

RESEARCH PROJECTS ON WOMEN'S STATUS: A PRESSING NEED IN THE ARAB WORLD

General information and sweeping statements are no longer compatible with the mentality and demands of our present age. It would be easy to say in a casual manner that illiteracy in the Arab World reaches high proportions, especially among women, but we cannot impress people by general, superficial statements. Only when statistics and figures tell them that the proportion of women illiterates in Arab countries reaches an average of 75-80% and that it is, in most cases, twice its proportion among men, then will they be convinced of the existence of the problem and the necessity of treating it.

When we talk in daily conversation about how poorly we meet children's needs in our Arab countries, how much injustice and exploitation may be involved in family relationships, many might retort by affirming that Eastern people consider children as the most precious gift of God and the family as a sacred and highly venerated institution. Only a deep, objective study of children's textbooks, as presented in No. 4 of *Al-Raida*, has revealed to us the great neglect and the commercial interests which dominate the production of textbooks for children. A similar study would reveal the defects of reading books and the urgent need for a well-planned and a well-produced library for them.

A similar research project would also prove the existence of bitter conflicts and hidden tragedies among members of the same family who live in apparently complete harmony. It would prove that our traditional family relationships based on selfish interest or parasitism need a complete revision.

The image of woman in the press, in school books, remains hazy, even unknown. Dr. Ilham Kallab's study has clarified it in part by showing how traditional and retrograde it appears in school books and how much this rigid image is likely to impress our children with the tradition of male dominance, sex discrimination, and underestimation of woman's role in society.

Women's liberation movements have been diffusing heaps of publicity material. They nevertheless admit that "actions speak louder than words", that achievement is more important than mere talk. Production of educational material for the semiliterate, of new literature for children, of mass media with a new attitude toward women, all these activities are worthy of our best efforts but, in the meantime, we have to prepare the way for them by documentation and research.

With this principle in mind and in accordance with its initial objectives, IWSAW has recently planned a new set of research studies dealing with the Arab woman; one, in collaboration with ILO, will have to do with "the Working Woman, her conditions and problems in eight Arab countries"; another will form a new link of a series on "the Image of Woman in Children's Textbooks".

If we add to these projects the studies already executed by the Institute, the Documentation Center which we are trying to develop and the English and Arabic bibliographies which are being prepared, we hope to pave the way for the Women's Studies Program which will be added to BUC curriculum in the near future.

In this issue of *Al-Raida* and in a former number (no. 2, p. 11), some information has been given about the progress achieved by Women's Studies programs in the universities of U.S.A. and of the Far East. By introducing such a program, BUC expects to meet a need in the Arab World for research studies on women performed at a university level.