

# Women of Jordan

- A Minor Field Study about women in a  
developing country

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## Abstract

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The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how young women in urban and rural areas of Jordan, a developing country, think about their role in the family, education and work. We also want to see which strategies they use to navigate in the family as a social system in a changing context. The study is based on 12 interviews with Jordanian women where six live in urban and six live in rural areas. The perspective of structural functionalism is used to investigate women's role in a system. In order to gain more focus on the gender role of the woman a gender perspective is used as a complement. The conclusion of this study is that the interviewed women want to study, work, and get married. All interviewees point out the importance of having an equal balance between education, work, family life and marriage. The difficulty is to find a good balance without neglecting any area. In order to do this, the women want their husbands to take a bigger part in the responsibilities of the family and household. What holds the women back from trying to achieve this is their view on gender. Partly they do not trust men to be able to take care of the family and partly they think that women are more suitable to handle the family and household. Today women use other strategies to manage to achieve their goals. Some divide their adult life into two parts where the first part focuses on education and making a career and the other on family. Many women also choose jobs that are flexible and can be adapted to their family life.

Key words: Women, family, gender role, responsibilities, social system, Jordan

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Sabina Christrup and Julia Eklund, 2009

## The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan



Source: Central Intelligence Agency, (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/cia-maps-publications/maps/803051.jpg>) (2009-08-13)

Area: 88 950 km<sup>2</sup>

Population: (2008) 5, 8 millions

Constitution: Monarchy, King Abdullah II

Language: Arabic

Religion: 90 % Islam, 6 % Christian

(Source: National Encyklopedin, <http://ne.se.ludwig.lub.lu.se/lang/jordanien/217142/217146>)

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Objective

“I’m a big, big girl in a big, big world” (From the song *A big, big world* by Emilia).

According to functionalist theories women have a function in all families in different ways. In some families women have the traditional role of taking care of the household and children while men have the function in the labor force which can be seen as a functional solution of the family system (Maconis and Plummer, 2007). Most common in almost all cultures is the women having the prime responsibility regarding family and household (Giddens, 2003:117). This is not always the case because the role of women is changing (Giddens, 2003). We think it is interesting to look at this subject in a developing country because the role of the woman in the family might be changing through development.

An important area for developing countries to consider is the increase of women’s work. Since women mostly make up 50 percent of a country’s population there is a big potential in increasing the economic growth by letting women work. In a lot of developing countries, women have been stressed out to work and they have encouraged to look for employment (Sonbol, 2002). The numbers of women in the labor force differ in urban and rural areas.

Jordan is a developing country, one of the countries in the Middle East that started to develop earliest. Jordan has, for twenty years, enjoyed a higher growth in income and jobs than most of the surrounding countries (Sonbol, 2002). Still not many women are working but women’s activity in the labor force is increasing year by year. In 2000, 14.6 percent of women were working and in 2007 it was 16.4 percent (The World Bank, 2009a). In 2008 85.1 percent of women working in Jordan lived in the urban area while 14.9 percent lived in the rural area (Department of Statistics, 2008a).

We want to look at women in Jordan because Jordan is a developing country. We want to see if also the role of the woman is changing with the changing country and see how the woman adjusts and lives up to the expectations that the changes might involve. We want to look at especially family and work because we think these are important institutions that people are included in. We also want to analyze this in relation to education. Education is increasing in developing countries (Sonbol, 2002). In Jordan the education level has increased from 5.4 percent of the women who have a bachelor degree and in 2001 and in 2008 the figure was 10.3 percent (Department of Statistics, 2004, 2008b).

From the statistics regarding women in urban and rural areas, it seems that the women in the rural areas are less involved in labor and education than women in the urban areas. We think it would be interesting to see if there are any differences in how women in urban and rural areas think about family, education and work and if they use different strategies to navigate in their everyday life.

## **1.2 Purpose**

The aim of this study is to investigate young urban and rural women's thoughts about their role in family, education and work in the developing country Jordan and what strategies they use to function in the family in a changing context.

## **1.3 Questions**

- How do young women in urban and rural areas of Jordan think about their role in family, education and work?
- How does the woman's role and position appear in a changing context?
- Which strategies are used by women to navigate through everyday life with regard to existing and changing gender norms?

## **2. Theoretical framework**

We choose to analyze our material through Talcott Parsons theory regarding Structural – Function because it concerns a system as a whole and from gender perspective because it concerns the actor. We think that these two perspectives will complement each other talking both about the system as a whole and the actor in it. We will analyze the interviews from a structural functional perspective, treating the family as a system, in order to elucidate the link between family and societal changes. We use a gender perspective to understand the actors, the women's strategies and interpretations.

### **2.1 Structural functionalism**

According to Andersen and Kaspersen, (2007) most theories about structural functionalism are based on Talcott Parsons' theory (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007). Parsons thought that the world was too complex and confusing and to impose order and create more understanding, he looked at the world as a system. Parsons' main interest was the system as a whole rather than the actors in the system. He looked at how the system controls and affects the actors and not how the actors create and maintain the system. Parsons thought that the importance of the world could be seen more easily by creating systems (Craib, 1992).

Parsons (1968) talks about the system of action and believes that actions are the results of what people choose to do voluntarily. So what Parsons is trying to do is to explain the already existing pattern of social actions and social institutions through individual premises that humans independently choose what they want to do (Parsons, 1968).

Parsons created four different systems of actions and we choose to analyze our material from the Parsons' Social System. The Social System has the most central part when it comes to structural functionalism. Parsons explains the Social System to be many participants in mutual interaction (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007).

According to Parsons, all the four systems of actions have to reach four functional imperatives to survive. The four functional imperatives are called AGIL where A stands for adaption, G for goal attainment, I for integration and L for latent pattern maintenance (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007). Adaption is about adapting to the given assignment through norms and values. Goal attainment is about internalizing societal norms and general cultural values. This is how the system achieves goals. Integration is about which actions are and are not allowed. The system keeps itself together through integration (Craib, 1992). Latent Pattern is about



maintaining the stability of the institutionalized culture. The commitment to the pattern is considered as well as the cultural pattern (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007).

Parsons goes further, dividing the four systems of action into four different systems that deepen the four functional imperatives. The four systems in the Social System are the fiduciary system, the societal system, polity and the economic system (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007). In the fiduciary system Parsons uses commitment as a key word and describes how individuals are educated into cultural values and norms of the system. The keyword in the societal system is influence. Parsons talks about institutions of social control and believes that they are conducting values and informal rules (Craib, 1992). The societal system does not concern commitment to the values of the society but motivation to make the system work and therefore contributes with what is necessary (Calhoun, 2002). The polity system includes power as a keyword. Decision making and resource mobilization is what the system is about. The economic system mentions production, material welfare and distribution of resources. The four systems coordinate and arrange mutual goals and organize the collective towards the goal (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007).

