THE DETERMINANTS OF FEMALE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN JORDAN

by

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Awareness of the importance of women's contributions to the development process, both as beneficiaries and as participants, has drawn increasing attention from scholars, planners and local and international organizations during the last two decades. These contributions can be thought of chiefly in economic and demographic terms, as well as in terms of benefits to the women themselves. In terms of economic contribution, the importance of women's employment would seem to be obvious. In countries where women's employment is already widespread, women are directly responsible for a major share of economic output, and, as earners, help raise many families out of poverty. In countries where the level of women's participation in the paid labor force is still low, they represent an underutilized resource whose fuller utilization could go a long ways toward raising output levels. Increases in education are also important because more educated women workers have much higher levels of productivity and earnings.

In the population field, it has become common to talk about the demographic contribution of raising women's status. Many authors have discussed how raising the status of women can contribute to the reestablishment of demographic balance at lower levels of both fertility and infant and child mortality. Women's status is commonly measured in terms
of female educational attainment and women’s share of paid employment (Buvinic, 1976; Zurayk 1979). It is argued that more highly educated women, especially those who work outside the home, are likely to have fewer, but healthier and better-educated children, which contributes to the social development of the society and eases the burden of pressure on limited national resources (Standing, 1978; UN, 1986; Farooq and DeGraff, 1988). Thus, the World Population of Action adopted at the 1974 World Population Conference in Bucharest insisted on the need for women to have equal opportunity in both education and employment so as to lower fertility and achieve development goals. The International Conference on Population, held in Mexico City in 1984, stressed in stronger tone the recommendation of the 1974 Conference to better integrate women as full participants in the process of development (UN, 1987).

Many scholars consider woman’s work to be one of the major factors raising women’s social and economic status in society. For example,

1 While women’s education is one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of lower risk of infant and child mortality (Cochrane et. al. 1980), the health implications of women’s work outside the home are much less clear-cut. The positive effect of increased income may be cancelled by the negative effect of neglect of children. According to Leslie (1989), any negative effects are most likely to be observed for very low-income women in nuclear families who lack adequate assistance in taking care of their children.

2 There is no consensus among scholars regarding the definition and the indicators of women status. In addition there is disagreement on the factors that suppress the opportunities for women and the way to improve and enhance women status (Curtin, 1982; Mason, 1984 and 1986). Curtin states that "theoretically, women’s status has been defined as the degree of women's access to (and control over) material resources (including food, income, land and other forms of wealth) and to social resources (including knowledge, power, and prestige) within the family, in the community and society at large. Mason (1986) has documented several indicators of female status commonly used in literature. These indicators can be grouped into three categories: demographic, kinship-family, and economic indicators. The demographic indicators include female age at marriage, average husband-wife age difference, and parents’ preferences for male children. The kinship-family indicators are exemplified by, among others, purdah (female seclusion), female property inheritance, patrilocal post-marital residence, arranged marriage, male feeding priority, and egalitarianism of the husband-wife relationship. Finally, female
Zurayk (1979) considers female participation in the labor force to be the main indicator of the changing role of women in Middle Eastern societies. She assumes that women who work outside the home gain economic independence that will have an impact on all aspects of their lives. Similarly, Standing (1978) asserts that the increase in female labor force participation should enhance women's socioeconomic independence and power in family decision-making processes. Moreover, the two indicators of women's status (women's education and labor force participation) interact with each other in a mutually beneficial way. More educated women are more likely to obtain satisfactory employment, and young women are more likely to remain in school if it is expected that they will bring in an income.

Determinants of female labor force participation rates include several cultural, demographic, and socioeconomic factors. Social and cultural factors are expected to be a major factors in determining women labor force status. However, there is a dearth of information with respect to the elements of cultural and attitudinal aspects of the people regarding female work. In particular there has been no comprehensive study on the determinants of female labor force participation. Therefore, with the available data, we are trying to explore the magnitude and the direction of the factors that affect women's decision to work.

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According to Curtin (1982) there are limitations for using women's levels of education and labor force participation rates as indicators of women's status. He states that 'in societies where alternative sources of child care are almost universally available to mothers through the extended family, labor force participation of mothers may not be a sexist issue. Likewise, in societies with a high percentage of illiterates, measures of status based on education assign different ranking only to those few who are literate. The illiterate majority is given one low status ranking, when in fact these persons have different rankings relative to each other.'
Women’s work for pay outside the home is typically observed to rise with the process of socioeconomic development. Similarly, the level of fertility falls as living standards rise. However, neither variable is necessarily related to economic variables in any close or rigid pattern, whether across societies or within a society across time.

Jordan is characterized by a very high birth rate and a very low female labor force participation rate, despite having social and economic conditions well above those of the majority of developing countries. This study focuses on the individual correlates of female labor force participation in Jordan and discusses implications for policies to integrate Jordan’s women more effectively into the work force.

Jordan has a high labor force growth rate that exceeds its population growth, 6.0 per cent and 4.5 per cent respectively, (World Bank, 1986). The high labor force growth rate and the increase in its size makes Jordan face a major problem of providing employment for new labor entrants, especially the educated ones. Jordan has a high unemployment rate in the range of 8-9 per cent (Department of statistics, Jordan, 1984) and this is expected to become aggravated during the coming years. This does not even take into account the problem of underemployment.

Jordan has a low crude labor force participation rate (total labor force/total population), about 20 per cent in 1982 (DOS, 1984). In 1980, among 159 countries, Jordan was ranked 158 in respect to percentage of economically active population (Kurian, 1984). The male crude labor force participation (male labor force divided by the total male population) rate for 1982 is 34.6 per cent compared with 4.3 per cent for female (Department of Statistics). The labor force participation rate of those aged 15 years and
above is 39.4. This relatively low ratio is due to the high ratio of young people to adults and the low female labor force participation rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.1</th>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1952</th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1979</th>
<th>1985</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crude LFPR</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crude male LFPR</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crude female LFPR</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LFPR males 15+</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>67.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>LFPR female 15+</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>%Female labor of total labor force</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source:

In 1982, female labor force participation was 8.4 per cent of those women aged 15 years and above compared to 67.8 per cent for men in the same age group (Table 1.1). Jordan was ranked in the bottom 10 of 144 countries in respect to the 1980 share of female labor in the total labor force (Kurian, 1984). The share of female labor force in the total labor force in 1982 in Jordan is about 10 per cent (Table 1.1) compared to 32 per cent in developing countries and 40 per cent in developed countries in 1980 (Farooq, 1986).

In spite of remarkable advances in the socioeconomic setting and great improvement in the status of women, Jordan still has one of the