

**Syria's Youth Perspectives and Orientations  
Towards Issues of Social Change**

(A field study, Syria 2007)

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## **Introduction**

The transformations impinging upon the Arabic society, including Syria, has been accelerating due to the development of the societal education surrounding the youth; from the religious and tribal identity to the national one then, nowadays, to the concept of the identity of what is beyond the national, and to the globalization that has been pressing in order to make the world directing towards the sole American-Western style.

All of this is taking place within a short period of time that made the youth live the crisis of their inability to identify its clear identity, in addition to the crises specifically surrounding Syria; the occupation of Palestine and Iraq and the continuing threat of the youth and their future, so that they have become living in constant anxiety about their national, crucial issues and personal affairs, such as finding a job, getting married, self-attainment, etc.

### **1. Purpose of the Study**

The research aims at studying the Syrian youth's inclinations and interests in issues surrounding them and how they think of the other (i.e. their attitude towards the other sex, the family, and surroundings, etc.), their future and the issues of their homeland and fellow citizens, in addition to the problems standing in their way.

### **2. Importance of the Study**

The youth form a large segment of the Syrian community. The mission of development and progress lies on their shoulders. My interest in this subject emerges from the special position this portion occupies in the structure of the society. They also represent a fundamental pillar upon which the boom and progress of the society depends; they are the nucleus of social change since they have power, energy and ability to renew and give; they are the core of economic change, since they have youthful productive potentials; the instrument and purpose of development, and there is no comprehensive development if the state does not pay attention to them and work continuously on fulfilling their demands. Knowing the youth's future orientations and the means of dealing with these orientations begets knowing Syria's orientations and future, too.

According to 2004 census carried out in Syria, the population between 15-24 years old is 4,003,00 forming 21.3% of the total population of the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR); that is, they are one fifth of the population. Hence the importance of the study as it sheds light on this fifth, being Syria's future.

### **3. Limitations of the Study**

**Spatial domain:** the study has examined the Syrian youth in selected governorates/ MUHAFAZAT represented in seven: Aleppo, Lattakia, Hims, Dai Azzor, Suwaida, Damascus and its countryside, taking into consideration the geographical areas and their social representation; that is, the ratio of each governorate from the sample is the governorate's population ratio.

**Temporal domain:** the theoretical study and the deduction of the hypotheses guiding the research have been carried out at the beginning of 2007. Data is collected in April 2007 in harmony with the start of universities and schools.

**Human domain:** the study examines the youth's viewpoints during the age between 14-24, the age of adolescence and taking serious life decisions that will define one's directions and relationships, taking into consideration the two educational stages, university and high school. The aim of this is not having entered the practical, realistic life yet, or finishing the education stage before entering the market. The study covered all youth ages regardless of their current occupations or jobs.

#### **4. Hypotheses of the Study**

The study depends on a basic hypothesis; that is, knowing the youth's orientations and viewpoints of issues relating to their personal lives and conceptions of the societal life, the changes surrounding them and the problems standing in their way, according to the youth's priorities. In addition, it depends on various hypotheses of studying relations the researcher seeks for, which might come up during the analysis, such as the relation of age, sex and education to the various issues of society, and the relation with the other inside and outside family.

#### **5. Methodology of the Study**

The study adopts the method of social survey for samples by randomly selecting provinces according to the property of being north, south, east or west of Syria. The researcher adopts the cluster sample for representing the youth's life in schools, universities and general life for those who stopped studying. The sample is randomly selected within the defined segment. We depend on the ratio of each segment of the population in the census groups.

#### **6. Instruments of the Study**

The study depends completely on a questionnaire that goes with the hypotheses of the study which will be proved or disproved.

The questionnaire includes general and personal information, information about viewpoints and attitudes and open questions.

- The questions depend as much as possible on various choices enabling the research team to use automatic sorting out of the results.
- The questions depend on an interview between the researcher and subjects in the governorates meant for research (under the supervision of a supervisor).

#### **7. Problem of the Study and its analysis in Syria**

The Social changes in Syria have imposed on the youth new requirements in order to adapt, and harmonize themselves with modern life. The youth are the most influenced by social change. These requirements start with them in the family and move with them to school and its educational system, then to the rest of the society (Assaati 2003: 9).

a. **Family:** It is no more the comprehensive, multifunctional institution, in educational, cultural, socio-economic terms. Its role is limited due to the emergence of other institutions competing with it to take its place. The family is no more self-independent; it is wide open to foreign influences and multi-educational practices. Consequently, the family has been subject to deep

changes making it a secondary environment for bringing up individuals (et al 1999: 266), though it remains the most popular site where children are cared for and raised.

**b. School and education system:** The Arab youth have the opportunity to keep updated with knowledge and thinking types that stir them up to stand against or even reject behavioral and value dictations to which the society is accustomed. Consequently, there is a gap between the old's education and that of the young, particularly with the availability of better opportunities of education for the latter which were not as available for the former. We find many disparities between the parents of a certain educational, cultural level, and the parents of a lower one in terms of dealing with the new circumstances surrounding their offspring (al-Hajjar 1992: 121). As well, we find a similar relationship between the instructor and student; the student's life is not devoid of being subject to the instructor's authority which in turn stands for the authority of the society, especially when the educational system, which is responsible for social naturalization, is defamed by tyranny. Educational systems are still suffering from deficiency and insufficiency in terms of the absence of entertainment in education, intolerable burdens laid on students' shoulders, the mistaken educational practices in schools and the undeveloped examination system and the non-copartner relationship between the instructor and student. All of this results in the failure of schools and the educational system at large in achieving the objectives of continuous education and encouraging the adolescent student to work independently and innovate.

