

LEBANESE WOMEN IN EDUCATION

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How much progress have the Lebanese women recently achieved in the field of education and public service?

Dr Rafeeqa Hammoud, professor of education at the Lebanese University, tries to answer this question in a paper which has been abridged as follows:

In the field of education:

There has been a noticeable increase in the number of students at all levels in Lebanese schools, but the number of girls is still inferior to that of boys. Statistics given in 1970 show that Lebanese children between 6 and 14, who did not go to school, numbered 22,000 boys and 45,000 girls. Their number increased among the older groups, i.e. those between 15 and 19. Of those whose ages ranged between 20 and 24 and who sought university education, 26 percent were boys and 9 percent, girls.

Though we have no accurate statistics about illiteracy, we may deduce from various sources of information that the number of illiterates is higher among women than among men.

In normal training schools, the number of women students has lately exceeded that of men, while in vocational schools, it is just the opposite. As a matter of fact, vocational training in Lebanon is at the elementary stage, the number of vocations being highly limited, technological development very backward, especially for women, who number only 10 percent of the graduates of vocational schools.

In universities, the number of women students in 1973-74 did not exceed 30 percent. Their highest proportion was in pharmacy: 61 percent of the whole. Next came those majoring in art-literature: 40 percent. In science, 25 percent, in law and political science, 19 percent, in medicine, 12 percent, in engineering, 5 percent.

In the teaching profession:

At the elementary level, women teachers form an overwhelming majority as compared with men. Their number gradually diminishes at the upper secondary and university level.

The causes which lie behind women's low status in the educational field are various.



In the first place, we may mention the parents' traditional attitude which leads them to think that women were born for housekeeping, so it would be a loss to let them study beyond the elementary stage. Some think that they do not need any school education. Such attitudes, imposed on girls in early life, help to create in them an inferiority complex and to prevent the development of their talents.

Second, unfair laws and regulations favor the application of the double standard in the family, in social groups, in

business and industry, where women are not treated on an equal footing with men. They are generally excluded from the higher echelons in the public and private sectors. Recently, they have been excluded from the judiciary school.

Third, the lack of planning projects and the absence of orientation based on local needs tend to create a surplus of trainees in one field and a shortage of them in another.

Fourth, the relatively low salaries allotted to women, the difficulty of reconciling outside work with home duties, the high cost of child care facilities in the absence of the mother, all these factors join to make working women give up their employment after marriage.

The reforms proposed by Dr Hammoud are those which can fill the needs already pointed out, namely:

Making use of all available media to spread an awareness and change public opinion.

Abolition of all laws which favor sexual discrimination and inequality in every field.

Providing working women with up-to-date nurseries and child care centers.

Establishing free compulsory education for both sexes at the elementary and intermediate levels.

Providing all the Lebanese districts, particularly those remote from the capital, with an adequate number of schools, adequate means of communication, board and lodging accommodations for students whose homes are far from school.

Co-education at all levels should be encouraged as a means of affirming sexual equality.

Eradication of illiteracy should be an object of general concern.

Finally, women themselves must be convinced of their ability to face new responsibilities. A change in mentality must go hand in hand with the change of laws and regulations.