

**Voice of Women
Voice of Women
Issue no. 83
21 October 1999**

In this issue:

The suffering of the wives of martyrs

Do women ask for divorce when married to infertile men?

Workshop on women's production in West Bank and Gaza

Women's health center opened in Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza

Statistical report published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

Training course on women in journalism held in Sweden

Obituary for Mr. Jamal Younis

Official studies on the realities faced by Palestinian women

Health center named after the late Dr. Firyal Al-Banna

UNESCO report on education, illiteracy, and women

Study on the low participation of women in lending programs

Special interview with Dr. Nader Said

Issuing a new Palestinian Labor Law

Palestine Vocational Girls College

Special interview with short story writer Iman Bseir

Early marriage and its negative and social impact

When deception turns marriage into a for-profit institution

Restrictions imposed on women in rural areas

Marriage of children destroys their innocence

He and she: The right of children to education

The extraordinary concerns of an ordinary woman:

Different names but the same result

The suffering of the wives of martyrs

This article sheds light on the suffering of the wives of martyrs due to the difficult economic conditions. Samira from the village of Kharabtha in the district of Ramallah has six children -- five daughters and one son. She has been providing for her children since her husband's death in 1989. Samira's husband, Ibrahim, was martyred on 9 March 1989 as a result of an electrical shock while he was on a national duty. She works in Israel picking tomatoes and almonds for 45 shekels a month.

'I leave the house at 3:00 am and return at 5:00 p.m. I work between 9 and 10 hours a day for 45 shekels a month. Sometimes my employer helps me when I need money,' she said.

A second woman from the surrounding villages of Ramallah goes with her children to the nearby mountain to pick six kilograms of sage and to sell them in the market for 60 shekels only. She also works in embroidery and sells her products to one of the charitable organizations in Ramallah in order to improve the living conditions of her

family. Two years ago, her eldest son entered Birzeit University to study journalism. 'I cannot afford the tuition fees because the money I get from the Ministry of Social Affairs is barely enough. I wish the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) would help me,' she said.

*Informed sources revealed that more than 1,800 Palestinians were martyred since the eruption of the Intifada, the 'uprising,' in the Palestinian Occupied Territories in December 1987.

Do women ask for divorce when married to infertile men? Hasan Salim, Women & Family Affairs Center/Nablus

When the husband finds out that his wife cannot have children, he is forced to have a second wife who would bring him a son to carry his name. What happens if the problem is that the husband is sterile? The wife cannot have a second husband as long as she is married to someone else. Does she ask for divorce? Would the society accept her or not? Does she have the right to ask for divorce or not?

The article presents the case of Um Khaled, a resident of Tulkarem, who has been married for 15 years without children. She tells her story by saying, 'I married 15 years ago and have not had children. The problem is on my husband's side, he had doubts before we got married about whether he could have children. I never wanted to hurt his feelings. On the contrary, I was very patient and sensitive with him. When I approached forty, he started thinking seriously about having a second wife as a result of the influence of his family members who convinced him that he was capable of having offspring, despite numerous medical results confirming his infertility.'

In another case, a 25-year-old married woman, Samira, from Ramallah says, 'After four months of marriage, I faced much criticism about my delay in getting pregnant as though I have been married for years. My husband's family insisted that we should see a doctor because one of us was suspected of having a problem and most probably it was me.'

She goes on to say, 'Thanks be to God that I got pregnant before seeing a doctor; otherwise, it would have become a nightmare and everyone would be talking about it'

She wonders, 'Are the married couples required to conceive children immediately following the marriage in order to protect themselves from outside criticism? Is the society, or the parents, or the married couples responsible for making the decision about whether to have children or not?'

'Motherhood is a right for women just as fatherhood is a right for men. Customs and traditions that give men the right to express their desire to have a second wife in order to have children are the same that prevent women from asking for this right, which is one form of injustice practiced against women,' 40-year-old Ahmad Rabah says.

Thirty-three-year-old Ahmad, a resident of Ramallah, expresses his opinion by saying, 'I think a wife has the right to ask for divorce if the husband is infertile or

unable to make love to her. If the husband cannot have children for another reason, the wife should be patient and hope that things will change.'

Social Counselor, Zahira Fares, from the Palestinian Working Women Society (PWWS) in Ramallah says, 'Arriving at the decision to ask for divorce differs from one family to another and is influenced by a number of factors, including to what extent the partners are attached to each other. When the wife cannot have children, the husband can have a second wife in order to be a father and to please his family.'