**c. Society:** In addition to the basic educational institutions that influence the youth's values and directions, there are the means of technological revolution and media that have led to interlocking the stripes of the educational process and pouring the values out from various resources on the youth to form their education and directions. The increase of the sharpness and educational, social, value discrepancy has led to the increase of the space between the old generation and its special education and the young generation and its special education and the aggravation of the so-called "generations conflict" phenomenon (al-Hajjar 1992:121).

Furthermore, the Arab youth's involvement in the existing contradiction within the society and the old's carelessness of this diversity may inherit various shapes of contradiction. The youth's non-participation in planning for their lives and running their affairs have led to the emergence of foreignization among the youth (Izzuddeen 2003:89).

The youth suffer at the end of adolescence and beginning of youth of personal, social and psychological problems disabling them to communicate proper with what is surrounding them. The youth's values and orientations towards their society and life, which we are trying to know in this study, sometimes clash with their lack of knowledge and recognition of political information and eruditions. This makes the youth passive towards their important national cases. This is accounted for by Holians who regards that the cause of the university youth's foreignization from their countries' issues is their ignorance of the international events and their low education; this is happening here and in Europe (Holians 1972: 120).

The whole world has become a small village because of the communication revolution and economic transformation towards globalization imposing new values on the youth, where the youth's cultural styles and choices have rapidly changed (Mok 2005: 310).

When studying the youth's orientations it is important to know their roles in the family and society. Schnieder found that the youth's deviation from the social pattern existing in their countries might make them careless about the changes taking place in their surroundings and unobserving to taking a specific decision about their countries' cases (Schnieder 1975: 130).

Consequently, overlooking the youth's problems and affairs by the society pushes them to step aside turning to personal affairs not of any interest to the whole community. In other words, attracting the youth is possible but by getting them involved in taking decisions in the family, school and social activities.

We will here focus on the previous studies that were carried out in Syria (the domain of the present research). Among the most important studies is Maha Zahluq's and Ali Watfi's study (Tartus 1992) entitled "The Youth's Orientations towards Marriage Habits and its Social Functions". The aim of this study is to identify the youth's orientations towards marriage habits, dominant marriage traditions, divorce habits, dowry and sexual relations between the two sexes.

Its sample is a comprehensive survey of summer camping students in Tartus.

- The results show the rooting of some traditional marriage traditions among the youth; a large segment of girls look at early marriage as a socially not accepted habit.
- Young men accept girls' marriage before 20; girls refuse polygamy.
- Young men reject dowry, whereas girls assert its importance.

Zahluq-Watfi's study shows the influence of bad habits dominant in the society on the youth's ideas and anticipation that have to be different. These ideas and anticipations are linked and affected by the family's traditional orientations and desires.

This is also clear in our present study in the attitudes of women and their traditional roles and in the youth's goals and attitudes that have been kept strongly bound to the past in Syria till 2007.

Mohamed Iz Arabi's study (1997) "Damascus University Students' Orientations towards Marriage Means and Family Organization" aims at knowing the students' orientations in Damascus University towards marriage means and family organization and the special characteristics of the future partner. The population sample is about 1122 male and female students from the various colleges of Damascus University. The result shows the influence of the socio-economic level on the issues of engagement and marriage, and the linkage of this to the various colleges of Damascus University, the discrepancy of the length of studying years and types.

This research, although has been dealt with by other researchers, discusses marriage issues and family organization by raising questions about the ways of choosing the partner, his/her favorite characteristics, and the best age of marriage for girls. However, our study tackles more issues regarding the socio-political life of the Syrian youth.

Regarding the sample ages, we find that the research concentrates on the ages before university—the age of adolescence. The aim of this research is to get to know the opinions of this group and their inclinations and orientations and which of those are closer to the family, as well as school friends' orientations. The research carried out by Ahmad Abu Ras entitled “The

Young Orientations towards Work and Education” (2001) is one of the most important studies about the youth's orientations. Abu Ras' study shares the target of this study concerning the knowledge of the youth's orientations towards education and work in the conditions of the social changes. Abu Ras' study concluded that the youth's orientations towards work:

1. vary according to sex
2. differ according to social status (married, divorced, single, widow, etc.)
3. change according to the job undertaken (public and private)

Abu Ras' study shows that the youth's orientations are almost the same in all the Syrian governorates/ muhafazat. This study as well extends to cover all the Syrian governorates dealing with Syria as one unit.

As a beginning we carried out a pilot study in the Sociology and Medicine departments (Damascus University) on some young groups in order to know their orientations and the possible quality of questions for the extensive research that we intend to do about Syria. This clarified the existence of the value contrast in students' life, between parents and children. As 80% of the sample group was in worry about its future. On the other hand, the same group believed that their being accepted in Sociology or Medicine was a just dependant upon the grades received in the baccalaureate, and not on their own choice. Moreover, the study showed also that accomplishment stimulus is one of the students' worries. There is in fact a doubt about accomplishment during one's life time.

