

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

The Perception of Students towards Women and the Perception of Women Themselves about Their Role and Status in Lebanese Rural Communities

Diana Maddah

Public Health Lecturer, Modern University for Business and Science, Lebanon

Widyan al Shaar

Administrative Assistant, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, Lebanon

Nisreen Alwan

Dean of School of Health Sciences, Modern University for Business and Science, Lebanon

Abstract:

The paper explores the perception of students enrolled in Lebanese rural schools towards the role of women within their communities and the perceptions of women themselves about their capabilities, challenges, and realistic situation. In total, 69 in-depth interviews were conducted with mothers and students in the North, South, Bekaa, and Mount Lebanon and analyzed using thematic analysis method. The results showed that the majority of students and mothers recognized the limited role of the Lebanese woman in the rural communities and the challenges she is facing. No noticeable difference in the findings was remarkable among the different regions. The fact that students underestimate the role of their mothers in their communities is alarming. Thus, interventions that target parents and children's mindsets/skills focusing on healthy childrearing practices and women's education, social skills, and self-esteem are needed.

Keywords: Lebanese rural communities, students, mothers, perception, women's empowerment

1. Introduction

Gender inequality remains a serious obstacle to human development (UNDP, 2015). Unfortunately, women face many constraints which vary from one society to another thus limiting their role in many situations including the risk of sexual- and gender-based harassment, social or cultural confinement, inappropriate protection, the traditional gender roles and expectations, the requirements of marriage, and the burden of labor (Kapoor, 2000).

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) uses The Gender Inequality Index to measure gender inequalities in three main aspects of human development-reproductive health, empowerment (level of education), and economic status (employment) (Gaye *et al.*, 2010). More than 16% of the world's adult population lack basic literacy skills, two-thirds of whom are women (Kickbusch *et al.*, 2005). Mother's education is a key determinant of infant mortality (Baker *et al.*, 1998). In the majority of the Arab world, women's participation in the labor market is the lowest in the world and women's involvement in politics is rare too (Gohar, 2016). Although significant progress towards enrolling both genders equally in primary education has been achieved, many countries or groups within countries are still miles behind. Women who are educated are more likely to have better employment offers which are associated with better income. They are more able to afford services including health (Low and Low, 2006). The primary attachment of the role of women in the Middle East is to the concept of motherhood and domesticity (Kazemi, 2000; Mostafa, 2003). Hence, the unwillingness of women to break the traditions and to go beyond the values is hardly present (Mostafa, 2003). In addition to that, nationality in Arab countries is essentially patrilineal. For instance, Lebanese women who have foreign husbands cannot pass on their nationality to their children. This restriction of transferring the nationality leads into chain of problems. Since these children are unregistered as Lebanese citizens, they are deprived of free education, healthcare insurance, and employment in the civil service.

Kazemi (2000) emphasized on the link between Islamic values and the patriarchal structure in the Arab countries where he placed man as the only decision maker and the head of the family. Some scholars have focused on the impact of the patriarchal system on the women's increased education and employment (Moghadam, 1992; Taraki, 1995). These issues; however, require further investigation.

In Lebanon, Sidani (2002) mentioned in his study that the role of women has improved in different sectors. This was due to two main reasons: the migration of men to other countries reflected in shortages in the male working force and the

second cause is the civil war where the economic changes necessitated women's participation in the country's development. The bad economic status led families to survive if supported by dual-career couples. Despite these facts about women's employment, the indicators about women's participation in the economic, educational, and political spheres do not show positive feedback about the engagement of women (Sidani, 2016). At the education level and according to HDR (2004), the educational enrollment of women has improved in schools and universities in both public and private Lebanese education sectors. However, adults' women literacy rate is 81% as opposed to a male rate of 92.4%. At the economic level, 30.3% of women are engaged in the workforce; however, women's estimated earned income (GDP per capita) is USD 2,552 compared to USD 8,336 for males (HDR, 2004). Moreover, most Lebanese women continue to struggle to reach higher managerial levels where only 8.5% of employees are in higher administrative positions (Sidani, 2016). At the political level, women's participation in public life also remains marginal. Four percent of the Lebanese parliament members are women who lead only three out of more than 300 municipal councils (Jamali *et al.*, 2006).

