



CAWTAR

The Center of Arab Women
for Training and Research



The Second Arab Women Development Report
**The Arab Adolescent Girl:
Reality and Prospects**



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The Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR)

The Center for Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR) was established in 1993 and based in Tunisia. The primary objective of the Center is to build a knowledge base for conditions of women in the Arab region, as a mechanism to improve their participation in development process. CAWTAR carries its activities through partnership with key actors in the domain of gender. Its network @NGED (the Arab Network for Gender and Development) leverages its activities in the region.

CAWTAR's Board of Trustees consists of the membership of: the League of the Arab States, the Tunisian Government, the Arab Gulf Fund for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), the European Union (EU) and the Economic and Social Commission of West Asia (ESCWA).

The Arab Women Development Reports

CAWTAR initiated the publication of flagship periodical Arab Women Development Reports (AWDRs) to address regional priority issues. The first AWDR was, Globalization and Gender: the Economic Participation of Arab Women (2001) and the Second one was Arab Adolescent Girl: Reality and Prospects (2003).

Why Adolescent Girls and Boys?

The number of adolescents girls and boys between age 15-19 is 31 million and estimated at 11 percentage of the total population of the Arab region. This is notwithstanding the number of girls and boys between the age of 11-14 years. The significance of this cohort of society is a priority for CAWTAR, a center primarily concerned with gender and development in the Arab region.

The adolescent girls and boys are the future citizens. Their potential role in society is shaped by the present conditions and opportunities available to them. The adolescents physiological changes are linked with the construction of their behaviors and knowledge. Their social role are defined: limited for the adolescent girl says Fatma 17 years from Morocco; and greater for the autonomy of the man, says Aziz, 18 years from Morocco.



Selected paintings of arab adolescents participants in CAWTAR's competition for the best design of the report's cover page

Women Development Reports

CAWTAR's Second AWDR has received substantial financial support from the UNFPA and the EU. This is in addition to the contributions of UNDP, AGFUND, UNICEF (Tunis Office) and UNIFEM. The World Bank support furthered the activities of the Center's Adolescent Project.

The objectives of the Report

CAWTAR's second AWDR is an exploratory work and a departure point for further studies of issues unexamined adequately. In this context, the objectives of the report are:

- a)** to build the knowledge base in terms of statistics, analysis and indicators concerning adolescent girls and boys in the Arab Countries.
- b)** To integrate the adolescents' views in defining the characteristics of the period of adolescence in Arab countries; and raising awareness about adolescence and gender.
- c)** To delineate the discrimination between girls and boys in the family, the school and society and the construction of their social roles during adolescence.
- d)** To identify the challenges of adolescent girls and boys, the norms and behaviors dictating their reproductive rights and their implications for their health.
- e)** To provide decision-makers, civil society organizations, the media community, the youth organizations and the adolescents themselves a coherent body of knowledge on adolescents' issues.
- f)** To encourage the specialized organizations and experts to conduct in-depth studies and to collect statistics and analytical information to formulate a suitable strategy for adolescents.

The Contents of the Report

The second AWDR is an integral part of a full fledged project covering: competitions for journalists, adolescent and young Arab researches; technical papers, studies and national reports; training; bibliography and database; documentaries, and an activation of Arab network specialized in Arab adolescent girl.

The report is divided into three parts.

■ **The first part** includes the problematic, the methodology and a conceptual overview of the evolution of adolescents in relation to self-identity and modernity. It also embodies the different aspects of adolescence and analysis of problems in context of the transformation of Arab societies.

■ **Part two** consists the analysis of qualitative studies based on interviews conducted in seven Arab countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia and Yemen. These analysis are conducted in six thematic chapters:

- a) Identity and Self-Image.
- b) Puberty, Reproductive Health and Love.
- c) Family Relations.
- d) The School and Labor.
- e) Adolescents' Culture and Behavior.
- f) Attitudes and Values.

■ **Part three** encompasses general analysis of the conditions of Adolescents based on statistics and indicators from the 22 Arab countries.

