

ABSTRACTS ON FAMILY ISSUES IN THE ARAB WORLD

SOCIAL AND FAMILIAL FACTORS LEADING TO LATE-AGE MARRIAGE AMONG SAUDI WOMEN

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The researchers scrutinize the familial and social factors that lead Saudi women to marry late. Their field of study is restricted to the family, which acts as an analytical unit, because they believe that late-age marriage of women is very much related to the social conditions of the family.

The working sample was chosen from a survey conducted in 1985-1986 by the Research Center for Crime Prevention, which is associated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The initial sample comprised 1% of the families living in the city of Riyadh, *i.e.*, 2,000 families. However, the researchers used two criteria to reduce those 2,000 families to 599: families had to have Saudi origin, and the father's age had to be 49 or above. Of these 599, 88 families experienced late-age marriages among their women.

Several familial characteristics leading to such

late-age marriage were identified. Among the most important is the increase in literacy rate among women aged 18 years and above; the increase in women's quest for higher education corresponds to an increase in late-age marriage. The participation of women in the labor force is another factor: families whose women work outside the home witness an increase in the late-age marriage phenomenon. Socio-economic status is also important: in 1% of the families concerned, women hold administrative or technical jobs, earn high monthly incomes, and live in wealthy neighborhoods. The researchers conclude that the phenomenon of late-age marriage of women varies according to the socio-economic characteristics of their families.

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DIVORCE IN KUWAITI SOCIETY ITS REASONS

Fahed Thakeb El Thakeb has taken as his object of study divorce in Kuwaiti society. He holds that Kuwait has over the years witnessed numerous educational, cultural, and social changes, which culminated in an increase in the literacy rate among women. This increase in women's education positively affected their participation in the country's labor force. Consequently, the age of marriage was postponed due to the impact of Western ideology on the educated woman, because this ideology changed her outlooks and allowed her to evaluate life from a different perspective. The educated woman became critical of the institution of marriage and of the socially prescribed gender roles.

This study aims at highlighting the determining factors that lead to divorce in Kuwaiti society. It espe-

cially attempts to analyze the divorcee's opinion towards these factors and to relate them to the social and cultural background of the women concerned. El Thakeb made use of a sample that comprised 258 divorce cases, which were selected from a total of 1,072 such cases during the years 1990-1992. He questioned only the female partners in the divorce.

His sample selected women divorcees according to age group, geographical area, and occupation or profession, and he put 245 questions to them. One of these was open-ended and concerned the reason for divorce. The latter (answered by 145 divorcees) were grouped into eight categories. Twenty-three percent stated mistreatment by and corruption of the spouse. Ten percent involved the unavailability of an independent home.

Eleven percent of divorcees blamed polygamy and nine percent sexual problems. Interactive problems in the couple accounted for another nine percent. Economic problems, on the one hand, and repulsiveness and lack of conviction, on the other, each also accounted for nine percent of divorces. Finally, psychological problems due to doubt and jealousy as well as physical problems again amounted to nine percent.

These varied problems must be analyzed in relation to factors in the background of the women questioned such as: the duration of the marriage, the educational level of the women, the monthly income of the couple before their divorce, the age upon divorce, the time period spent with the husband, and the duration of residency with him.

El Thakeb concludes that these problems were most often due to changes in the Kuwaiti educational and social sectors. Moreover, he holds that the most important reasons leading to divorce, especially for young female university graduates, are lack of independent housing, lack of interaction between the couples, and dissatisfaction with the marriage. He attributes this finding to the changes that occurred in women's outlooks concerning marriage and family as a result of Western influence.

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THE EFFECT OF WAR ON LEBANESE WOMEN'S FERTILITY RATE

Dr. Muhammad Faour examines the effect of war on the fertility of Lebanese women on the basis of statistical data collected from four surveys between the years 1970 and 1985. The first was conducted by the Ministry of Planning in 1970. It included all the Lebanese provinces. The second was undertaken by the Family Planning Association in 1971 and the third was conducted by the American University of Beirut in 1983. The last study, by the Hariri foundation in 1985, included the provinces of Beirut, the southern suburb of Beirut, the Bekaa, and the North.

Dr. Faour begins by comparing all these data because Beirut and its southern suburb - unlike the North and the Bekaa, where only intermittent skirmishes took place - witnessed continuous battles over a period of seventeen years. He maintains that the fertility rate of inhabitants living in those Lebanese areas that served as battle fields and suffered the ill effects of war the most decreased, regardless of socio-economic strata, more than did the rates in safer areas. Faour cites several factors that serve as indicators of a woman's fertility rate, namely educational level, economic growth, the intensity of war and its violence, the use of contraceptives, ... He concludes that the war's impact as a determining factor in decreasing fertility is important but relevant only in certain cases. In areas which served as battle fields and where continuous violence, destruction, and brutali-

ty prevailed, a decrease in fertility rate did occur. However, in areas where recurrent battles causing minor destruction took place, the link between peace and fertility proved insignificant, for these areas witnessed long intervals of peace regardless of the instability in national security. Yet, the effect of the Lebanese war on the economic, social, and psychological conditions indirectly influenced the rate.

Finally, Faour attempts to associate the decrease in female fertility with behavioral changes. He concludes that due to the prevailing socio-economic conditions the advantages for a small family exceeded those for a large one. Moreover, the increased access to higher education improved women's status in society for it empowered them by rendering them more conscious of their situation. With consciousness came maturity and an eagerness for further education, as well as an insistence on sharing responsibility in basic family decisions with the male partner. In addition, daily interaction with the international mass media that advocate late-age marriages and a low fertility rate has helped to bring about current behavioral changes.

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