### **Analysis of the study data about the Syrian young people, 2007**

The sample included 2370 students between the ages of 14 and 24, the years of study between high school and university. It is the period between the two ages of adolescence and beginning of youth age when work choices are to be made. There is also the stage of marriage: choosing the partner and the issue of keeping family values and traditions alive when having a family. All this requires a stable body of values that leads to the right decision taking for every stage and orientation.

### **Age and Gender**

The sample comprised 2370 individuals whose ages are distributed approximately due to the right choice of the sample of the Syrian family society. The largest percentage was (14.3%) for those aging 24 year old, followed by ages 20 and 23—the ages of university and looking for work. People of ages 15-18 amount to 34%, 19-21 (31%), and 22-24 (35%). This shows that all sampled students are over 19 years old, which represent 66% of the researched students. It is a group which should be studied to know its way of thinking and understanding of current issues and the view of the youngest people in the Syrian society. As it is on the ground; concerning the diagram of gender it is distributed to males and females approximately equally in the whole sample, 49% females and 51% males, respectively (Fig.2).

### **Sample Distribution According to the Governorate (Fig. 3)**

The sample we chose was in proportion with each governorate's population in relation to the whole population in Syria. So, it is normal to have a percentage of 59% only from Damascus with its countryside, and Aleppo, bearing in mind that these governorates have residents from the other Syrian areas.

### **Education (Figure 5)**

The diversity of fields that this sample was taken from manifested itself clearly in the different levels of education which are closer to the levels of the education of the population where 80% of those are less than high school. In the process of focusing on the educational level and training of the survey givers, the formal certificate is the one gained through public education only.

The percentages of illiteracy and those who can read and write (3% and 5% respectively) are low in the sample in proportion with the state of illiteracy, in general, in Syria. The percentage mounted up to 19% in the whole country for different ages (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). The number reflects the young group of society rather the youngest. Add to that, the researcher favors those who give opinion and express interests. With the aim to know the relation between gender and education and their quantity in the sample (Figures 2-4), we find that in all educational levels the females number is larger than that of the males, except in the primary school where the percentage of males is 69%, while the females is 30%. This percentage is approximate in the preparatory stage (49% males vs. 50% females), while it is 84% males and 52% females in the high school. The disparity is for the benefit of females in intermediate institutes reaching 46% for males, in return to 54% for females. Also, in university the percentage is for the benefit of females (54% vs. 46% males). For example, the percentage of females is greater than that of males in different faculties, except in Engineering with all its different departments. The sample is generally educated as it is shown from the percentages in Figures 1-5 and 2-5.

### **Work (Figure 6)**

This sample concentrates on high school and university students, which represents 63% of the whole sample. This conforms to the intended age groups which are mainly between 14-24, the suitable age for education, in addition to the fact that this conforms to the ages where 57% are between 20-24 ages. These rates show that the sample is mainly comprised of students. This is emphasized to know the selections and expectations of the coming sample.

### **Relation with Family (Figure 7)**

In the whole sample the largest percentage of describing the relation with the family as being "good" is 36%, "excellent" 34%, "incongruent" 5%, "weak" 4%, "fair" 19.5%. These percentages, from "fair" to "incongruence," mounted up to 28.6% which is one third of the whole sample. However, in the presence of other people, a big percentage in the society is keen on saying that the relation is "excellent". There is always a difference between what they say and what is actually done in the society; i.e. 'generation conflict' as it is called sociology.

### **When upset, who do you confide with (Figure 8)?**

This question follows the question of the relation with the family due to the fact that 41% of the sample finds the resort with a friend, though the relation with the family is "excellent". On the other hand, 17% of the sample answered "no one" which draws attention to the loneliness of the adolescent and his/her inability to share his problems with anyone. The disparity between generations is represented clearly in the age difference with the mother (18.5%) and the father (4.5%), reflecting lack of communication and weak family ties. Figure (1-8), sharing problems according to gender, shows that 76% males and 24% females resort to the father, while to the

mother the percentages are reversed; 29% for males and 19% for females.

This makes it clear that there is gender segregation in the family; males approach males, females resort to females—either parents or siblings. “Sharing worries with brothers” is 80% for males and 20% for females, while for sisters it is 17% (males) and for females it is 82%. The biggest number is among friends of the same sex, which is very important socially, culturally and economically. That is due to the fact that friends are coupled with each other, usually exchange opinions and communicate with each other more than with the other members in the family and the society.

### **The Best Way for Getting Married (Figure 9)**

In spite of the several choices of marriage laid to the youth, it is limited to two ways only: family arranged marriages (28%) or personal choice (68.5%). The latter is the up-to date way for an educated person to choose the spouse with a desire to build a relationship based on mutual satisfaction of both parties. To validate the results, we divided the sample in accordance with these choices and according to gender to conclude that males preferred personal acquaintance (Figure 2-9), while girls preferred engagement through the family. This is because girls have tendency to a tradition which she can trust and be more guaranteeing for the future of the relationship.

