

Building A National Identity: Muslim Women's Rights in Syria

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Survey research has a role to play in providing Muslim women with a public voice where custom and culture do not permit them their own. It can be used to inform and shape empowerment policies from the perspective of each population. The Women in Muslim Countries (WIMC) study¹ is designed to measure women's empowerment in actual daily practice, providing an in-depth look into the oft-perceived gap between current public policy and empowerment initiatives, as well as actual practice on the personal and local level. The answers are intended to yield a metric for promoting excellence in public policy by informing policymakers on women's attitudes about the affects of policy initiatives, as well as a measure of the degree of effectiveness of those policies.

As part of a collective effort to understand the status of rights (in practice and beliefs) of Muslim women around the world, D3 Systems, Inc. sponsors and manages the 23 country WIMC. The nationwide Syrian survey, the focus of this report, consists of interviews with 505 randomly selected Muslim women nationwide in Syria. The respondents were interviewed in person by native Syrians, from May 13 to May 24, 2008. With a 95% confidence interval, results from this survey can be expected to have a margin of error of +/- 4.4 percent.

This report addresses results of the Syrian survey in the context of other Muslim majority countries. It looks at the rights, behaviors, and attitudes of Syrian women today, while also examining efforts made by the Syrian government to protect and promote women's rights. The results of this study indicate that the majority of Muslim women in Syria feel they are free to exercise their rights at home and in the public domain, with respect to employment, compensation, access to health care, and voting rights. They also believe their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW are protected and promoted within the Syrian version of shari'a.

¹ WIMC is sponsored and managed by D3 Systems (www.d3systems.com). At the time of this report, results from 22 countries were available for analysis. Syrian opinion throughout the report may be analyzed and compared against opinion from the other 22 countries: Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, Iran, Lebanon, Bosnia, Kosovo, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Yemen, Kuwait, and the UAE.



Muslim women in Syria appear to recognize an implicit social contract between citizen and state. In this study, greater portions of Muslim women in Syria appear to be happier receiving improved social services, such as healthcare and education, over those who desire greater income and more money. In addition, a sizeable portion of Muslim women in Syria believe that no change in their lives is necessary to make them happier. Taken together, these two findings may suggest that government participation in social life and a sense of national identity may be more highly valued than individualistic desires for greater wealth.

Background on Women's Rights in Syria

Since 1963, Syria has been ruled by the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party. The Ba'th Party, which views women as a base of political support, has sought to promote gender equality in Syria.² However, the political effort to promote and protect women's rights in the public space has been met with opposition by Islamic forces seeking to preserve Syria's long-standing social and religious traditions.³ Despite this opposition, the Syrian government has entered into numerous international agreements aimed at improving the status of women.

Currently, Syria is a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Syria ratified the CEDAW in September of 2002, and acceded to the Convention in March of 2003 with a number of reservations, some of which contradicted the central purpose of the Convention: Article 2, in its entirety (considered a core provision of the convention, this article requires states to condemn all forms of discrimination and provide legal protection of the rights of women); Article 9, paragraph 2 (granting children the nationality of their mother); Article 15, paragraph 4 (on freedom of movement and choice of domicile); Article 16, paragraphs 1 (c), (d), (f), and (g), (regarding rights and responsibilities of marriage, as well as the dissolution of marriage with respect to guardianship, kinship, maintenance and adoption); Article 16, paragraph 2 (regarding the legal effect of the betrothal and marriage of a child); and Article 29, paragraph 1 (arbitration between countries locked in dispute).⁴

² See: UN POGAR, Gender and Citizenship Initiative <<http://gender.pogar.org/countries/country.asp?cid=19>> (November 2009).

³ According to the UN: "Deeply felt social codes discourage women from entering the public realm or making political demands. While a minority of women has entered the workforce and politics, the majority continues to live a traditional lifestyle." See: UN POGAR Gender and Citizenship Initiative <<http://gender.pogar.org/countries/country.asp?cid=19>> (November 2009).

⁴ See: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, "Declarations, Reservations, and Objections to CEDAW: Syrian Arab Republic," <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/reservations-country.htm>> (November 2009).



Despite this legal contradiction, the country has attempted to improve the status of women's rights. As one source notes: "Syria was in the vanguard among the states concerned with women's rights, because of its prevailing political thought, open unto the principle of women's equality to men."⁵ Case in point, the 1973 Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic provides for equality of the sexes under the law.

Constitutional principles that promote equality of the sexes are enshrined in Articles of 25, 26, 27, and 45. These articles promote each citizen's right to participate in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country, as well as the ability of individuals to exercise their rights and enjoy their freedoms within the limits of the law. Article 45 explicitly addresses the issue of women in the public space: "The State shall guarantee to women all of the opportunities that enable them to make a full and effective contribution to political, social, cultural and economic life, and shall endeavour to eliminate the restrictions impeding their development and participation in building Arab socialist society. These constitutional principles determine the meaning of the criteria designed to achieve respect for the equality of the sexes and also recognize the legal competence of women."⁶

The International Convention of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which came into effect in 1976, obligated the Syrian government to provide equal economic, social and cultural rights for males and females.⁷ The Family Law, adopted by the UN in 1979, came into effect in Syria in 1981. Issues of health care and education were addressed by the Convention. Article 11 ensures that women are not subject to discrimination in the work place, while Article 12 prohibits discrimination toward women in areas of health care.