She concludes by highlighting the importance of young couples undergoing medical exams before marriage in order to avoid deception.

Dr. Maher Abu Zant, Head of the Sociology Department at An-Najah University in Nablus, says, 'We are a masculine society, which looks at women with inferiority. Women are required to have male children and are blamed for not having children even when it is due to the inability of men and even before performing medical checkups. Therefore, I recommend that couples undergo all necessary medical checkups before marriage in order to avoid problems of this type between them.'

Gynecologist Nahro Majaj says, 'Going to a specialist solves half of the problem, and the second half is receiving proper treatment and having faith in it. Many go to non-professionals, who prescribe improper treatment which can cause severe complications.'

He adds, 'I am surprised by those who marry several times although they know for sure that they cannot have children. Most of these cases occur as a result of the pressure of the family. I know families who were patient for years and eventually had children. A family from Haifa had three children after 14 years of marriage.'

Dr. Majaj points out that the word 'infertility' no longer exists in the world of medicine due to medical and technological developments. He stresses the importance of raising health and sexual awareness among young couples concerning the dangers of infertility by undergoing laboratory and clinical checkups before marriage.

Workshop on the reality of women's production in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

On Saturday, 9 October 1999, a workshop on *The Reality of Women's Production in the West Bank and Gaza Strip* was held by the Holy Land Institute in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce in Ramallah. The Institute's Regional Manager, Fawaz Hammad, highlighted the importance of paying attention to women's production programs. He said during its upcoming program cycle for the year 2000, the institute will take into consideration the recommendations that will be suggested by the representatives of the women's centers and institutions.

During the workshop, participants were divided into work groups with the aim of highlighting the weaknesses and strengths of women's production, most importantly the lack of studies and research in this field; evaluating the existing projects and

laying down criteria to ensure its continuity and launching awareness programs and training working women in production.

During the one-day workshop, Ms. Zahira Kamal, the Director General of the Directory of Gender Planning and Development at the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation spoke about the reality of women in the field of production and the importance of launching awareness programs in women's projects. She pointed out the low level of participation of women in the production labor force, which does not exceed 12.5%. She demanded greater provision of job opportunities that would ensure that women could live with dignity and more economic independence.

The Director General of the Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC), Suheir Azzouni, pointed out that the WATC deals with Palestinian women as citizens with full rights, especially economic rights. It is the duty of the state to provide job opportunities for women just as for men. In her speech, Ms. Azzouni pointed to the necessity of women entering new work fields that have greater social value than the ones available to them now. These include information technology, food processing using modern technology, and chemical industries.

The Director of the Palestinian Working Women Society (PWWS), Amal Khreishe, spoke about the status of working women in the Palestinian labor force and the problems and obstacles that hamper women's participation in the labor force in light of the difficult economic and political situation that has made the Palestinian economy dependent on the Israeli economy.

Women's health center opened in Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza

The Palestinian Minister of Health, Dr. Riyad Za'noun, opened a new women's health center in Jabalia Refugee Camp in Gaza, at a total cost of US\$400,000 donated by the UN Population Fund with the participation of the Italian Company (Ezos) and the Red Crescent in the Gaza Strip. The later bought the land to build the center. The UN Development Fund supervised the project.

In the opening speech, Dr. Za'noun confirmed that the ministry supports the health centers concerned with women's issues in order to provide better health services. He stressed the importance of opening health education units for early detection of breast cancer and uterine cancer, and providing special care to women aged 45 and above because they are likely to develop chronic diseases after this age.

It is noteworthy to mention that 20% of Palestinian women do not receive medical services, 80% of them do not receive medical services after delivery, and 21% of women participate in the family planning program

Statistical report published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

A recent statistical report published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) in Ramallah has shown that:

- 68% of Palestinian women have not obtained their rights in inheritance
- 28% of males believe that women have the ability to manage their properties successfully
- 87% of females and 19% of males aged 18 years and above do not contribute to their family's budget
- 52% of males and 8% of females aged 18 years and above own a house or real estate
- 17% of males borrow from banks as opposed to only 6% of females

Training course on women in journalism held in Sweden Itaf Yousef

Between 27 September and 14 October 1999, a training course on 'Women in Journalism' was held at Fogo Academy in Kalmar in Sweden. Twenty women from Asia, Africa and Latin America attended the training course, which included a series of lectures and meetings. During the training course, participants exchanged their experiences in journalism in their countries. The participants visited the Swedish capitol, Stockholm, and were introduced to historical and religious sites in the city. They also visited the radio and TV stations and one of the largest newspapers in Sweden and were introduced to the advanced equipment used in the two facilities. In addition, they visited a number of Swedish organizations and centers, such as the Victimized Women's Shelter, the Victimized Men's Center and The Refugees Absorption Center. At the end of the training course, the academy distributed Diploma certificates to the 20 participants.

