

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
UNIVERSITY OF DAMASCUS
FACULTY OF LETTERS
SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT

THE WOMEN'S ISSUES IN THE SYRIAN MEDIA
SAMPLE OF THE SYRIAN RADIO STATION

Dr. Amal Hamdi Dakkak

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Introduction:

The Syrian woman holds an important position in the Syrian society. Interest in woman and her causes has increased, and so is "the role which the media can play in the process

of social change and comprehensive development, and in forming the cultural and worth pattern of the members of the society” (Salem, Nadia, 1990, p. 54). The media takes part in forming positive stances for the woman and prepares for her the opportunity to contribute effectively in the movement and building of the society in all fields and at all levels. The media reflects a set of issues linked to the causes of women, some of which are of a social cultural, legal and educational nature.

“The broadcasting station remains a powerful tool to disseminate new ideas, information and values and to strengthen what serves the development and combat the values that impede it. It is still an effective tool to arouse the awareness of the individuals about the issues and subjects which they practice with behavioral patterns inconsistent with the new life conditions” (Rizk, 1989, p 56).

The Syrian Broadcasting Station, since its beginning, has been paying attention to the issues of women through presented programs. The content of the programs presented through serials and plays is of particular importance since it is supposed to be a fertile field for presenting many issues that aim at raising the woman’s awareness and participation towards the advancement of the society.

The purpose of this study is to analyse a sample of the contents of the radio programs addressed to women in the Syrian broadcasting station in order to introduce the women’s issues raised by such programs. The importance of such programs lies in their interaction with women’s issues. Their value is also evident through the values they try to promote by directing them to women in different environments (cities, countryside). The importance of the programs is evident from the women’s issues they raise from time to time (social, health, economic, educational, etc).

What is the information discourse addressed to the woman through the Syrian Radio Station (General Program Channel) and to what extent the contents of this program reflect the woman’s issues and are compatible with the woman’s aspirations to the society in which she would contribute to its social and economic change process.?

The study tries to analyze the content of two radio programs directed to women and are broadcast on the General Program Channel during 2005.

I. Study Procedures and Steps:

1. Purposes of the Study:

To examine the social problems facing women and the issues raised through these two programs.

2. Assumption of the Study:

The radio programs reflect the woman’s issues in Syria. They include eight basic axes:

1. Social issues
2. Cultural issues
3. Health issues
4. Psychological issues

5. Legal issues
6. Economic issues
7. Educational issues
8. Political issues

3. Methodology of the Study:

The study relies on the analytical descriptive methodology assisted by an ad hoc questionnaire which contains the following issues:

1. Social
2. Cultural
3. Health
4. Psychological
5. Legal
6. Economic
7. Educational
8. Political

II. Research Methodology:

1. Study Sample:

The Women's programs on the Syrian Radio Station are broadcast on the General Program Channel and the People's Voice Radio Station. The women's programs on the General Program Channel are of two types:

A. Periodic Direct Programs which include two programs:

1. The Family and the Development
2. The Woman and the Society

B. Indirect Programs: They are either programs within the direct broadcasting period that deal from time to time with health, legal and social issues of concern to women, or some serials that deal with women's issues. The People's Voice Station broadcasts the Program called The Family World prepared and supervised by the Women's General Federation in Syria.

The research sample was selected from the programs broadcast on the General Program Channel:

1. The Family and Development: a weekly program prepared and presented by Ms. Rajaa Al-Zein, and directed by Wafaa Omar Hussein. Time:: 20 minutes.
2. The Woman and the Society: a weekly program prepared and presented by Ms. Taghreed Risha. A female broadcaster takes part in the presentation. It is directed by Shaker Darwish. Time: 15 minutes
3. Research Period (time scale):

The period for both programs was fixed at the start of the three-month program cycle 1/7/2005 through 30/9/2005. There are 24 programs in total each comprising 12 parts (episodes).

4. Analysis Unit: Each speaker (male and female) both programs. Program tapes recorded during the broadcast are used.

II. Characteristics of both Programs:

A. Time of the Programs:

The following table No. 1 shows that both programs are broadcast in the evening, are recorded and not directly transmitted.