⁵ George Jabbour. "Syrian Women and Human Rights." Paper presented at the "Women in Syria Today" conference. Damascus University. 25-26 June 2006, Damascus, Syria. <<http://www.fafu.no/ais/middeast/syria/syrianwomen/SW-Jabbour.pdf>> (November 2009).

⁶ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. "Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Initial Report of States: Syria. (29 August 2005): p.38.

⁷ This includes the right to work, the right to fair and satisfactory conditions of work, the right to form trade unions, the right to social security, rights of family protection (including special protection for mothers before and after giving birth), the right to enjoy an adequate standard of living, the right to physical and mental health, the right to education, and finally, the right to take part in Syria's cultural life. See: George Jabbour. "Syrian Women and Human Rights." Paper presented at the "Women in Syria Today" conference. Damascus University. 25-26 June 2006, Damascus, Syria. <<http://www.fafu.no/ais/middeast/syria/syrianwomen/SW-Jabbour.pdf>> (November 2009).



Syria's emphasis on secular nationalism has long been considered crucial to the state's survival in the face of competing cultural, political, and religious forces in society.⁸ Women were often seen as markers of the nation's progress and therefore encouraged to enter the public space. The secular national ideals of unity and equality proved to be important ideological platforms upon which the legitimacy of the government rested. Moreover, the country sought to provide social services in exchange for this legitimacy.

In the face of economic decline, public discourse about the role of women changed at times, as Islamic forces sought to put women back in the domestic sphere in order to retain and revitalize Syria's cultural-religious identity. Women were viewed as "carriers of tradition" not markers of modernization.⁹ As Islamic forces gained more power in times of socio-economic problems, the state also began to reemphasize the role of the family in Syrian society, while tolerating efforts to promote Islam in the public space.

Many scholars emphasize Syria's diverse society, made up of competing ethnic and religious forces, namely Islamic forces. While Syria promoted a form of secular nationalism that cultivated ideals of equality, especially in the labor force, Islamic forces routinely pushed back against these state sponsored initiatives to bring women into the public space.

Concerned about losing Syria's cultural-religious identity, rooted deeply in Islam, these groups sought to place women in the domestic sphere. In essence, women were markers of progress for both groups: for the state, women were seen as markers of progress and modernity, but for Islamic groups, women were seen as a marker of cultural authenticity. In the face of economic decline, the Syrian state released its firm hold on the promotion of a secular nationalist society, effectively allowing Islamic discourses to enter the public space.

Official political rhetoric now seems to place women as keepers of the domestic realm; however, new forms of dialogue have reframed this duty as crucial to the overall improvement of the state. In this sense, social responsibility is not limited to women operating in official public capacity, but rather, it requires that women take care of the home. In return for this complicity, the state provides them with basic needs, while also officially recognizing them as important actors in securing the well-being of the state. This became increasingly important to the Syrian government as state resources diminished, and securing the social welfare of citizens was placed

⁸ S.L. Sparre. "Educated Women in Syria: Servants of the State, or Nurturers of the Family?" *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 2008): pp. 3-20 (p.4).

⁹ Ibid (p.16)



in jeopardy.¹⁰ Muslim women are able to connect their roles as keepers of the domestic realm with the overall progress of the nation.

This give-and-take relationship appears to have some influence on the figures presented in this study. Namely, Muslim women in Syria appear to accept their social responsibility, while finding no contradiction between secular and non-secular forms of law.

This is an interesting finding when placed in the context of Syria's GDP per capita ranking with other Muslim states. D3's research has found a consistent relationship between a country's GDP and the beliefs and attitudes of that country's women. Beliefs and attitudes change at certain GDP break-points.

However, Syria appears to be an exception to this relationship. Syrian GDP ranks behind most of the Muslim countries featured in this study, especially within the Levant region. Despite this fact, Muslim women in Syria appear to desire either no change to make their lives happier, or they desire an improvement in social services rather than personal wealth. This finding reflects a long standing tradition of state provided services as part of the strategy to foster national unity among the population.

Syria's history suggests willingness (at some level) on the part of the government to promote and protect women's rights. Also, a brief glimpse into Syrian society shows that the status of women has long been considered crucial to public discourses regarding the condition of the nation. Do Muslim women in Syria perceive a gap between the policy and the empowerment initiatives provided to them under international law and realized in everyday life? What are the desires of Muslim women in Syria? Finally, what can we say about how these desires influence their perceptions of their own role in the Syrian socio-economic landscape?

¹⁰ S.L. Sparre. "Educated Women in Syria: Servants of the State, or Nurturers of the Family?" *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 2008): pp. 3-20 (p.9).