### **Choosing Clothes from the Market (Figure 8)**

The biggest percentage of males who chose their clothes by themselves is 48%, by the mother is 22%, and with the help of a friend is 15%. If we look back at the relation according to gender (Figure2-10), we find that the individual choice for males is greater than that of females. By himself/ herself is 55% (males) and 44% (females). As regards shopping with the mother we find that the males' percentage is 24%, while for females it is 75%, because the female has a tendency to choose her clothes with the help of her mother. The lowest percentage goes for the father, shopping with the father is only 2.6% of the sample (for both males and females), although the father is one who usually pays for the items bought.

### **The appropriate Age for Marriage (Figure 1-11)**

The question aimed at defining the girl's best age of marriage. The young in Syria generally believe that the best ages for marriage are: 20 (27% of the sample), and 25 (19%). Between these ages there are dispersed rates that are obvious. To put it differently, this is the opinion of the sample which supports the idea of getting married either after high school or after university. Of course, this depends on the conditions of the man or woman at any stage. For example, the age of marriage for a university girl student is after graduation. The researched sample shows with a larger percentage of 25% that the best age for youth is 30, and 21% to the age of 25 years old. Studying the accumulative percentage we find that 90% of the sample prefers the marriage of the male before 30, bearing in mind the age group of the research because most of the young change their beliefs after this age.

### **What is the Appropriate Number of Children in the Family (Figure 11-2)?**

The largest percentage is 33% who chose 2 kids, 32% 3 kids, 21% 4 kids. This means that 92% of the sample chose 4 kids and less. This is a policy to lessen the number of children in Syria in general, as response to family organization campaigns by the state and the responsible bodies

about family issues. This is due to the increase in population which is threatening development. The researched age group is between 14-24, which means that the concept of a smaller family have become clearer in the minds of those who want to have a family in the future in Syria. There is a percentage of 4.5% of those who want one kid—a very little percentage in contrast with the prevailing traditions to increase the number of children in the family.

### **Priorities in the Family (Figure 12)**

Regarding Question 12, we find that the aim was to know the most important values in the family, not in the partner but rather inside the family to which the young belongs. This was to know and be closer to the family atmosphere. There is a romantic tendency on the side of the youth to choose *love* as a priority (36%), followed by *religion* 32% and *education* (11%), very far from love and religion. This means that the Syrian family dangles between love and religion. The strange thing is that 115 of the researched sample considers *money* as a priority among the family values, as 5% put it in the first place, while 11% in the second place, and 18% in the third place. Going back to the first value of the whole sample, i.e. love, we find that the priorities vary according to gender; 44% for males and 56% for females. This proves that females are more inclined to this value. As for religion it is 54% (males) and 46% (females). The value of education is divided equally between males and females. Money, on the other hand, is a priority to 115 people of those researched, 62% for males and 38% for females. This shows that males are more inclined to considering financial values as a priority in their lives, due to marriage requirements. Comparing family values with the educational level we find that *love*, the first priority, was chosen by 41% of high school students, officials or university students, and 11% of graduates. On the other hand, the priority of religion was chosen by 6% of the graduates, 7% by the intermediate institute graduates, 42% by the undergraduate, and 35% by the preparatory school students. From this it is clear that the socio-political atmosphere makes the value more effective, as the family choice affects the young in their own choices of values.

### **Expectations of having a Job after Graduation (Figure 13)**

In the sample, the researched answered "Yes" (30%), "No" (10.5%), "job opportunities are hardly possible (29%) and 27 % considered that "it is possible but with some kind of favourism." This suggests that 66% of the sample doesn't have trust in getting a job after finishing school. Answers affirm that the young have a feeling of unfairness, where 29% believe that *favourism* could achieve job opportunities but not *efficiency, efforts exerted, or academic achievement*.

### **Have you ever Participated in a Cleaning-up Campaign in your Town? (Figure 14)**

To avoid direct questions like: Would you like to volunteer in any humanitarian work?, and get clear answers regarding the sense of volunteering, social responsibility, and the desire to do something for the general welfare of the society; we used the above-mentioned question in the survey. Thus, 41% of the youth answered "Yes" in return to 20% who said "No", while 39% of the researched answered "Yes", but only with the participation of the whole society, which shows reluctance to volunteer work. That is because the work of the whole community means that work is not voluntary. It is a situation which expresses lack of desire to work voluntarily for the benefit of the whole, something that needs nurturing in the family or school.

That is why we discussed in Figure (2-15) the relation of education to volunteering, which showed that the highest percentage of "Yes" is from university students (39%), followed by

(32%) for the undergraduate. Thus, ages between 15-20 are more willing to volunteer for the welfare of the community.

Generally, the disparity between the desire to volunteer if others participate and the non-desire to serve the community is at a very high rate. It is something very worrying in a society where the good deed should be regarded highly for the public welfare for a better future.

### **Are you Optimistic about your Future? (Figure 15)**

The majority of the sample is confident about their future (77% vs. 22% of those who are not). This is a good thing but to an extent; when comparing this with the expectations of getting a job we find that the majority expect difficulties in finding a job unless other means are available, such as *favourism*. Those who were confident of finding a job amount to 30%, which means that the expectations of 77% are not based on real grounds. Comparing answers with education (Figure 2-16) we find that the confident, those who had a high school certificate (45%) said, "Yes", 9% for university students and 9.3% for graduates of intermediate institutes. It is possible to say then that the more education one has, the less job openings one has. Figure 15 shows that males are less confident than females. Those who said "Yes" are 48% (males) and 52% (females), compared with "No" 55% (males) and 45% (females). That is due to the fear and worry of males due to their inability to meet marriage requirements and to have a family, which is the male's sole responsibility in the eastern society.