Moving to the status of the Lebanese women living in the rural areas, their main role is restricted to taking care of children and bearing all the household activities contrary to the husband who is responsible for household expenses (The National Observatory for Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas, 2010-2011 unpublished). The study conducted by the National Observatory for Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas (2010-2011, unpublished) showed that the role of women is dominant in the field of agriculture especially in food-processing tasks. In addition, the results showed that the nature of women's work differed according to the region (rural versus urban), socio-economic conditions, and education level of women. For instance, the employment rate of women is 15% in Akkar Caza (North Lebanon) and 40.3% of them have confirmed the need for training on business management aspects, banking procedures, and time management skills. The study showed a similarity in the results among all the rural areas studied. According to UNDP (2013), more than 50% of women in Baalbeck-Hermel region are only housewives, 12% of them are economically active despite the poverty present in this region. As a consequence, women living in this area have been marginalized from the economic and social decision-making process. There is a similarity in women's needs in Akkar region and Baalbeck-Hermel where women are deprived from any opportunity to learn how to succeed in running their own small businesses and need tools to affirm a position and voice in the household and society (UNDP, 2013). The aspirations and dreams of the Lebanese rural women are not tailored to their own achievements but rather are related to the needs of the family (economic and social). In addition, most of the women interviewed in this study mentioned their deprivation from access to education, technology, and other resources needed for their empowerment (The National Observatory for Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas, 2010-2011 unpublished). Many NGOs have highlighted the issue of early marriage that is prevalent in the Lebanese rural areas, where girls were victims of their parents' choices and decisions (Maroun, 2012).

Despite the fact that women living in rural areas showed a high participation in the election, their representation in leadership positions is still very low (The National Observatory for Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas, 2010-2011 unpublished).

The study cited above is the only research project conducted about the status of women (economical, educational, political, and social status) living in the Lebanese rural areas and is unfortunately not published yet. However, the results show a necessity to examine empirically the perceptions and insights of women about their role in the Lebanese rural societies and ways to empower themselves. Tackling public health issues such as women's empowerment might ensure having educated generations that would develop the perception of women's values in the communities. Many studies showed that students, whose mothers are uneducated, are less likely to complete primary school compared to those whose mothers are educated (Moghadam, 2003; Roudi-Fahimi and Moghadam, 2003; Würth, 2004). This requires further investigation on the students' perception of women in their communities in order to highlight the importance of women as active agents in their societies. Educating future mothers and implementing in them the essential role of women in the development of society will create a suitable milieu for their daughters to have equal access to basic education, protect themselves from sexual exploitation, and make decisions about their future.

Given the lack of research on this topic, this study, using the ecological framework, aims to provide an investigation starting from the belief, attitude, and behavior of women concerning their capabilities and realistic situation in their rural society, moving to the perception of their children, then ending with a description of the larger environment (physical and social) in which those women are living.

The main objectives of the study are to: (1) investigate and compare the perception of students (male and female) towards the role of their mothers in their society in the visited rural areas, (2) compare perceptions between males and female students towards the role of women in the community, (3) explore the importance of women's education in rural areas in Lebanon, and (4) scrutinize and compare the perceptions of students' mothers about their own status and roles in their communities among different regions. A comparison between the perceptions of mothers about their roles and that of their children is also drawn in this study.

2. Methodology

2.1. Study Area/Setting

Four field visits were conducted in the North, South, Bekaa, and Mount Lebanon to carry out the interviews with students and their mothers from June till August 2016.

2.2. Study Design

2.2.1. Qualitative Approach

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted by adopting the phenomenological approach through collecting data from the mothers to explore the meaning of gender inequity according to rural women perceptions and to have a deep understanding of the barriers these women face in achieving their personal development.

Approval from the Institutional Research Board at the Modern University for Business and Science was obtained regarding conducting interviews for mothers and the students. All interviews were conducted in colloquial Arabic. They were carried out in a conversational style between the interviewer and the interviewee in a private room at the interviewees' residences as a mean of protecting the privacy of participants. Participation was strictly voluntary and confidential. Interviews were guided by open-ended questions and probes.

