

Attitudes of Arab Immigrants toward Welfare

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Abstract: *The effects of welfare assistance and dependency on family structure in the United States has been discussed extensively in regard to different ethnic groups, particularly African Americans, Hispanics, and Anglo-Americans.^[1] What is its effect on Arab American families? In most countries of the Middle East, extended family relations rather than welfare has been the traditional means of support, and in previous years in the Dearborn immigrant working class Arab community, welfare was not common or accepted. Many who were eligible in those days did not have access to it because of language and transportation problems, or they felt shame for their family if they accepted it. However, this pattern is changing, with more persons accepting it in this community.*

Keywords: *American, Arab Immigrants, the Middle East, Welfare*

1. Introduction

The purpose of my study was to find if and how attitudes have changed and if outside income, given often to women, has affected gender roles, as it has in other American ethnic groups. A major consideration in this regard is that most families in the United States are of a bilateral kinship model and the patrilineal nature of the Arab family present different adaptations.

Most studies of poor urban African Americans, for whom welfare has interacted with racism, show that discrimination of a direct and indirect form, such as the exit of jobs from the inner cities and poor education, helped to displace husbands from needy families, or at least the husbands were not there when case workers came around. Wilson finds that only one-fourth of blacks in inner-city neighborhoods are husband-wife families, a figure that may drop to 15 percent in the lowest income areas. This rate compares with one-half of Puerto Rican and white families. However, three-fourths of Mexican families have two parents, even though many are very poor.^[2]

The context affecting urban African-American families also include the fact that many men are jailed, murdered, or handicapped, and some use drug peddling as an economic alternative. These developments among poor urban African Americans developed primarily in the last 40 years, before which 75 percent of the black male population had full-time jobs, whereas it is now 48 percent. Among other economic factors, outsourcing and downsizing by corporations has contributed to unemployment or part time employment for urban and nonurban persons. However, just because they are not the nuclear family of husband wife-kids does not imply that many black welfare families do not have extended kin networks of some design. Stack has vividly portrayed the strong kin and nonkin networks of reciprocity, especially by women, that evolved in black families on welfare.^[3] In another important study, Browner and Lewin found a role shift among Mexican-American families, in which the women began to depend on their children and shift their future hopes to them rather than their husbands.^[4]

There are different reactions to welfare among ethnic groups because of family structure, norms, and values in racial and economic contexts in this country and in their home countries. It is an interactive process. What are the tendencies in the patrilineally based families of poor Arabs?

This study looked at 57 Arab immigrant women and men on welfare in 1993 to examine the following issues: their demographics and characteristics; why they are on welfare; attitudes toward being on welfare (i.e., shame or acceptance) and whether religion affects these attitudes;^[5] attitudes toward marital relations in the home in relation to welfare (i.e., relative power of women and men); and their job history, attitudes toward child care outside the home, and their future hopes. The study examined significant differences between men and women and between the two major communities in the area, the Lebanese and Yemeni.

2. Norms and Values of the Arab Patrilineal Family

Immigrants may receive their work permits after entering and receiving their green cards, but cannot receive welfare, except for medicaid, for 3 years after entering the country. Their sponsor is required to support them, but this regulation has not been strongly enforced. Persons can work up to 100 hours each month and still be eligible. In 1996, Michigan lifted this limit and instituted a program called "work first" in 1996, which stated that recipients work or attend classes 20 hours each week, and more recently required 30 hours.^[6] It also mandates that persons must get a job after 2 years of benefits and that a family receives no more than a total of 5 years of benefits. On the other hand, those who entered on refugee status were entitled to receive welfare benefits immediately on entry before 1996. The new laws place restrictions, such as a single person can receive only 8 months of benefits. States have been given some leeway on deciding some issues and may give up to 20 percent waivers for some conditions.^[7] It is fair to say that there is much confusion regarding the effects of the reform provisions. This study was done before the 1996 bill was passed, and attitudes reflect earlier regulations.

