

## Critical Study of Research Work on Women and Children, Egypt <sup>(1)</sup>

Under the title, "Women and Child Welfare: A Critical Study", Dr. Wadad Suleiman Morcos published a 46-page, stencilled paper analyzing a series of studies conducted in Egypt between 1976 and 1980, dealing with women's and children's status and welfare. The following are the main points included in her work.

### **I. Studies about the traditional status of women in society.**

Few studies deal with woman's status in rural areas. One such study states that there is a certain regression in girls' schooling and a higher proportion of illiteracy in those areas; however, this statement is not supported with statistical indices.

Mrs. Morcos recommends that there be further research, and that this research aim at generating more information on health, nutrition, living conditions and women's participation in development.

One anthropological study of relations between mother and child in rural areas and methods of child upbringing at the early stage emphasizes a number of superstitions related to this function, for example, dressing the child in shabby clothes to ward off jealousy and the evil eye.

### **II. Studies of the social status of women**

reveal a definite progress in girls' education (in urban areas), but that progress has lagged behind

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that of boys' education. Their proportion is only 25% of that of the latter in higher education, 38% in elementary schools. The social effects of girls' education have not been analyzed.

A few studies show a certain bias in recommending the restriction of women's specialization to fields appropriate to their "nature".

Studies analyzing class or environmental influences make no distinction between rural and urban women. These studies also overlook the effect of regional training.

Other neglected topics:

- factors that impede woman's education;
- Impact of girls' education on family life and child upbringing, including marriage age and the fertility rate.

### III. Woman's Participation in Economic Life

Studies show an increase in the number of working women between 1952 and 1972, but they fail to point out the proportion of working women to the total number of working-age women, and the proportion of working women to the whole labor force.

One study shows the role of ideological currents, such as Nasserism, in promoting woman's work and in establishing laws to govern that work.

The method of social history is applied in two studies dealing with the evolution of woman's work. They mention the first participation of women in the "Workers' Union" in 1928 and the promulgation of the first law regarding the protection of working women in 1933. But the conditions of woman's work before those dates are not considered.

None of these studies explores the issue of woman's working rights within the framework of the following criteria:

- Equal pay for equal work,
- Equal opportunity for promotion.
- A higher promotion of women in the field of technical and scientific employment.
- A labor code ensuring women proper protection during pregnancy and adequate means for child care during their absence.

### IV. Sociology of Working Women

Most studies use the statistical method to show the number of working women at different ages, the rate of their persistence and the influence of marriage on their work.

Statistics show the rising percentage of educa-

ted working women, particularly in technical, administrative and scientific employment. A falling percentage in the industrial sector is noticed but not explained.

The influence of urbanization, industrialization, fertility and emigration on woman's work has been overlooked. Also overlooked has been the influence of woman's work on her personality, on her relations with society, with her employers and her colleagues. Two studies, however, state that an urban woman gives work the primacy over marriage; while the contrary is true of a village woman. Another study describes the struggle that a working woman has to go through because of competition, social stereotypes and unequal status in the family.

According to one researcher, a woman's work strengthens her morale and enhances her position in the family. We should add here that woman's work will not enhance her position in the family unless the following four conditions are fulfilled:

- a. The husband's participation in housework.
- b. The utilization of technological methods to alleviate domestic chores.
- c. Women's sharing in family plans and decisions.
- d. A change in family status from despotic and traditional to democratic and equalitarian.

Influence of Woman's Work on her Family:

- a. Reduced fertility;
- b. Tendency to use modern methods in bringing up her children;
- c. Better adjustment by her children to their environment than by children of non-working women;
- d. Children are more ready to approve of woman's work outside the home.

### V. Women's Participation in Political Life

In 1956, Egyptian women obtained the right to vote and to run for parliamentary elections. In 1962, the first woman minister was appointed, but in the judicial field women have no representation. Their political influence is highly limited. Their participation in electoral campaigns is very low; the same is true of their representation in socialist committees. None of the studies try to identify the causes of their political retardation, even though the issue is a crucial one. Women's presence is needed in the legislative departments, where they could more effectively plead in favor of their



claims for a progressive status and for the application of child welfare plans.

#### **VI. Woman's Role in the Family**

Several studies pointed out that the prevailing family pattern in rural areas is the extended family. However, they failed to show the impact of the family type on the status of woman and the upbringing of children.

The influence of family laws on the mental health of mother and child was studied. Fear of divorce or polygamy may lead a woman to opt for a large family. One study showed the unhealthy influence exerted on children:

1. by parental dissensions.

2. by the father's passiveness regarding the upbringing of children.

3. by the unequal status of the spouses before the law, as reflected in the laws of divorce and guardianship. Family tension and disruption affect the morale and the mental health of children. No experimental studies have focussed on this topic.

Finally, the studies fail to answer the following question: Does a working woman's double role favorably or unfavorably affect the child's development?

Most of the studies adopted the demographic

statistical method, neglecting that of the social historical method. Conclusions were more descriptive than analytical and explanatory.

Moreover, the bulk of the studies were executed in urban areas, taking educated women for a sample and overlooking uneducated working women.

#### **Critical Remarks Concerning Studies on Children's Status.**

Briefly condensed they are:

1. Scarcity of special studies on the social upbringing of children, priority being given to the study of fertility and child mortality.

2. Scarcity of studies on child labor. Child labor seems to have dwindled in rural areas, but no studies have been made of it in urban areas.

3. Regarding methodology, most studies on children were demographic, giving statistical reports without trying to show their social and economic factors.

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(1) Abstract of a study published by the "Population and Family Planning Board", Research Office, sponsored by the Supreme Council for Population and Family Planning in Egypt, July 1981.