During interviews with the students (males and females), questions related to the following aspects were asked: their understanding of women's role in the community, women's rights and duties, importance of education of women, and the influence of the mother on their lives. The mothers were asked how they see their role in the house/community, goals they accomplished in their lives, goals they dream to achieve, and how their education level affected their status.

2.2.2. Sampling

Our study group was students (11-14 years old) and their mothers (35-45 years old). Students and their mothers received the consent forms from the investigators. The two consent forms were collected from the participants during the interviews. Only signed forms were considered for the study: one concerning the students signed by their parents and one from their mothers signed by them. Once participation was approved by parents, oral assents were taken from students to ensure their readability for interviews. Although the sample size was large, interviews were conducted until the thematic saturation was reached (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). In total, 34 interviews were conducted with the mothers and 35 interviews with the students (Table 1).

After responses of the interviewees were tape-recorded, transcriptions were made and filed in a private place so they can be reviewed during analysis. Transcribed information was subjected to a coding process. All codes were inserted according to each theme (Brewer, 2000). While conducting the interviews, some themes seemed to be very recurrent among almost all the interviews such as "males are the decision makers", "women cannot participate in politics", "many taboos are preventing women from development", "men are the breadwinners", and "women's role is limited to raising children". During thematic analysis, some additional themes were also added to the main themes set in the interview guides. Relevant information was compiled and analyzed for discussion as they constitute the findings of the study.

3. Findings

3.1. Students' Perspective

3.1.1. My Mother: Her Rights, Duties, and Challenges Rights

When asked about women's rights, no major differences existed between male and female students and among different regions. However, students' perspective towards women's rights differed based on priorities/preferences in the four visited rural areas. For example, all interviewees in the North stated that freedom, marriage, education, abolishing violence, and participation in political activities were among the rights to be attained for women. According to them, most of these rights are considered a demonstration of Imaan (religious faith) and should be attained in both sexes in Islam. However, this was not the case in real-life situation. Males (fathers, brothers, husbands, and older sons) were viewed as guardians over women. They were seen to have more power.

"My brother has the right to shout at me as he would like to, he knows better than me." Girl, North

Only one female student in the Bekaa agreed that women have the right to get married but refuted all other rights mentioned previously.

Children's thoughts towards women's rights varied accordingly in the South from work, participation in election, involvement in organizations, driving a car to gender equality. Only one male from Bekaa and one female from Mount Lebanon also mentioned work should be among the achieved rights.

"In the village, people gossip that a woman should not work as work is defined for men. A woman should stay at home and take care of her family." Boy, Bekaa

3.1.2. Duties

Based on the interviews conducted, the results conform to the traditional family structure where the father is the breadwinner and the mother is a caregiver staying at home. The study did not find gender and regional differences concerning women's duties.

Most students in the four rural areas agreed that raising children is one of women's duties, whereas only four students from the South considered household work, staying calm, educating children, and taking care of husband are also among the duties. This reflects a lot about the social development of young children in the Arab world. Such development is restricted to the feminine world where the father has little to do with his children in terms of care and raising. According to them, a father is the breadwinner, knows the right from wrong, does not help in household work, and is the one responsible for everything. Such findings coincide with those from a study done on UAE families where young children's social development is based on the feminine world of the mother and her female kin (Crabtree, 2007).

However, there were different opinions regarding role of women including rights, duties, outlook, and conduct. For example, a boy from the North stated that a wife is not allowed to go out without her man's permission as a mean to protect her virtue and honor. This was also agreed by three boys: one from the Bekaa and two from the South. The remaining boys from the South were against women's participation in political parties and elections. A girl from South stated that a job is not a priority for women. According to a girl from Mount Lebanon, women should be subordinated. On the other hand, some girls from South disagreed with what have been stated earlier. According to them, the role of women is crucial in their society but people do not confess that as they think that they cannot have all her rights in the society. Women are doing everything for their societies and therefore all their rights should be achieved. It is important to note that one girl from South was not able to distinguish between rights and duties which indicates absence of awareness in this matter.

Based on the aforementioned, it is clearly visible that students were aware of the rights to be attained and duties but they were jeopardized by social and cultural background.

