

Empowerment of Women

Through Education and Training

Panel Discussion: December 11, 1994

Empowerment Through Education is the first in a series of lectures that addresses *empowerment of women in Lebanon and the Arab World*. The series consist of informal discussions between audience and panelists who are specialists in their field. Future panels will discuss **empowerment through the law, through history, through work, and through the media**. The panelists of Empowerment Through Education were Drs. Julinda Abu Nasr, Director of IWSAW; Huda Abdo, Chairperson of the Education Department, and Paul Tabar, Chairperson of the Social Science Division, both at the Lebanese American University (Formerly BUC). Dr. Adnan Al-Amin Professor of Education at the Lebanese University, the American University of Beirut and author of two recent books on the status of education in Lebanon served as moderator.

The discussion covered a number of determinants of women's education in Lebanon and analyzed the relationship between education, work and family. Abdo, a psychologist and educator emphasized that traditional value systems are more powerful than expectations and aspirations for women. Education and work, she noted do not overrule traditional patriarchal values and norms. Women are themselves raised to think that marriage is the optimum for them, asserted Abu Nasr. Tabar explained that market systems in-

fluence women's development in education and consequently, the labor force, depending on the characteristics of the market and the times. Al-Amin, on the other hand, noted that women have achieved and continue to reach higher levels of education and participation in the Labor force. This article consists of a review of some of the important points that were made during the panel. We include some of the input that came from the audience.

Abdo: Women's education and employment is largely regulated by value systems and expectations that give priority to marriage, motherhood and home making for women.

Amin: Demands of the labor market compose another point of entry into the analysis of women, education and work. Hence, markets are changing whereby the demand is no longer for manual skills but for administrative and mental skills. It is, therefore, safe to say that if the labor market is in demand for skills which require degrees, and if women are getting higher education, then women can compete with men unless traditional norms and values prevent it. In Lebanon, Bahrain, Qatar and other urbanized countries, you find a large number of women in the service sector, thus in administration and teaching. This, however, has a perverse effect on women's status in the labor market because the effect of feminization has been a devaluation of wag-

es. Everytime a woman enters a certain sector, the wages for that job and those skills decrease.

Tabar: What you have just described could also be seen as a deskilling of jobs due to changes of the capitalistic market. For example, the job of a clerk in England was considered important and was held largely by men (up to 90%). With the introduction of typewriters and other technologies it was deskilled and became less important. Men were eventually replaced by women (90% of the clerks are women today). The same applies for computer operators while computer analysts are men, the latter requiring considerably more mental skills than the first. I, therefore, feel that the economic structure is the primary force behind this gender-related change.

Amin: Looking at the last 10 years, you notice that the majority of jobs in modern markets require training and skills, and women are getting higher education and degrees. The relationship between a degree and employment is strong especially among women, because opportunities are directly related to educational qualifications. The difference between men and women in this respect lies in a larger variety of occupations, jobs and opportunities that are accessible to men in any country or any system.

Abul-Husn: Employment does not simply mean holding a job, but includes getting promoted and growing. Experience is an

important variable that comes into play if we are to discuss job mobility and continuity for women. Women suffer from less experience than men due to interruptions caused by family needs, i.e. maternity, delivery, etc..

Khalaf: Women's work follows a bi-modal model. Women do not work on a continuous basis and their participation in the labor market is interrupted as a result of women's duties as home-makers, and child-rearers. Women enter the market at one point in their life, leave at another and may return later, and so on and so forth. This is why women are more concentrated in the secondary market rather than in the primary market.

Tabar: If so then the issue at hand is not whether women have the choice between working or not, but the problems accumulating from a double burden of work and family. **Khalaf:** Yes, it is imperative here that we differentiate between a career woman and a working woman. A career woman is someone who is willing, by hook or by crook, to compete, get ahead and persevere. In reality, however, the bulk of women are still working women. The fact that a woman joined the labor market does not empower her.

Khalaf: What I am trying to say is that because women perform more than one role, they simply cannot join the primary labor market the way men do. What are the characteristics of the primary market? It is a market where there is systematic promotion, where labor unions play a very important role, and where continuity and experience are basic for promotion. By virtue of double roles,

women somehow do not have continuity in their jobs in most cases. Where labor unions are concerned, a very small percentage become union leaders mostly because meetings take place in the evenings and women cannot leave their homes and families after having been away all day. Thus, even if a woman is working, she has that other role that forces her into the secondary market. If a woman is out of the labor market for five years, there is a big gap between her and a man who had started out with equal qualifications. His job was not interrupted like hers because she had three kids. By that a woman loses the chance to join the primary market and ends up joining the secondary market. Along with the secondary market comes lower wages. Furthermore, whenever a woman rejoins the labor market, after having left it, she is forced to accept lesser pay and jobs that have become de-skilled because she has lost part of these skills.

Amin: We have so far made two important observations about women's participation in the labor force: 1) Women tend to join some professions more than others, despite more tolerance to relatively new fields, and 2) promotion and mobility is subject to constraints because women have another domain of work that is putting pressure on them, i.e. the family. Hence, although education increases chances and opportunities for both men and women, it is still lower for women.

Abul-Husn: Whenever a woman rejoins the labor market, after having left it, she is forced to accept lesser pay and jobs. Principal role expectations re-

main traditional whereby men are providers and women are provided for.

Osseiran: Not any more! I feel that men are confused about what role they should play. You will notice that especially from looking at our commercials: men are portrayed as sentimental, docile and soft, instead of the old macho and hoarse look. Men are confused.

Amin: Yes, you will notice that the image of the hero in our modern society is not the strong but the intelligent one, who can be either a man or a woman. This is changing the image of the sexes and the issue is becoming more complicated. Hence, the classical model is being challenged, and increase in women's education is the major factor affecting these changes. Hence, by virtue of higher education, and consequently participation in the labor force and earning a living, women's power has increased in the home as well.

In Conclusion, it would be safe to say that the panel on **Empowerment of Women Through Education** deduced that education has changed the lives of women. Despite the fact that macro and micro-social and economic factors interact to assist women in added participation in society, the powerful predominance of traditions on the lives of women in any society play an important role in the conflict between work and family. Education changes expectations and needs of women. Roles, expectations, needs, skills, and participation of women in society are all subject to the psychological, mental and intellectual forces as well as awareness and empowerment through education.

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