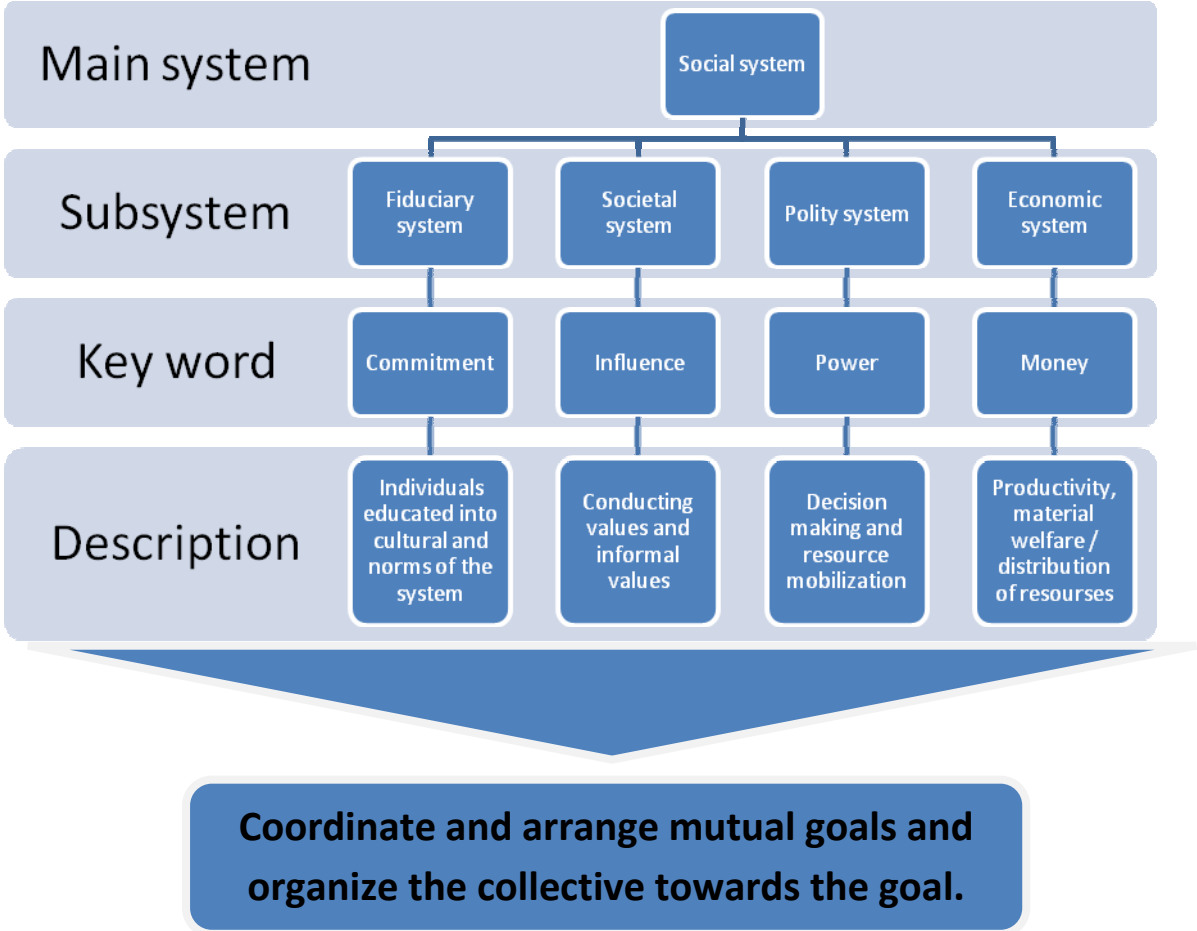


Figure 2: Subsystems of the social system

### *2.1.1 Criticism*

Some criticism has been directed at Parsons' structural functionalism. Some criticism claims that it is hard to understand social structure and patterns of value as if they are created through actions from conscious humans that accept their role without conflict. Criticism also concerns the fact that culture is not considered and that this makes the conflicts surrounding norms and values hard to analyze. Dahrendorf thinks Parsons' theory explains everything as a utopia because it could not describe the conflicts in society. Another criticism was that the norm comes before the explanation of the norm. One response to this criticism is that if the norm is going to show before the explanation of the norm there has to be a retrieving connection; we have to be able to see that the norm and the consequences of the norm retrieve several times. The norm can stabilize through this. Criticism is if there really can be a retrieving connection in society (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007).

Merton is one of the major critics of Parsons' theory. He is critical to Parsons' attempt to find a theory that explains everything. Instead Merton wanted to divide social life into smaller parts and create theories that explained, for example, different groups and role conflicts. There are no functional imperatives according to Merton. He also criticized the functionalist assumption that functions could explain social phenomena. The important consequence of Merton's modification of Parsons' theory was that it had several ways of explaining the world, compared to functionalism that only has one explanation. Parsons' theory is also criticized for generalizing (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007). He was criticized for not taking history into consideration. The most significant failure in Parsons' theory seems to be, according to the criticism, the exploration of the biological, living systems with the social system. The result of the theory is a generalization of a theory of people and of society (Craib, 1992).

Those who still defend Parsons' Structural – Functionalism are called neo- functionalists (Craib, 1992). Many theories develop Parsons' ideas by keeping what was durable and clarifying the misunderstandings before reconstruction. Niklas Luhman created wider concepts and theories regarding functions in self organized and self adjusted systems. Also Habermas has used several building blocks from Parsons' System theory. According to him, no theory about society can be taken seriously if it does not relate to Parsons' theory. Parsons has the status of a classical scholar (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007).

In conclusion we want to clarify the choice of Parsons' theory in this study. Critics say that Parsons' theory does not take important aspects into consideration and that it is too general. This is according to us one of the strengths of the theory. Parsons wanted to impose a structure on a complex world in order to make it more understandable. When we use Parsons' theory we are able to have a good overview of a complex subject. In order to gain more depth to the study this theory must be extended with other theories.

## **2.2 Gender perspective**

Parsons has also been criticized because he sees the nuclear family as the most functional family (Giddens, 2003). According to Parsons, differences in gender help to integrate society. Men and women's differences help society to operate. While women take care of the family and household men are supposed to work and have contact with the larger world. Parsons believes that our gender identity takes form from socialization where we learn skills of importance to being an adult and fit into the system. Parsons believes that boys develop instrumental and rational qualities which include for example being prepared for the labor market while the girls develop expressive qualities like emotional responsiveness (Macionis and Plummer, 2007). This has been criticized by sociologists and feminists who claim that this is to accept oppression of women in the home, and take for granted unequal labor where women take care of the home and men work outside the home, and see this as a natural order (Giddens, 2003). Because we think there is a lack of problematization of the gender role and its consequences for women in Parsons' Structural functionalism, we have chosen to complement our analysis with a gender perspective. The importance of Gender is something that has been significant in sociology (Giddens, 2003).

Gender is about social expectations of behaviors that are acceptable for men and women. Gender role is about performing and learning the different behaviors of being a male or a female (Macionis and Plummer, 2007). Some believe that the differences in men's and women's behavior are hereditary. For example that men in all cultures like to hunt or participate in war because of their high aggressiveness while women are more passive and calm. The opposition to these ideas asserts that women are expected to be more passive and because of pregnancy, for example, they could not participate in hunting. The social interaction has an important role in shaping the behavior of humans (Giddens, 2003). From a socialization perspective we are born with a biological sex and internalize social expectations and norms that seem to fit our biological sex. Thus gender is not biological but culturally

shaped. Boys and girls are punished or rewarded for their behavior and learn how to live up to their gender role (Giddens, 2003).

### **3. Previous research**

#### **3.1 Family and family in a developing country**

There is a lot written about families. We have chosen to look at Nock (1983). Nock writes about families and the relationships within the family, the social environments of the family and other social institutions. Nock writes in some chapters about families in different societies and talks about arranged marriages and cultures where the family has a great influence in the choice of a husband or wife. He talks about the importance of love and about societies where love is not a prelude to marriage (Nock, 1983).

#### **3.2 Women and education in a developing country**

Jejeebhoy (1995) has written about women's education and reproductive behavior. According to Jejeebhoy women's education is low and the inequality between men and women is high. He points out that education allows women to get wider contacts to the world outside the family. Education can change people's lives. It changes attitudes and behaviors and can generate openness to new ideas. The effects of education for women are many; it gives women more power in the form of decision-making within the home, economic independence, self-reliance and physical autonomy in interacting with the outside world. For men this is already acquired in their role of gender (Jejeebhoy, 1995). According to a report from the United Nations (UN), educated women are better at improving their family and themselves. They are better at taking care of the things that can benefit them most regarding services, opportunities and see alternative ideas, roles and support. Just as Jejeebhoy mentioned, the report also brings up education being important for women in developing countries because of increasing economic independence, power when it comes to decision-making in the household and participation in public life (Grown, 2005).