Obituary for Mr. Jamal Younis

The Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) offers its condolences on the death of **Mr. Jamal Younis**, who was a prominent cultural figure and a defender of women's rights. The WATC offers its deepest sympathy to Mr. Younis' family and prays for God's mercy on his soul.

The late Mr. Younis served as the head of the Arabic Language Department at the Palestinian Curriculum Development Center in Ramallah. He was a member of the Consulting Committee of the WATC radio program *With Women*, which is broadcast on *Voice of Palestine* twice a week on Sundays and Wednesdays between 9:10 and 9:30 a.m. The program deals with social, economic, health and cultural issues pertaining to women.

Official studies on the realities faced by Palestinian women

The women's departments at the Palestinian ministries have released studies pertaining to the educational and cultural realities faced by Palestinian women and

their participation in the labor market and decision-making positions. A study prepared by the Women's Health Department at the Ministry of Health shows that women constitute 41.7% of the team working in the ministry: 3% of these are doctors, 3% are heads of nursing departments, 39% are nurses and midwives, and 18% are pharmacists.

With regard to education, studies have shown that female teachers in the kindergartens in the governorates of the West Bank constitute 99.9% of the total number of teachers. Of these, 43.3% have completed their high school education, 48.8% have completed a teaching diploma and 8% have completed a bachelor's degree. In the governorates of the Gaza Strip, female teachers in the kindergartens constitute 99.5%, 43.9% of whom have completed high school, 42.5% of whom have completed a teaching diploma, and 12.4% of whom have a bachelor's degree.

In terms of the participation of women in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and the Palestinian National Council (PNC), 28 women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip ran for the PLC elections in January 1996. Five women won seats in the elections: two in the West Bank and three in the Gaza Strip. There are currently 56 women among the 688 members in the PNC.

In the field of written media, the study reveals that men hold the positions of director general and editor-in-chief, while women hold the positions of secretary and administrative affairs staff. The study focuses on the employees of two local newspapers. At the first newspaper, 10 of the 200 employees are women, 6 men hold high positions and one woman holds the position of administrative manager. In the second newspaper, 17 of the 125 employees are women, one holds the position of assistant to the administrative manager, and the rest work as accountants.

Regarding the private radio and TV stations, the study noted that there are six women out of 24 men working in the local radio station 'Amwaj', and nine women out of 20 men at the 'The Voice of Love and Peace' radio station.

The study concludes by emphasizing the importance of increasing women's participation in the labor market and decision-making positions. The Directory of Gender Planning and Development at the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation suggested a number of recommendations. These include reviewing the Palestinian Press Law; preparing a list of women specialized in various fields to enable the media to reach them easily; cooperating with the research centers at the local universities to ask students to conduct research pertaining to women and encouraging the journalism departments at the universities and colleges to offer courses on women.

Health center named after the late Dr. Firyal Al-Banna

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat issued a decree to name the Center for Early Detection of Breast Cancer, which is currently being constructed at As-Shifa' Hospital in Gaza, after the late Dr. Firyal Al-Banna, a Fateh activist.

On Tuesday, 12 October 1999, a eulogy ceremony was held by Fateh Movement at the Rashad As-Shawa Center in Gaza in memory of the late Firyal Al-Banna. The ceremony was attended by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and a number of official and national figures. During the ceremony, Mr. Ahmad Abed Al-Rahman, the Secretary General of the Palestinian Cabinet, delivered a speech on behalf of President Arafat, during which he praised Dr. Firyal, who was the first to submit a report about the intifada to the Palestinian headquarters in Tunisia.

Najla' Yassin, from the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), demanded that Firyal's desire be realized to establish a medical center for early detection of breast cancer. In her speech, she referred to the significant role the late Mr. Yassin played in serving his homeland and his people.

It is noteworthy to mention that the 'Center for Early Detection of Breast Cancer', is being constructed with donations by the European Union (EU) at a total amount of US\$250,000 and by the prominent businessman Hammad Al-Harrazin, with total contributions of US\$150,000. The balance is to be covered by the Ministry of Health.

