

"The Family in a Changing World" (1)

The family as a social unit is affected by cultural and technological factors leading to a change in both its functions and its internal and external relations. Technology may exert either a direct or indirect influence. The direct influence of technology shows in the family's readiness to adopt modern domestic utensils and equipment. Industrialization produces the indirect factor of migration from rural to urban areas and, in this way, helps to dislocate the family.

The family's response to these changes is not uniform. The rural family is generally less responsive to them than the urban one. While the modern nuclear family, restricted to the couple and children, seems to flourish in the urban areas of both Western and Arab Eastern countries, the traditional, extended family is more likely to persist in villages and rural districts.

Changes in family structure

A change from the rural system, in which the family produced most of its needs, to the industrial system which came with the spread of factories, is usually accompanied by a reduction in the size of the family and an increase in the number of nuclear families.

Freedom in choosing a mate means, in rural areas, that the parents and relatives avoid the use of coercion or imposing their will on the candidates for marriage. In urban communities, it involves mutual acquaintance and liking before marriage, mutual understanding and confidence, instead of "identical social status" required by rural and laboring classes. It is noteworthy that the proportion of free choice in marriage is higher in middle class society than in the upper class where the family name and "noble origin" continue to have their hold on people's minds. In any case, the parents' opinion in a proposed marriage is still considered, even in urban society.

Relationships within the family have also undergone a change. The father is no more the head and the absolute ruler in the family. In urban society, the mother shares his prerogatives and plays a more important role than before in taking decisions and planning the family budget, while in rural communities and working classes, the woman is entirely dependent on her husband.

Unlike some sociologists, such as Talcott Parsons, who assume that the nuclear family is on the way to disintegration, Dr. Khawli's investigation concerning the Arab family leads her to conclude that it is evolving into a "non-isolated nuclear family." In spite of the increasing number of economically independent women, close rela-

(1) A well documented study prepared in Arabic by Dr. Sana Khawli, from the School of Arts, Cairo University, 1974; condensed by Najla Husny, (IWSAW).

tions with near kinsmen are retained even in families with a high cultural level. Visits and mutual help continue to be the rule, except in unusual circumstances which impose on the family an involuntary isolation.

Changes in the functions of the family

From a self-sufficient family which produced all its needs before the Industrial Revolution, the family has changed into a consuming unit, depending on the outside for the provision of its needs.

Though the educational function is now performed by other institutions, the family still carries out the task of guiding the children. In educated urban families, the parents supervise the children's schoolwork. In rural families, this task is carried out by the older brothers and sisters, because the parents are generally illiterate.

The socialization process which conveys to the young the values of their community and indicates to them the roles that befit their social position, is bound to follow the structural and ideological background. The rural family tends to adopt a lenient attitude toward its girls, while the boys receive a rather severe treatment. In urban families, the difference in treatment between boys and girls tends to disappear.

In urban nuclear families, young mothers have achieved a good deal of independence in bringing up their children, free from the intervention of older people which still prevails in extended families.

The impact of technological change on the family

Modern household equipment has certainly helped the working woman in urban society to reconcile outside work with home duties. But the new condition has created for her and her husband new problems caused by

their disagreement on the following topics: authority, budget planning, children's guidance, savings, relationship with kinsmen.

The introduction of television into the recreational program of the family is considered by some people as a factor of cohesion between family members because it induces them to spend their leisure time at home. To others, television looks like an isolating factor because it requires them to be silent listeners and thus it replaces family gatherings and conversations which created communication and understanding.

Woman's outside work is considered an important factor in affecting change within the family. Her employment defines to a large extent the family economic, cultural and social levels which in turn influence the children's social upbringing. The modern woman, more particularly the highly educated one, considers work as a means of self-realization aside from its economic value. Woman's employment has also helped to spread the nuclear, independent family which is gradually replacing the tribal, extended family.

A general look on the Arab family of today shows that, because of the various social and technological changes that have more or less affected Arab society, the nuclear family which tends to prevail, especially in urban areas, has more chance to survive and to achieve unity than the tribal, extended family. Its structural change is in harmony with the modern social change and in keeping with the conditions that ensure its existence. The new opportunities for education and work offered woman have contributed to raise her position and allow her further participation in family responsibilities. But her equality with man remains theoretical and relative, because those opportunities are still highly restrained. A woman's position within the family still carries many traces of the traditional extended family.

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"Lebanon"

An annotated bibliography including English and French publications about Lebanon, compiled by Dr. Shereen Khairallah, from the "University Orientation Program" American University of Beirut, and published by Clio Press Ltd. 1979.

This bibliography of 154 pp. covers the geography of Lebanon, its history, religion, politics, socio-economic conditions, culture, education, language and literature. It

appends a section on the Lebanese press bulletins, periodicals, bibliographies and finally, an index of the whole work. It forms a part of "the World Bibliographical Series", in which each volume "seeks to achieve, by use of careful selectivity and critical assessment of the literature, an expression of the country and an appreciation of its nature and national aspirations, to guide the reader towards an understanding of its importance."

"Garyounis Scientific Bulletin" Feb. vol.1, no.1, 1979, 32 pp.

A publication of the Research Center, Garyounis University, Benghazi, Socialist Popular Libyan Arab Jamahiriyyah. The first number received by IWSAW contains 5 studies prepared in English by professors and researchers at Garyounis University. The studies deal with physical, agricultural, mathematical and biochemical topics, supplied with illustrations, diagrams and references.

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