3.1.3. Challenges

The interviewees from North, Mount Lebanon, and South shared the same thoughts regarding challenges and barriers facing women such as oppression from husband, restrictions in choosing outfit, dealing with other gender, early marriage, going out at night, continuing education, discrimination and marginalization, single handed tasks of care-giving, conservatism in religion, and lack of institutions that hire women. For example, oppression from husband was clear in the response of some students in preventing their mother from work and violating her. In addition to that, they think that no one is helping women to achieve their rights (education, politics, freedom to travel, being active in society). A female from North stated that she cannot have friends from other gender.

One male student from Bekaa considered that some men are treating their wives as slaves.

"The man has the right and he is the decision maker and the woman has to obey." Girl, Mount Lebanon

"For example, her family does not allow her to get educated or her husband prevents her from completing her education." Girl, South

From what is stated above, it is very clear that many families conform to patriarchal model where males are viewed as authoritative and females as submissive human beings. This is similar to what has been attained in a study showing University Emirati females' perspectives towards gender norms and roles within the family (Crabtree, 2007).

Constraints on women were unreservedly acknowledged in the interviews. According to them, women have inferior positions as their duties do not extend outside their home environment. Women have less freedom compared to men. This in fact agrees with the study carried out by Crabtree (2007).

3.1.4. One Family: Sharing Is Caring

Findings show that parental influence on children was clearly obvious when it comes to decision-making at home. This is an indication of the importance of parents' role in developing gender beliefs and of androgynous gender role orientation in children. Children usually learn to adopt gender roles during their childhood. Their attitudes and behaviors regarding gender roles are mainly learned at home as parents pass them to their children (Witt, 1997). Perceptions of male dominance, per se, become stronger with age as children acquire more understanding and awareness of the social world (Neff et al., 2007).

One interviewed girl from North and another from South want their future husbands to be the decision makers indicating the fatherly influential effect.

"My husband-to-be is more mature; a man is usually more mature." Girl, South

Although 15 out of 35 students from all over the selected areas considered their parents as decision makers at home, they personally think that difficult decisions are always taken by men like buying a car or a house. According to them, equity in decision-making is needed but within certain limits.

3.1.5. Role Model

Opinions regarding role models varied among and within the different regions: nine students from the North, Mount Lebanon, and South (representing the highest frequency) chose their mother to be their role model. Out of the nine students,

two boys stated that they considered their mothers as their role model because they have raised them and treated people in a good way. Four students from the North, Bekaa, and South considered their father as their role model. One boy from the South has chosen his father because he has the power and bravery.

Five students from the North, Bekaa, and Mount Lebanon considered both of their parents as their idols. This is because they encourage them to continue their studies and inspire them a lot.

Only five students from the South considered their siblings, cousins, uncles or aunts as good examples because they wanted to pursue their education like them or be like them (serving in the army) and have the freedom in doing whatever they want.

3.1.6. Empowering New Generation, Empowering Society

Despite the discrepancies in the definition of women's rights and duties among the students interviewed; the majority of students in the North, Mount Lebanon, and South stated that women can be empowered by education, freedom of thought and opinion, employment, attaining her rights, engagement in organizations and political parties, support from her husband, and establishment of institutions that protect women and children. For example, a girl from North wanted to study law in order to advocate for women's rights.

3.2. Mothers' Perspective

3.2.1. Between the Myth and the Fact: Rural Women's Rights and Challenges

In our study, all the mothers who were interviewed in the North mentioned that men and women should have the same rights for education, food security and freedom; however, this was not the case in real-life situation. This is similar to the findings of the study conducted by Kiwan et al. (2016) where women also focused more on personal and societal issues in relation to their participation in political activities and education. For them, husbands' attitudes and family limitations on mobility were raised as significant obstacles to their improvement.

Twelve mothers mentioned that a woman should not be like a man; her duties are different. Her house and children are her priority. This is similar to a study conducted in the rural areas in Egypt where the wife's perception of her main role is limited to taking care of her family (Mostafa, 2003).

"If she (mother) is not there (at home), who will be taking care of the children? A woman should not play the role of a man." Mother, South

The other three interviewees in the South defined woman as "traditional" and "modern". A traditional woman is the one who does not stand up for her rights and the modern woman is the one who advocates for her rights. In their opinion, a woman who never had the opportunity to get the education needed to be empowered would not be able to understand and fight for her rights.

