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Women achieve financial independence:
Divorce is not the end of the world
Khawla Ahmad and Mai Ahmad

This article sheds light on the negative view of society toward divorced women and how women behave after the failure of their marriages. It presents cases of women who suffered a great deal as a result of divorce but have been able to succeed in life, proving that divorce is not the end of the world but the beginning of a new life.

The article presents the case of a 19-year-old divorced woman, Ashwaq, who was divorced six months after she was married. She tells her story by saying, 'I married my cousin in response to my parents' desire. I used to live on the second floor and my family on the first floor. They never treated me as a married woman. My mother used to call me early in the morning to help her clean the house without taking into consideration that I was married and had lots of duties and responsibilities. Going down to help my mother created problems between my husband and me and ended in my divorce after six months of my marriage.'

She adds, 'I cried and felt afraid, but I decided to continue my education and be a successful person capable of determining my future without the intervention of anybody. I went back to high school and later went to university.'

'I swore that my divorce was going to be my new birthday. Many men are asking for my hand in marriage, but I am not going to marry until I become independent in order

not to become a divorced woman once again. I advise all women not to submit to their parents' desires and to have independent personalities,' she adds.

The Director of Community and Mental Health Department at the Mental Health Hospital, Dr. Ayesh Samour, says, 'The view of society toward divorced women varies according to the customs and traditions. Some people say that divorced women are not fit to marry another time, while others say that divorced women need support and encouragement in order to overcome the crisis easily. This view depends on the personality of the woman. Women who are confident are strong enough to overcome the problem within a short period of time and to start a new life again.'

He goes on to say, 'Married women who live unstable and insecure lives with their husbands are likely to suffer psychological and mental disorders as a result of the psychological pressures they are exposed to, in addition to psychological and sexual violence. I have treated women who were able to completely recover and live a stable and secure life after divorce.'

Dr. Samour urges men to respect women's rights, as women are human beings who need support, encouragement, respect and appreciation. He stresses that justice won't be achieved as long as women are not treated respectfully. He concludes by affirming that divorce is not the end of the world, but could be the start of a new and stable life.

Counselor Abeer Asaqa expresses her opinion regarding the issue by saying, 'The inferior view of society toward divorced women leads to psychological, social and economic pressures that prevent women from leaving the house and working outside. In addition, divorced women are likely to suffer from despair and frustration. That's why women do not have the power to take important decisions pertaining to their personal life due to their strong feeling that they have no right to do anything.'

How women reinforce violence and discrimination against them Shahnaz Abed Al-Razeq

Specialists in psychology and sociology worldwide have agreed that society plays a major role in reinforcing violence and discrimination against women in Palestinian society through enhancing the customs and traditions, which creates readiness amongst women to accept maltreatment and injustice from men. This is due to their conviction that men have the right to do this and are free to do anything they want.

Dr. Husni Al-Masri, a lecturer in Psychology and Education at An-Najah University in Nablus points out that the first enemy for Palestinian women is ignorance of their rights. While women are asking for their rights and responsibilities, they do not know how to preserve and defend their rights. In addition, the failure of the majority of women to ask for their rights and to confront issues related to violence and discrimination has created a huge gap between men and women.

Dr. Maher Abu Zant, a Lecturer in Sociology at An-Najah University points out that women believe for social and psychological reasons that they are not capable of participating with men in many aspects of life.

He clarifies that society contributes significantly to the subjection of women to men and accepts their maltreatment and injustice. Women who are exposed to violence have the right to lodge a complaint against the attacker, but restrictions imposed by society prevent them from taking such an action, he adds.

Dr. Abu Zant says that there is an imbalance in the child rearing process, which usually begins at home. He stresses that the family accepts that the male members of the family beat the female members, considering this behavior as something normal in the Arab society. This view reinforces the common belief that women are inferior to men.