The new restrictions on welfare reflect feelings of a shrinking job market and feelings by employed persons that welfare has generated a perpetual welfare class, many of whom are cheating and many of whom are foreigners. But there is also evidence that many persons go on and off welfare between jobs,^[8] and Julian Simon, an economist at the University of Maryland, found that each foreign-born worker contributes \$2,500 per year more in taxes than he uses in services.^[9]

What does patrilineal descent involve? How is it different from bilateral descent? In patrilineal and matrilineal descent groups, one is born into a preexisting group defined by gender. It is not something one chooses; the structure exists. Members have certain obligations to particular people because of the group into which they are born. In a patrilineal system, this group is traced through males but includes females; in a matrilineal system, it is traced through females but includes males. Patrilineality does not mean that you do not have obligations to your mother's family, but it does indicate that the father's family is primary, and vice versa for a matrilineal system. In the Detroit area, these patrilineal kin groups often operate as corporate groups to monopolize chains of small shops, known locally as party stores.

Most North American families originating from Europe trace descent in a bilateral fashion through mother and father indefinitely. It is more individually centered because there is no preexisting defined group. It is a flexible model, and extended kin are defined more by choice than assignment. It usually varies and is changeable, depending on who you live near, who you like or do not like, or who has money or does not, and you have the option of not relating to them at all in the American industrial capitalist system.

Patrilineality and patriarchy are distinct, with the latter designating male power or control, not descent or kinship, and one can have patriarchy or male control in bilateral families in the United States. However, control of property in the patriline and patrilocality, in which males of the patriline live near each other, acts to concentrate male members of Arab families economically or politically, often bringing added male power to the family. If women are separated from their patriline, they risk losing power. Women share the power of a strong patriline and bring that power to their marriage. This is a point seldom understood by Westerners regarding the role of women.

In addition to descent factoring, the extended rather than the nuclear family model is seen among Arabs culturally, whereas among many in the capitalist industrial U.S. system, extensive kin relations have sometimes broken down. In migration situations, males and females are sometimes separated from their families, but it is usually temporary. Strong attempts are made at reconstruction of villages such as Bint Jbail and Tibnine. Cultural attitudes that accompany patrilineality and relate to employment include a strong mandate in Arab and Islamic cultures for husbands to be responsible for support of the family. It is commonly given as a reason for sons getting twice the inheritance of daughters among Muslims and for supporting a son's education over a daughter's. Among a wife's guarantees in Islam is one that she should not be forced to work outside the home. The influence of Islam has risen in the community, evidenced by the proliferation of mosques from two major ones to a one-half dozen new ones in the past ten years. Islamic dress by women is also evident to a much greater degree than previously, primarily because of the immigration of southern Lebanese Shi'a and their imams.

Economic class is also important in the consideration of welfare and women's employment. I previously examined what I called the "rich peasant" attitude of men who feel that, when they get enough money, their wives should not "have to work"; it shames men's honor. I witnessed this in villages in the Middle East and in Dearborn.^[10] This attitude is not limited to Muslims or Arabs but is shared with many around the world.^[11]

There are cultural, economic, and political barriers to Arab women gaining power through employment. On the other hand, education is seen as a good thing, and families often support education for daughters, in some cases mainly to increase their chances for an educated husband. Whatever the motive, education can be used by women to gain entrance to more economic control in the family.

3. The Dearborn Community

The Dearborn area has been an entry point for Muslims from the Arab world for the last one-half century.^[12] It has recently expanded, and its population of 18,000 represents approximately 20 percent of the population of Dearborn compared with 6 percent twenty years ago. In a previous article,^[13] I observed that welfare had increased in the community and was caused by three primary factors. First, a depression in the auto industry in the early 1980s forced many layoffs and was followed by increased automation and out-sourcing, thereby reducing the need for unskilled laborers. We see a plurality of the jobs (35 percent) reported by men in this sample who work at gas stations, while only 23 percent worked for the big three auto companies. The largest portion wanted to work in the auto factories.

The second reason was the simultaneous infusion into the area of persons especially from Lebanon, but also from Yemen and Palestine, because of the conflicts in their homelands. The Lebanese civil war, which lasted for sixteen years from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, and the war with Israel in the 1980s, which resulted in occupation of part of south Lebanon, greatly affected the southern Lebanese Shi'a. Some of their villages such as Bint Jbail are in occupied territory today. Immigration rules give first priority to nuclear family relatives, and there is an existing large ethnic community in Dearborn full of relatives to join.