#### **3.3 Women and the labor market in the case of Jordan**

Sonbol (2002) writes about women in Jordan and about Jordan as a developing country. Jordan is one of the countries in the Middle East that started to develop earliest. For the past 20 years Jordan has enjoyed a higher growth in income and jobs than most of the surrounding countries. When it comes to human development Jordan has, according to the World Bank, developed exceptionally. The infant mortality has been lowered, people live longer and literacy was at 82 percent in 1992.

Still there are several facts that complicate the economy of Jordan. The first is that 50 percent of Jordan's population is very young and this is a problem in a lot of developing countries. The growth rate is also very high so the trend of a young population will continue. The gist of this is that the percentage of economic opportunities has to increase to maintain the living standard and the political stability. Jordan has lost some investors and trade partners and unemployment is increasing.

An important area for developing countries to consider is the growth of the women's work. Since women mostly make up 50 percent of a country's population there is considerable potential in increasing the economic growth by letting women work. In a lot of developing countries, women have been stressed out to work and been encouraged to look for employment. Jordan has taken these actions but there are still a very limited number of women that work 12.5 percent in 2002; this could be an effect from the increasing unemployment. In Jordan it is found that a woman does not work longer than almost four years. One reason for the short work period could be the interference of marriage (Sonbol, 2002).

### **3.4 Women and gender**

Aihwa Ong and Michael G Pelez (1995) have written an anthology where they have questioned the role of gender in The Southeast Asian region. Gender is viewed as a process of change and ambivalence for the contributors to the book. One theme in the book, which is of interest for our thesis is focusing on how gender is understood, represented and reworked (Ong and Michael, 1995) One of the contributors, Evelyn Blackwood (1995), has written about how the role of women in Minangkabau Village are taken for granted: Women's control over the households has been seen as valid and natural. The women are defined as mothers and wives rather than other social roles that are associated with prestige and control or as Blackwood say, as full social beings (Blackwood, 1995). Suzanne A. Brenner (1995) is questioning how femininities and masculinities are constructed in an Islamic society according to power and self control. She writes that women in a Javanese society are less involved in matters that give status. Instead they are found more suitable and having a more significant role in resources that can be invested in the family status. She is questioning the women's self control (Brenner, 1995).

## **4. Definitions**

“Family” – When we talk about family we are talking about a wife, a husband and their children. This is because it is this constellation of a family all our interviewees refer to.

“Work” – In our study work is about paid work outside the home. When we are writing about domestic work we are careful to point this out.

“Household” –By responsibility for the household we mean the domestic work such as cleaning and cooking.

## **5. Method**

### **5.1 Choice of method**

In this thesis we have studied how twelve young women in urban and rural areas of Jordan think about family, education and work. The purpose of this study is not to generalize but to look deeply into those young Jordanian women think about those subjects in their natural context. Because our purpose is to understand we have chosen to use the hermeneutics that assumes constructions as a basis (Gustavsson, 2003). We have chosen to do a qualitative study that strives for meaning and understanding (Jacobsson and Meeuwisse 2008).

We have used semi structured interviews in this study because it gives an opportunity to develop the answers of the interviewee and it lets the interviewee enter deeper into the answers. This is suitable for our study because we want to look more deeply than broadly into how women in urban and rural areas of Jordan think about family education and work. We have chosen to look deeply into some specific cases and look at the details (Denscombe, 2000).

We are aware that a case study cannot be completely objective. A case study is not only built on facts. It always includes the analysis and interpretation of the researcher. Because the researcher has the main influence in a case study, his or her preconceived views, according to Gustavsson (2003) might be seen as unscientific, can find their way into the study. He indicates this as unavoidable in all analysis and interpretation (Gustavsson, 2003).

### **5.2 Limitations**

A case study has to be very defined and limited to be able to separate from other cases (Denscombe, 2000). This case study is limited to women in Jordan. Jordan is a country that is developing fast (Sonbol, 2002) and the fact that we are interested in looking at women's thoughts in a changing context made us choose women in Jordan.

In order to get an in-depth study that is not too general, we have chosen to interview women that are between 20-30 years old and the major focus areas are family, education and work. The selection of focus areas were made primarily because they are subjects that are of special interest to us. One limitation that we do not make is a geographical limitation within Jordan this means that both urban and rural areas will be included in this paper. We chose to interview six women in the capital city Amman to represent the urban area, and six interviews



in three different villages in the rural areas. By not imposing geographical limitation this study can also find similarities and differences between urban and rural areas.

### **5.3 Semi-structured interviews**

As already mentioned we used semi structured interviews in our study. We wanted our interviewees to speak more freely and to develop their thoughts and opinions to focus on their priorities of importance (Denscombe, 2000). Because of the possible difficulties with comparing the answers in a semi structured interview we had a structured interview guide based on our three themes family, education and work (see appendix 1) (May, 2005).

In using semi structured interviews one consequence might be that the interviewer in different ways affects the interviewee which can have an effect on the reliability of the empirical material. We have considered this further in 5.6 Objectivity and reliability (Denscombe, 2002).

A semi structured interview can cause violation of the interviewee's privacy because of personal influences (Denscombe, 2000). We were trying to make our interviewees feel comfortable during the interview.

One obstacle when interviewing the Jordanian women was that we had to use an interpreter in those cases the interviewee was not English speaking. Unfortunately neither of us speaks Arabic. The obstacle with using an interpreter can be that the interviewer's answers can be translated incorrectly, that the exact words for translation do not exist or that the interview becomes interrupted by discussions between the interpreter and the interviewer. We were aware of this and tried as much as we could to be sure of that the interpreter understood the question correctly. Another disadvantage of using an interpreter can be that the interpreter has difficulty remembering the entire story that the interviewee tells because they find it hard to interrupt the interviewee in the middle of a story (Allwood and Franzén, 2000).

### **5.4 Sample and selection**

We have chosen to interview twelve women aged 20-30 who live in Jordan. This is because we believed women in the age group 20-30 are in a phase of development and decision-making regarding their lives. Also because Jordan has a high percentage of young people who are the ones that contribute most to development through labor market and education (Sonbol, 2002). Many of our interviewees are born and raised outside of Jordan which can mean that our interviewees are influenced by other situations and thoughts than if they were born and

grew up in Jordan, but this has no affect on our study because our purpose is to interview different young women now living in urban and rural areas of Jordan.

One of our contacts in the field, Dr Rula Quawas, professor in English literature at the University of Jordan, made it possible for us to interview the first six women in Amman. She helped us contact six women who were willing to participate in our study. The other six interviews in the rural areas were made possible through our other contact person, Boriana Jönsson from the Foundation “Kvinna till Kvinna” which supports women’s organisations in conflict regions. She arranged different trips for us to villages around Jordan. We found our interviewees while there and with the help from our interpreter. From this our sample for the study was made at random and by coincidence.

Case studies are often criticised for not being able to generalize. According to Denscombe (2000) it is possible to generalize from a case study because the case can be seen as an example included in a larger group (Denscombe, 2000). But as we mentioned our purpose with this study is not to generalize.

