

Women in Education and Work in Beirut

*By Dr. Gladys Saade Azar
Review and translation of summary
by Nayla Khodr Hamadeh*

Recently, Dr. Gladys Saadeh Azar completed her Ph.D in Sociology at the Sorbonne University in Paris. The following article is a brief summary of her Doctoral Dissertation. Her work was based on a field study conducted in Beirut concerning the relationship between education and work among women in Beirut.

This summary presents the situation of female education in Lebanon, identifies the research problem of the study and reports the findings which were reached.

Female education in Lebanon has made significant progress since independence. Generally speaking, there has been a general favorable trend for women education, despite the regional differences. Nevertheless, Beirut played the leading role. In 1982-1983, female participation on the national level reached a point where it exceeded its male counterpart.

Education and work, however, are still not directly linked. Married females and mothers tend to leave their work after a certain age or when they reach a certain financial situation. At the same time, the fields of educational specializations of women are more inclined towards literary and cultural areas which generate jobs that are easy to quit.

At the beginning, the education of girls was a privilege of the upper social classes. It was considered a symbolic achievement, furthermore,

elevating their girls' economic and social status. Following the democratization of education and its propagation among females, it acquired a new value, which added to its social value: Education acquired an economic (materialistic) function and it became a source of security for young females.

The study conducted aimed at closely examining the attitudes, behaviors and reflections of a group of young females between the age of 23 and 27, who got their "brevet"(1) between the years 1970-1973. The research sample was taken from different schools in Beirut. Beirut was chosen as the sample location because of its important economic and cultural character, which perpetuates a functional role of work. The research followed-up on the respondents' activities and tried to examine what they have done out of the studies they completed, i.e. whether they were working, and if so, what kinds of jobs they held. It even looked into the accommodations they made for their professional careers.

The results of the study can be summarized as follows: In a sample of 182 females, 64 percent continued their secondary school education, whereas 36 percent dropped out after middle school. The reasons they gave for dropping out were either linked to the financial situation of the family (51%), marriage (33%) or to failure at school (16%). Those who continued their studies explained their perseverance either as a "love for culture" (71%) or as a more materialistic aim, notably better jobs

(15%). Among them 67 percent pursued university education while 26 percent dropped out at the secondary level.

While 89.5 percent worked at a one time or another, only 63 percent of the sample were working at the time of the study. Thus, we notice that a large majority did work and those who dropped out explained that they did so because of the difficulty of coping with the multiplicity of roles for a woman, such as having to be a worker, a mother and a housewife.

Among those who were still working, 92 percent were satisfied with their work, although 52 percent of these were ready to quit. This contradiction might be more circumstantial that real because women feel that their jobs are secondary to their role of wife and mother.

Concerning the fields of work of the respondents, 47 percent were secretaries, 35 percent were teachers and 14 percent held jobs in business administration. Hence, the 82 percent representing the first two categories held jobs in traditionally accepted occupations for females. Thus, work for women has become part of the accepted social norms of Beirut. Work is more intense among non-married women with a strong tendency to quit once married. Yet, the professions they engage in remain mostly "feminine" professions.

Because women's status is still

largely linked and dependent on that of their husbands, they (women) tend to consider their own professional activity as being marginal. Work is not considered a fundamental condition for participation in society or for self-realization. Work is easily dropped in favor of the traditional roles of mother and wife, anytime it creates conflicts.

Thus, the general tendency among the respondents is **Yes for education, Maybe for work**, depending on its compatibility with more traditional values. However, the present economic crisis has made work and employment an obligation for women in order to help the family's financial needs. The consequences are bound to produce a new social reality •

(1) The brevet degree is part of the Baccalaureat system of education. It is the degree the student gets at the end of the middle school in order to qualify and be able to pursue his secondary education.