A third reason is the existence of a social service center, the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS), located in the heart of the community and staffed by bilingual persons. Before the 1970s, assistance was of a limited nature for Arab immigrants because of lack of Arabic-speaking social workers and the distances necessary to travel to social agencies. ACCESS celebrated its 27th anniversary in 1998, and during that time, it has developed from a storefront staffed mainly by volunteers with a \$20,000 budget to the current organization with 120 full-time staff members who operate in six buildings, and it has a \$4.2 million budget.^[14]

As with others on welfare, there is some dishonesty in this community, such as putting a wife on welfare while the husband continues to work above the low-income requirement or, less frequently, getting or reporting a separation or divorce for the sake of welfare and using two addresses while living together.^[15] Because of these irregularities and misuses, nonwelfare persons in the community often looked down on all welfare persons. This is particularly true of those of earlier generations among the Arab community who felt they had worked and not taken welfare.

The low income of most of the Center's clients (75 percent of the clients are among those receiving \$5,000 to \$10,000 annually) indicates that most are struggling economically.^[16] Welfare is merely another strategy of survival in an unstable employment market for persons who often have limited skills and have suffered upheavals in their countries of origin. A manager of welfare assistance at ACCESS said that about one-half of the welfare claims listed women as the head of the household in 1996.

The study included more women than men, and members were not of the same families.^[17] It was a snowball sample, one in which interviewees suggested other persons or were known by the interviewers to be on welfare. The sensitive nature of this topic made a random sample impractical. The participants were not asked in whose name the welfare came for the same reason. The study included Lebanese (64 percent) and Yemeni (35 percent), in approximate relation to their number in the community.

3.1. Demographics and Reasons for Being on Welfare

In contrast to previous studies, I found very few of the Lebanese in this sample came from a rural peasant background (13 percent of the women and 14 percent of the men). This is probably because their roots are in south Lebanon, but they or their parents were forced to flee the area to larger cities such as Beirut during the wars and Israeli bombings of the last 20 years. Among Yemenis, 43 percent of the women and 60 percent of the men still list their father's occupation as a peasant and their origins as rural.

All but one of the participants were born abroad, and most of those interviewed had been in the United States ten to fifteen years (38 percent). Men had been here on average longer than women. Fortyseven percent of women were in their twenties, and 77 percent of men were in their thirties. Significantly, only

one person had a parent on welfare. They do not fall into the generational welfare patterns so often discussed publicly.

The educational skills and work experiences of the women and men in this sample were low, with approximately one-third never having been to school and one-third receiving only up to six years of education. A very high percentage of each group said that they spoke, read, and wrote English, but this does not necessarily attest to their level of fluency. The Yemeni women had scores higher than the Lebanese men or women and higher than Yemeni men, apparently reflecting the fact that four times as many Yemeni women reported taking English classes at ACCESS than Lebanese women (64 versus 15 percent). All said they spoke Arabic, and one-half of each category said they could read or write it. Two-thirds of the women had never ever been employed, and one-third of the men had not. It appears that there are limitations in their backgrounds for finding a job easily. One benefit of learning English is to get a driver's license, which for women gives them a new-found independence, according to workers at ACCESS.

Two-thirds of the women are married, 16 percent divorced, 5 percent separated, and 9 percent widowed. All the men interviewed were married. Divorce does not carry the stigma for Yemeni that it does for Levantine women, and there were more divorced Yemeni than Lebanese. I would caution against seeing divorce as a sign of women's freedom, because the divorce may be influenced more by their fathers or their husbands than by the women themselves. The average number of children they had was 3.5 (72 percent said they had between one and four, and 38 percent said they had between five and ten). This is higher than the national average, and as with other low-income minorities, children are seen as a safety net for the future. The provisions of welfare that assist those with more children do not slow this trend. Seventy-seven percent of the women and 92 percent of the men said their children lived with them. Children who did not live with them lived in Lebanon or Yemen.