"The traditional woman is not able to understand her rights in the same way the modern and free woman does." Mother, South

All the mothers who were interviewed in Bekaa stated that a woman should pursue her education and be able to express her opinion. The same results were shown among the mothers interviewed in Mount Lebanon who mentioned that a woman should get the same rights as those of a man.

The interviewees mentioned common barriers and challenges that the woman living in a rural area is facing, such as preventing her from pursuing her education and working and precluding her from participating in political and social activities. The majority of them stated that a woman living in the village is less liberal than that living in the city. Furthermore, early marriage and religion are considered as critical social factors affecting the empowerment of women.

All interviewees mentioned that religion shapes their relationship with society. As women, they are supposed to be conservative in choosing their outfit, in dealing with the other gender, in going out at night, in allowing their daughters to go to city to continue their education or fighting against violence. Such topics are considered as taboo.

This in fact contradicts openly religious (Islamic) values that in deed raise the status of females in their societies. This is similar to the findings found in a study conducted by Kiwan et al. (2016) where women mentioned that religion is considered as a societal obstacle for their empowerment.

The same results in Indonesia were found by Tambunan (2009). He mentioned that women are still facing many social, cultural, and religious taboos in the rural areas in Indonesia that deny them any access to higher education especially after marriage.

"From the point of view of religion, girls should only spend the night at home and not in any other place." Mother, Bekaa

Fifteen mothers mentioned that they are prevented from working or from continuing their studies as their husbands do not accept that. The majority mentioned that a woman cannot go out of her house without her husband's approval. In three interviews, the mothers stated that their husbands would like to have more than four children, and they considered a woman's main role is raising her children and taking care of her house.

"My husband does not like that (to work). He wants me to stay at home with my children. I would not object because I do not want to destroy my family." Mother, Mount Lebanon

The economic condition of the family as well as education level of the parents or husbands are playing a crucial role in overcoming this traditional thinking in the rural society. The better the economic condition and the education of the family, the less is the influence of the traditional thinking in their attitudes towards women in acquiring better education (El Khaled et al., 2016). Education of girls affects the family health reducing infant mortality and changing reproductive behavior. This is associated with an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem. Educated women are more likely to stand up for themselves, participate in the labor force, and seek healthcare for themselves and their children (Douki et al., 2007).

“Tradition and culture are playing a crucial role in preventing women from reaching their goals in the rural areas.”
Mother, South

As for raising children, the majority mentioned that raising a boy is different than raising a girl. A girl is not allowed to discuss or learn about some topics, like sex.

Five women mentioned that they are not allowed to express their opinion. They are oppressed by their husbands:

“Here, man is dominant. He does not even give his wife a chance to talk and express her point of view.” Mother, South
Many mothers stated that early marriage prevented them from pursuing their education. However, three interviewees mentioned that they would encourage early marriage for their daughters if the groom is wealthy. They have linked their oppression to their low socio-economic status.

As for the political participation, the problem is critical as the majority of the mothers mentioned that they cannot even elect without the permission of their husbands. If they want to participate in the election, they should obey their husbands' decisions on whom to elect. This is in agreement with Subrahmanian's study (2005) which mentioned that worldwide participation of women in the political decisions structures remains insignificant. According to Kiwan et al. (2016), politics is seen to be a masculine activity associated with the authoritarian status of man.

3.2.2. Rural Women's Role in Society

Based on the conducted interviews, all mothers stated that their main role in society is to support the family, raise the children, and encourage them to continue their studies. This is similar to a study conducted in the Asian developing countries which stated that women remain far behind men in enjoying freedom and other basic human rights (Tambunan, 2009).

“I am sacrificing many things for my children's sake...” Mother, North

Sixteen out of 34 women attained at least first year of University and whom only five are working as teachers and are socially active in social organizations and one is helping her husband in agriculture. The others did not attain University degree, did not work, and they were not socially active. This is due to the lack of any social organization in their communities, lack of family support from the parents' or husband's side, and being busy with household chores:

“My dad had a traditional mentality, to be educated or not-educated, it does not matter...” Mother, North

“He (husband) asked me to leave my University...I reached first year of University and that's it. No need for more education.” Mother, Mount Lebanon

All the working mothers mentioned that a balance between work and family is needed. Therefore, in addition to their job, women remain, above all, housewives and mothers who are far more involved than fathers in the household needs and for caring for children. However, their work has a positive impact on their children. Being working mothers affect their daughters' understanding of their role as females.