UNESCO report on education, illiteracy, and women **Talal Awkal**

Since 1990, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been celebrating International Literacy Day each year on the 8th of September. Every year, UNESCO publishes figures on illiteracy worldwide, including the Arab countries. UNESCO estimates the number of illiterate people aged 15 and over in the Arab countries at 65 million, constituting 43% of their populations. The illiteracy rate for women is estimated at 56%. This figure provides some explanation for the limited economic, social, cultural and scientific development in the Arab countries, also associated with the nature of the political regimes throughout the region and the state of human rights in these countries.

The report reveals that there are 6.7 million children who are not registered in schools, constituting 13% of the total population. The percentage of females who are not registered in schools is twice that of males. There are 4.3 million female children and 2.4 million male children.

Lebanon, which is considered one of the developed countries of the Arab world, suffers a relatively high illiteracy rate compared to its population. The Lebanese Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Michael Mousa, said the illiteracy rate in Lebanon exceeds 13.06% and the semi-illiteracy rate is more than 23.3%.

Statistics released by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) for the year 1997 showed that the illiteracy rate among males and females aged 10 years and above is 11.6% and the semi-illiteracy rate is 16.9% in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, excluding Jerusalem and Gaza. Illiteracy rate among males is 7.7% and 20.1% among females aged 15 years and above, which means that illiteracy rate among females is three times more than males. Of Palestinians between 6 and 18

years of age, 12.3% are not registered in schools and 62.3% have not finished the high school.

Study on the low participation of women in lending programs

A recent study on the consultation services provided to small projects, which was prepared by the Researcher Isam Abu Baker, Director of the Local Employment Department at the Ministry of Labor, has confirmed that the participation of Palestinian women in the lending programs is low for several reasons, including:

- Prevailing social customs which restrict women's right of ownership
- Lack of information about small projects owned by women
- Inability of the lending institutions to reach women
- Low participation of women in the local training programs

The study notes that in order to increase the level of women's participation in the lending institutions, the following must be addressed:

- Improving and developing women's skills in marketing and administration
- Raising the level of coordination among women's groups and programs targeting women
- Improving the level of communication between women and the lending institutions

The aims of the lending institutions are:

- To help create job opportunities for women through small projects
- To limit the dependence of small projects on the Israeli economy
- To support and promote the local economy
- To activate the production role of women

Mr. Isam added that the lending institutions in Palestine were established under unusual circumstances. They began operating in light of the absence of the central authority and the absence of the financial and banking system.

The study highlights the importance of launching consultation and media programs, informing women about the possibility of obtaining a loan through holding meetings on the lending programs and its services, and visiting the lending institutions and training institutions concerned with administration and marketing.

Special interview with Dr. Nader Said Walid As-Shurafa

The Director of the Development Studies Program at Birezeit University, Dr. Nader Said, was recently interviewed by *Sawt An-Nissa*, during which he stated that the 1998-99 human development report published by the Development Studies Program contains errors about the status of Palestinian women. The report states that Palestinians are highly educated and have a high level of intellectual life and that the status of Palestinian women is better than that of women in other Arab countries. He

supported his argument by giving examples of the low level participation of Palestinian women in the labor force and in decision-making positions in the municipal councils, the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and the Palestinian National Council (PNC).

On the economic level, Dr. Said pointed out that the income earned by women is only 10% of the income earned by men working in different institutions. He also argued that there is a relationship between the political and economic status of women and their social status in terms of fertility rates, early marriage and domestic violence.

During the interview, Dr. Said stated that for the society to develop healthily, women must be integrated in all spheres of life and recognized as a vital component of the social capital. Such integration requires equality in rights and recognition of full citizenship for women.

Dr. Said depicted the current stage of development as one of turmoil and struggle during which Palestinian society must determine whether it will follow in the footsteps of other traditional and undemocratic Arab societies or will embrace diversity and equality.

Issuing a new Palestinian Labor Law Reem Al-Ajab

The article sheds light on the importance of implementing new laws and reviewing the current ones, including the Palestinian Labor Law, in order to establish a civil and democratic society based on the principles of justice, equality and freedom. The article presents an array of opinions on the issue. The Director of the International and Arab Relations Department at the Ministry of Labor, Zeinab Ghneimi, attributes the low level of participation of women in the labor market to the reluctance of employers to employ women, especially married women, because of their other commitments. Other reasons include the lack of a national economic developmental policy that analyzes the labor market in light of the current political conditions.

