

**Mohammad Issa Barhoum**

## ATTITUDES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARD WOMEN'S WORK: THE CASE OF JORDAN

### INTRODUCTION

Economic growth in underdeveloped countries, including Jordan, is associated with substantial social change. According to the theory of social deviance, underdeveloped societies are characterized by a traditional distribution of labor where customs and values greatly influence the manners of economic performance. These customs and values shape attitudes of people toward work in general, and the issue of participation of women in the labor force in particular.

In the Middle East, Jordan is one of the foremost exporters of trained and technologically educated workers. Highly skilled technicians and professional-level workers find a ready labor market in the neighboring oil-rich countries of the Arab Gulf. In this process—brain-power export—Jordan is a significant contributor to the development of the region. Undoubtedly, out-migration has affected the whole society to a great extent physically, economically, and socially. Jordanian workers in the Gulf have been sending a substantial portion of their earnings back home, stimulating lively investment in real estate and capital development. In major cities like Amman and Irbid, urban growth has been rapid, as a steady stream of people arrive from the rural areas. At the same time, shortages have occurred in the labor force, bringing about a greater need for the participation of women in the developmental schemes. As a result, women's participation and involvement in wage-earning activities outside the house is increasingly a part of Jordanian daily life. The role of women in national development is recognized by both governmental officials and social-economic planners. For the first time in Jordanian history, in the 1974 Parliamentary Act, women were given the right to vote. In 1980, a woman was appointed Minister of Social Development.

Societal structures and technological forms tend to determine job assignments and status positions for men and women. Sex role distinctions contribute to the maintenance of society. Developmental pressure in Jordan on the economy, the family, political structures, education etc., have brought changes in attitudes toward women's roles in society. The functional perspective helps us to see these changes and to understand them.

The contribution of women to the development process can be measured by their participation in the labor force. In 1972, women constituted 3.5 percent of the labor force and by 1980 this figure had risen to 12 percent (see Ministry of

Labor Statistical Report, 1981). Clearly, the participation of women is increasing at a strong rate. This increase is attributed to improvements in education for women. Parents, especially in urban areas, have come to realize that education today is as important for girls as it is for boys. It is also recognized that women have legitimate needs for education and work training, especially in the event of divorce or the death of a husband. In addition, inflation has reduced the buying power of the husband's wage. The single wage-earner family is rapidly being overcome. Women are being forced into the job market, and their financial contribution to the family budget has become essential. It is in this very practical context of daily life that the contribution of women is gradually being acknowledged and accepted. So far, women have found their greatest acceptance in jobs traditionally reserved for them—secretarial, nursing, and teaching. The majority of Jordan's working women are in these fields.

In recent years, especially since 1976—The International Year for Women—there has been increasing awareness in Jordan of the need to rationalize women's contributions in national development planning. It is now understood that increased productivity will require a greater participation of women in the workforce. To serve this purpose more research and analysis of women in the workplace are essential.

#### THE RESEARCH

The present study deals with the attitude of university students towards women's work in Jordan.

##### *1. Purpose of the Study*

The main aim of this study is to examine the influence of students' socioeconomic background on their attitude toward women's work in Jordan. It is assumed that the lower the economic, educational, and occupational status of the family, the more traditional attitudes will be.

##### *2. Methodology*

Data presented for this study were gathered in February 1979 by the author. The sample for this investigation consisted of 200 young males and females between the ages of 18–24, enrolled full-time in the University of Jordan. This sample represents 2 percent of the total number of the University of Jordan students. These students were randomly selected from different class levels at the university. Students selected for this purpose were told about the importance of the research and were therefore urged to be honest in their responses. A questionnaire was administered by the author in a classroom situation, and each student answered the questions as if it were a test. About 81 percent (162) of the questionnaires were completed and returned. The questionnaires were computerized and designed with major quantitative items such as age, sex, university level, parents' education, occupation, and so forth. Qualitative items were in the form of

TABLE 1 *Percentage distribution by sex and mother's occupation*

| Mother's occupation | Male  | Female | Total |
|---------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| Working             | 3.8   | 7.1    | 5.6   |
| Housewife           | 87.2  | 78.6   | 82.7  |
| No answer           | 9.0   | 14.3   | 11.7  |
| Total               | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0 |

open-ended questions and were centered on the respondent's attitudes toward women in the workplace.