Results

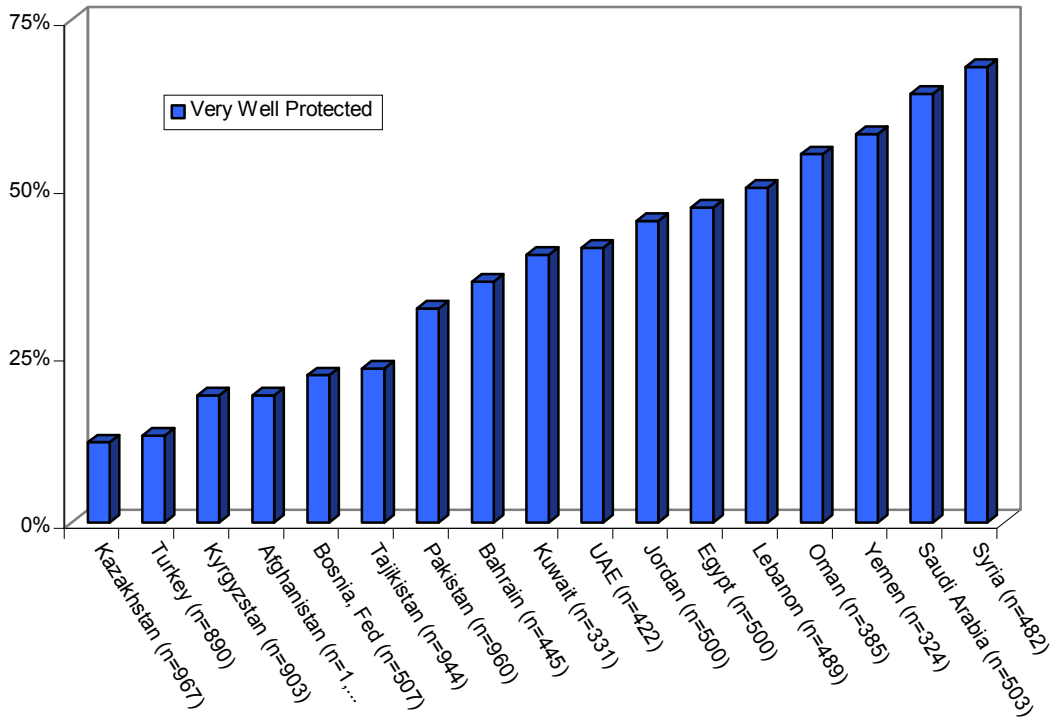
Despite reservations of the Syrian government to a number of CEDAW articles, the majority of Muslim women in Syria believe their rights guaranteed under the CEDAW convention are protected and promoted within shari'a.¹¹ When Muslim women in Syria were asked how well they believe their rights under the CEDAW convention can effectively be protected and promoted within shari'a, 95% believe their rights are either "very well protected" or "somewhat protected." Of those who answered the question, 68% believe their rights can be "very well protected." This portion represents the highest percentage out of seventeen countries where the question was asked. The next closest country is Saudi Arabia (64%).¹² (Figure 1)

¹¹ Respondents were read the tenets of the CEDAW convention prior to the question asking about its protection under shari'a.

¹² Only Egypt (98%) and Jordan (97%) rank higher. Among countries from the Levant region, Syria ranks second only to Jordan. Lebanon ranks third with 84% of women believing their rights are "somewhat protected" or "very well protected. Across the sixteen countries, Syria has the third highest share of women who believe their rights are "somewhat protected" or "very well protected"



Figure 1: How well do you believe that your rights under this convention can be effectively protected and promoted within Shari'a (Islamic Law) in your country?



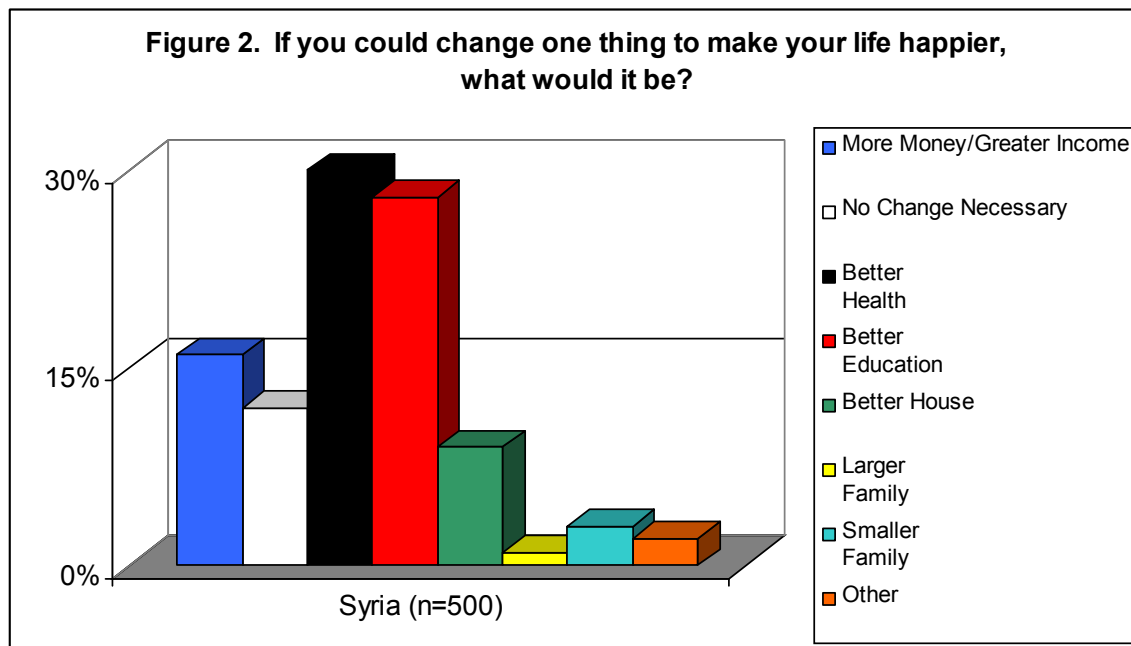
Only 5% of Syrian women in the survey believed their rights under the CEDAW cannot be protected and promoted (“not well” or “not at all”) under shari’a. These figures suggest that Syrian women, along with Muslim women from Egypt and Jordan, are more likely to accept shari’a law (on some level) as the basis for governance in their society. It appears likely that Muslim women in Syria see no conflict between shari’a and their own civil liberties, unlike Turkey, where a pronounced division appears to exist between women who accept shari’a law and women who reject it.