Low participation of women in vocational training

The Palestinian Ministry of Labor took charge of the vocational training centers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip on 10 September 1995, one year after the arrival of the Palestinian National Authority to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Director of the Community Liaison Department at the Ministry of Labor, Ms. Ayshe Odeh says, 'After the Palestinian Ministry of Labor assumed control, it laid down training strategies based on the needs of the local market, taking into consideration training for advanced skills that were in demand in regional and local markets.'

'Currently, there are 14 training centers affiliated with the Ministry of Labor distributed throughout the Palestinian controlled-areas. They provide training in 18 professions. In addition, we have been able to standardize the curricula for the training centers,' she adds.

In response to a question regarding the low participation of women in the training centers, Ms. Odeh says, 'The Ministry of Labor has not placed any restrictions on women's registration in the rehabilitation and training skills courses. Usually, women register for courses in secretarial skills, sewing, cosmetics, architectural drawing, electronics, shoes designing, and hotel management. Women rarely register for car mechanics, tiling, or bleaching. During the years 1995-1998, some 1,060 female students out of 2,861 students registered in the training centers, constituting 37% of the total number of students (23% in the Gaza Strip and 42% of the West Bank).

Symposium on women and decision-making positions

As part of the Advocacy of Equal Rights for Women through Strengthening the Network of Women's Institutions and Committees Project, WATC held a symposium on Thursday, 23 September 1999 entitled 'Women and Decision-Making Positions' at the Baladna Cultural Center in Ramallah.

With regard to women's experience in the municipal elections, Ms. Nahla Qura, a member of WATC's Administrative Committee, clarified that the Ottoman, Jordanian, Egyptian and Israeli laws were in force before the PNA took over the rule in the Palestinian controlled-areas. 'Following the arrival of the PNA to the West Bank and

Gaza Strip, women have been able to reach positions in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Laws have been passed mandating that at least one woman has to be appointed in each municipal council,' she said.

At the end of the workshop, Ms. Zahira Kamal, the Director General of the Women's Department at the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation answered questions related to school dropout among female students, and the role of women's departments at the various ministries. She stressed the importance of launching a special program concerning the importance of vocational and academic education.

Amended Criminal Law submitted to the Jordanian Parliament

The Jordanian Prime Minister, Abed Al-Ra'ouf Al-Rawabdeh, submitted to the Parliament the new project of the amended Criminal Law after it was approved by the Cabinet. The project calls for the abolishment of article 340 of the Jordanian Criminal Law, according to which men are given the right to kill their wives, sisters, or female relatives under the pretext of defending the family honor. (For further information, see page 4 of issue no.81)

Human Development Report in Palestine: Increase in poverty and unemployment rates Walid As-Shurafa

The 1998-1999 Human Development Report in Palestine, which was prepared by the Women's Studies Program at Birzeit University, reveals the following trends:

- *Decrease in individual income
- *Reduction in the education and health budget
- *Increase in discrimination and violence against women
- *Increase in population growth
- *Children under 15 years constitute 47% of the total population in Palestine
- *60% of the treasury is spent on the employees' salaries, according to Ramzi Rihan, representative of the PNA institutions
- *Poverty rate is 16% in the West Bank and 38% in the Gaza Strip
- *Poverty rate among families headed by women is 30% and 22% among those headed by men.
- *56% of Palestinian laborers work in Israel
- *60% of poor families cannot provide basic needs
- *Women's representation in the official institutions and decision-making positions is still limited; women constitute 7.5% of the membership of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), 5.6% of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), 3% of the Cabinet, 1% of the local councils, and 23% of the charitable societies.
- *Women constitute only 11% of the labor market

The marriage of the rapist to the victim **Ruqia Al-Alami/Jordan**

Ms. Hiam Kalimat, member of the Arab Organization for Human Rights and a member of the Human Rights Department at the Jordanian Premiership, has sent memoranda to the Jordanian Minister of Justice, Dr. Hamzeh Haddad, the Jordanian Prime Minister, Abed Al-Ra'ouf Al-Rawabdeh, and the Head of the Arab Organization for Human Rights, Najib Rashdan asking them to support the issue of the female administrative detainees who are being held in the Jordanian prisons.