3.2.3. Satisfied? Who Can Tell?

Eleven women were not satisfied with their current status due to their inability to continue their education and work because of marriage and children. They want to be empowered and active in social life. Six mothers said that they are satisfied, two of them mentioned that even if they are not well-educated, they can see their ambition through their children's achievements. Four were satisfied as they were working and participating in some organizations. The other 17 did not answer this question.

3.2.4. Empowering Woman, Empowering Society

Empowerment is defined as having control over the choices and issues that affect one's life. It means having representation in decision-making bodies (where to live, whom to marry, having children, number of children, freedom of movement, choice of friends, etc.) and management over the distribution of resources. Women should be empowered by gaining the skills and self-confidence to develop themselves and challenging existing male-dominated power structures in order to participate fully as equals in their families, communities, and countries (Rani and Yadeta, 2016).

According to the interviewed women in our study, a woman should be powerful. This could happen only through education; especially before marriage. Many expressed their refuse of early marriage. Women should work and be financially independent. An improvement in economic conditions would improve the standard of living of women, but real change would require a transformation of the attitudes of governments and men regarding women (Rani and Yadeta, 2016).

“It is very important to me to be a working lady who is able to take care of her family and build a successful profession, as well. It is much more important than spending time at home with other women gossiping. It matters to me to be an effective woman inside and outside home.” Mother, North

In addition, many of them suggested solutions to change the gender inequity through insisting on educating their girls and helping them move to the city to continue their studies. According to the findings of the study conducted by El Khaled et al. (2016), the best way to provide a brighter future for women in Middle East, in general, and Lebanon in particular is through the improvement of their education level.

The majority of the interviewed women added that religion should not be considered as an obstacle in the way of development and success. On the contrary, religion should be a way to build a better perspective of life. They believe that women should be empowered by attending and participating in educational workshops. Many social organizations that support and advocate for women's rights should be launched. A woman should be given the chance to work and build her own future. According to the Women's Information Centre (2005), one of the most important approaches to supporting women's empowerment is their engagement in the political activities which in turn requires a strong governance which focuses on the development of the civil society. Women should be involved in NGOs and women's movements (Women's Information Centre, 2005).

The interviewed women who believe in woman's empowerment added that the latter should be the aim of every member in the society because her success supports their success. Men should change the way they view women. The integration of men in any woman empowerment strategy has been discussed in Kiwan et al. (2016) study where a group of women highlighted the importance of involving men in the initiatives that lead to women's empowerment.

"He (man) always see woman as a weak person, she cannot do anything." Mother, Bekaa

4. Conclusions

The findings revealed no major differences existing between male and female students and their mothers regarding their rights, duties, and challenges faced. No noticeable differences were also remarkable among different regions. Freedom, marriage, education, abolishing violence, work, and participation in political and social activities are among women's rights cited by the majority of the interviewees (mothers and students). Despite that, the majority of students and mothers recognized the limited role of the Lebanese woman in the rural communities and the challenges she is facing (early marriage, restricted/no access to education, no access to social organizations, lack of work opportunities, cultural beliefs, and religious constraints, etc.). Males were viewed as authoritative and female as submissive human beings especially when women are economically dependent on them. Women's role is restricted to raising and educating children and household work. Such challenges can impede the pace of women's empowerment. It is quite obvious that both students and mothers underestimate the crucial role that women can play in their societies.

Women's empowerment requires an improvement in the educational and social skills and self-esteem of the woman in her rural society. The fact that students underestimate the role of their mothers in their communities is alarming. Therefore, adopting healthy childrearing practices at early age is crucial to ensure the presence of a generation who believes in the importance of the role that a woman might play in her society. Interventions that target parents and children's mindsets and skills and that focus on women's empowerment are needed.

5. Policy Recommendations

The findings of this study put forth several recommendations for future interventions tackling women's empowerment at all the levels of the ecological framework. As revealed in this research study, most students are imitating and inheriting the culture and traditions of the environment where they live and this will prohibit the empowerment of women and their development from generation to generation. Such findings indicate the urgency of designing an intervention for students.

