



The Arab Families Working Group

### **Male Migration and Feminization of the Lebanese Family**

Migratory movements have been witnessed in the Arab world and have registered a substantial increase in the 1970s in the direction of the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf. Among the most contributing factors behind these flows one could mention the rise in oil prices, the shortage of both semi- skilled and skilled labor in the Arab host countries as well as wage differentials.

Lebanon was, and still is, one of the major- if not the major- supplier of skilled laborers to these countries. Actually, Lebanon has witnessed two large periods of mass migration in its history, the first one between 1898 and 1914 and the second between 1975 and 1990; the latter corresponding to the civil strife period. The exodus did not, however, stop and it is estimated that 1,300,000 Lebanese migrated between 1975 and 2005. This trend was boosted by the July 2006 war and is still going on, not only because of the prevailing adverse economic situation, but also because of disillusion and skepticism regarding the future of the country.

In fact, non- economic variables are, equally important determinants of migration and are strongly linked to how national and non- national futures are envisaged by families and youth. These different imaginaries of the future could partly explain why some social milieus with the same economic specificities did not witness the same migration flows during the Lebanese war or the period that followed it and that migration encompassed well-established and successful individuals and families as well. What has actually happened is that along with economic deprivation, there was an overall general feeling of despair, of failure to rebuild a nation- state and consequently a desire to escape.

The paper presents the preliminary results of a study which focuses on a micro aspect of the Lebanese migration namely, the emigration of the head of the household and its impact on public/ private shifts, well- being and decision making within the family, focusing essentially on the wife left behind.

For that purpose, a representative sample of 107 households is selected from a national survey covering 18,243 households conducted by the Saint- Joseph University in Beirut, the results of which were published in 2003 under the title “Youth Entry in the Labor Market and the Emigration of Lebanese since 1975”.

After drawing the profiles of the households surveyed, an attempt is made at examining the reasons behind the husband’s migration, and its impact on the wife’s involvement in the decision-making process. For that purpose 4 independent variables are selected to assess the changes that have taken place. These are:

- Family income
- The time elapsed since the husband’s migration

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- The husband's level of education
- The wife's level of education

A word of warning is, however, necessary. Despite the fact that the analysis of the data based on the selected sample could shed some light on the issues raised, it is important not to extrapolate these findings, particularly when it comes to small sub- groups. The survey should be looked at as an exploratory one which would require an in- depth follow-up on its major findings, if sound conclusions and recommendations are to be formulated.