### **Level of Education (Figure 16)**

In general, the question does not present specific indicators, because the answer was 20% "Greater", 43% "Equal" and 32% "Makes no difference". It is possible to say that *equality* in the educational level is preferable by a high percentage of the sample. Figure 16 (knowing of the relation between gender and the partner's educational level) proves that males are inclined to "Better" (9%), "Less" (8%), "Equal" (46%), and "Makes no difference" (37%). Those who prefer the partner to be educationally "Better" are 23% (males) and 77% (females). This rate shows that females accept their partners to be at a better level. So "Equal" in the educational level and "Makes no difference" are the prevalent. On the other hand, if there is a desire of a better level, it is more important for the male (Figure 2-16).

Figure 3-16 clarifies the level of the partner alongside the educational level whereby the more the educational level is, the more his/her choice of "Equal" or "Makes no difference" will be. Those who are aware of this issue are university students, although a small number of 4% prefers a less educational level.

### **The Characteristics of the Partner (Figure 17-1)**

Since the education of the researched group is higher than average in the society, the priority was given to *morals* (48%), *love* (20%), and *education* (2%) indicating that the Syrian society is easterly-inclined in terms of giving priority to *morality* and *good reputation* in choosing the marriage partner and guaranteeing the continuity of life after marriage.

Comparing males and females (Figure 17), we find that "morals" is a priority for 49% (males) and 51% (females) which means that, practically speaking, there is no difference. But regarding "love", a percentage of 41% (males) and 59% (females) imply that females depend on *love* in their marriage decisions. Concerning "Beauty" as a priority, it is 78% for males and 22% for

females. This percentage shows that *morals, love and beauty* are important issues for males, while *morality and love* are for females.

Further, the characteristic of having money, i.e. being rich, in the partner is 7% from the sample (27% for males and 72% for females), which indicates that money as a value is important for the females to guarantee a stable marriage. Most of those who selected the money value, among the educated, carry high school certificates, approximately 44%.

### **Wearing a veil in our society (Figure 18-1)**

The question was raised in order to get clear answers to why girls wear a veil, i.e. exploring the relationship between what the woman wears and piety. The highest percentage was 30% for *piety*, 20% *modesty*, 21% *compliance with the family traditions*, and 26% *compliance with the society*.

The question was about whether wearing a veil is out of conviction and determination or mere compliance with others. It is a hypothetical question to ask for both boys and girls; therefore, all subjects of the sample answered it.

By studying Figure (18-2), about gender and veil, we notice that the selection of religion is convergent; 48% for males and 52% for females. As for the category "compliance with the society" 55% of males and 45% of females selected it, which means that the former are more convinced that the veil is a mere compliance with the society. Regarding the category "compliance with family", 45% of males and 55% of females selected it, which indicates that wearing the veil is directly affected by family.

All in all, the other non-religious choices indicate that the society interferes in the veil issue and the women's and men's conviction comes in the second place after *pressure of the society, family and surrounding*.

### **The most respectable profession (Figure 19)**

The doctor's profession occupies the first position, where it is selected as a priority by 34% of the subjects, then the university professor's profession (19%). More than a third selected the doctor's profession at first, and about a fifth the university instructor's as a second profession without much dispute about that. After that comes the politician, lawyer and engineer respectively because the politician is the third in the first rank, the lawyer is the third in the second rank and the engineer is the first in the third rank, which confirms the classification of the social professions as:

1. Doctor
2. University professor
3. Politician
4. Lawyer
5. Engineer

We think that this classification is related to people's concepts and needs of these professions; the doctor's profession is described as a humane one that everyone needs it and it is close to all people.

What is pitiful is that amongst these professions are government employees who occupy the lowest position on the social scale of professions; they used to be the educated ones, the ones enjoying high prestige in the government. They however occupy today the lowest rank as if people have unanimously agreed upon that.

The choices are related to the youth's interest and job fields; among the educated who selected the first priority for the university instructor, are 47% carrying high school certificates, that is, university students (Figure 19). The doctor's profession as a first priority is scattered to the various educational levels with high ratios, where the highest is among secondary and high school certificates holders, that is, secondary school and university students.

### **If qualifications are equal, who gets the job? (Figure 20)**

If the qualifications are equal, the job will be gotten, according to the opinion of 43% of the sample, by the girl, whereas 18.5% say that it is the young man who gets it. What is strange is the 38% who answered by "Don't now" which is generally a high percentage reflecting the lack of desire to answer or inability to evaluate what may happen in similar circumstances, or unwillingness to comment on such a question. However, 43% is still high and indicates that the youth's society is, in particular, considering that the girl is receiving a special treatment just because she is a female.

Comparing the answers with the available gender variable, we find that males and females have almost the same perspective concerning who gets the job if both applied to it, mainly the female; 19.5% believed that the young man will get it versus 50.5% believing that the girl will get it, and 30% of males answered (Don't know). Both males' and females' responses were the same as regarding the same question; 52% of males and 48% of females have the same conviction; *the female will get the job*.