## **5.5 Procedure and accomplishment of interviews**

The fact that this is a Field Study and that we had 2 months to collect our data in Jordan implied we had to be well prepared (Aspers, 2007). Because this is a Minor Field Study (MFS) sponsored by the Swedish International Development cooperation Agency (SIDA) we had many early deadlines in our preparations. This gave us the incentive to be well prepared. First of all we needed a well considered idea and secondly we needed to implement the MFS course in Gothenburg which gave us a lot of tools. We gained more information and discussed our idea with other students and teachers on the course. We also met with a person who had expertise of Jordan and she gave us a lot of good insights and valuable information. In field we had two contacts who agreed to help us with our data collection in Jordan. Our contacts helped us to become more familiar with the culture and inform us about women’s situation in the country. Before going to Jordan we had constructed a detailed project plan. Our first step when we arrived was to meet our contacts where we informed them about our project and where they had the chance to give us feedback. After the feedback and after clarifying our purpose, objective and questions we designed an interview guide based on our three themes: family, education and work (see appendix 1). One of our contacts helped us with booking our six interviews in Amman. Our contacts were our key to the field (Aspers, 2007). The interviews in Amman took place in a separate room at the University of Jordan. After

completing them we discussed the interview guide again but without any reconstructions of the questions. Our other contact person assisted us in arranging two one day trips to three different villages around Jordan. For those interviews we needed an interpreter. A woman accompanied us and helped us with this. We could not book any of the interviews in the villages in advance so we had to find our interviewees while there. Our interviews in the rural area took place in separate rooms in different organizations. All of our interviews were 30-50 minutes long and both of us participated one at a time being in charge of asking the questions while the other took notes and studied the body language when the questions were asked. Our interpreter spoke English and Arabic. We taped our interviews and transcribed them word by word. Since we have used an interpreter in some interviews and used another language than our and our interviewee's mother-tongue there can be limitations in the language which can affect the quality of quoting. This is why we have chosen not to quote in our text even though we are aware of that we could have used quotes from one or two interviews.

## **5.6 Objectivity and reliability**

We think that reflections about our pre-understanding, things we might be taking for granted, are of great importance when doing a case study with interviews. What can matter in our role as researchers are our ideas, opinions and values about the subject of the study. Our interests and experiences, our social background, age, gender and our education can also affect the result of our study (Denscombe, 2000). We have tried to be aware of this and have discussed it before and during our work.

One thing that can be of importance for reliability during the interviews is the fact that we are two students from Sweden. Even our age, gender and ethnicity can matter. Which information the interviewees want to give us and how honest they want to be in their answers can be influenced by how they experience us (Denscombe, 2000). Things like religion and traditions can also be of importance (Aspers, 2007). The fact that we are women and that we are at the same age as the interviewees can be positive for our results. If there are sensitive subjects it can be easier for the interviewed women to open up because we are women as well (May, 2005). That we are from Sweden and the west could also be of importance. Some interviewees might see us as intruders (Aspers, 2007). Because of this we have been very careful in informing and remaining neutral to the interviewee, informing her about the purpose of our questions.

We conducted the interviews in the environment of the interviewees and the effect can be that they felt safer to open up more during the interview (Denscombe, 2000). We got the impression that the interviewee became more and more secure during the interview. It felt as if some of them were a bit short in their answers in the beginning but after a while it seemed like they felt more relaxed and shared more information with us. One of them even told us that she was a bit sceptic in the beginning but that she had changed her mind. She told us that it was a great opportunity for her to talk about subjects that it was not very common for her to talk about.

Using an interpreter can affect the reliability if the translations are incorrect. We were through in making sure that the interpreter understood the questions. We think that it was positive that we had an Arabic interpreter because we believe the interviewees felt more secure (Allwold and Franzén, 2000). Both of us participated during the interview at times where we used an interpreter. Because of this the interviewee might have felt in weak position. We decided to participate because of different reasons. One reason was the fact that we were doing the interview in a foreign language but also to take notes to be secure in case our dictaphone broke and to catch the silent communication.

One of the disadvantages of taping can be that the interviewee can feel uncomfortable and become inhibited. This can lead to the interviewee not talking as much. But the fact that we have taped the interviews and transcribed them word for word will also increase reliability (Denscombe, 2000).

## **5.7 Division of work**

In this thesis we have both discussed and made all decisions around the study together. We have written most parts together. Some parts are written separately but we have discussed, read and corrected it together.

## **5.8 Ethical matters**

In our study all the interviewees have participated of their own free will. In all our interviews we have started with a legible explanation of our study and asked the interviewees if they have any uncertainties about it before the interview starts. All the interviewees are anonymous and we will not use the information in any other circumstances. To guarantee anonymity for the interviewee we wrote an agreement which stated that we will not in any circumstances write the interviewees name or reveal their identity in any other circumstances (See appendix

2). We have decided not to write the name of the villages. Instead we will write about all those villages as the rural area. This is because the villages are very small and it could be easy for them to identify each other. The contract also includes that the information will not be used in any other context. This contract was for us and the interviewee, signed in duplicate at the beginning of the interview. Before the interview we also asked permission to tape it.

Some of the interviewees are not English speaking. This means that they will not be able to read the complete thesis. We are willing to translate it into Arabic if required.

## **6. Analysis and empirical data**

### **6.1 Presentation of the Interviewees**

Nour is nearly 22 and lives in Amman. She lives with her mother, father and siblings. She was born in Kuwait and moved to Jordan because of the second gulf war in 1987 and stayed. Nour's parents were born and raised in Kuwait. Her father is an electronic engineer and her mother has an MA in physics. Nour is Muslim. She is studying a bachelor's degree and has worked for two years tutoring children and foreign students and her goal is to become a teacher.

21 year-old Fatima lives in Amman and has spent her whole life with her mother, father and siblings, one brother and three sisters. Her father works as a travel agent and her mother used to be a teacher but now she is a homemaker. Fatima is Muslim. She is top of her class, studying a bachelor's degree.

Shada is 20 years old and was born in the United Arab Emirates in Abu Dabi and lived there for ten years. She lives with her father, mother and two brothers. Shada is Christian. She is studying a bachelor's degree in English literature.

Lara is 23 and comes from a mixed background with her mother from England and father being a mix of Jordanian and Palestinian. She grew up in Saudi Arabia and then moved to Jordan about ten years ago with her parents, four brothers and 2 sisters with whom she now lives. Her father works, has a degree in civil engineering, and her mother is a homemaker, has a diploma and taught English some years ago. Lara is practicing Muslim. She is studying a bachelor's degree in English literature.

Ban is 27, lives in Amman but grew up in The United States of America. She has been moving back and forth between the USA and Jordan but now lives in Jordan. Her parents and most of her siblings live in the USA. Her father is retired after having a successful business that her brother now is running. Ban's mother has helped in the business but mostly takes care of everything else. Ban is Orthodox Christian. She has studied both in the USA and in Jordan, is a holder of two Bachelors in Multi Media arts and English literature. She is right now doing her PhD and has started her own consulting company that provides consulting for academic programs.

Suada is 30 and she has lived in Amman all her life with her mother, father, sister and brother. Her father works as an architect and he studied in the USA. Her mother has a Bachelor's

degree in History and worked as a teacher, then at Suada's father's office but now she has not worked for five years. The family is Muslim. Suada has just finished a Master's degree in Women studies and she is also a pharmacist.

Nisrin is 28 years old and she lives in a rural area with her mother, father and four sisters. She also has four brothers but they are married and live with their new family. Her father works in the army and her mother is a homemaker. She is Muslim. Nisrin has a bachelor's degree in teaching and works part time as a teacher.

Esma is 30 and has lived in a rural village all her life. Her father is working in the army and her mother is a homemaker. They are nine people in total in the household and she has two brothers that are married and have moved out. Esma is Muslim. Esma has a Master's degree in Law and is now doing an internship at an office in a nearby village.

Bint is about 25 and lives in the rural village with her husband and twin daughters. She has been married for about two years. Her husband works in the army. She was born in the neighboring village and her parents still live there. Bint is Muslim. Bint took training for makeup and hairstyling and now works as a teacher for hair and makeup.

