any other field.

Information for the study, namely to discover the attitude of university students toward working women, was gleaned by the author through a questionnaire administered in a classroom situation. The sample consisted of 200 male and female students, fully enrolled at the University of Jordan. Both sexes were more or less evenly represented and the majority of them were between 19 and 24.

Briefly stated, the results came as follows: young men whose parents are professional people show a positive attitude toward women's education so that they may participate in the world of work. Male students who come from laboring classes indicate the more traditional attitude of the ascendancy of the male. Attitudes of university women are predictable. They would not be in university if both they and their families were not in accord with the trend favoring the highest possible development of women.

A survey of the educational background of the students' parents shows that the highest percentage, 37%, falls in the elementary education category. Though percentages are about equal for both fathers and mothers at the elementary and high school stages, fathers' education is higher than mothers' at university level: 17.9% for fathers, 3.7% for mothers. This is expected in a society where female enrollment in schools drops from 46% at the elementary stage to 1.2% at the higher education stage.

In the non-education category, the percentage of mothers is double that of fathers, but the case is different when fathers of males are compared, as to educational level, with fathers of females. Ninety-two percent of those who have no education are fathers of males while 7.7% of them are fathers of females. This means that the females come from higher income groups than males and consequently enjoy a better standing.

Many studies of this nature have been undertaken throughout the Middle East in recent years during which women have begun to take their place as contributing persons to their families, their society and their countries. Almost without fail the same conclusions are drawn: 1) results depend on the background of those from whom information has been received; 2) progress is slow but steady; 3) women continue primarily in traditionally accepted professional areas.

The picture has changed little during the past five years, but at least there have been no backward steps.

Reviewed by Jane Leasor

(1) Abstract of a study prepared by Dr. M.I. Barhoum, Sociology Department, University of Jordan, Amman, for the Institute for Women's studies in the Arab World.