MODERNIZATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN
FAMILY LIFE IN JORDAN
1961-1981

FAHMI SALIM GHAZWI
Alwahadna, Jordan

B.A., University of Alexandria, Egypt
M.A., University of Alexandria, Egypt

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the process of social changes in family life in Jordan; describes and explains the nature of the traditional family; and analyzes the effect of modernization on Jordanian family life as well as examines the role of religion as it relates to the mode of life and how it has set certain boundaries around the developing family system in the process of modernization. Social changes in the Jordanian family are determined by comparing the current social conditions to those of the past, namely those of 1981 and those of 1961. The principal units of comparison are those of social institutions such as the family, religious beliefs, and modernization in 1961 as contrasted to those of today. Primary empirical evidence from Jordanian government documents has been used as well as data from interviews of 250 heads of households, randomly selected from two cities and one village for gathering data and information on family patterns and religious beliefs. Jordan, similar to other Third World countries, is a society identified by rapid change from a conservative to a more modern one. As a result of the process of modernization, family patterns in Jordan are complex: Part of the family is traditional and part of it is modern. Therefore, although the development toward modernization may be emphasized, the structure of the family pattern is likely to evolve and the family unit may have a varied form. On the other hand, available evidence indicates that religion has taken a position in Jordan leading
to some useful insight into the nature of the family structure. Certain aspects of family life remain traditional as a result of religious beliefs such as duration of marriage, polygamy, and remarriage after divorce. Moreover, family ties remain important in the organization of everyday life. In contrast, the process of modernization has had a great effect on part of the family structure and, as a consequence, on the nation as a whole.

As for the future, one might ask the following question: Do the developing traits and characteristics indicate that Jordanian society is beginning to move toward modernization in family behavior. The answer at the present time cannot be affirmative. The immediate prospect is a continued adaption leading to a complex family unit that incorporates the traditional pattern as well as the borrowed pattern of Western life.