3.2. Reasons for Migrating to the United States

Seventy percent of the women said they came to the United States to accompany their husbands or parents, whereas the major reasons for men's migration were the war (38 percent) and employment possibilities (23 percent). Many reasons were given for being on welfare. Sixty-seven percent of women and 81 percent of men were on Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), with about 20 percent on General Assistance. (General Assistance was eliminated in Michigan after this study.) Women reported that their husbands had lost their jobs (34 percent) or just did not have enough income. About one-fourth mentioned health reasons, including medical insurance (14 percent) and illnesses (12 percent). The high price of medical care was seen as a justifiable reason, and they often mentioned their children in this regard. Fourteen percent reported divorce, 10 percent reported being separated, 5 percent said the reason was migration, and 5 percent mentioned that their sponsor withdrew. A 14-percent divorce rate is low for those dealing with American welfare clients nationally, but Zogby reported 4.5 percent for all U.S. Arabs.^[18] Sixty-four percent of the men indicated they received welfare because they lost their jobs or had no income, and about 30 percent attributed it to a need for health insurance (23 percent) or to illness (8 percent).

Overall, most men and women stated that they obtained welfare because of the lack of jobs or low incomes; fewer claimed reasons of health care. Most are married, one-fourth of the women indicated divorce or separation, and very few related it to migration or sponsors. Men and women have low levels of education, and few of the women have been employed or know English well. Most were not recent immigrants. The women are in their twenties and so far have an average of 3.5 children. Large families are an asset in terms of AFDC, and this trend will probably continue. The men came because of war or the lack of work. They are older by a decade on average, and few are divorced.

3.3. Attitudes toward Welfare

Attitudes toward welfare and how people felt others thought about it were important issues in assessing a change from the previous attitudes of shame and dependency on the family. Seventy-two percent feel welfare has beneficially affected their lives, and most importantly, 90 percent said their immediate family members did not object. This seemed to be an important sign of change in the community and an acceptance of an alternative to family help in times of need. The number of men and women who indicated they relied primarily on welfare was twice that of those who said they relied primarily on their families. This indicates welfare is becoming an alternative to the wider family networks or may be contributing to their network in a positive way.

When asked if they felt embarrassed by it, 58 percent of women said "no", but 6 percent of men said "yes." More women than men said they gained a feeling of independence when they were on welfare. Similarly, many more women felt happier with it than without it (54 versus 16 percent). Men were more divided (32 percent happier versus 41 percent less happy) but were definitely less happy than the women. The positive experiences of other people on welfare within women's networks also affected them. Three-fourths of the women felt that their friends had also had a positive experience with it, and 53 percent of the men did too. The stigma seems to be lifting for women but is still there for some men.

I think it is important that, among welfare recipients, women reported wider networks of support outside their nuclear family than the men. Women had twice as many relatives living close by as men (50 versus 23 percent), and the men on welfare seemed more isolated overall. This lack of extended kin for men would be an important reason for them to need and seek governmental assistance. Very few men or women reported feeling lonely; however, three-fourths of the men listed their spouse as their best friend, while less than one-half (44 percent) of the women did, who frequently listed their mothers and sisters instead. For financial help, women go to their husbands and brothers, but men seek out brothers or persons outside the family.

Women also visit with others more often every day or twice each week, while men visit once or twice each week. Men travel outside the area more frequently than women, every day or once each week, but about one-half of the women said once per week and one-half said "almost never." The desire to get a license and drive is a major factor in their independence. In the area of religion and attitudes, about one-half of males and females belonged to mosques and reported that they attend regularly, but the women said their spouses attended much less than they did. We wanted to know what the religious leaders were saying about welfare. The highest proportion of men and women (about 70 percent) mentioned that the leaders say nothing or they do not know. Approximately 20 percent of each group said that the imams felt it was a good thing. None reported that the imams spoke against it. There were periods in which some religious leaders felt ACCESS was in competition with them for caring for the community; however, these tensions have eased.

When we analyze feelings toward welfare, women are happier and less ashamed than men on welfare, and they have more friends on it. This is particularly true of Lebanese women. Women also have more family members living in the community than men. Men on welfare seem more isolated from their families, depend more on their wives, and feel more embarrassment. However, both genders felt their families did not object. Although religious attitudes have increased in the community and approximately one-half attend the mosques, those on welfare felt there were no major objections from the religious leaders. In their view, there is no feeling of public shame, but the men did express that they were embarrassed that they are not providing enough. The networks women have and the ease of obtaining assistance may also be attributable to the fact that most of the intake workers at ACCESS are women. The negative effect of applying to a female worker by a woman is less than for a man applying to that worker.

