

News Brief, June 30th, 2015

Child marriage: 13% among Lebanese and 23% among Syrian refugees according to a study done by USJ Political Science students and professors. Questions raised about Syrian-Lebanese child marriages.

The Political Science Institute at Saint Joseph University held a conference on Monday June 29th at Huvelin campus in which the results of a quantitative study about Child Marriage funded by the Canadian embassy in Beirut were presented. Data was taken from Electoral Lists for Lebanese citizen, UNHCR database for Syrian refugees, and a field survey done by political science students in North, Bekaa, Mount Lebanon, Beirut and South.

The conference was opened by Professor Fadia Kiwan who raised the importance of the topic, and need to address it scientifically. ISP professor Hala Itani then presented quantitative results and analytics. The study shows that 13% of women in Lebanon got married before age 18. The highest percentage is among Alaouis (16% of women married under 18), followed by Sunnis (13%), Shiis (12%), Durzis (10%), Maronites and Greek Orthodox (7%), Greek Catholics and other Christian communities (6%).

Aside from confessional differences, the study showed differences among regions, with Hermel on the top of the ranking with 16%. Meinye Denniye, Tyr, Hasbaya, Tripoli, and Akkar follow with 15 to 14% of child marriages. Batroun, Jezzine, Methn, Baabda, Kesrouan, Byblos, Koura, Chouf are on the bottom of the list with the lowest ranking (5 to 7%). Beirut has a rate of 8%.

On the Syrian refugee side, the UNHCR data shows that 23% of Syrian women present in Lebanon today were married before age 18. The variation across regions did not seem very big in the case of Syrian refugees. With regards to Syrian youth, among the 70,269 Syrian girls age 12-17 present in Lebanon today, 4454 were married before age 18, which is equivalent to 6.3% against 0.2% of young boys.

The obvious difference between Lebanese and Syrian refugee rates raises the issue regarding Syrian-Lebanese interaction in the present and future. Professor Alsharabati who participated to the study and discussions, said that during the field work there were testimonials by sheikhs regarding such marriages although they were not captured by the survey. "There is a demand and supply dynamic which is worrying. Some people talked about marriage of Syrian young girls with Lebanese adults in exchange for payments of 3,000,000 LBP to the girls' parents." She added.

Professor Itani also presented a causal analysis, showing the importance of socio-economic variables such as education, revenue, parents' education, and cultural variables such as tribal identity. The quantitative analysis proves that education takes over all other variables, including confession, showing the importance of education in addressing this issue. It also shows that mother education has a bigger impact than father's education, limiting child marriage. This raises importance of education among girls and women in low income and remote areas, and especially among Syrian communities. "Today 20% of Syrian children in Lebanon are going to school" and this is alarming commented Prof. Alsharabati.

The conference ended with a short movie done by students sharing the field experience and challenges they have faced. Students were present in the conference, discussing, commenting, and reacting to questions with their usual dynamism and motivation.