Mariam is 28 and was born and lives in a rural village. She lives with her parents, three brothers and two sisters. One brother and two sisters are married and live in new houses. Her father works outside the house while her mother is a homemaker. Mariam is Muslim. She has had some training for computing and is now a teacher of computing at an organization for women.

Zeliha is 23 and lives in a rural village. She lives with her siblings. Her parents are both dead and she and her siblings share all the responsibilities in the house. Zeliha is Muslim. Zeliha goes to the University and works in a women's organization.

Elif is 29 and has lived with her husband and their daughters for five years in the rural village. She was born in Saudi Arabia and she moved to Amman with her parents because her father was from there. When Elif was fifteen years old they moved to the village. She wants to move back to Amman. Elif is Muslim. She studied technology and computer science and now works as a computer teacher. Her husband works fulltime.

## **6.2 Family**

### *6.2.1 Marriage*

For many of the women we interviewed marriage is a function and an important institution of the society and something they are looking forward to.

In the urban area, Nour thinks that marriage is a commitment of respect and understanding. Marriage is also about two families approving of each other and Nour thinks this is very important. She sees herself as being married in the future. Fatima believes that marriage is about two individuals who enjoy life together, for better and for worse. She further thinks that a healthy marriage includes equal rights between husband and wife and the ability to be who you are. According to Fatima it is generally viewed that you as a woman have to study, get a job, get married, and get children before you die. Fatima does not agree with this and rather thinks that you can be complete and successful without being married but if there is someone you want to spend your life with, then marriage is good. She still hopes that she will marry someday and her ideal family is with a husband and maybe two kids.

When Shada talks about marriage, she emphasizes the words partnership, shared responsibility and appreciation as extra important. She says that she wants to live in a partnership and not a dictatorship and both parts in a marriage should share responsibilities of money, children and possessions. When Shada talks about appreciation she thinks about her parents and thinks that they do not see what the other person is doing; they only see the surface so they sometimes do not thank the other person or help each other. It is important to appreciate each other. Shada's mother wants to arrange a marriage for her but she is against that. She wants to meet someone and fall in love before getting married and she wants to see and explore the world. According to Shada, arranged marriages are more about two families marrying each other. She does not like the idea of her marriage being a deal, where she is just some kind of currency. She wants to feel that she is ready and getting married on her own terms. Shada sees young students at the university that are engaged and have a lot to learn and experience before getting married. She thinks that these girls will feel frustrated later on and might take this out on their men because they did not let them experience life before getting married. By saying experience life Shada means to be finished with education and have worked some. According to Sonbol (2002) a lot of women tend to marry in arranged marriages. 42.5 percent marry cousins or uncles (Sonbol, 2002). According to Nock (1987), the family can exercise control over who their children should marry. This is because the view



is that a marriage is more about extending the network of the already existing family (Nock, 1987). Shada also talks about the importance in having an understanding man. She believes that if you have a very understanding husband it is possible to work and study while having your own family. Shada talks about women being able to handle multiple tasks simultaneously meaning women could easily divide their time being able to be good mothers, students and wives. Still Shada believes that from time to time it would be hard to have an equal balance. Shada knows that she will get married someday because her mother would not let her become a spinster.

Unlike Shada, Lara believes in arranged marriages and defines herself as being more traditional. According to Nock (1987), love is not a prelude to marriage in some societies. More important is the function of the relationships (Nock, 1987). On the other hand she, just like Shada, believes in equality between man and wife and that a woman should work and responsibilities should be shared so she explains that she is a bit split between the modern and traditional. Lara believes that everyone wants to have another half. She looks at marriage as being a very important institution in every society. The most important qualities in a marriage should be communication, mutual respect, and friendship according to Lara. One of the problems that Lara finds with arranged marriage is that it often seems to be a deal between the parents and she is against this. She is against dating and pre-marital relationships but thinks that it is important to get to know each other before the marriage and feels that the balance between this two is hard to find. She talks about the aspect of bad reputation and feels that if a man came and asked to get to know you before talking to your parents this could give you a bad reputation. Lara does not like pre-marital relationships because she thinks that it is built on sexual endorsement and focus on acknowledgment of each other. She thinks that these sorts of relationships many times can be more of an obsession of a person than a qualitative relationship where you can develop yourself. Lara also talks about the idea of honor and the women being the ones holding the family honor. If the woman spends time with a man she has shamed and dishonored the family and Lara thinks that this really affects what decisions women and men take. According to Lara in Jordan it is considered the woman's main goal in life to find a husband. This goal is the same for the man but it comes with a career.

Ban is for pre-marital relationships and has tried to have relationships with other nationalities but she always felt that something was missing. She wants to have a husband with an Arabic background and she especially wants the Arabic background to be passed on to her kids. She believes that marriage is a partnership or institution and she is looking for someone who could

be a good father. Ban does not focus on the love or attraction, her aim is based on more practical values like building the foundation for a supporting and caring family. Ban believes that love is something that can be universal; she explains it for example to be the love for her future children to live in a better future or the passion to change something. Ban wants to get married but she has been holding off because she has not found anyone suitable to be a father of her children. She does not want anyone looking for marriage because the culture is pushing. Ban believes that the Arabic culture sometimes puts pressure on people to get married because it is not socially accepted if you are single at a certain age. She can feel the pressure sometimes since she is 27.

For Suada marriage is about having a husband and children. She looks at family as being important and the main unit for society. She thinks that a society that depends more on the family is better than one that does not. The main quality of the family is, for Suada, love. She believes that love is everything in life. She believes that family is all about relations between each other and that it is important to have good relations. She wants to be educated before being married because there are a lot of responsibilities with marriage but if she did not complete her education before marriage she would still try to continue. She thinks that it would be hard.

In the rural areas Nisrin does not think much about marriage and did not have so much to say about marriage. She wanted to study and work before getting married. Talking about qualities in marriage she wants her husband to be understanding and intellectual. Esma wants a different marriage than her parents. She wants both her and her husband to work. She also wants her husband to have the same level of education. Esma does not think that it is important to get married but she says that it is the opinion in the village that it is. When talking of marriage Bint says that it is very difficult to be married. This is because with marriage comes a lot of responsibilities. She explains that the marriages in the village are mostly arranged. A man comes to the house of the woman and asks her parents if he can marry her. Bint explains that her husband lets her work and if he supported her she would also be able to get more education. If there were any problems about her not being able to balance work and family her husband can make her stop working. Mariam agrees with Bint in saying that marriage is hard and gives you a lot of responsibilities. According to Mariam women learn at an early age how to be a good wife. She hopes that someone will marry her and that there will not be any problems between her and her husband. Zeliha wants her husband to be open-minded and not try to control her. She thinks that it is very important to get married. She

also says that she wants to move outside her village but she has to move wherever her future husband will move. Elif explains marriage as being the last station in a woman's life. She says that tradition is that they have to marry. She believes that it is better to work and have a job before getting married so that you have experienced something else before marriage.

If we look at marriage through Parsons Societal subsystem, it seems to be a value for a lot of the women in the urban area to get married. According to Sonbol (2002) more than 90 percent of the women marry around the age of 24 (Sonbol, 2002). Nour means marriage is important. Fatima says that it is generally viewed that you as a women have to get married. Shada's mother wants Shada to have an arranged marriage. According to Shada, her mother will not let her become a spinster. One of the keywords that Parsons use in the societal subsystem is influence (Craib, 1992). In this case Shada's mother is the one influencing Shada to get married in an arranged marriage. The value is still to marry, just as in Fatima's and Nour's case and in Shada's case the value could be to get married in an arranged marriage. Lara believes marriage is a very important institution in every society and she believes in arranged marriage. Ban believes that the Arabic culture sometimes pressures people to get married.