This perception may be influenced by Syrian government initiatives. In the last twenty years, the government has instituted a series of modest economic reforms. Along with these reforms, the



UN reports that the Syrian government is showing an interest in reforming areas that impact the citizens' quality of life. These areas include education, information technology, administrative development, unemployment reduction, the improvement of government administration, and finally, health care.¹³

When asked if they could change one thing to make their lives happier, a plurality of respondents says “better health” (30%). Twenty-seven percent say “better education” would make their lives happier, while 16% say that more money or greater income would make their lives happier. Twelve percent say that no change is necessary. (Figure 2)



¹³ Despite Syria's socialist economy, there is evidence of a shift toward privatization of the national economy. A UN report notes, "The reforms have focused on expanding the role of the private sector in the national economy, particularly in the fields of industry, trade, education and banking, and on making adjustments aimed at developing and enhancing the legislative and regulatory environment governing operation of the productive sector, including trade facilitation, tax reduction, the adoption of measures for a uniform bank rate and the promulgation of legislation typically providing for special facilities designed to encourage investment and export." See: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. "Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Initial Report of States: Syria, (29 August 2005): p.8.



WIMC has found that Muslim women’s desires and aspirations correlate quite predictably with the economic status of each country or region of the study.¹⁴ For the purposes of this survey, women’s desires in Syria were compared to other countries in the region ranked by GDP per capita. Syria proves to be a unique case study of all the WIMC countries, since it lags behind in GDP per capita yet women appear to desire little in the way of personal wealth.

Muslim women in the much wealthier countries of Saudi Arabia and Turkey are less likely to express a desire to meet daily needs such as more money in comparison to other desires such as better education and better health. Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan all rank behind Saudi Arabia and Turkey in GDP per capita, and majorities of Muslim women in all three countries express a desire for more money or greater income. Interestingly enough though, Syria, which ranks the lowest among these six countries in GDP per capita, is second only to Saudi Arabia in terms of respondents who said no change is necessary in their life. Looking at Figure 3, it is evident that larger portions of Muslim women favor better education and better health in Syria than in the other three Levant countries (Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan) despite the fact that Syria ranks the lowest in terms of GDP per capita. Below, only Saudi Arabia and Turkey have lower portions of Muslim women who say they need more money or greater income to make their lives happier. (Figure 3)

¹⁴ Feld, Karl and Will Hayes. “Different Faces of Shari’a: Women’s Aspirations in Saudi Arabia and South Asia.” (2009).



If you could change one thing to make your life happier, what would it be? (Comparison by GDP per capita rank, 2008 est.)

