

Women and Work in Lebanon⁽¹⁾

Between 1972 and 1975, women in Lebanon represented 48.1% of the total population. The economically active women represented 17.5% of the female population and 18.4% of the total labor force⁽²⁾. According to a later survey no change in these figures has occurred since 1975.

Female occupations in Lebanon are generally traditional and reflect women's tendency to choose those that befit their sex. Seventy-seven percent of the professional women, according to the 1972-1975 report, were employed as teachers; 61.6% of the women working in the commercial sector were secretaries and typists; 66.9% of those working in services were servants and 69.5% of the women industrial workers were working in the textile or tailoring industries. In the agricultural sector, women were classified as agricultural laborers or unskilled workers. Though these women have always contributed to agricultural production, the majority are still considered as «family aids» and are not remunerated for their work.

The low-rate activity of the female population can be explained by cultural, demographic, educational and economic factors. The cultural factors discourage women from joining the labor force because of the high value that society places on marriage and raising a large family as a result of traditional en-

couragement of high fertility. The lack of education, in general, and the lack of vocational training in particular, keep the majority of women in low status jobs.

Recent demographic data and studies in development planning imply the following predictions for the future:

1) The rapid population growth will increase the active portion of the population which will number around 2 million in 1985.

2) The large scale rural-urban migration will drain the rural areas of a large number of its male members who will seek gainful employment in the towns and cities, thus leaving the rural areas with fewer hands to work the land.

In view of these factors, the questions to be asked are: Will there be enough jobs for the potentially active? Will they receive enough education and training for the more specialized occupations? What kind of jobs will be left for women?

Two monographs, one in English and one in Arabic prepared by IWSAW on women and employment in post-war Lebanon, will try to answer the questions regarding the current of working women and future projections of their work.

The Employment Status of Women in Lebanon

The pressing social problems of Lebanon and of the Middle East necessitate the maximum contribution by all members of society to general reconstruction programs. They should heighten an awareness of the need for creating educational and employment opportu-

(1) **Monograph Series, No.1**, Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, Beirut University College, Beirut, 1980.

(2) **Al-Raida**, Aug. 1979, vol.II, no.9, p.10.

nities for women, a relatively neglected element in planning schemes.

To meet this need, we have to recognize the urgent necessity of preparing occupational information pertinent to career counseling for secondary school and college bound students.

The following information on the current employment status of women and future trends is based on a study project carried out by Mrs. Evelyn Richards, Guidance Office Counselor, BUC, and the IWSAW in 1979. She used a sample of 240 large organizations in Beirut and its suburbs, considered the largest industrial area in Lebanon.

The findings may be summarized as follows:

A. Sex Distribution of Employees

- 1) The female employees constitute 20.43% of the total of employees.
- 2) The highest number of females, 33%, is found in the administrative category and includes 99% of the secretaries and typists employed.
- 3) In the commercial category, 29% of the workers are women and nearly all of them are employed as sales-persons.
- 4) In the service category, 24% are women, 90% of whom are employed at the lowest level.
- 5) The professional category includes 20% women, mainly employed in the educational professions: 67% of secondary school personnel and 93% at the elementary level.
- 6) In skilled and semi-skilled categories, 15% of the employees are women, the majority of whom are found in traditional women's occupations, i.e. in textile, embroidery, tailoring and rug-weaving industries.

B. Marital Status of the Female Labor Force

The results show that 82% of the currently employed women are single.

The commercial category employs the largest percentage of married women (49%), as sales-persons:

In the service category 98% are single women.

In the professional category, 69% are single women.

In the administrative category, the single women number over three fourths of the whole.

In the skilled and semi-skilled category, only about 8% are married.

C. Response of Employers

Employers prefer to employ women in traditional occupations. They all prefer female elementary school teachers. Over 95% of them prefer female secretaries and typists. Over 50% prefer female workers in textile and rug-weaving industries. As to the marital status of employees, there is no outstanding difference between those who prefer single workers to married ones except in tailoring and rug-weaving where the majority of employers prefer single female workers.

D. Starting Age

Employers expect nearly two-thirds of their workers to be between 19 and 30 years of age. Thirty-four percent prefer them between 21 and 25.

E. Educational Preparation

All employers require in their employees a minimum amount of preparation, represented in college and university degrees for professional employment, and in brevet and baccalaureat part one for the commercial category. In skilled and semi-skilled employment, 55% require a technical degree (Baccalaureat technique).

F. Conclusions

As shown by the reported findings, employers prefer women only in a few traditional occupations. They generally prefer them young and single because in this case they expect them to leave upon marriage and thus lose the chance of development and promotion.

According to the UNESCO survey (1973) «the development of trade, tourism and industry is opening new jobs for women and the requirements are for more technical or vocational education.»

For the purpose of guiding women in their vocational plans and encouraging them to choose non-traditional jobs or careers, Mrs. E. Richards and the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, in collaboration with the «Contact and Research Center», have sponsored the publication of a brochure entitled Careers. This 15 page booklet informs women regarding the many possibilities open to them in choosing an occupation in Lebanon.

Career information is undoubtedly one of the powerful methods of influencing career development.

Other methods are:

- 1) Career counseling for secondary school and college students. The «Guidance Office» at BUC is one example.
- 2) Using the mass media to counteract stereotyped attitudes toward woman's roles and potentials.
- 3) Providing more accurate and up-to-date information on women in school and college curricula.
- 4) Further research is needed to obtain additional occupational data and test the effect of occupational information on the career choice of women in Lebanon.

Finally the above study does not include women who are self-employed in professions like medicine, dentistry, nursing and midwifery, child care, dress-making, educational projects, catering, commercial and administrative work, free-lance writing, handicrafts, tutoring and the arts. More research is needed to obtain data on self-employment among women, their work in smaller organizations, their recent employment in journalism, air-travel companies, broadcasting and television programs, computer science and other technological jobs.