Schools are the best place to spread knowledge about women's rights and their empowerment. This could be done through a series of workshops and leadership sessions that integrate both female and male students; in addition, to some activities that require the presence of their parents. Those workshops and sessions should tackle knowledge about women's rights (education, work, right to express their opinions, etc.) and the skills needed to transform this knowledge into practice. Students will be trained to have a positive attitude towards women's empowerment and increase in their self-efficacy to improve their quality of life.

Based on the findings of this study, more substantial training workshops focusing on educational skills (literacy and numeracy), social skills (stress and time management), and economical knowledge and skills (how to run small businesses) are needed. Moreover, men should be integrated in the workshops and awareness sessions should be conducted about communication, negotiation skills, and economic justice. Communication and negotiation skills are essential to encourage women to be part of the decision making at home and to solve problems with her parents, husband or other family members. Participation of women in art activities and theater might also help her in expressing herself.

In addition to that, economic independence of women is needed to decrease their subordination to their husbands who are considered as breadwinners. Women might face many challenges such as the limited number of job opportunities in the rural areas and the cultural obstacles of going to the city to work. For this reason, training and encouraging Lebanese rural women to start a social enterprise and development projects are needed. This is feasible with the support of many NGOs that are giving women small loans to start their initiatives. The political participation of women in the local society (municipal level) also requires further support from the communities in general and the husbands in particular.

In this study, an intervention was conducted at the South region where the highest number of interviews were carried out. Awareness sessions that tackle women's rights, self-efficacy, economic justice, and empowerment were organized and divided into two parts, the first targeted women residing in the town and the second addressed young school students.

6. Acknowledgements

This research study is funded by the "Knowledge is Power (KIP)" project by the American University of Beirut, Lebanon. Many thanks are attributed to the Research Office at the Modern University for Business and Science, Lebanon for all the facilities and help offered during this work.

7. References

- i. Baker, D. W., Parker, R. M., Williams, M. V., & Clark, W. S. (1998). Health Literacy and the Risk of Hospital Admission. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 13(12), 791-798. doi:10.1046/j.1525-1497.1998.00242.x.
- ii. Brewer, J. D. (2000). *Ethnography*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- iii. Crabtree, S. (2007). Culture, Gender, and the Influence of Social Change amongst Emirati Families in the United Arab Emirates. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 38(4), 575-587.
- iv. Douki, S., Zineb, S. B., Nacef, F., & Halbreich, U. (2007). Women's Mental health in the Muslim World: Cultural, Religious, and Social Issues. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 102(1), 177-189.
- v. El Khaled, D., Novas, N., Gázquez, J. A., García, R. M., & Agugliaro, F. R. M. (2016). The Women Education in Lebanon: Lessons for Middle East. *Espiral: Estudios sobre Estado y Sociedad*, 9(18), 27-36.
- vi. Gaye, A., Klugman, J., Kovacevic, M., Twigg, S., & Zambrano, E. (2010). Measuring Key Disparities in Human Development: The Gender Inequality Index. *Human Development Research Paper*, 46, 1-41. Retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2010/papers/HDRP_2010_46.pdf
- vii. Gohar, A. (2014, March). Women empowerment via ethical fashion. Inter Press Service News Agency. Retrieved from <http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/03/women-empowerment-via-ethical-fashion/>
- viii. HDR. (2004). *Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*. Human Development Report, United Nations Development Programme, New York.
- ix. Jamali, D., Safieddine, A., & Daouk, M. (2006). The Glass Ceiling: Some Positive Trends from the Lebanese Banking Sector. *Women in Management Review*, 21(8), 625-642.
- x. Kapoor, S. (2000). Domestic Violence against Women and Girls. *Innocenti Digest* 6, 1-25. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/digest6e.pdf>
- xi. Kazemi, F. (2000). Gender, Islam, and Politics. *Social Research*, 67(2), 455-474.
- xii. Kickbusch I, Wait S, & Maag, D. (2005). *Navigating Health: The Role of Health Literacy*. Alliance for Health and the Future, International Longevity Centre: UK. URL: <http://www.ilonakickbusch.com/health-literacy/NavigatingHealth.pdf>
- xiii. Kiwan, D., Farah, M., Annan, R., & Jaber, H. (2016). *Women's Participation and Leadership in Lebanon, Jordan and Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Moving from Individual to Collective Change*. Oxfam, GB. Retrieved from <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/womens-participation-and-leadership-in-lebanon-jordan-and-kurdistan-region-of-i-604070>
- xiv. Leedy, P., & Ormrod, J. (2005). *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (8th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- xv. Low, B. J., & Low, M.D. (2006). Education and Education Policy as Social Determinants of Health. *Virtual Supervisor*, 8(11), 756-761.
- xvi. Maroun, S. (2012, March). Marriage is not always what women want in rural Lebanon. *World Vision in Lebanon*. Retrieved from <http://www.wvi.org/lebanon/article/marriage-not-always-what-women-want-rural-lebanon>
- xvii. Moghadam, V. (1992). Women, Employment and Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa. In Kahne, H. and Giele, J. (Eds), *Women's Work, Women's Lives: The Continuing Struggle Worldwide* (pp. 87-116). Boulder, CO: West Press.
- xviii. Moghadam, V. (2003). *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (2nd ed.). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- xix. Mostafa, M. M. (2003). Attitudes towards Women who Work in Egypt. *Women in Management Review*, 18(5), 252-266.
- xx. Neff, K., Cooper, C., & Woodruff, A. (2007). Children's and Adolescents' Developing Perceptions of Gender Inequality. *Social Development*, 16(4), 682-699.
- xxi. Rani, D. L. & Yadeta, D. B. (2016). Empowerment of Rural Women through Cooperative: A Case of Saving and Credit Cooperative Society of Dendi District, Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 2(8), 367-373.
- xxii. Roudi-Fahimi, F. & Moghadam, V. (2003). *Empowering women, developing society: female education in the Middle East and North Africa*. Population Reference Bureau, Washington. Retrieved from <http://www.prb.org/pdf/EmpoweringWomeninMENA.pdf>
- xxiii. Sidani, Y. (2002). Management in Lebanon. In *International Encyclopedia of Business and Management* (2nd ed., pp. 397-802). Thomson Learning.

