

Role of Radio Broadcasts in Modifying Traditional Attitudes Toward Women

The above is the title of an extensive field study carried out in a South Egyptian village by Mr. Atef el-Abd, who presented it in 1979 to the Information Department, Broadcasting Service, at the University of Cairo, as a requirement for obtaining an M.A. degree in mass communication.

The study covers 469 double-space stencilled pages, plus an appendix of statistical tables containing results of questionnaires and other forms of study.

The author carries out a detailed analysis of social conditions in the Egyptian village, the traditional attitude toward women, the factors leading to its persistence and, finally, the role played by radio programs in modifying it. This last topic includes four chapters discussing the relationship between radio listening and the social conditions of people included in the study.

Statistical Figures

The place chosen as a field of study is a small village of South Egypt with 4800 inhabitants (1976 census), mainly Moslem (95%); principal occupation: farming 45%; percentage of working power: 98% for men, 1.3% for women, with almost all women classified as housekeepers. Among the housekeepers are those who help men in farming activities without any remuneration. The 1.3% who are classified as workers include a woman teacher and ten women who are paid for farming activities.

According to the study, the village has 50 divorced individuals of whom 70% are women. Out of 298 widowed people, the proportion of widows reaches 70%. Widows rarely remarry. They generally replace their husbands in farming tasks and responsibility for the family.

The percentage of illiteracy in 1960 was 88% for those over 10 years of age. In 1976 it fell to 82% with a higher percentage for women.

Distribution of Property

Twenty percent of the population own less than a feddan (about 400 square meters); 50% own 1-3 feddans; 12%, 3-5 feddans; 7%, 5-10 feddans, 8.6%, 10 or more feddans.

Education is restricted to 3 primary schools for teaching the Quran and reading and writing and one government elementary school accommodating 395 students, 89 of whom are female.

Information media are highly limited. Twenty percent read papers, 13% go to the cinema; 8% benefit from television programs. The radio is the most available means of information. Seventy six percent listen to radio programs, 62% of the villagers own radio sets.

Status of Women

Though the author used his own village for his sample study, he points out the difficulty he met in interviewing the village women. Their attitude was generally negative.

The few interviews he had with them took place in the presence of men, hence they tended to lack accuracy.

Men monopolize leadership in the village. It is important for social workers and leaders engaged in the task of woman's emancipation to try to convince male villagers of the benefits they would derive from women's education and participation in development.

Role of Radio Programs in Changing Attitude.

This role may be described through the following sub-topics:

- a. **Women's education.** Nearly 65% of the respondents were in favor of girls' education, 35% had a negative attitude. A positive association was found to exist between radio listening and the first attitude. The same attitude applies to those who listened to the housewife's programs.
- b. **Women's employment.** Approximately 66% of the respondents declared their approval of women's employment outside the home while about 35% were against it.
- c. **Woman's right to choose her mate.** About 75% of the respondents confirmed a woman's right to choose her life mate or to be consulted regarding this choice.
- d. **Women's right to vote.** Seventy percent approved women's participation in elections. Arguments supporting this activity: it is legally recognized, women form half of the population, their votes are needed for municipal elections. Arguments against it: impact of tradition (91%), woman's place is at home (30%), women have a defective mind (16%), religion forbids it (5.7%).
It is noteworthy that a positive association was detected between radio listening and a favorable attitude toward woman's employment outside the home, her right to choose her mate and her right to participate in elections.
- e. **Preference for male children.** Around 60% preferred male children; 2.4% preferred females, 39.4% showed no preference.
No relation was found to exist between radio listening and sexual discrimination. On the other hand, a positive relation was confirmed between listening to the radio and sharing woman's opinion in family questions.
- f. **Increased information about women.** No significant association was detected between radio listening and information about women's organizations and their activities. Newspaper reading was confirmed as a factor in this connection.

When asked if they had heard about a woman occupying a minister's position in the government, 58.4% said they had heard the news; 78% knew the name of the woman minister and maintained the existence of a positive association between radio listening and given information.