### 3. Findings: Statistical Analysis

*Description of the Sample* Students from all university levels are represented: 32 percent from the third and fourth years, 21 percent from the second year, and 13.6 percent from the first year. The low representation of the second and first year students is due in part to the fact that some questionnaires were dropped from the original sample. As for religion, most of the respondents were Muslims (81.5 percent), 15.4 percent were Christians, and 3.1 percent account for any others. Muslims form the highest percentage simply because they constitute the largest group in the university student body.

As far as the student's mother's occupation is concerned, Table 1 shows that the vast majority of respondents' mothers do not work, which can be explained in terms of the level of development in the Jordanian society. According to the social deviance framework mentioned earlier, customs and values determine the manner of economic performance and shape the attitudes of people toward the participation of women in the labor force. The data show that 66.7 percent of the working mothers are mothers of female students. The plausible explanation is that these mothers probably come from either the high or middle class since most of the female students in the university come from well-to-do families. It is known that the social values of such families include tolerance of the participation of women in the labor force.

Among fathers of the student respondents, the single largest occupational category (38.3 percent) was commercial, i.e., owners and managers (see Table 2). The fathers of female respondents accounted for the largest portion of this group (28.1 percent of all fathers). The fathers of male student respondents were mainly unskilled workers (88.1 percent). The high correlation between women students and more successful fathers in commercial occupations indicates a positive view of women's education in this social stratum. Unskilled working-class fathers are more likely to send their sons to university. This difference is a significant indication of the correlation between social class and the occupation of women in higher education.

TABLE 2 *Percentage distribution by sex and father's occupation*

| Father's occupation | Male  | Female | Total |
|---------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| Professional        | 3.8   | 10.7   | 7.4   |
| Commercial          | 33.3  | 42.9   | 38.3  |
| Clerical            | 37.2  | 21.4   | 29.0  |
| Unskilled           | 10.3  | 1.2    | 5.6   |
| Unemployed          | 6.4   | 15.5   | 11.1  |
| No answer           | 9.0   | 8.3    | 8.6   |
| Total               | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0 |

TABLE 3 *Percentage distribution by sex and father's education*

| Father's education | Male  | Female | Total |
|--------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| University         | 16.7  | 19.0   | 0.6   |
| High school        | 16.7  | 39.3   | 17.9  |
| Elementary         | 35.8  | 38.1   | 28.4  |
| No education       | 30.8  | 2.4    | 37.0  |
| No answer          | -     | 1.2    | 16.0  |
| Total              | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0 |

TABLE 4 *Percentage distribution by sex and mother's education*

| Mother's education | Male  | Female | Total |
|--------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| University         | 5.1   | 2.3    | 3.7   |
| High school        | 16.7  | 34.5   | 25.9  |
| Elementary         | 25.6  | 44.1   | 35.2  |
| No education       | 52.6  | 19.1   | 35.2  |
| Total              | 100.0 | 100.0  | 100.0 |

Among fathers of student respondents, 37 percent had an elementary school education, 28.4 percent had attended high school, and 17 percent attended university (see Table 3).

Mothers of student respondents were as educated as the fathers in terms of high school attendance (see Table 4). But only 3.7 percent of the mothers had attended university, compared to 17.0 percent for the fathers. This is to be expected in a society where female enrollment in schools drops from 46 percent in the elementary cycle to only 1.2 percent in the higher education cycle. Comparison is made on the

total number of students enrolled in each cycle. Social and cultural attitudes toward education for women are reflected in these figures. Indeed, there is a long history of values and customs which manifest discrimination against women's education.