- xxiv. Sidani, Y. M. (2016). Working Women in Arab Countries: A Case for Cautious Optimism. In Handbook on Well-Being of Working Women (pp. 689-701). Springer.
- xxv. Subrahmanian, R. (2005). Gender Equality in Education: Definitions and Measurements. International Journal of Educational Development, 25(4), 395-407.
- xxvi. Tambunan, T. (2009). Women Entrepreneurship in Asian Developing Countries: Their Development and Main Constraints. Journal of Development and Agricultural Economics, 1(2), 27-40.
- xxvii. Taraki, L. (1995). Islam is the Solution: Jordanian Islamists and the dilemma of the modern woman. The British Journal of Sociology, 46(4), 643-661.
- xxviii. UNDP. (2013). ART GOLD Bekaa. Retrieved from <https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/LBN/ART GOLD Bekaa PD 2013-2015.pdf>
- xxix. UNDP. (2015). Work for Human Development. New York. Retrieved from http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report_0.pdf
- xxx. UNESCO. (2013). Adult and Youth literacy: National, Regional and Global Trends, 1985-2015. Retrieved from <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/literacy-statistics-trends-1985-2015.pdf>.
- xxxi. Witt, S. (1997). Parental Influence on Children's Socialization to Gender Roles. Adolescence, 32(126), 253-259.
- xxxii. Würth, A. (2004). Women's Rights in the Arab World: Overview of the Status of Women in Family Law with Special Reference to the Influence of Islamic Factors. Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ). Retrieved from <http://menengage.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/womens-rights-arab-world-2008.pdf>
- xxxiii. Women's Information Centre(2005). Training Manual for Gender Planning. Ministry of Community Development Gender and Children, Tanzania.

Appendix

Region	Number of Mothers	Number of Students	
		Females	Males
North	4	6	4
Bekaa	3	1	2
Mount Lebanon	12	5	1
South	15	12	4
Total	34	24	11

Table 1: The Number of Interviewees (Mothers And Students) Involved in the Study in the Different Sampled Regions