Rida Awadallah, Official in Charge of the Women's Department at the Ministry of Labor and the Director of the Palestinian Working Women Society (PWWS) in Gaza, states that the low level of participation of women in the labor market can be attributed to discrimination against women in wages and appointment. Statistics confirm that the number of women who have completed their education is less than that of men, she added.

Palestine Vocational Girls College

The Palestine Vocational Girls School in Ramallah was first established as an academic college in 1952. It was known as Dar Al-Mu'alimat before the arrival of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in the self-rule areas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1994. The college used to teach Arabic, English, mathematics, science and other subjects and used to accept students after fulfilling a number of conditions.

Dr. Najwa Arafat, the Dean of the College, says, 'Following the arrival of the PNA, the college conducted a study concerning the needs of the local market. As a result of the study, it was converted into a vocational college that accepts female students only.'

'The name of the college was changed in 1996. The curricula and courses offered to students were also changed. In addition to offering courses in physical education, vocational education, and musical education, the college offers courses in data programming, graphic designing, fine arts, office administration, accounting, and business administration. Vocational education includes courses in carpentry, electricity, smithery and construction. These changes have been introduced in order to offer courses that are in synch with our modern society's needs,' she said.

She went on to say, 'We hold symposia and lectures dealing with health issues. We are not only concerned with granting certificates, but also with developing the personalities of students and raising their awareness concerning health issues. We also organize field visits to social institutions and on-site visits.'

With regard to the future plans of the college, Ms. Arafat said, 'Our plan is to raise the level of education to a bachelor's degree in line with the policy of the Palestinian Ministry of Education, according to which students who have only a diploma degree will be not appointed to government positions after the year 2003. Therefore, we are preparing new programs and plans. A new building, which is underway, is funded by the Arab Kuwaiti Fund and supervised by the Palestinian Economic Council for Development & Reconstruction (PECDAR). The World Labor Organization (WLO) furnished the college with advanced equipment, computers, a mini bus and a language laboratory.'

Special interview with short story writer Iman Bseir Widad Al-Barghouti

Iman Bseir won the first prize in the women's creativity contest organized by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture in 1998. She has published a collection of short stories. She wrote a play, which was performed on the stage of the British Royal Theater in London. She has been working for the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem for more than ten years, which has given her extensive contact with the suffering and difficulties faced by Palestinians.

When deception turns marriage into a for-profit institution Tayseer Jaber

The article sheds light on men who deceive their wives for material gain. Among the cases presented in the article is the case of a married woman who found out that she was divorced without her knowledge. One day, she approached the court to issue a document upon the request of the Palestinian Ministry of Education. On the paper was written the word 'divorced'. She had continued to live with her husband for seven years without being aware that he had divorced her. Without this document, it would

have been impossible for her to discover the truth. Her husband had concealed the truth from his wife because he wanted to continue to profit from her financial assets.

Restrictions imposed on women in rural areas

The article sheds light on the social restrictions imposed on women in the rural areas. Women in these areas are frequently not permitted to choose their future partner and some are deprived of their right to pursue their higher education, to work, or to leave the house unless accompanied by a family member, while at the same time men enjoy all these freedoms.

Early marriage and its negative and social impact **Shahnaz Abed Al-Razeq**

The article sheds light on the phenomenon of early marriage in Palestinian society, its dangers, consequences and negative social, health, and psychological impact on young couples. Statistics released by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) for the year 1996 revealed that 40% of females married before the age of 18 as opposed to 6.7% of males.

The article states that society, governed by its customs and traditions, plays a major role in reinforcing early marriage.

The article also focuses on the close relationship between early marriage and school dropout. The study notes that the rate of early marriage in the West Bank is higher than in the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, the rate of early marriage is 21.7% while it is 20.3% in the Gaza Strip.

Dr. Najeh Jarar, a Lecturer in Sociology at An-Najah University in Nablus, attributes the phenomenon of early marriage to economic, social and cultural factors. Families who suffer from economic hardship feel compelled to have their daughters marry at an early age to alleviate some of the family's financial burdens.

Counselor Suhad Al-Jabi from the Counseling Program at the Palestinian Working Women Society (PWWS) notes that society is responsible for reinforcing early marriage. She states that young mothers have a need for love, care and affection and many experience a psychological crisis after the first night of marriage as a result of lack of information to interpret their experience. As a result, they can develop negative feelings towards themselves and their husbands, leading to fear and anxiety.