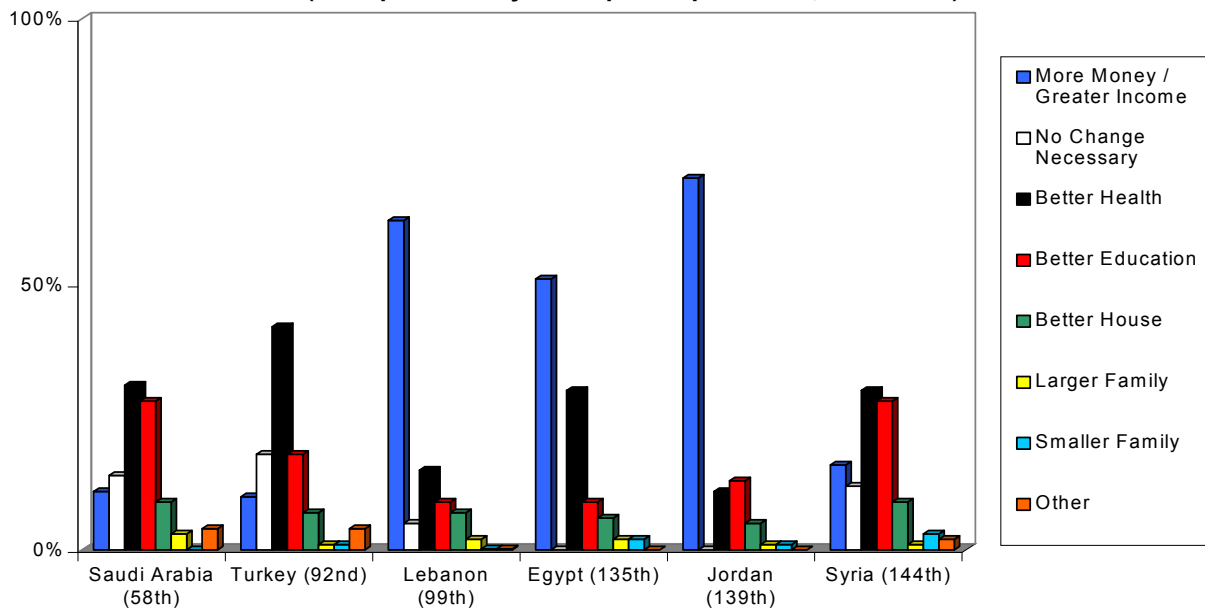


Figure 3 reveals a unique finding with respect to desires among Muslim women in Syria. Despite its low ranking in GDP per capita compared to the other countries featured in this study, Muslim women in Syria tend to place *greater* emphasis on social services such as education and healthcare, rather than income and money.

Understanding Syria’s history of state-provided services is useful in providing an explanation for this finding. In the wake of colonialism, the modern Syrian state sought to foster a strong sense of equality and national unity among its citizens, despite the country’s relatively heterogeneous cultural and religious make-up. Government leaders based their rule on a strict form of secular nationalism that slowly relaxed as Islamic forces gained a foothold in public debates about government, personal development, and society. In exchange for legitimacy, the government allowed Islamic discourses to enter the public space; however, the citizens were also provided with a number of social services. Special emphasis was placed on educating a viable workforce



regardless of gender, and providing low food prices along with improved infrastructure.¹⁵ This social contract formed the backbone of its legitimacy.

Women played an important role in this give-and-exchange between the government and its citizens. Essentially, Syria considered an official rhetoric of unity and nationalism as essential to the country's survival.¹⁶ Gender equality was often connected to the nation's progress and the advancement of women's rights in the public space became a metric of this progress.

Socio-economic changes in the late 1990's contributed to the rise of Islamic discourses in public debates, as Syria faced political and economic changes from within and outside the country. As one scholar notes, government interest in mobilizing women in the national labor force became secondary to encouraging women to retreat into the domestic space, a course favored by Islamic groups. Family politics took center stage in the national debate and women were encouraged to take care of their homes in an effort to improve socio-economic conditions in Syria. Ultimately, family politics and the exchange between political legitimacy and social services help to explain their desire for education and healthcare over greater income.

Looking at occupation status, the majority of Muslim women in Syria work in the domestic sphere. When describing their work status, 53% of Syrian women identify themselves as homemakers. In contrast, 28% of respondents are paid by an employer to work, and 15% are currently unemployed, while 5% of actually own their business. Among Arab countries participating in this survey, only Iraq (8%) and Lebanon (6%) have a higher percentage of Muslim women who own their own business.

Respondents who self-identify as housewives are slightly less likely to desire more money than their employed counterparts. The desire gap is even greater between housewives and the unemployed. The majority of respondents who seek better healthcare and education are housewives.

Among those women not employed outside the home, 70% are "interested and able" if they had access to training and startup money to start a business. Fourteen percent show an interest, but feel they are prevented from doing so due to other factors in their lives. Only Egypt (10%) has a lower percentage of respondents who find themselves in a similar situation. It appears that a

¹⁵ S.L. Sparre. "Educated Women in Syria: Servants of the State, or Nurturers of the Family?" *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 2008): pp. 3-20 (p.6).