Ms. Hiam also referred to the measures practiced against victims of rape both under 15 years of age and above. She demanded that the articles of the Jordanian Criminal Law be amended especially those that allow the rapist evade legal consequences if he asks the victim to marry him and the latter agrees. This provision is illegitimate according to Islam because of the unhealthy psychological conditions that can pressure the victim to accept the marriage.

In Egypt, the Mufti Sheikh Naser Farid, called for the amendment of the article that allows the rapist to evade legal consequences if he asks the victim to marry him and the latter agrees. He identified a pattern of the attacker asking the victim to marry him as a means of avoiding consequences and subsequently humiliating her and then divorcing her. For these reasons, a marriage on this basis is considered illegitimate and completely rejected by Islamic clergymen.

The Egyptian Cabinet decided on 4 April 1999 to abolish the article that pardons the rapist in the event that he marries the victim. The issue will be submitted to the Egyptian parliament for approval.

In the memorandums, Ms. Hiam recommended the following:

- Urging legislators to make all necessary amendments to the Criminal Law, including article 340.
- Raising public awareness of the issue through academic, media and civil society institutions

Another victim

The article is about a 19-year-old woman who was repeatedly raped by her father. One day, the daughter asked her father for permission to work outside of the house in order to fill her free time after she quit school at an early age. Her father refused. Two days later, while they were alone, her father told his daughter that he would agree to her request on the condition that she responds to his sexual desires. He subsequently raped his daughter.

One day, the woman's mother returned unexpectedly to the house after having been away for 15 days. She found her husband sleeping with their daughter. The victim admitted that her father had raped her several times and referred to the frequent threatens when she refused to respond or tried to tell anybody.

The family justified the incident on the basis of problems within the family, especially between the parents. The victim reversed her accusation against her father in order to preserve the reputation of the family. Her mother separated from her husband and took her youngest daughter away.

**Special interview with Artist Latifeh Yousef
Dunia Ismail**

Latifeh was born in Palestine and has a diploma in Art Education. She is a member of the General Union of the Palestinian Fine Artists and a member of the General Union of the Arab Fine Artists. She is currently the official in charge of exhibitions at the PLO Cultural Department and currently works with the Palestinian Ministry of Culture.

**Family breakup and poverty lead to child labor
Hasan Salim, Women & Family Affairs Center, Nablus**

As a result of the difficult economic situation in Palestinian society, many students have left school at an early age to help alleviate the suffering of their families. According to the statistics of the Ministry of Social Affairs, 50% of juvenile delinquents left school at an early age. The highest delinquency rate falls in the age group between 13 and 18 years.

The Ministry of Education has taken a number of steps to limit the phenomenon of school dropout, such as allowing students to stay in school or return to school until the age of 18 years and opening new schools or classrooms in small villages, remote areas and Bedouin areas.

Deputy Assistant of the Ministry of Education, Mohammed Sabah, clarified that the phenomenon of the employment of children is not new. Europe and the United States submitted a proposal to address the phenomenon, but it was not supported in the developing countries because the phenomenon is linked to poverty. Wealth countries are therefore asked to place priority on projects that work to reduce the level of poverty in developing countries.

In a report published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), children, ranging in age from 12 to 16 years, constitute 6.6% of the labor force, of those 81.2% work, and 18.2% look for jobs. The report notes that the majority of children in the Palestinian labor market belong to families consisting of seven members or more. Of families consisting of 10 members or more with children in the labor force, 67% of these children belong to families whose male heads have finished the ninth grade only.

Mr. Ibrahim Al-A'raj, Head of the Vocational Training Department at the Ministry of Industry said, 'The employment of children is the responsibility of the family, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Higher Education, and other parties.'