### **Choosing what to study (Figure 21)**

In the sample, 60% of the questioned youth considered that the total marks of the secondary school certificate is the factor that tells a student what to study apart from the student's desire or his family's. This is the situation in Syria, though that progressive countries have chosen other ways to get rid of the horror caused by the secondary school certificate (the so-called Baccalaureate in Syria). These new ways include such suggestions as general first Baccalaureate, university-specific Baccalaureate, or exams undertaken by the university before getting admission.

We find out that the student's family interference with choosing the major is 5%, and that the student is the decision-maker. In Figure 2-21 the student's family interference was 38% with males and 61% with females. This means that the family can interfere with the females' choice more than the males in choosing their major in the university. 53% of males and 47% of females said that they were responsible for their own choice. 68% of males and 32% of females said their

friends helped them choose their major. This implies that males have more self-assurance and they are decision-makers more than females.

### **Source of Information for the Youth (Figure 22)**

A percentage of 40% (exactly 935 questioned persons) said that *television* was their first source of information. This 40% is a high percentage for a medium considered largely as a provider of general information and drama series. A percentage of 23% said that *books* are their second source of information. Books are an excellent source of information, but we don't know whether they mean secondary school books or university books because the purpose of these books is just to help the student pass the examinations. However, school or university books cannot be considered as a constant source of information.

A percentage of 17% said that *the Internet* was their source of information. Consequently, we can arrange the priorities of information sources as follows:

1. Television
2. Books
3. The internet
4. Friends
5. The family

Most young men prefer their position among their friends more than in their families because they find themselves on the same level with their friends, while occupying a middle position in their families.

The research confirms the role of the Internet in social life: it is necessary that decision-makers should be aware of taking benefit from the Internet to have a social effect on the youth particularly. If we study the relationship between the Internet as a source of information and the levels of education levels, we find that the high percentage (43%) was university students, and 24% was preparatory school. if you visit the Internet cafés in Syria, you will find that the young men are dominating the scene. Using the Internet as a source of information is something new for the new generations. On the other hand, the previous generation is still depending on the traditional mediums to get knowledge. For the young men, the Internet is not only a medium of knowledge; it is also a way to spend time. Figure 4-22 shows how much the Internet is important for all educational levels, even for the illiterate.

### **Spending Free Time (Figure 23)**

In Figure 23 a percentage of 35% chose to spend free time with friends, while 18% chose TV. But you can watch TV with friends. Consequently, we conclude that TV and friends occupy 53% of the youth's free time. 11% of the sample chose *reality*. This is a good percentage for the Syrian youth who are always described in the press of being non-readers. Moreover, this high percentage of friends, (35%) ask visiting relatives (9%), indicates that the youth escape from their families to their friends because they are the same age. This reflects tendency towards self-assurance in the framework of their own values.

### **Mixing with the other Sex, Co-education (Figure 24)**

The issue of co-education at school and mixing with the other sex in companies or factories was put under discussion inside and outside the university. In Figure 24, a percentage 48% agreed on

mixing in the university, while 48% extremely disagreed because mixing is only in the university.

Concerning secondary school, 79% were against mixing and 17% were with mixing. This is very normal because co-education at schools is not common in Syria. So, the students described the current situation. A percentage of 72% opposed to mixing at work, while 24% supported it. These two percentages reflect a continuous religious intellectual orientation because we do not have sex segregation. This segregation may be caused by the fact that certain types of jobs may fit only a particular gender.

In Figure (24-4), 82% were against segregation, while 14% were for it. It is clear that this percentage is incorrect because it contradicts with the figures about mixing. In concluding the data, segregation was not indicated. This empty space shows a desire against segregation and it cannot be considered as an empty answer.

### **Who is the Fittest, Males or Females? Figure (25-31)**

A set of questions is put in order to figure out the questioned sample's opinion about sex segregation. The main question shouldn't be "Do you believe in the equality between males and females?" Note that the answers are misleading because everybody supports equality. In Question 25-31 we asked very specific ones to know the attitudes of the question sample concerning sex segregation issues like jobs or defined missions and the relationship between these issues and the historical role of both men and women.

Asking the question of sample about *cooking*, a percentage of 67.5% believed that cooking is related to women, while 2% attributed cooking to men, and 30% did not find any difference.

Asking about *car driving*, 35% were with males, while 62% didn't find any difference. All these results are due to the social tradition, which relate cooking to women and car driving to men. So, 62% didn't find any difference and 35% related car driving with men only. 35% is very big percentage in a society seeking Equity.

Disparities are greater in the sport of swimming percentage that 30% find "it fits guys and not girls, in return to 66% who find it "makes no difference". A percentage of 3.5% think it suits girls, which is very strange since half of the sample is girls. This result shows that social beliefs and the inferior attitudes towards women are adopted by men and women equally.

Figure 28 demonstrates that a big percentage of 40% consider that women go to school or university in order to go out of the house. After all, they believe, women are to get married and have a house, while men work after marriage.

The disparities also very sharply concerning the question about "Authority at home," (Figure 29). In spite of the fact that half of the sample is males and the other females, 65% of them state that authority is the right of men and should be with them. Only 30% answered "it makes no difference" which is related to household issues, have nothing to with gender. On the other hand,

a percentage of 65% believes that men are the leaders of the house even if they lunatic or less educated.