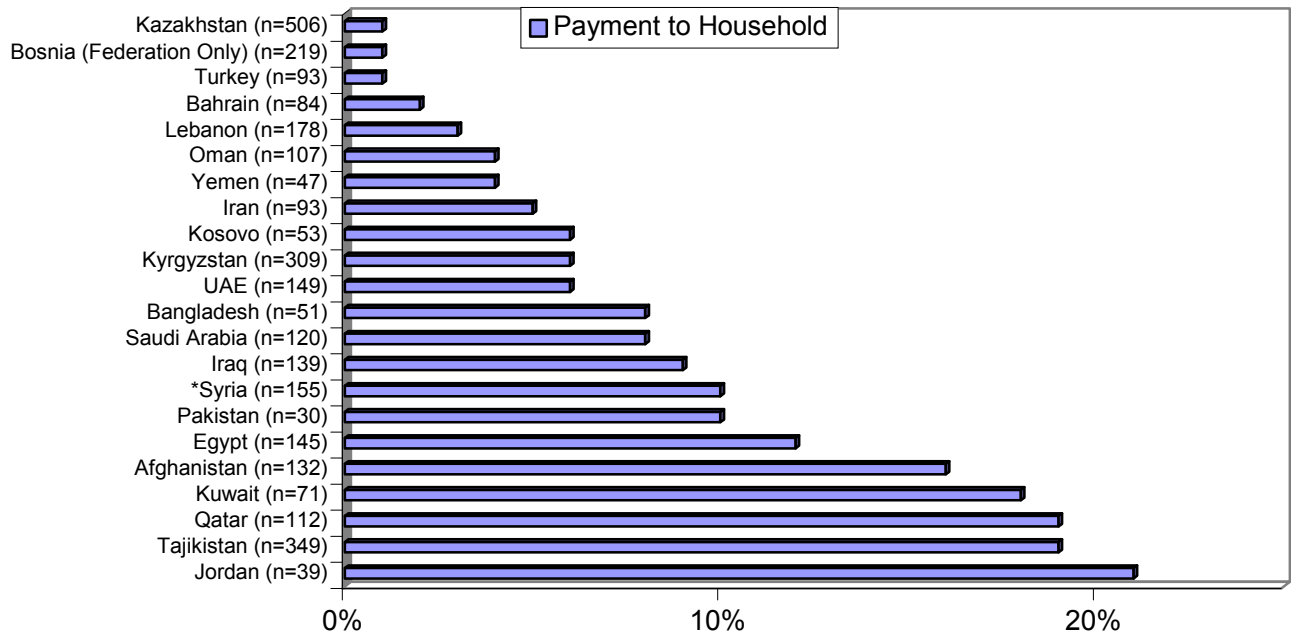
¹⁶ Ibid (p.7).



large number of Muslim women in Syria find no legal constraints (religious or secular) to starting their own business.

Among those employed outside the home, 10% of Muslim women in Syria find themselves in a situation where payment is made to someone in their household on their behalf.¹⁷ Only five countries in the WIMC survey have a larger portion of Muslim women who are not paid directly. Among those five countries, two (Egypt and Jordan) are from the same region as Syria. (Figure 4)

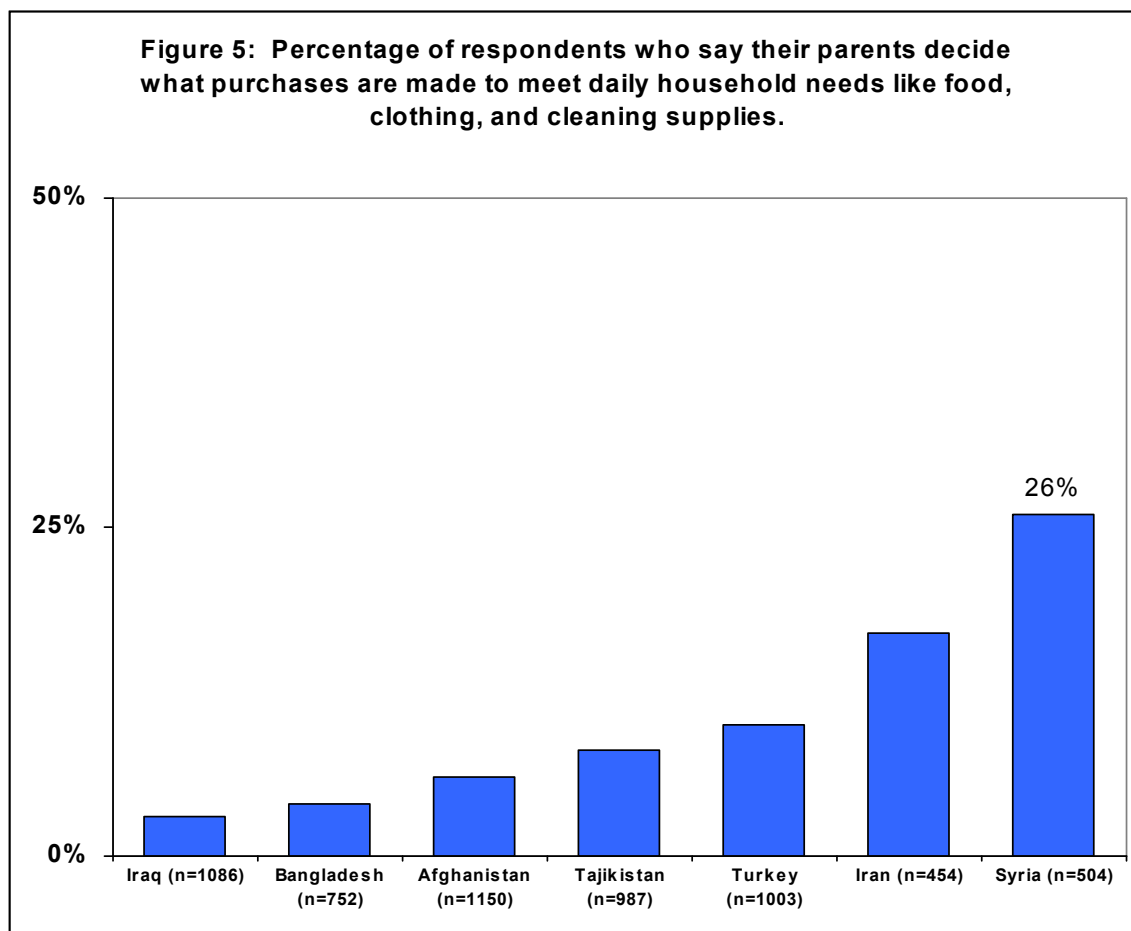
Figure 4. Are you paid directly, or is payment made to someone in your household on your behalf?