She points out the negative psychological impact experienced by young women frequently following their first pregnancy. Women at an immature age can lack confidence and the ability to take care of their first child. 'A mother who is incapable of taking care of her first child feels frustrated. This may lead to psychological instability in family stemming from the mother's relationship with her child,' she adds.

Social Counselor Samia Taha from the PWWS argues that married young women are often not psychologically prepared for marriage, which may have a negative impact on how they fulfill their roles as wives and mothers and result in low self-esteem, especially as their husbands frequently do not understand what they are experiencing.

She notes that society intensifies the negative psychological impact experienced by divorced women by forcing them to have a second marriage before they have overcome the negative experience of their first marriage. This may lead to psychological disorders among women and significant damage to their self-esteem.

Gynecologist Mohammed Abdo calls on young women who marry before they turn 18 years to see a doctor before pregnancy in order to avoid health hazards. He notes that the fetuses of mothers under 15 and above 40 face increased risks. He also notes that postpartum depression occurs more frequently among young mothers.

Marriage of children destroys their innocence **Wisam Basyouni**

The article is about a 12-year-old boy who marries upon the request of his parents. Instead of going to school, he worked in a factory to bring money to his family. A boy of his age, however, should spend his time playing or studying, with school taking a natural place in his life. He should be focused on his dreams for future rather than facing the burdens of work and marriage at such a young age. How is it that the labor unions permit a 12-year-old child to work? Why are they silent about the problems this creates? What is the role of the child rights defense institutions in this issue? Education and play are among the basic rights of children that must not be surrendered.

He and she: The right of children to education **Laila Yousef**

Under the slogan of 'The Children's Right to Education', the Swedish government has approved a pre-school system which differs in some aspects from the kindergarten system in place in Palestine and the neighboring countries. Not only does the system teach reading and writing skills, but also skills such as drawing and play, in order to develop mental abilities and self-confidence of young children.

The pre-schools offering the new system open their doors at 6:30 am and close at 6:30 p.m., giving parents the opportunity to work while their children are in a safe environment. The family pays 30% of the tuition fees and the balance paid by the Swedish municipalities, encouraging low-income families to send their children to these schools.

Due to the importance of providing children with a family atmosphere, the Swedish government has decided to include men in the institution. Currently, there are three men and 47 women employed, 80% of whom have a university degree and the rest of whom are graduates of colleges specialized in childcare.

The number of men working in this institution remains low because of the low salaries. If the salaries are increased, it is likely that the number of men will increase because typically Swedish men value caring for children as a fundamental part of their lives. In addition, they consider working with children not only as a societal duty, but also an important sphere of sharing responsibility between men and women.

Perhaps our government and municipalities should consider establishing such institutions to care for the children in our community instead of leaving them to play in the streets where they are exposed to various dangers.

**The extraordinary concerns of an ordinary woman:
Different names but the same result
Itaf Yousef**

The article is about dowry, the property that a woman brings to her husband in marriage. Nations differ in their customs and names for phenomena, but the outcome can be the same. In Asia, this is termed 'dowry,' in parts of Africa 'lobola,' and in the Arab countries 'al-maher.' In India, if a woman wants to marry, her family has to pay the dowry to the husband. It started with the wife presenting her husband with a simple gift. But it has changed considerably. Today, the husband may expect his wife to offer him a house, car, electrical equipment or other things. If the wife cannot afford these, she cannot marry the man she loves.

The word 'dowry' does not exist in the Latin America. 'How could a wife pay her husband a price for their marriage?' said a young woman from El Salvador asks. 'I do not think that I would find a family willing to pay me money to marry their son,' says Maria from Sweden.

The names are different but the result is the same. In India, the woman will suffer if her family cannot afford the dowry. In Africa, the woman will also suffer if her husband cannot get the cows. What about Palestine? Does only the woman suffer or the man also? In many cases, dowry stands in the way of young couples if the parents demand huge amounts. Many young men cannot marry because of the high cost of dowry. Sometimes, the husband is asked to pay one dinar only. This dinar is followed by a long list of demands, such as sweets, a party, furniture, gold, clothes, electrical equipment, satellite TV, a microwave, a video recorder or other things.

The article concludes by saying, 'The time has come to give up some of our traditions that place such a huge burden on young couples. We have to give young couples the freedom to choose what is most suitable for them. If a woman had the choice, she would neither accept dowry or gold for her marriage. As a result, this would save the groom from debts that would not only affect him, but also his family life for a long time.'