As regarding the position of the Prime Ministry, Figure (30) shows that 56% think it is a position for men more than women, a thinking which expresses a prevalent social attitude that women are not qualified to serve for leadership positions in the country. This is not due to the fact the majority of the sample is males but because of the prevailing thinking in the society.

As for Figure 31, it is about education after university. The majority of 82% believe that “it makes no difference”, because there will be no benefit from the call for equality in education if females would work in the kitchen after graduation. The problem isn’t in leaving the Prime Ministry for men, but the question reflects a general attitude that women are not fit for such VIP positions; regardless of women’s competence, ability or education. There are those who say that this is common in Arab and Islamic countries, though the Near and Far East’s past history witnessed women holding the position of a prime minister in Islamic, Christian and Hindus countries with exceptional performance.

### **Going to Friday Prayers (Figure 32)**

The aim of this question is similar to the Question of the Veil. Are religious external appearances an expression of a strong belief in God on the side of the young or do they just try to keep in line with the social environment and family? We find that 50% do this out of real devoutness and belief (Figure 33), while 50% consider it a personal issue. This means that the majority go to Friday prayers contentedly and for religious purposes, while a little percentage does it for the sake of others.

### **Who will win the elections? (Figure 33)**

A percentage of 27% answered “pro-government people”, and 28% “no honest elections in Syria.” In both answers 55% “don’t have strong belief in the elections”. Moreover, a percentage of 16% is for the one whom the public want and 16% for the rich; which shows that running for election is very costly. In addition, 13% said it is for “the most efficient,” which is strange because the efficient comes only through elections that do not exist.

### **Immigration to other countries (Figure 34-35)**

*Immigration* is approved by 43.4% of the young, while 56% rejected it—a division which shows a psychological instability and inconfidence in the future in the country. In Figure 15, we find that 22% of the young do not trust their future, while 30% expect to find work and the rest do not for different reasons (Figure 13).

Figure 34 shows that 56% do not approve of immigration, totaling 1336 subjects; their disapproval and non-desire to stay in the country are displayed in Figure 35 which shows the highest percentage for non-immigration which is because of: adherence to family, desire to strive for living at home despite the difficulties, and emphasizing the role of the family in the individuals’ life, besides in defining their choices. One of the most important reasons to reject immigration is inconfidence of other countries concerning of better circumstances, because immigration is a difficult venture for the majority who prefer to work and strive in their own country.

### **Our future ideology (Figure 36)**

The main concepts were ordered as follows: *Islam* (27%), *humanity at large* (26%), and *pan-nationalism* (24%)—a general orientation that depends on people’s beliefs and reflects the increasing number of Islamic movements in the Arab World whose motto is “Islam is the solution”. It is due also to effects resulting in from the eldest generation to make the society Islamic as the figures show: 11%, 21%, and 19%, respectively.

It is clear that *Islam* and *humanity* occupy the first place, *nationalism* and *family* the second place, followed by *pan-nationalism* in the third place. Academically and culturally, the numbers are contradictory, but research findings should be reported as they are. For example, in comparing the level of education to choosing *nationalism*, though school, Syrian media, and Syria are described as pan-national, we find that nationalism was chosen by 24.6% (preparatory students), 24.5% (high school), and 24.4% (university graduates). The majority who gave it the third place (43%) are university students, while for 50% of the sample it is an expression of an existing setback at the young in their attitude about pan-nationalism which was the preoccupation of all in the 60s and 70s. Nationalism as a solution to Syria’s problems and Arabism as an ideology are not any longer prevalent among the young.

### **The best way to regain the Golan Heights (Figure 37)**

This study is done and questionnaires are distributed after the victory of the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon over the Israelis in July 2006. This made the choice of Resistance takes the highest percentage among the young; about 37% believe that the resistance is the best way to regain Golan. In return, 20.5% believe that regaining the Golan could only be achieved through peaceful solutions and negotiations. However, a percentage of 19% believes in a military attack to make this dream come true.

It is worth mentioning here that despair is clearly seen among the youth of 23%; no hope in the return of the Golan. It is a high percentage where the young find themselves powerless and unable to react against the arrogance and arbitrariness of the enemy, despite the recent victory of the Islamic Resistance. Some believe that the situation is different on the Syrian front. The word “no hope” implies toughness and pain of losing part of the country forever. Thus, the majority believe in military force to regain the Occupied Golan.

### **Do you support negotiation with Israel? (Figure 38)**

A percentage of 41% do not acknowledge the existence of Israel and 24% do not agree to negotiate with it, a result showing that 61% want war to restore the Golan. On the other hand, only 15% agree to negotiate. This high percentage is in the wake of the victory of the Lebanese Resistance in 2006. However, it is strange that 17% of the sample has nothing to do with this issue, simply because they tend to avoid involvement in political discussion—an attitude towards politics resulting from the attitude of the state towards political opposition, it is the attitude of the teacher towards the student and the father towards the son and so on so forth.

### **Will Arab Unity be realized? (Figure 39)**

To get the Arab nationalism into the third rank among young people, Figure (43) shows that 55% of youth think that Arab unity will never be achieved in our present generation; an ultimate

despair due to the failure of the previous unity attempts. Thus, 37% contend that this aspiration will be achieved later, in the next coming generations. In contrast, six percent only think that it will ultimately be realized soon. This suggests the weakness of optimism in the young generation especially in the attitude of the Arab nationalism and the unity.