No.	Program name	Periodic	Hour	Time (m)	Week Day	Program Type		Parts	Total
						Rec.	Direct		
1	Family & Development	Weekly	5.30 pm	20	Tu..	+	-	12	12
2	Woman & Society	Weekly	7.30 pm	15	Wed.	+	-	12	12
Tot.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	24

B. Program Preparation:

Table No. 2 shows that women prepare, present and direct the programs. Their participation in the Family & Development Program is 100 percent, and in the Women & Society Program 66.66 percent, (33.33 percent for men's participation). The preparation and presentation of the programs by women help in presenting the women's concerns and issues.

The media woman is capable of presenting and discussing women's issues, finding solutions therefor, and educating them.

C. Guests of the Episodes:

Both programs, i.e. The Family and Development and The Woman and the Society, appear to depend largely on experts concerned with family issues and affairs, of various specializations and high academic levels and qualifications. Tables 3 and 4 show that most guests were of high specializations and experience in the women-related social work, such as working in the Family Planning Center, nurseries, Women's Federation, family and civil societies. All these establishments are concerned with women's affairs. Their staff is highly competent and specialized also in sociology, law, economy, nutrition and development.

Tables 3 and 4 include the distribution of the guests according to their specializations and work places.

Table No. 3
Specializations of the Guests
of the
“Family & Development” Program

No	Guests		Specialization	Profession	Total
	M	F			
1	-	1	PhD in Law	Professor of Law at the Moroccan University and expert in the Int. Fed. of Family Planning	1
2	-	1	University Diploma and nutrition expert	Instructor at Damascus Secondary Schools	1
3	1	-	University Graduate	Member of the People's Council	1
4	1	-	Doctorate in Sociology	Damascus University	1
5	-	1	Judge	Public Prosecutor for the President for the Supreme Justice Council	1
6	-	1	Social Researcher	Expert in Marital Problems	1
7	1	-	Doctorate	Information expert at the Ministry of Environment	1
8	-	1	Doctorate	Secretary General for the Civil Societies	1
9	1	-	Doctorate in Economics	College of Economics	1
10	1	-	Social Researcher	Expert in Development & Education	1
11	-	1	Doctorate	First Director General in Syria	1
12	-	1	University Degree	Civil Societies	1
Total	5	7			12
%	41.66	58.33			

Table No. 4
Specializations of the Guests
of the
Woman & Society Program

No	Guests		Specialization	Profession	Total
	M	F			
1	1	-	Doctorate in Sociology	University Professor	1
2	1	-	-ditto-	Qatar University	1
3	-	1	Doctorate in Pharmacology	Damascus University	1
4	-	1	University degree	Activist in civil issues	1
5	-	1	Diploma in Sociology		1
6	-	1	University graduate	Deputy chairperson of the Business Women Committee	1
7	-	1	University Degree	Executive Director of the Family Planning Society	1
8	1	-	Physician	Health Center Director	1
9	1	-	Education researcher	-	1
10	1	-	Instructor at the Faculty of Education	Damascus University	1
11	-	1	Diploma in Education	Nursery Office	1
12	-	1	Agricultural Engineer	Women's Federation	1
Total	5	7			12
Percentage	41.66	58.33			

D. The Objectives and both Programs
directed to women:

The objectives of both programs are complemented through the message they want to deliver to the woman. Such objectives can be summarized as follows:

1. Present all the dimensions the social and humanitarian issues and problems, analyse them and suggest solutions for them.
2. Achieve some concepts, such as the mutual relation between the family and the development in its comprehensive and modern concept.
3. The woman's role within the family framework in the fields of development inside and outside the house.
4. Inform and educate women about their legal, social, economic, educational and political rights etc. inside and outside the family.

E. Women's Issues:

The issues raised through the contents of both programs were distributed into eight issues: social, cultural, health, psychological, legal, economic, educational, political. (See Tables 5 & 6).

1. Social Issues:

These are the most pressing issues in the Syrian society, given the social and economic changes in the society. See tables 5 and 6. Both programs reflected these issues clearly. The episodes of the Family and Development program includes 30 issues out of 166 (18.07%). From the total of these issues, it is noted that the major issues raised from among nine issues are (1) the marital problems and their impacts on the children; (2) early marriage, (3) the need to raise the marriage age ; (4) the woman's role in improving the family status; (5) equal opportunities between the man and the woman; (6) family disintegration; (7) balancing between the work and the house; (8) woman's role in the social upbringing of children; and (9) make good use of the leisure time.