¹⁷ In Jordan, the percentage of women who are not paid directly reached 21%.



Within the domestic sphere, 30% of Syrian women say they have control over the decision-making of purchases to meet daily household needs. This portion falls right at the average across the sixteen countries surveyed. However, a quarter (26%) of respondents says their parents have daily household purchasing power. This ranks first among the sixteen countries in the survey (Iran ranks second with 17%). (Figure 5)



Behind Iran (44%), Syria ranks the highest (43%), along with Kazakhstan (43%), among Muslim women who control the savings in their household. Across the Arab countries participating in this survey, the next highest percentage of Muslim women who control savings in the household is found in Saudi Arabia (41%). Close to a quarter (22%) of Syrian women say that they and their spouse have separate savings in the household.¹⁸

According to a CEDAW report, the Syrian Ministry of Health seeks to provide preventative health services and treatment to citizens, *without discrimination*.¹⁹ The results of this survey show that a large majority of Muslim women in Syria do not believe they have ever been denied health care because of their gender. In fact, only Lebanon (4%) has a lower percentage of women who believe they have been denied health care because of their gender (Bosnia is slightly higher at 6%).²⁰ In total, 94% of Syrian women believe their gender *does not* prevent them from receiving health care. (Figure 6)

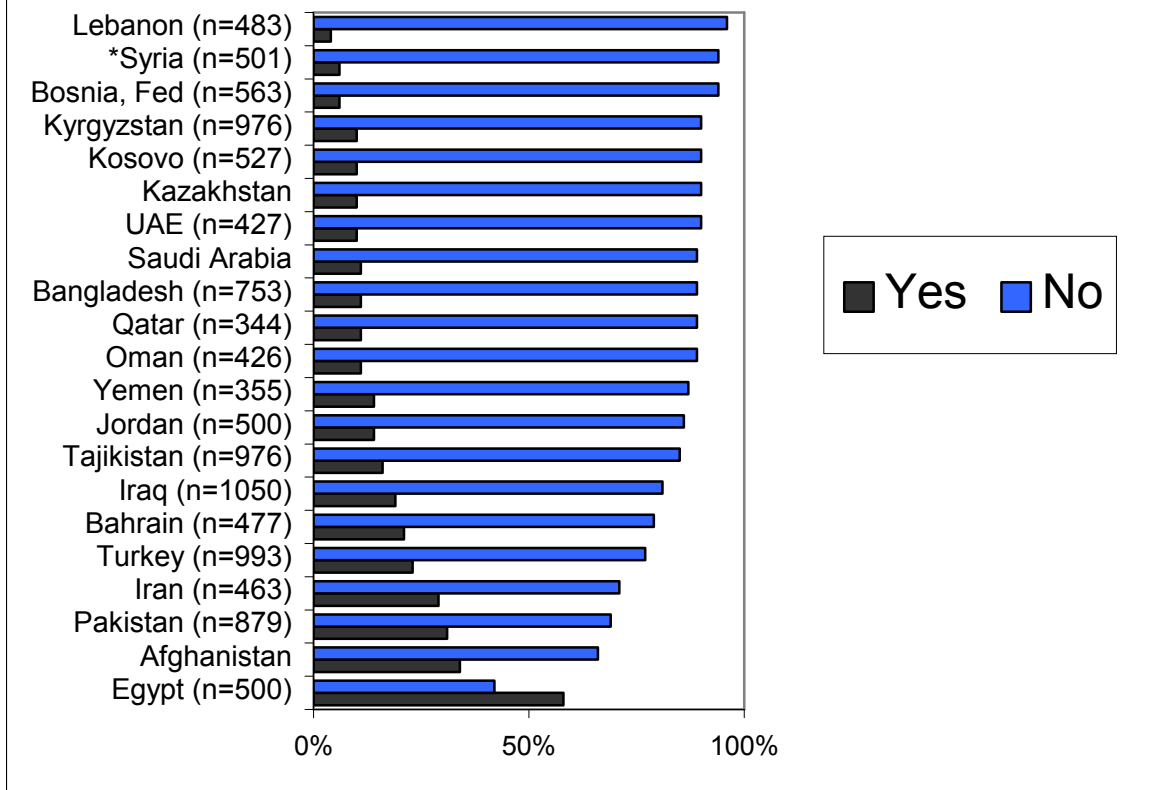
¹⁸ In regard to control over savings in the household, this figure ranks third behind Pakistan (50%) and Iran (31%) across sixteen countries surveyed for this question. Among Arab countries in the survey, Syria has the highest portion of Muslim women who say that separate savings applies to their household (tied with Saudi Arabia and Lebanon).