'The employment of children is associated with economic and cultural development and training centers that exist were established after the phenomenon had become a reality,' he added.

Family affairs and society's concerns
In'am Abed Al-Hadi, Women & Family Affairs Center, Nablus

A wife has the right to request certain conditions be fulfilled by her husband provided that they do not violate the nature of the marriage contract. For example, she has the right to ask her husband to live in the same city where she is living, or to allow her to pursue her education, or to work. In addition, she can ask her husband not to marry another woman. Any violation of these conditions may result in the breakup of the marriage.

In reality, women do not exercise these rights either due to their ignorance of marriage laws or because human relations compel them not to impose conditions on their husbands.

The Personal Status Law or the Family Law or the Family's Rights Law must deal with women's rights as human rights and must not prevent women from exercising their rights as clearly stipulated in the articles of the constitution.

There is a consensus, with the exception of the Tunisian and the Druze legislation, that a husband has the right to ask for divorce. He can go before a judge who is not compelled to listen to the wife's opinion. The same is not true when a wife asks for divorce. She has to prove that her husband has caused her physical or psychological harm or else her claim is considered too weak by the judge to consider the case.

One may also ask why a law not been enacted compelling marrying couples to undergo a medical exam before marriage in order to reduce the risk of creating a family burdened with psychological and physical disabilities?

Is the family a safe refuge?
Faten Abu Za'rour, Palestinian Working Women Society (PWWS)

The article is about a 22-year-old woman and mother of six children, the youngest of whom is five months old. She married at the age of 15 years and had her first child when she was 16 years. Her marriage was relatively successful and happy until her husband married another woman who was older than him. His first wife could not live with the new reality. She left the house and sought the help of her family, but they abandoned her.

Her husband made her leave the house and prevented her from taking her children, including her five-month-old child. She has been living with her family for four months. She is ostracized and unwanted.

What is the fate of this woman after her husband kicked her out and her parents refused to help her? Is the house a safe refuge when one of the family members is exposed to injustice and maltreatment? Will she face the same fate if she continues her education and marries again at an older age? Would this woman and other women face this fate if our legislators and society were aware of the importance of raising the age for marriage to 18 years? It is of the utmost importance to establish legislation and laws that protect the family and women in order to prevent tragedies such as this.

Human development and gender
Elin Kuttab, Head of the Women's Studies Center, Birzeit University

The 1998-1999 human development report establishes a relationship between development and the completion of the Palestinian national project, which necessitates the participation of all groups of society, including women who constitute half of the society's population. The report calls for the crystallization of a developmental perspective that enables Palestinians to unite efforts toward their main goal, which is the establishment of a democratic and civil society based on equality, social justice and development in order to ensure the rights of future generations.

It is clear that human development cannot be achieved for the marginalized groups of society unless guiding policies are laid down, since economic growth does not result in human development for all sectors of society. Therefore, it is the duty of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and civil society to develop policies on with consideration for gender in order to promote development that is based on equality and democracy.

There are clear indications that Palestinian women have carried their political and national responsibilities, but their level of participation in decision-making positions is still low. Women constitute 7.5% of the membership of the PNC, 5.6% of the PLC, 3% of the Cabinet, 1% of the local councils, and 23% of the charitable societies. In addition, there is a considerable gap between the two sexes in the political arena, resulting in a need for policies that empower women and open up opportunities for them to gain the same experience as men. Integrating women in the educational sector and the legislative arena is crucial at this stage in order to eliminate laws that discriminate against women, especially the Personal Status Law. Developing legislation that promotes equality between men and women is a priority for the achievement of an independent Palestinian state on the ground.

Our hope is that this report will play an integral part in the Palestinian development plan due to the fact that any discrepancy between policies and the Palestinian bureaucracy has a negative impact on the greater society, considering that development is essential for the realization of Palestinian national liberation and the achievement of a democratic and civil society based on equality and social justice.