The Woman & Development Program reflected these issues. Its episodes contained 26 cases of a total of 129 issues, i.e. 20.15%. See table No. 6. Out of the total issues raised in the Woman and Society Program, the issue of violence against women ranked first. Seven violence-related cases were treated, followed by the mother's role in the social upbringing. The program treated six subjects in this context followed by the way the mother should treat her children (5 subjects), early marriage issues (3 subjects), impact of the family relations on children (3 subjects). Finally, the program treated the issue of the woman's freedom in taking decisions on two main issues. It is noted in this context that the issues of violence against women, early marriage, raising the marriage age and social upbringing occupied first rank in importance, because the subject of violence against women is gaining importance at present and is being treated in all media. Besides, the Arab society, in general, and in Syria in particular, is undergoing a stage of wide change. Violence against women is no more tolerable within the circles of scholars which justifies the attention given by the media to this topic, especially the program of the Woman & Society.

As for the second topic, namely the mother's role in the social upbringing, it is noticed that the social transformations and the development of the media, including the presence of TV sets in each home rendered the topic of upbringing a basic one of concern to the family and all those working in the educational and information fields. Hence, it is natural for the program to reflect this subject due to its importance in the social life.

2. Cultural Issues:

Culture is, with respect to the woman, an important issue, because her culture reflects on her family and social life. The social and economic transformations contribute to asserting the cultural subject in general.

Through Table No. 5 related to the Family and Development program, there are 20 subjects dealing with cultural issues out of a total of 166 different issues, (.12.04%); five subjects addressed the role of media in stressing the values for the woman, child and family members; three subjects for the role of information in forming the

environmental awareness, the role of TV in upbringing the children, and the role of the media in educating the woman on how to make good use of her leisure time. This was followed two subjects about the care of the environment and the tree, and development, the issue of cultural disparity between the husband and wife. Finally, an important issue was discussed, namely the role of information in the promotion of sex which contributed largely to marital disloyalty.

Within the cultural issues raised in the program of the Woman and the Society as shown in Table No. 6, there are 14 subjects dealing with cultural issues out of a total of 129 issues (i.e. 10.85%). Six topics discussed the important of symposiums in raising the woman's awareness, and four subjects dealt with the media and their role in educating women, while four subjects stressed the society's view towards women.

The media through the contents raised by them may assist the woman in educating herself positively and may urge her to acquire socially-unacceptable behavioral patterns, which reinforces the importance of the program directed to women. This shows the importance of both programs in dealing with the media and shedding light of the positive and negative factors of the media. The society's view is still inconsistent: some view that the woman is an essential element of development; others consider that she must be a housewife and must be kept away of work and education. It would be very useful if the women's programs monitor this issue and shed light on the positive and negative aspects of the way the society looks at the woman at the level of education, work, social participation, etc.

The radio seminars and those held in the cultural centers, or through the TV about raising the awareness of the woman of her various issues and at the level of the family and work show the importance of monitoring both programs by such seminars and the benefit achieved for the woman and members of her family, in general. The seminars in the program of the Woman and the Society ranked first among the various cultural issues dealt with by the program. The program stressed the importance of the seminars in raising the woman's awareness. This was followed by the role of the media in educating the Woman and the society's view towards her.

Table No. 5
Issues raised through the Program
of the
Family and Development
and the Percentage

Women's Issues	Repetition	Percentage
Social issues	30	18.07
Social issues	20	12.04
Health issues	23	13.85
Psychological issues	07	4.2
Legal issues	25	15.06
Economic issues	20	12.04
Educational issues	22	13.25
Political issues	19	11.44
Total	166	99.95 (100)

3. Health Issues:

With the increasing health awareness in the society, the media paid attention to the health of the family. The radio program "The Family and the Development" dealt with health issues of interest to women. The health issues were repeated 23 times out of a total of 166 issues, i.e. 13.85%. Four issues dealt with guiding women to healthy food and cleanliness and the women's role to preserve drinking water, and the women's role in securing healthy food. Three issues dealt with providing contraceptives and with combating AIDS. Two issues dealt with the mother's care about her health, while one issue dealt with the treatment of sterility. The same program addressed health issues (17 repetitions) out of a total of 129 issues, five issues about smoking and its dangers on women, four issues about the nutrition of the pregnant woman, three issues about the woman's care of her physical health. Three issues focused on the mother's care of her children's health, while two issues dealt with the physical maturity of the girl before marriage.