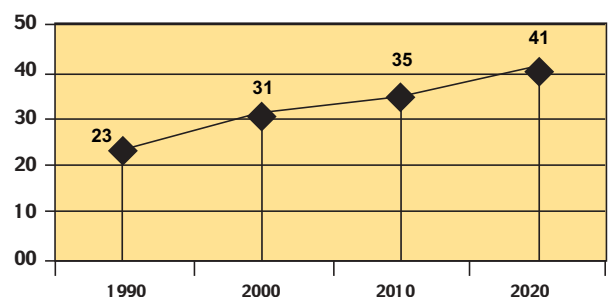
Rainbow

CAWTAR has dedicated a special edition, Rainbow, to the views of Arab adolescents as a complementary component of the Center's Adolescents project. The publication structures the 200 testimonies of adolescent girls and boys, from seven Arab countries studied by the second AWDR, in a portray of 'lives' resumes drafted in editorial fashion.

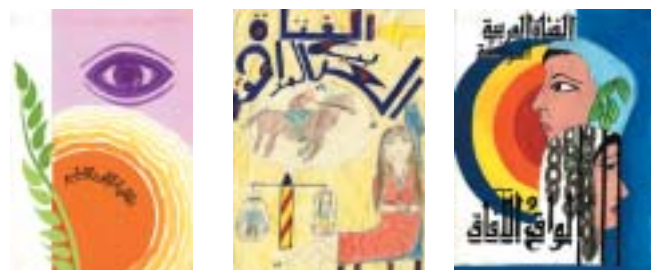
The Adolescents in Numbers

The number of Arab adolescents between age 15-19 has increased from 23 million in 1999 to 31 million in 2000. It is anticipated that this number will reach 35 million by 2010 and 41 million in 2020. The percentage of adolescents has moved up from 10.3 per cent in 1990 to 11 per cent in 2000, taking into consideration that in the same year the percentage of population at age 19 years and below represent 49 per cent of the population of the Arab region.

The rate of the number of adolescents (15-19) in arab countries



Source: UN department of economic and social affairs, World Population prospects, 1998/ revision Vol1, Comprehensive tables, 1999

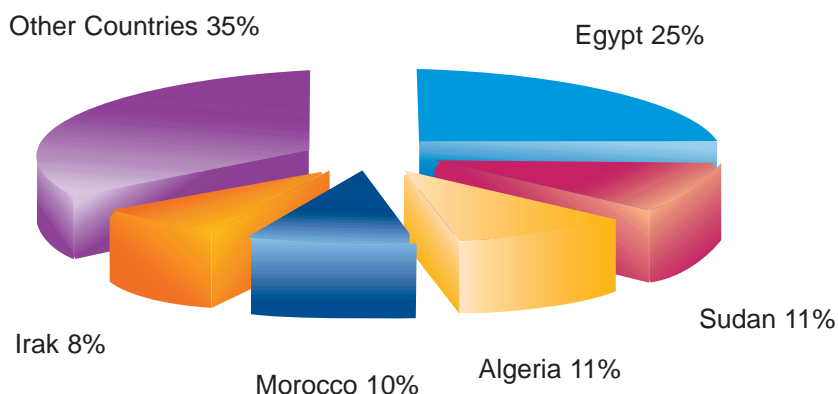




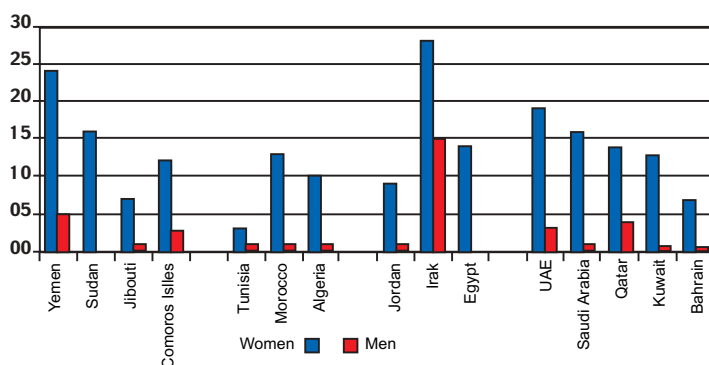
Two Third of Adolescents in 5 Arab Countries

The distribution of Adolescent girls and boys is disproportionate to the size of population in each of Arab countries. The adolescents in Egypt represents $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total population of adolescents in the Arab countries, among which 11 percent from Algeria and Sudan, ten per cent in Morocco and 8 per cent in Iraq. Two third of adolescents in five Arab countries which undergo difficult economic conditions and three of which are torn by war and internal conflicts.