As for those parents without any education, the percentage of mothers is double that for fathers (see Tables 3 and 4). Generally, the fathers of female students have education consistently higher than the fathers of male students (see Table 3). Once again, this study confirms the correlation between the socioeconomic position of the father and attitudes toward higher education for women. The case is different for the no-education level, where 62.3 percent of those who have no education are fathers of males compared to only 7.7 percent for females. This again shows that the females come from higher income groups than the males and consequently they enjoy a better social status than those females who come from lower income groups.

Analysis of responses on the issue of women's work showed three attitudes: (1) the conservative, which condemns work outside the home; (2) the tolerant, which permits women to work (however, with certain conditions); and (3) the liberal attitude, which believes in the equality of men and women in the workplace. It was also found that almost two-thirds of the respondents were in favour of women's work, provided it would be limited to teaching or government posts. Work in the home, however, was considered by the majority of the respondents to be more important than outside employment.

*Over-all Sex-role Orientation Differences: 't' test and the Confidence Interval*  
Responses were classified on a three-point scale with the following ranking:

- 1 strongly disagreeing with traditional patterns,
- 2 some disagreement with traditional patterns,
- 3 strongly agreeing with traditional patterns.

Each respondent had a calculated average response based on the scores attributed to the answers. Low mean scores indicate nontraditional responses whereas high mean scores represent the traditional.

In order to detect the influence of the first set of variables on the students' attitude orientation with respect to sex roles, the independent variables were divided into two groups. The computed value of 't' for both sexes for the first set of variables is 5. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected because the observed value exceeds the critical value of 1.96 and we can assume that there is a difference between the two means. In other words, the two means are truly different. To summarize, there is a significant difference between males and females for the first category as far as sex-role orientation is concerned, as Tables 5 and 6 show. The confidence interval for the first set of variables is from 2.84 to 3.04 for females and 2.55 to 2.72 for males. The interval calculation for the female interval estimate does not include the point estimate for males. This indicates that the two means are distinctly different.

The computed value of 't' for both sexes in the second set of variables is 0.86. Since our observed value is less than 1.96, we accept the null hypothesis. Accordingly, there is no difference between the two means; they are identical as

TABLE 5 *Distribution of sex-role orientation scores for the two sets of variables for males*

| First set           | Score   | Second set          | Score   |
|---------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
| Father's education  | 0.20140 | University level    | 0.20358 |
| Father's occupation | 0.22800 | Religion            | 0.12772 |
| Mother's education  | 0.24504 |                     |         |
| Mother's occupation | 0.01156 |                     |         |
| Constant            | 1.95101 | Constant            | 2.35177 |
| Average total score | 2.64    | Average total score | 2.68    |

TABLE 6 *Distribution of sex-role orientation scores for the two sets of variables for females*

| First set           | Score   | Second set          | Score   |
|---------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
| Father's education  | 0.50244 | University level    | 0.19353 |
| Father's occupation | 0.22150 | Religion            | 0.22072 |
| Mother's education  | 0.26564 |                     |         |
| Mother's occupation | 0.01940 |                     |         |
| Constant            | 1.92738 | Constant            | 0.33423 |
| Average total score | 2.94    | Average total score | 2.74    |

TABLE 7 *Multiple regression analysis of attitude scores on sex-roles for females for three independent variables*

| Variable            | B       | Beta     | STD B   | F     |
|---------------------|---------|----------|---------|-------|
| Father's education  | 0.12289 | 0.29642  | 0.07339 | 2.804 |
| Father's occupation | 0.04783 | 0.13232  | 0.04252 | 1.266 |
| Mother's education  | 0.06117 | -0.12805 | 0.08644 | 0.501 |
| (Constant)          | 1.98544 |          |         |       |

shown in Tables 5 and 6. This supports the conclusion that there is no difference between males and females with regard to the second set of variables concerning sex-roles. The confidence interval for the second set of variables is from 2.74 to 2.84 for females and 2.59 to 2.77 for males. Calculation for the confidence interval shows that the interval estimate for females includes the point estimate for males, which indicates that the two means are identical.