4. Power Relations in the Home

Was there a shift in husband-wife relations, as we have seen in other ethnic groups where men are sometimes alienated or wives put more faith in their children? When asked who has the most power in the household, one-half the women said it was their husband, but onethird reported that they did. Because 25 percent reported they were divorced or separated from their husbands, this is not a strong difference, if in fact they were separated. All the men reported that they thought they had the most power. There may be a slight shift in perception, but overall, it is not great. The husband is seen as head of the house by most women and by all the men. However, when asked who controls the money in the family, I think there is a shift, especially for Lebanese women, 71 percent of whom said they controlled the family budget, compared with 29 percent of Yemeni women. The men also felt that they did, with 71 percent of the Lebanese men and 100 percent of the Yemeni men claiming control. Even with the number of reported divorces and separations among the women (14 percent of Lebanese, 21 percent of Yemeni), this is a significant finding of perceptions among Lebanese women. I think it represents an increase in women's control from an earlier study of women not on welfare, in which women reported buying items for their children and in which all the women, Lebanese and Yemeni, said their husbands handled the budget, and the women were given spending money.^[19] This trend was confirmed by ACCESS social workers, who felt women getting the checks empowered them in paying for household items. They mentioned that this was especially true as they increased their ability to drive by learning English to get a license and thereby increased their mobility and access to stores outside the community.

The question of women relying more on children than on their husbands in later life, which was crucial in the Mexican-American case, was viewed differently by gender. ^[20] One-half of the women said "yes", but men thought that wives should rely on them rather than on their children.

Overall, men retain their position at the head of the household as perceived by men and women, unless there is divorce or separation. Each gender feels they control the household money more, and we find that there is increasing power going to women in the control of the budget and household money. At least one-half the women indicate that, in later life, a mother should depend on her children more than on her husband, a pattern similar to the Mexican-American case.

Let us examine several cases of divorced women who felt welfare was a necessity. In regard to divorce and separation, we asked if they felt women should gain custody of children, to which 93 percent of the men and women answered in the affirmative.

Maha from Yemen is 48 years old. She is divorced with seven children between the ages of eighteen and thirty-one who live in California, Yemen, Chicago, and Dearborn. She says she depends on her son in Dearborn for help. She does not have enough money, and she would like to get a job, but she has only 2 years of schooling and some ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. She feels welfare helps women but does not weaken men at all. She likes life here and is not lonely at all but misses her family and the country of Yemen and wants to go back to live with her children.

Lena from Yemen is thirty-seven years old with four children. She reported that she was separated from her husband who lives in New York. Her parents were deceased, and she was far from her relatives, who were in Yemen, and she must depend on herself. She reports she is happy and does not feel lonely. She definitely feels more secure on welfare and without it would "probably go back to my husband and be miserable again." Her children are young, and she feels she cannot get a job because she never went to school and does not know English. She thinks men resent women on welfare and that it may be risky for men, but that it does not create the family problems. She definitely feels welfare strengthens women's roles, is not sure if it weakens men's roles, but likes the freedom in the United States. In contrast to Lena's situation, most of the husbands of the women who are separated or divorced live in and around Dearborn, not abroad.

Another divorcee from Lebanon who was thirty-four years old and had two children likes it better here, but most of her relatives are in Lebanon. She goes to ACCESS for help or to one aunt who lives close by. She has few people to help with her children, is unhappy and depressed about the war, but is not lonely here. She has many friends on welfare and some aunts here. She has had three years of education, her children are young, she knows no English, and consequently she feels she cannot get a job.

Leila is a Lebanese woman who is separated and wants a divorce. She has seven children and no education. She came because of the war and strongly feels men do resent welfare. She also depends on her brother and son. She is not happy and said she and her kids would starve without welfare. She thinks her husband is ashamed of her being on welfare. One of the few who felt lonely is a forty-five-year-old Yemeni widow who misses her husband. She has five children between five and fifteen years of age. She depends on her father and sisters who live nearby. She definitely would like to work, and her sisters would help with her children, but she worries about the fact that she has only two years of education.

In these cases of women who are divorced and separated, we find they do need the money and feel it helps them to be independent of their husbands. Most were not educated and felt at a disadvantage in working, especially those with young children.