¹⁹ The report states: “The Syrian Arab Republic has accordingly made great efforts to deliver health care to all,” Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. “Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Initial Report of States: Syria, (29 August 2005): p.58.

²⁰ Across the sixteen countries participating in the survey, Egypt (58%) overwhelmingly has the highest portion of respondents who believe they have been denied health care due to their gender.



Figure 6: Do you believe you've ever been denied health care you needed because you are a woman?



These numbers suggest that Muslim women in Syria are not only satisfied with their quality of life on some level, but they perceive an ability to exercise their rights in order to receive their own pay, start their own business, control the household finances, receive health care, and vote, irrespective of any conflicts that may exist between secular and religious law.



Discussion

The Syrian government's tendency to promote women's rights is not a new phenomenon and is hardly surprising considering the government's effort to promote ideals of equality and national unity. The role of Islam in society is as prevalent in Syria, as it is in other Arab countries; however, the relationship between the state and citizen makes Syria an interesting case study. As one scholar notes, "...the Syrian state has succeeded in creating a national identity by which individual citizens feel a social responsibility for the state."²¹

Syria's endorsement of the above-mentioned Conventions, as well as the CEDAW in 2002, indicate a willingness on the part of the Syrian government to protect the rights of women regardless of prevailing religious and cultural influences, including the observance of shari'a. According to a UN report,

"The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic has taken a number of legislative measures to limit discrimination against women, including the promulgation of Act No. 42 of 2003 establishing the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs as a governmental body tasked, inter alia, with: reviewing discriminatory laws and proposing either their amendment or new laws; proposing amendment of the articles relating to the age of custody contained in the Personal Status Act No. 18 of 2003; proposing amendment of the articles on social insurance contained in Act No. 78 of 2001 so as to give women the right to bequeath their pension to their heirs; seeking an increase in the maternity leave under Legislative Decree No. 35 of 2002; and seeking ratification of the agreement to establish the Arab Women's Organization, signed in Cairo on 15 July 2002."²²

It appears that some religious elements are also working to improve the status of women in Syria by reconciling secular law with shari'a. The Syrian Commission for Family Affairs conducted four workshops, in 2005, aimed at reexamining the legitimacy of the Syrian government's reservations with Article 15, paragraph 4. The opinion of the religious leaders participating in these workshops was that Article 15, paragraph was not incompatible with shari'a. In addition, the Syrian Mufti Sheikh Ahmed Badreddin Hassoun stated that honor crimes were wrong, and

²¹ S.L. Sparre. "Educated Women in Syria: Servants of the State, or Nurturers of the Family?" *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring 2008): pp. 3-20 (p.14).

²² Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. "Consideration of reports submitted by States Parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Initial Report of States: Syria, (29 August 2005): p.11.



requested that the Minister of Justice set up a committee to amend the current laws addressing honor crimes.²³

This is reflected in the priorities measured in this study of the country's Muslim women, in which improvements in social services tend to come before their desire for greater income. Ideals of government participation in social life and the place of the nation-state in society may help explain this. Muslim women in Syria may be more likely to connect their role in society with the progress of the state. They may expect the government to provide them with these services in exchange for their acceptance of the Syrian state.

In line with the Syrian government's effort to promote women's access to the workforce and education, it appears that women still desire social mobility and an opportunity to participate in the national economy, as evident by the large majority of women who express a desire to start their own business. This may also be explained to some extent by recent government efforts to privatize the national economy, and a past willingness to educate and train women to enter the workforce. Regardless of the mix of public debates surrounding the role of women, Muslim women featured in the survey apparently view themselves as potential actors in the national economy largely unrestrained by shari'a or state policies.

Conclusion

This study suggests that Muslim women in Syria are exercising rights in the public and private spheres. Syria has entered previous reservations to certain CEDAW articles contradictory to the spirit and purpose of the Convention. Despite this, it appears that Muslim women in Syria perceive an ability to exercise their rights in everyday life. This finding likely stems from the effects of competing secular and non-secular forces within Syrian society combined with a history of state practices aimed at fostering national unity and equality.

D3 has found that majorities of Muslim women in Syria would be interested in and able to use the opportunity to start their own business; are paid directly by their employers; are able to vote; and are not likely to feel they have been denied access to health care due to the gender. In addition, Muslim women in Syria express a desire for better education and better health, rather than daily needs such as more money.

²³ See: Amnesty International USA, "2008 Annual Report for Syria"
<<http://www.amnestyusa.org/annualreport.php?id=ar&yr=2008&c=SYR>> (November 2009).



It is apparent that both the Syrian government and the religious clerics are working to improve the status of women's rights under national laws to some extent by recognizing international laws and norms within shari'a. Each group uses the status of women as markers of progress in their efforts to shape Syria's future. Irrespective of these competing elements, Muslim women in Syria appear to exercise some control over their lives, and the figures presented here show that a large portion of Muslim women in Syria find no contradiction between the principles enshrined in the CEDAW and shari'a.

The Syrian case study offers a fascinating glimpse into a society shaped by secular and non-secular forces. Further research should continue to observe the status of women in Syria, as competing discourses shape the country's political and social landscape.