The focus given by the two programs on health issues is considered an indicator about the attention given by the media to raising the woman's awareness, because the woman is the family's pillar, and hence, making her aware of these health issues shall reflect on her family and on the society.

4. Psychological Issues:

Addressing psychological issues is important for the woman, because her numerous roles at home and at work affect her psychology. Thus, she is need of psychological care and of guidance and awareness through the media. The woman's psychological health is of no less importance than her physical health.

Through the radio episodes that were studied, a very few raised these issues despite their importance. In the program "Woman and Development", it dealt with seven cases out of 166 (4.2%), three cases stressed the sound relationship between the husband and wife, three dealt with the family problems conducive to frustration on the part of the woman; two cases dealt with the family problems and their impact on the woman's psychology and the marital differences.

In the program "Woman and the Society", the psychological issues represented a small percentage (3.10%). Those issues were treated through the following two cases: emotional maturity and psychological state of the mother and its effect on the embryo. Despite the importance of the psychological issues, their rate was little, perhaps they had been raised during the program in other episodes.

Psychological issues were considered among the important ones. With the overall transformations in the society, it is imperative to make the woman aware of the importance of caring for her psychological health in order so that she can adapt herself to the new changes and surmount some difficulties and problems that she may encounter at home or at work, which would cause her psychological tension. This would, in turn, reflect on her family, and hence on her work and on the society.

Table No. 6
Issues treated by the “Woman and Society” Program
and the Percentage

Women’s Issues	Repetition	Percentage
Social	26	20.15
Cultural	14	10.85
Health	17	13.17
Psychological	04	3.10
Legal	19	14.72
Economic	19	14.72
Educational	13	10.07
Political	17	13.17
Total	129	99.95 (100)

5. Legal Issues:

The media addressed the legal issues, given the developments in Syria and the women’s demand for many laws such as the foster age, bequeathing the woman’s pension to her children, and other laws. The radio station focused on the legal issues.

The “Family and Development” program tackled 25 legal issues out of 166 representing 15.06%, ranking second after the social issues.

The amendment of the law on women and the law of the right of rural women was repeated 5 times each, followed by the woman’s bequeathing of her pension (\$ repetitions), followed by three repetitions of the amendment of the foster age, social insurance, agricultural relations and family allowance.

The “Woman and Development” Program addressed in its episodes during the radio cycle under study numerous issues. The legal issues represented 14.72%, ranking second after the social issues which addressed 19 issues: 7 dealt with divorce, 4 with inheritance, 3 with the mother’s right to fostering the children, 5 laws related to marriage.

6. Economic issues:

The information material is important in forming and delineating the dimensions and frameworks of the roles established for the woman, and it has impact on forming the woman’s awareness of her role in the various positions she occupies (1). The woman’s effective participation through her economic role requires more efforts on the part of the media to stress this role.

Twenty economic issues were broadcast within the “Family and Development” program, thus ranking third after the social and economic issues. This is indicative of the importance given by the media to the woman’s economic issues. The issue of the woman’s role in improving the economic status represented five repetitions out of twenty, followed consecutively by three repetitions (1) the role of business women in

the national production (2) the economic activity of business women, and (3) the development of the situation of the working woman. This was followed by two repetitions of each of the woman's economic liberation and her participation in the production process, and her attainment important positions in participating in the economic aspects.

The episodes of the Woman and Society program included 19 issues in this field. It is noticed that the woman's work ranked on top (7 issues) of the raised issues. This was followed by the topic of raising the family income (5 issues), then rationalizing consumption (4), and participation in the development of the society (3).

7. Educational Issues:

These are important issues since there is a mutual and strong relation between education and raising awareness. The woman's education and raising her educational level lead to raising her ambition in the various fields. They also raise her awareness toward her family, which, in turn, is of benefit to the society.

The educational issues raised through the Family & Development program represented 22 repetitions out of a total of 166 (13.25%). The education of women and the stress on the importance of education to the woman included five repetitions, followed by the Advancement of the Woman's Status required educating her (4), the Woman's Onset in the field of scientific research inside and outside Syria (4). Then came three repetitions of each of the following issues: Woman's literacy, stressing the education of girls and preventing their drop-out of school, and the need for continuous education.