According to Sonbol (2002) women in rural areas tend to marry earlier (Sonbol, 2002). In the rural area Esma said that the village opinion is that you have to get married. The value there is that marriage is important. Nisrin does not say much about marriage but Zeliha believes that marriage is very important. According to Elif it is tradition that you have to marry. Both Bint and Mariam are already married. According to Mariam, women learn at an early age how to be a good wife.

According to the Fiduciary subsystem, the value of getting married has to be maintained. Parsons talks about commitment being one of the keyword of the Fiduciary subsystem (Craib, 1992) Fatima says that she hopes that she will marry. Shada wants to get married but not in an arranged marriage, she wants to fall in love. Shada and Fatima will maybe maintain the value if they get married according to Parsons' theory. Nour says that she sees herself as married so she will probably maintain the value. But in Shada's case, she does not want to maintain the value of getting married in an arranged marriage. Unlike Shada, Lara wants to maintain the value of getting married in an arranged marriage and maintain the value of getting married. Also Ban wants to get married. Esma in the rural area thinks that she will get married even though she says that she thinks that marriage is not important. We could see Esma as being very committed to the value, wanting to get married even if she thinks that it is not important.

Zeliha in the rural area wants to get married so she will maybe maintain the value of getting married. Elif believes that she will marry. Mariam got married and in that way maintained the value of marriage.

Some things do not fit in to Parsons' theory. The value of getting married will maybe not be maintained in some of the women's lives. The value and gender role can be changing. As said before, according to Macionis and Plummer (2007) gender role is about performing the different behaviors of being a male or a female (Macionis and Plummer, 2007). It seems to be that to get married is a role of gender for the women. But maybe the gender role is changing? For example Fatima believes that you can be complete and successful without being married. At one point Shada says that she does not want the marriage to be a deal and this is why she is against arranged marriage. The value in Shada's case, to get married in an arranged marriage seems to be changing. Lara wants to maintain the value of getting married in an arranged marriage but she is against it being a deal so in some way maybe the value is changing. Still maybe not, because Lara also makes it clear that she is against pre-marital relationships. Ban says that the Arabic culture sometimes pressures people into getting married and it is not accepted to be single at a certain age. Ban is now 27 and she says that she can feel the pressure sometimes but she does not seem very worried about it. Is this a value that is changing? Ban waiting with marriage? Esma does not think that marriage is important but she thinks that she still will marry. Will she maintain the value or is it changing? This we do not know. Is Esma committed to the value? According to Sonbol (2002) women nowadays tend to wait with marriage (Sonbol, 2002).

Gender role is about performing and learning the different behaviors of being a male or a female (Macionis and Plummer, 2007). In marriage the different gender roles are well defined, both in what is expected and what function the marriage is going to fulfill and what way husband and wife are going to interact. Especially in the rural area the gender role is well defined. Esma says that the village opinion is that women have to get married. According to Mariam, women learn at an early age how to be a good wife.

### *6.2.2 Children*

Having children seem to be something that is very central in a lot of the interviewed women's life's but according to The World Bank women in Jordan are having less children nowadays. 1990 the number of children per women was 5.4 and 2005 it has decreased to 3.6 (The World

Bank, 2009b). A distinct pattern is that a lot of women mentions that they will stay home and take care of their children for at least a couple of years.

Shada laughs and says that she wants one dozen children in the future. She comes from a smaller family with only a few siblings and she has always seen how her mother interacts with her siblings and the greatness in having many siblings to support you. Fatima feels that you are missing something if you do not have children, for her having her own children takes a very central role. Fatima also feels very strongly about male children and believes that you have to have a male child to feel complete. Lara would like to have a few children and does not have a special idea about how many or if they should be male or female. Ban has a clear idea of her future children and she sees herself with three children. Talking about children, she does not talk about whether they should be male or female. She is more focused on passing on the same love, good values and even some of the things that she did not like as a child that her parents passed on to her. Suada thinks that she will have children one day but she has not thought about it so much. Nour says that children are going to be the most important part in her life and especially in their earlier age. She thinks that both the father and mother should have equal responsibility in raising the children.

Some of the women living in the rural areas had very short answers when it comes to thoughts about children; some also thought that there was nothing much to say about children. They knew that they were going to have children and that was it. According to Sonbol (2002) it is globally dominant in marriage that the woman's primary function is to give birth to the children and to take care of them at home (Sonbol, 2002).

For example Nisrin, says it is obvious that she is going to have children but she does not know how many. Esmā thinks about having two children in the future. Bint already has twin daughters and can think of having another child but not until the twins were a bit older. Mariam does not know if she wants to have children but she still thinks that she will have if she gets married. She can imagine having two, not more than that. Zeliha wants to have two boys and two girls. Elif has three daughters and she does not know if she will have more children.

When it comes to raising children Fatima wants her future children to know that they can shape their future the way they want. She believes that she cannot control their future and that she can only give the children the tools and the skills they need for life. She thinks that mothers always try to do their best for their children. When Shada thinks about

responsibilities around the children she wants it to be shared between her and her husband. Shada believes that marriage is a partnership so there should not be one parent being the more dominant, she says that both parents should be on top of the children and be responsible for them, interact with them and know everything regarding them. She also says that the mother is the one more in charge in the beginning, first years. Lara thinks that it is important that it is the mother of the child who takes care of the child the first years. Lara says that she thinks it is horrible with mothers leaving their children with a maid and in the end the child is raised by the maid instead of the child's actual mother. When the children come to an age where they are not very impressionable anymore the mothers can go back to work. Ban says almost the same as Lara. She thinks that it is possible to combine work and raising children but that she has to stay home for about four years as a mother. She feels that the most important relationship is between the mother and the child. She thinks that the main responsibility around children is on the mother because she thinks that women can understand children more than men, especially when it comes to teaching them or taking care of them. When it comes to for example playing with them, there is no difference whether it is a male or female. Also Suada agrees. She will stop working when she has kids until they are around five years old or when they can depend on themselves.

The rural women Nisrin and Zeliha did not tell us anything about how they wanted the responsibility around the children to be divided. Esma believes that the mothers are responsible for the children the first years. The father has more responsibilities when it comes to children in the child's later years. Esma thinks that the child learns more about society if the father interacts and takes responsibility for the child. Bint, who has children, works now and believes that it is possible to do so and at the same time raise children. She thinks that the hardest thing is to know where to leave her children when she works. For the moment her mother takes care of one of her daughters and she has put the other one in kindergarten. It is too expensive to put them both in kindergarten. Mariam does not think anything special about how to divide the responsibility when it comes to her future children she think more about the children's future. She wants her children to move from the village and live anywhere else. She says that she want them to have opportunities and that there are no opportunities in the village. Elif also says this. Elif does not want her children to stay in the village. She wants them to have an open mind and believes that there are more opportunities elsewhere. The village is small and there is not much of a future there she says. She also says that she wants

her husband to help her more with the children. She feels that it can be hard to handle everything when all the children need something.

Some of the women that we interviewed feel the responsibility of staying home during the children's first years and they feel that women are better equipped to raise the children the first years. Parallels can be seen with Parsons' Fiduciary subsystem. We registered that the women wanted to stay home to take care of their children as a value and gender role. This can also be seen as informal rules of conduct (Craib, 1992).

That women take the role of being the childcare provider can be to maintain the existing value and can be explained by the societal subsystem. According to Sonbol (2002), the majority of women stay home a longer period after giving birth. As mentioned, it is globally dominant in marriage that the woman's primary function is to give birth to the children and to take care of them at home (Sonbol, 2002). The women that we interviewed are committed to taking care of their children the first years because of the existing value and gender role. We registered in our interviews that the women did not seem to question them being the ones taking care of the children the first years. The women have a feeling of solidarity and are loyal to the values about women being the best suited in raising children. Both the urban women Nour, Fatima, Lara, Ban and Suada and the rural women Esma, Bint and Elif think it is important that women are closest to the child. Bint's mother is the one taking care of Bint's children while Bint works and also this shows a woman taking care of children. This value can also be seen as a gender role.