The percentage of arab adolescents (15-19) in 2000



The percentage of married or previously married between the age 15-19 (1991-1998)



Source: League of Arab States, Department of Demographic Studies, Mother and Child database

Reproductive Health

The reproductive health and rights connote fundamental implications for the lives of Arab adolescents, the critical of which is the discrimination between adolescent girls and boys. The available statistics indicate the percentage of married adolescents between age 15-19 represents four to ten times compared to that of married Arab males in Arab countries. In all Arab countries the average of the age of early marriage of females is lower by two years compared to that of males. The difference of average age between females and males is seven years in some Arab countries: Sultanate Oman, Mauritius, Djibouti and Mauritania. It is observed that the average age of marriage for both men and women is low in the rural compared to urban areas. It multiplies with the increase of the education levels. It is observed that the percentage of married adolescent girls and boys, notwithstanding the differences between them, is the lowest in Tunisia. This indicates the importance of examining the factors behind that especially in the context of the impact of early marriage on adolescents' health, education and other productive activities.





The Qualitative Studies of the Report: The Findings

200 adolescent girls and boys in the seven countries under the study of the report were interviewed. The interviews were transcribed from audio recordings to become a repository of a wealth of information available for analysis.

The interviews elaborated the similarities and differences between adolescent girls and boys across the seven countries as well as within one country. The salient common denominators among the seven Arab countries are:

- lack of consistent, coherent self-representation, and social belonging is influential factor in shaping the autonomous personality
- a taboo for adolescents and families to discuss reproductive health and lack of scientific information available to the family and the school.
- Family relations are relatively tensed and mediated by adolescents understanding of the position of their families. The extreme cases in terms of the relationship between adolescents and their families are divided by submission or confrontations which relate to discrimination between girls and boys.
- The school for Arab adolescents is generally uninviting. They repeatedly criticized the traditional didactic methods in education. The openness of teachers rather than their competency is a decisive factor for adolescents' role modeling. The headmaster of the school is perceived as a 'prisoner' by the majority of adolescent girls and boys.
- Work is a priority for a high percentage of adolescents. However, they generally believe in gender roles in labor with few exceptions.
- There is clear differences with respect to the interest in activities. As well as gender disparity in terms of behavioral control and hobbies.
- Adolescents are generally reluctant when it comes to political activities and prefer communities and rationality in making decisions and reactivity in taking actions.
- Religion is always present. It often mixed with prevalent customs and traditions. Views about religion vary from flexible to extreme.

- There are differences among countries and similarities transcending national borders. The interviews uncovered various variables within the country in light of the economic status, the place of residence whether in the city or the rural areas, the social and professional belonging, the education and cultural levels of the family, the surrounding political and institutional environment and the specific characteristics of the single family.

The Recommendations of the Report

- **The self identity and autonomous personality:** the primary education objective is to contribute to the construction of proactive, independent and conscious personality.
- **The reproductive health:** national plan for addressing the early marriage among specific social classes. Build partnership with civil institutions, government and the judiciary to legalize the minimum age of marriage and to examine the implications of late marriage for the adolescent girls and boys' health and social behaviors.
- **Family Relations:** delineates the negative impact of discrimination between the adolescent girls and boys in the family, and a margin for judicial intervention to address the extreme types of discrimination against girls.
- **The school:** upgrade the education methods and associate them with modern technology and the school and careers.
- **Labor and economic activity:** protect the rights of adolescent girls and boys to form trade unions and to benefit from social security and health insurance and all types of employment related benefits.
- **Behavior and hobbies,** maintain institutional structure such as clubs, communities, youth residences, sports and cultural clubs specially in poor urban neighborhoods and rural areas.
- **The attitudes, values and religion:** raising awareness to differentiate between what is religious and what is customary and political choices and ideology to avoid confusion and misconception by adolescent girls and boys.
- **The attitudes, values and politics :** Call on political parties to develop more advanced platforms to improve the image of political activities and to move beyond the traditional understanding of politics as a struggle over power. This negative image is the main reason for adolescents disaffection and mistrust of organized political action.
- **Studies and Statistics:** build database on adolescent girls and boys and make accessible to all concerned parties.