8. Political Issues:

The Syrian woman participated in the political action and was afforded good opportunities in the decision-making positions. Therefore, political issues are considered among the important issues in the Syrian society. The media is highlighting the woman's political participation and making it aware of her political role. Table No. 5 shows that the political issues in the "Family & Development" program were repeated 19 times out of a total of 166 (11.44%).

Foremost among these issues were: The support given to the woman by the political leadership in Syria which resulted in her wide participation in politics; woman's participation in sustainable development, the woman's development from the 1970s so far in decision-making. Each issue was repeated 14 times. In the second rank, the program focused on the woman's attainment of significant positions (3 repetitions).

Political issues in the "Woman & Society" program accounted for 17 issues that were discussed through the tackled issued, and accounted for 13.7% of the total 139 issues during the period of the research.

Foremost among the topics was Woman's participation in the political field. The Syrian woman is keen on promoting her participation in leading positions.

In the second place was the subject of the woman's struggle against armed violence: four topics were treated three for each of the woman's participation in international

organizations and her participation in the decision-making, and two for her participation in the international conferences and her activity in this field.

V. The Results of the Study and the Proposals:

The results of this study show that the two programs concerning women on the Syrian broadcasting station (General Program Channel) present a wide variety of rich topics and reflect the issues and problems in the society.

There remains an urgent desire on the part of women in general and on the part of those concerned with women's affairs to expand the women's programs that tackle various issues. The rate of the programs designed for women in Syria is modest as compared to other programs in other Arab countries, such as Egypt.

-- Despite the varying issues tackled by these programs, the period allotted to them little and their substance is recorded. It is preferable if they are based on direct contact with the woman. Besides, broadcasting them in the evening diminishes the possibility of their access to the widest possible number of those concerned with them. It must be indicated that the modern programs rely on reportage and direct surveys where the presenter or broadcaster carries out field interviews in different places of the country. Thus, we notice that the two programs have not adopted the modern methods as much as they adopt the traditional methods.

- The study shows that there is a significant development in the topics tackled by both programs to adapt them to the socio-economic changes that occurred in the Syrian society. The social topics ranked first followed by the topics dealing with the legal issues.

This reflects the awareness of those in charge of information about the importance of these topics that enable the woman to participate in developing her society, to acquire skills, and help her to work inside or outside the house which would help in increasing the family income, raising the living standard, and increasing production.

- The analysis sample of the these programs succeeded in addressing the woman in her capacity a partner in life responsible for developing and advancing her society by making her aware of her rights, urging her to join the development projects, and focusing on the need of educating her while stressing the strong relation between education and raising awareness. The woman's education and raising her standard would lead to raising her ambition and aspiration for claiming her rights.
- The radio programs on women, as indicated by the studied sample, are keen on addressing them in their new roles. This reflects the importance of their current role in their society, since these programs address the woman as a citizen with responsibilities and duties towards her society.

--A change has been noticed in the look of those responsible for these programs to the women community. The traditional woman is no more the one that occupies the features of the woman's programs. It is rather the modern woman of independent personality

who seeks education, relies on herself and on the work, and seeks to increase production.

It is imperative to point out to a number of proposals that would help in developing the woman's programs on the Syrian radio station:

1. The need to expand by adding programs to cover a wider space.
2. The need to have open programs based on direct transmission to allow for communicating with the women.
3. The need to expand these programs to become field reportage in different locations in Syria. This requires providing capabilities for those who prepare the programs and are responsible for them
4. Conduct radio seminars with the participation of women in order to present their issues.
5. The need to establish a method that allows the woman to present her problems by mail or phone message.
6. The need to have a standing information office to receive the women's questions and refer them to the program concerned.

VI. Limits of the Research:

It must be pointed out that the content and results of this study are connected to the research sample and did not include the direct interviews carried out through the morning direct transmission programs, such as legal, social, health etc. dealing with women's issues through direct dialogue between the specialists and the interviewees in their different locations.

The research may be developed in the coming stages through a direct analysis of the raised topics in the direct transmission.

Dr. Amal Hamdi Dakkak
Damascus
POBox 31154
Home phone: 3329731
Mobile phone: 098/963945
Fax No. 00963-11-2234336

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