In the rural areas the fact of having children seemed to be obvious. When we asked the question about if the women wanted children we registered that the women answered the question as if it was obvious. The women in the rural areas did not talk about responsibilities. We wonder if the fact that the women in the rural areas did not talk much about responsibilities for children was because maybe also this is something obvious for them. This we do not know, we can only speculate. We can look at having children as a value and a part of the fiduciary subsystem. If having children is a value then women maintaining this value are a part of the societal subsystem. The women maintain the value of having children by not reflecting about having them, it is something obvious. The women are loyal to the value. If the women also think that it is obvious that they are the ones taking care of the children also this is a part of the fiduciary subsystem. They are again being loyal the value of women being the ones taking care of children but this is a fact we are not sure of, we are only speculating.

The fact that it is so obvious that the women that we interviewed want to have children may show the importance of family. Family can be seen as the institution that holds the values. The value can be the fact of having children. All of the women said that they were going to have children if they married. According to the societal subsystem this is to maintain the value. Fatima told us about the importance of siblings, having them as a support and Shada talks about having children to feel complete and with these parallels can be seen with the importance of family and so we again see the importance of family.

According to Calhoun (2002) values are subject to change. Shada, Ban, Esma, Suada, and Elif want their husbands to share responsibilities regarding the children, especially when the child is around four or five years since they want to work by then. Is this a value that is changing? That women want their husbands to take a bigger part in raising the children. According to the socialization perspective of gender the fact that we are shaped into different roles leads to inequality between men and women. Five women seem to want to change their gender role. The new conflicts appear because the women want to work and they solve the conflict by staying home the first years after the child's birth and then wanting their husband to share the responsibility regarding the child.

### *6.2.3 About the responsibility in the household*

The gender role for both the women in the urban and the rural area seems to be the women having the responsibility in the household. Many of the women say they want the responsibilities in the house to be divided but it seems like the women themselves take on the role of being responsible for the household.

“Logically speaking men and women are different” says Nour. She thinks there cannot be real equality between men and women even when it comes to responsibilities within the marriage, like the household. She thinks that an Arab woman is more aware of what the house needs and what it doesn't need and she says that an Arab woman is the leader in the household. She says that it is good preparation for her that she now helps her family at home because in the future no matter how helpful your husband is he will not stay at home with you every single day. But she thinks an important thing nowadays is that the chores in the household should be equal. Shada also means it is important that the chores in the household are equal. As an example she takes her mother and father's situation where her father is always out of the house working and her mother never leaves the house. She can see that this is unhealthy both for her mother, her father and their relationship. But she also feels that it is best that her



mother does the household work because her father always comes home late from work and he is very tired. She also says that her father is unable to do the home duties because he has no knowledge about it. It is often the women who do the domestic work (Macionis and Plummer, 2007).

Fatima thinks it is generally viewed, both by men and women, that to stay at home and take care of the household is a woman's job. She perceives a man working in the household is generally viewed as demeaning in the society and she disagrees with this. She says that when someone does something in the household it is not because they have to do it, she says it is a labor of love. If her mother does something for her in the house she thinks that a very nice person has done a very nice thing for her rather than that she had to do it as a woman and as a wife. She indicates that in some families it is more functional that the woman takes care of the household, in other families it can be the man. She also talks about the role of being a mother taking care of the household as a mother/daughter issue. She thinks that older women view the situation as them having no option while women today know there is.

Laras view of how responsibilities should be divided in the household is that the one who works less outside the house should have most of the responsibility at home. She says that she rather sees the women taking care of the family before working and devoting time to a career. In her family her mother is taking care of everything at home and her father is the breadwinner. Ban believes like Fatima that many people in society are thinking of the women as the housekeeper. She thinks that the chores in the household should be done equally, half by the wife and half by the husband because it is a partnership. She thinks this is one of the reasons that she is still single because she is a person who has many jobs and projects and does not want to be in a relationship where, as she said, the man is the breadwinner and she does everything else. In her family her mother is the one taking care of the household but she says this kind of structure of the family is nothing she would like to have in the future. Suada believes that each person in a family has to be responsible for their things and that everyone has to share the responsibility for the household. In her family the responsibility of the household is on her mother, herself and her siblings because her father is out working.

In the rural area Nisrin means that the responsibility should be divided depending on who does most of the work outside the house. She says that if both she and her husband are working then the responsibility for the household must be divided equally. She also feels it can be equal for the women to work more in the household if she doesn't work outside the

house. In her family it has always been the girls who take care of the household. She thinks it will be different in her future family because she wants to work and then she and her husband have to share the responsibility for the household. Esma says that the responsibilities for the household have to change. Nowadays responsibilities must be divided, not like in her family where her mother is taking care of everything inside the house. Bint tells us that she is the one who cleans and cooks in the house. She also works outside the house. She says that she would prefer the husband to do half of the work in the house. Mariam says that it is okay for the women not to work if the husband has a good job with a good salary. But if he doesn't and if the family needs more money it is okay for the woman to work as well, even though she thinks it is best for the woman to take care of the home. Her mother has always been the housekeeper. Zeliha means that both she and her husband in the future should divide the responsibilities for the household. Nowadays it is the girls in the house who are taking care of the household. Elif says that the responsibilities for the house are on her. Although she thinks divided and equal responsibilities is the most important thing. Now she is working outside the house and at the same time she has all the responsibilities of the household. Giddens (2003:172) writes that studies have shown that even though women are a part of the labor market they still have the main responsibility for the home.

Nour says that men and women are different even when it comes to responsibilities and that the women are more aware of what the house needs. Fatima and Ban think it is generally viewed in the society that the women have the main responsibility for the household. All the women except for one woman, all the interviewees have mothers who are stay at home mums. The norm in the urban area seems to be the women are the one having the responsibility in the household and so is the role of gender. The norms in Parsons' social action system can be found in the Fiduciary subsystem where maintaining and internalization of the collective conceptions is taking part (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007). Some of the women we have interviewed seem to have a different view on women's and men's responsibilities in the family sphere. They do not want to set the norms in action because of this they do not to fulfil the societal subsystem (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007). Like if the latent pattern about women's attitude to work in the system, the family is changing. Fatima, Nour, Shada, Lara and Ban think the responsibility for the household should be made equal. But Nour also said that the responsibilities between a man and a woman cannot be made equal because men and women are different and Shada says it is best that her mother works in the household because her father is too tired when he comes back from work and unable to do the home duties

because he does not know anything about it. This can show how the gender role of women being responsible for family and household is still alive in some cases, even though the women are aware of it and say they want to have a change. In almost all societies the responsibility of domestic work and children lies on the mother (Giddens, 2003:117). Lara says that the one who works less outside the house should have more responsibility in the household but she says that she prefers the women to prioritize the family before work. Suada thinks that everyone in the family should share the responsibility. Fatima thinks it is a mother/daughter issue. She thinks that older women view the situation as having no option while women today know there is. It seems like old norms and values are changing, which they actually are (Calhoun, 2002).

In Nisrin and Zelihe's homes it has always been the girls who have had the responsibility. In Esma and Mariam's home's it has always been the mother taking care of the household. For Bint and Elif the household is their responsibility. It looks like if women taking care of the household also are a part of the gender role for the women we have interviewed in the rural area (Giddens, 2003). In the future Nisrin wants the one who works less outside the house to have the most of the responsibility in the house. Esma, Bint, Zeliha and Elif want to have divided responsibilities in the household. This can also be expressed out from Parsons Fiduciary system that the norms might not are working as latent pattern in those cases. In Miriam's case it might do. She says that it is good for the women to have the responsibilities at home. Nisrin says the responsibilities will be different from in her family now and Esma says it have to change.

