

Does Education Empower Women?

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Women's education has increased substantially in the Arab World during the last decade or two. Statistics indicate that the male-female ratio of enrollment in secondary school and higher education is diminishing and in some places like Lebanon it is suspected that the number of women university students is higher than its male counterpart.

Nevertheless, the relevant question concerning women's education in the world in general and in the Arab world in particular remains the same: Has education empowered women in the labor market and in the home?

We do know, based on various studies and discourses, that an increase in women's education is followed by an increase in their participation in the labor force. We also know from similar studies about 'women and work' that women lag behind men in decision-making positions and surpass them in jobs in the secondary market.

This, nevertheless, does not mean that increase in women's education did not improve women's status in society, because it has. It is a fact, after all, that women are moving in larger numbers into the productive and dynamic spheres of public life. It does, however, indicate that women are replacing men, maybe not where it counts, but where it is convenient for men to move into the next level. Hence, scholars attest that jobs given to women quickly become de-skilled, and lower in wages (see article entitled Empowerment of Women Through Education and Training (December 11, 94)).

In the home, the impact of education on women, is seen in terms of an improvement in the quality and efficiency of home and family management. However, no matter how educated a married woman is or how hard she works for the career she may have or aspire to, she is not relieved of her duties as a home-maker and house-keeper. She is primarily expected to fulfil the duties dictated to her by the patriarchal system. In other words, traditional roles, values and norms persist despite structural changes in society.

The above questions are raised and discussed in an informal panel discussion organized by the Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World. The discussion meant to raise various descriptive and analytic aspects of women's education, including, increase in female enrollment in schools and universities; effect of education on work; and the relationship between structural changes in society and gender roles including the double burden on women. The content of the discussion is hereby transcribed in this FILE of Al-Raida.

The File also includes a feature article that discusses various aspects of women's education in a number of Arab countries notably Egypt, and Lebanon. Moreover it comprises a research paper that examines the image of women in children's school books, highlighting processes whereby gender roles are standardized. Children's education is addressed in a second article which reviews a recent publication for children.

Last but not least, our present file presents some of the views of a well-known Arab-American scholar, Edward W. Said, on education, and women's movements. Said recently addressed the university and intellectual communities of Beirut in a series of appearances where he discussed his prominent book, *Orientalism*, and other aspects of social developments in the world and the Arab World. On more than one occasion,