### **Syria's Goals (Figure 1-40)**

In spite of the pessimism prevailing among the young, Syria still clings to Arab unity, reaching 45%, while *democracy* got 20% only and *Islam* 13%. This means that *Arab Unity*—despite the despair—is still the hope of the youth.

Syrian school children usually recite every morning: *Our goals are: Unity, Freedom and Socialism*, not forget that they are put in order and the result is *Democracy* comes first at 5%. Having all this mind, goals might be ordered as follows: *unity and democracy, freedom, socialism, and Islam*.

Concerning education we find that 32% of those who got a university degree put democracy first, and 19% of the students who got general secondary certificate believe so, too. As shown in Figure (4-40) 53% of the secondary students and 44% of the university students and 30% of the university graduates think of unity as number one.

### **What problems young people suffer from? Figure 3-2-1-41)**

The Figure reveals that the problem of unemployment is the most crucial problem that the young faced where 62% of them find no work opportunity. This choice is related to the age of the sample and its educational level where the first problem facing them is to find a job as a gate to settling down, getting married and finding proper housing. The problem of finding accommodation came in the second place (22% of those who were surveyed, then the issue of getting married (11%). Since the question is hypothetical, what is meant by marriage chances is to find the appropriate partner for males or females.

In relation of this Figure with sex we find the marriage chances as a problem of 62% for females and 37% for males and the housing problem is of 56% for males, and 44% for females, whereas regarding education chances we find that both males and females share them equally.

In Figure 3-41 the problems of youth and educational level, we discover that the work chances problem is the first of 64% of secondary certificates holders and they are 43% of those who chose the work opportunities problem which is the lightest rate for the different educational levels. The biggest problem is to find a job in the future. All of their attitudes is to avoid problems in Syria. The different political attitudes of youth are related to their desire of the stability of work market and finding a suitable job.

### **Analysis of the last question (open question)**

We tackle in this part the comments of the youth who were questionaired on the questions raised and their suggestions in general that stressed that all the problems are important and emphasize work chances.

Work chances are these among the choices but the emphasis expresses the dimensions of the

problem among the youth. There is a common sense among the youth that there are unfair opportunities in getting jobs. There is a real desire of taking care of the youth; their problems, work chances, depending on confidence and taking care of them in media.

Males believe that females take their opportunities of work, whereas the comments of females showed the family pressure. Some of the remarks show a contradiction if the research looked at the form in detail such as: agreement about mixture between men and women and considering that cooking is the only girl's business at the same time. The power is for man in the house. Being aware of the form will sometimes help us know the reasons behind the questionnaires' answers are of the priorities and complains to none.

In the suggestion she said, "My family stands against marrying the one I love." The researcher couldn't follow up each form separately but following up some of the form will be useful to know the youth's visions and the reasons of adopting certain attitudes and values. There is suffering at the youth's generation of the rates of admission to the university: commentaries of one of them that the government doesn't want anyone to join university (Question 21). Some of the opinions emphasize religious tendencies which play an important role in the oriental girl. The final solution lies in return to Islam for all the youth's problems. Kinds of opinions recurred many times in different governorates.

We may arrange the suggestions as shown in the figure below that suggests the suffering of youth through their expressions in form and content.

Because the figures are of SPSS system which don't tackle all these questions: through the data we explained that the most important problem is (work chances), but when this sentence recurs many times in the forms - despite pointing to it in the questions- indicates that this problem is the most crucial one which the youth suffer from.

The order according to the emphasis on in the forms is (the most important):

1. Finding work chances and putting an end to the unemployment.
2. The equality in getting jobs.
3. Returning to Islam.
4. Enlightening family without putting pressure on sons and daughters.
5. Not-depending on the total marks of the baccalaureate.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The study showed that the most crucial problem among the youth is the need for finding job opportunities and getting rid of the unemployment. And this actually is the most important social problem which should be fully thought by sociologists, whereby an increase in the official figures is marked (see the table below):

2003	2002	2001	2000	Year
5083000	5459000	5255000	4937000	Work force
548438	637805	545000	469000	unemployed
10.8%	11.7%	10.3%	9.5%	Average of unemployment

Source: The Central Bureau of Statistics 2004, Damascus

The problem of youth's unemployment marks out the attitudes of youth against current political issues and their desire to societal stabilities and their worries about the future of Syria.

The study showed the necessity of conducting further social research into the relations of the family and the ways of understanding the social role of woman: to emphasize the equality of rights and duties, and also to understand the relations between parents and sons to bridge the gap between them. There is a necessity to ensure better circumstances for the youth to get married to realize social stability.

Further, the basic concepts related to the future of Syria do not seem to be clear among the youth during the revolutionary movements of the fifties and sixties of the past century; nationalism was the aim and the hope among different age groups but the failures of this achievement made the dream of unity seem unreachable and impossible. This does not worry us; however, the fear of spreading individual values and freedom is the thing we should care about since such beliefs will make the youth's contribution to development almost null. This confirms the fact that a new 'upbringing' is urgently needed.

This research is not only a study to show the youth's inclinations and orientations, but a means to probe the future development in Syria in all walks of life; economically, socially as well as politically.