5. Gender Differences in Perceptions of How Spouses Feel about Welfare

What is their perception of their spouses' attitudes toward welfare? Most women felt their husbands did not resent them being on welfare. A Lebanese woman said, "No, because they don't like to go themselves to the welfare offices, and they push their wives into it." As if to confirm this, 85 percent of the men say they do not resent their wives being on welfare. However, 69 percent of Yemeni women said they felt the men resented it, much more than the 19 percent of Lebanese women who thought their men resented it.

Men feel their wives are relieved with welfare. Women do not usually think men are, but women do not resent their husbands being on welfare. Significantly, 85 percent of the women and 61 percent of the men feel welfare strengthens the women's role, and when asked if it weakens men's roles, all said "yes,"

except Yemeni men, and 80 percent of them said it did not. One Lebanese man said forcefully, "Welfare will fulfill her needs rather than her husband. She will think she is financially independent without me. It will weaken or destroy my role." More Lebanese women (56 percent) think welfare is threatening for a husband's role than Yemeni women do (14 percent). One said, "He will start to be lazy, because he just waits for the check." Another said, "It weakens his personality; he should be responsible for the family."

Yemeni women show a more traditional approach, feeling that their men are ashamed but that their husbands are not threatened with it and that the relations will remain as they are. This difference is also shown when asked who would control the money if a couple is separated, with 96 percent of the Lebanese women saying for sure the wife would while 75 percent of Yemeni women think the husband would. When we asked if they think it leads to divorce or separation, most men and women said "no," but more men than women (38 versus 12 percent) think it leads to family problems.

Overall, men and women concur that welfare strengthens women's roles, and all except the Yemeni men feel it weakens the man's role. Yemeni women concur with their husbands, feeling it does not change their husband's power and does not weaken them. These Yemeni women also think that their husbands resent women being on welfare more than Lebanese women do.

When asked if they would like to go off of welfare, all the men said they would. Most of the women said they would, but 40 percent said they would not. When asked if they would like to work, all the men said "yes" if they got more money, and three-fourths of the women said they would also. They were positive about it. One said "I'd rather work; I feel tied up." Very few (9 percent) said "no" and that was because they were too old or had young children.

Selwa, who was 30 years old and had two young children, said she felt "like a slave to welfare," that it was not enough money to live on, and that she would rather work: "I can't put money in the bank, can't buy a house, can't save money for the kids' future." She was trained as a beautician and eventually wants to open up a beauty shop. Her husband works in a bakery but does not want her to work. She comments that "her husband thinks welfare spoils her, that she doesn't have to care for her husband anymore; welfare replaces him."

Most men and women said they did not have sufficient funds. In terms of inheritance from their families, 65 percent of women said that they did not control their inheritance but that their family did, and 35 percent said their husbands did. Most men did control their inheritance, with only one-third saying their fathers did. What kind of work could or would clients attempt? The answer is especially important in view of the new mandate for employment. In order of preference, women listed caring for children, secretarial work, cleaning houses, sewing, working in a store, and working in a factory. For the men, the most preferred choice was work in a factory. Auto factory wages in the Detroit area are very high, about \$40,000 to \$60,000 for line workers, but there have been many layoffs, and many are now turning to jobs in gas stations, often owned by relatives.

Workers at ACCESS who process welfare claims mentioned forthrightly that they did not think women would clean other persons' homes, because many had had their own maids in Lebanon. In the Middle East, maids are often a sign of status, and some have been abused in various ways, especially financially. However, the possibility of cleaning stores, schools, and other buildings was considered to be acceptable. For the women dressed Islamically, ACCESS workers felt there is a chance of discrimination in hiring. They indicated the Islamic scarf alone probably did not represent a hindrance in being hired, but the long dark Islamic gowns or the brightly colored peasant dresses worn by many women were seen as hindrances.

Day care can be a particular problem for women who want to work. In close ethnic neighborhoods, family members often help. When asked who would care for the children if they worked, 24 percent said their mothers, but 31 percent of the women said they had no care at all. All the men said their wives would.

Personal attitudes toward day care vary, and when asked if they approved of using day care centers, the women were about evenly split, but 77 percent of the men said "no." Both genders felt that women with small children should not work, but men were stronger (100 versus 73 percent). In relation to problems with children, very few (8 percent) said they had any. This contrasts with the results of studies of other welfare parents and reflects the continuing strength of the Arab family with its generational respect, two parents, and extended character.