It is concluded that there are differences in respect to sex-role orientation, based on the first set of variables and the confidence interval calculation. However, this conclusion cannot be supported with the second set of variables.

*Opinion of Respondents on Higher Education: Calculation of Chi-square for Variables 10 and 11* The computed value of chi-square for variable 10—why students have come to the university—is 9.49. It is not significant with 3 degrees of

freedom at the 0.02 level, since the computed value is less than the table value of 9.84. Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis and assume that the model of statistical independence is valid. In other words, there is no difference in attitudes between males and females in respect to opinion on variable 10.

The computed value of chi-square for variable 11—why girls come to the university—is 6.76. It is significant at the 0.10 level with 3 degrees of freedom since the computed value exceeds the table value of 6.25. As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected. In other words, there is a difference in attitude between males and females in respect to opinion on variable 11.

*Multiple Regression Analysis of Attitude Scores on Sex-roles* Analysis of each independent variable with respect to sex-role orientation reveals that the father's education and occupation are the only two significant variables (0.05). This is true only in the case of females, as Table 7 shows.

As for the explanatory power of the first set of variables in the case of males, it is 9 percent as compared to 25 percent for females. If one looks at the average score of males' attitudes compared to females', one finds that attitude can be classified as number 2 on the scale (certain disagreement with traditional patterns). But this is applicable only to those students whose parents have a university degree, are professional or administrators, and whose mothers are working. The case is different in the other categories, as we noticed earlier. This makes the attitude score closer to agreement with traditional patterns. In conclusion, one can say that there is a positive relationship between the first set of variables and the attitude scores. The rate of variation for females is higher than that for males, as indicated above.

In the second set of variables the explanatory power for both sexes is almost the same, as shown in the tables. As a result, the proportion of variation for both sexes is small.

## CONCLUSION

In view of the findings, one can focus on three attitudes toward women's work: (1) the conservative, which condemns women's work outside the home; (2) the tolerant, which admits a degree of freedom for women and allows them to work within certain conditions; and (3) the liberal, which represents those who believe in equality of the sexes.

In the first set of variables, statistical analysis identifies differences between the sexes with respect to sex-role orientation. These differences were not present in the second set of variables (university education and religion).

The chi-square test results show no difference in attitude between sexes in respect to opinions on why students come to the university. But they do show differences of opinion on why women students go to university. The majority of male students say that women come to university for social prestige and status.

Multiple regression analysis of each independent variable with respect to sex-role orientation shows that father's education and occupation are the only significant variables at the 0.05 level, only in the case of females. For the rest of the variables, the observed linear association is statistically insignificant.

As for the explanatory power of the first set of variables, it was found that 25 percent of the variation in the females' attitude is explained by the linear regression in the first set of variables, whereas only 9 percent of the variation in the males' attitude is explained by the same set of variables. The explanatory power of the second set of variables is almost the same.

To conclude, the statistical analysis reveals that the education and occupation of parents affect the attitude of students toward women's work. This was evident in the case of the female students more so than it was in the case of the male students. The plausible explanation for this is that parents of female students have a higher education. In terms of the theory of social deviance, parents' education affected the attitude of their children as a result of the change in the traditional customs and values with regard to sex-role differentiation and the participation of women in the labor force. This implies that the change in attitude toward sex roles is only feasible if it is preceded by a change in customs and values pertaining to that attitude.

In view of the findings contained in this study, one can say that change in attitude toward women's work is certainly taking place in Jordan but not at a rapid pace.

SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT  
UNIVERSITY OF JORDAN

#### NOTE

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