Caring for children of other employed women of the community in their homes may become a major avenue for work, but for most, some training will be required. Because the second generation and many

of the educated immigrant women are working, there does seem to be a growing market. Other initiatives may include cleaning or sewing enterprises.

Women were asked about their husbands' attitudes toward wives being employed. Two-thirds said "no," their husbands did not want them to work, while only 11 percent said yes, and 17 percent said maybe. In many ways it was felt that women contributed to the home economy and raised their power through welfare. This was preferable to working outside, because of their husbands' restrictions and the other constraints mentioned previously.

When asked about their long-range plans, the women gave varied answers, but in order of preference, they included going to school, getting a job, going to Lebanon, living better, raising children, and divorce. For men, it was to get a job (70 percent), to live better, and raise kids.

Women and men liked it better in the United States than in Lebanon or Yemen, but women did so by a much higher degree (78 percent) than men (53 percent). The women's primary reason (60 percent) was that there was no war. Although life style was a weaker answer (18 percent), Lebanese women complained that the war had separated them from their families. The men felt the negative effects of the war financially and so found life better in the United States. One man, who was 30 years old and had two children, who came here as a visitor and got stuck because of the war, commented, "In Lebanon I was stronger financially. I had a business with my brother, whereas here I am employed by someone." He prefers Lebanon. Others said they preferred the social life in Lebanon more. Hassan Jaber, Deputy Director of ACCESS, mentioned that many had returned with high hopes to Lebanon and found it changed with few chances for jobs. They then came back to the United States with the decision that this will be their home.^[21]

6. Conclusions

Arab Americans on welfare sampled in Dearborn do not all think alike; they have different situations and adaptations. However, over time, there has been a shift in the attitudes toward welfare, with a more accepting attitude toward it. We also found that most think it strengthens a wife's role, particularly in the control of the household budget, and all but Yemeni men think it weakens a husband's role. There is a shift to strengthen women as in other cultures.

Within the patrilineal Arab families, however, the shift is made with less alienation of the male than has been observed among some other ethnic groups. Women are given power within the family structure as a substitute for working outside. This has been especially attractive among women who have limited skills, education, or employment history and whose husbands do not want them to work. The attitudes against women's work outside the home persist, but welfare allows a woman greater participation and raises her self-esteem in relation to her husband and other family members. Those with the traditionally positive view of large families, which is found among many poor from the Middle East, find justification for the welfare programs.

Religion does not affect their attitude toward welfare negatively, because among the one-half who attended mosques, most thought the imams supported it or were neutral. Welfare assists in making separation and divorce a possibility for abused or dissatisfied wives and can serve as an added threat against a husband's misbehavior. The changes resemble those in the Mexican-American family to some degree, which indicates that the strength of the family in the home culture and the lack of skills and education in the host culture are crucial variables. The patrilineal ideology and defined gender roles of Arab families add to the strength of the role of the husband. The shift to dependence on children rather than the husband in the future of welfare women is not as strong as it appears to be among Mexican Americans, but this attitude is expressed by one-half of the women and is viewed as a stronger option for Arab women than Arab men think it is.

There are short- and long-term consequences of welfare assistance. For many, it is a short-term solution, but real empowerment to break dependency will require more education and economic opportunities and a change in attitudes toward women's employment outside the family and about large families. Most women indicate they want to work. However, the 1996 regulations mandating employment will eventually force some off welfare (without the benefit of employment) because of constraints of limited skills, discrimination in hiring, or unchanged attitudes against work outside the home. This may be difficult for those who genuinely need it to escape a bad marriage, and they will turn again to their families for support. As this happens, it will reduce the community's wealth overall.

Day care is a problem for women with many children. One possibility for work in the home by some

may be in caring for the children of others who go out to work. Training for day care employment would be important in such cases. The men on welfare, who have fewer kin and networks in the United States, will undoubtedly turn more to working cheaply for friends, or they may be forced to migrate back to Lebanon or Yemen. The recently arrived Iraqis and other legal immigrants without skills or extended families in the United States are in a precarious position since the immigration bill has cut many benefits. Some of these benefits have been secured from the state of Michigan.

ACCESS is being greatly challenged to increase educational and employment programs for men and women. It must continue its success in maintaining its political networks with the state, because it may need to request employment exemptions for some of the poor, and it will need to make alliances with other social service groups or compete with them to gain assistance.

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