From a gender perspective it can be seen as the women's gender role is about taking care of the household and the children. Some of them say this is not what they want, they want to share responsibilities, but in some cases it shows that how they think of their gender role as taking care of the domestic work and the family. For example Nour says that men and women are different and that it cannot be equal between them although she says she wants to have divided responsibilities at home. This phenomenon also appears when Shada talks about the responsibilities between her mother and father. She says she wants to have divided responsibilities in the household, but at the same time she says it is okay that her mother does the domestic work because her father works and he does not do domestic work. From a gender perspective this can be seen as some sort of inequality between the men and the women that the domestic work is a women's work and it can be seen as the women are giving themselves the gender role as responsible for domestic work (Macionis and Plummer, 2007).

### **6.3 Education**

That education is highly prioritised is a distinct pattern among the women we interviewed. Both in the urban and rural areas the women hope to develop further in their education.

In the urban area, Nour thinks that education is of importance. For Nour, education is “number one” and she thinks that there is no limitation for knowledge. She wants to learn as much as possible and in ten years she sees herself as a PhD holder. Fatima distinguishes between knowledge and education. She believes that knowledge is something everlasting while education is something that is very important if you want to be outstanding. She explains that in Jordan these days, a Bachelor degree is not a big deal because everyone has one. A Masters gives you more opportunities so Fatima is planning to get one. Just as with Nour, education is very important to Shada. She thinks that people who do not finish a degree do not have all the options in their life to do what they want to do and have a hard time to develop further. Shada also explains her mothers’ situation and feels that her mother wants a role other than being a housewife and if she had a degree she could have done something more. Shada wants to continue studying for a Master’s degree and perhaps later on complete a Doctoral degree. Lara believes that education is the foundation of knowledge and that you have to work hard to achieve your goals. She thinks that this is more important for women than for men in a society like Jordanian society where, according to Lara, a lot of women do not work. Lara studies because she enjoys it very much and her aim is to graduate as a PhD. She mentions that a lot of women chase a PhD as a tool to open more doors in life. Lara admits that she is one of them. According to Lara, having a PhD nowadays is common among women. That education is one of the big obstacles to self development is something that Ban thinks but she continues to say that it only provides you with the raw material and that working makes you create something from it. She believes that education puts people into a system and enables them to be a part of the society. Ban has studied several years and is now working on her PhD and is at the same time working with her own company. Suada thinks that education is the main thing in life and that nowadays it is of more importance than before to get educated because of the developing society. Suada wants to study for a PhD to be able to teach at a University later on.

In the rural area, Nisrin thinks that education makes you a part of the society, especially for women. She sees it as a chance for women to come out and experience society. According to her it is more important that women educate themselves than men. She thinks about continuing her education and would like to take a Master’s degree. When talking about

education, Esma talks a lot about the future. She feels that education is a tool that teaches people how to deal with society and future life. She really wants to finish her studies before becoming a mother and hopes to continue to study for a PhD. Bint feels that education gives women power and that education helps women to develop. According to her education leads to work and work leads to money and money leads to power. Bint wants to develop in the future. Mariam believes that education is very important and is very positive to continuing her education if she is able to someday. Zeliha and Elif look at education as the best thing for a woman. According to Zeliha education gives women confidence and power, an open mind and ability to see other people and another world than only the world at home. Elif also mentions the importance of education giving women the ability to work. Both Zeliha and Elif hope to continue their studies and develop their skills.

According to Jordan Governmental Statistics for 2002, 49.8 percent of university students are women and 67 percent of the women in Jordan have secondary education (Keddie, 2007). All the women in the urban area mention the importance of education. Fatima and Shada say that it gives women more opportunities, Lara says that women use education as a tool to find out more about life. Ban explains that education gives the ability for women to be a part of the society and Suada thinks it is important because of the developing society.

Women in the rural areas answered almost the same as the urban women. All of the women also thought of education as being very important. Nisrin, Esam and Zeliha thought that education makes you a part of society and helps people to deal with society. Zeliha also mentions that education gives women power and confidence. Bint also agrees and adds that education also helps women to develop.

All the women, both in urban and rural areas want to get more education in some way. According to Sonbol (2002) the percentage of women educating themselves in developing countries is rising (Sonbol, 2002). Many of the women want to have a Masters degree or a PhD. Fatima says that a bachelor's degree in Jordan is not as outstanding anymore since everyone has one. She means that you have to have more education. Also Lara says that having a PhD opens more doors in life. The importance of education can be seen through what Parsons calls the Political subsystem. The women are motivated to educate themselves to achieve their goals like being part of society and to develop. All of the women want to educate themselves more and develop and also many of the women want to have a Masters degree or a PhD. A key word in Parsons' Political subsystem is power (Craib, 1992). Many of

the women think that having a higher education leads to more power and according to Fatima it also makes you more competitive. They mobilize their resources and are driven by the goal of achieving power and getting more opportunities (Craib, 1992).

A lot of women that we interviewed felt that they get the opportunity to take part in the larger world by getting educated according to gender perspective. According to Shada her mother would like to have a different role than being a housekeeper and Shada believes that this could be possible if her mother had had an education. Gender role is about learning the different behaviors of being a male or a female (Macionis and Plummer, 2007). Lara means that women use education as a tool to find out more about life and develop. Do the women that we interviewed want to find out more about their gender role that might be changing? Perhaps, since they all say that they want to develop and get more education.

## **6.4 Women and work**

According to the World Bank 16.1 percent of the women in Jordan were employed in 2007 (The World bank, 2009c) In 2008, 85.1 percent of the employed women lived in the Urban area and 14.9 percent lived in the rural (Department of Statistics, 2008c) Work is something that seems to be important in almost all of the interviewed women's lives in different ways. Some of the women say it gives an opportunity to see society and meet different kinds of people, some say it is because you otherwise will sit home alone and others say it gives power to the women. Some of the women also have high goals and want to work with something they are very interested in. In many cases, especially in the urban areas, it seems like work is an important part in fulfilling themselves. The family is also an important institution in all the women's lives and to balance the responsibility for the family and work outside the home is a double for the women. The women usually return home to their other work which is domestic work, raise children and cook (Macionis and Plummer, 2007:371). They must have different strategies to manage to navigate through double responsibilities.

### *6.4.1 Importance of Work*

As we mentioned the education level has increased in Jordan. In 2001 5.8 percent of women that educated themselves with a bachelor's degree or above and in 2008 it was 11.1 percent. Of those graduating with a BA, 44, 8 percent start working (Department of Statistics, 2008d).

It is important to go outside the house and work to see society and meet different kinds of people. This is Nour's opinion about the importance of working women. Lara and Shada also think that work is important because it makes you find out more about people and learn how

to deal with them in different ways. You also find out more about the world and it gives you more experience than you would get from university or your family. Shada says that work builds your personality. Nour thinks work can help you, as a mother, to deal with and bring up your children in a better way because you will know more about people and about society.

Fatima says work is important because it will make women become more financially independent and through this stronger as a person. She thinks work makes women feel more important, but as long as it is a free choice she has nothing against women being stay-at-home mums. She thinks more women are going out to work because of the economic situation in Jordan nowadays when families need more money. Not because the perspective on women has changed. Shada thinks it is important to feel that you have earned your own money and that you can support your own needs without asking someone else for money. Lara says that a lot of women want to have their own money to spend on themselves or to save in case of a rainy day such as a divorce. Sometimes she thinks that girls work to fill time between graduating and marriage and after marriage they settle down and finish work. According to Sonbol (2002) 44 percent of married women are planning to leave their jobs after having children.

Ban describes herself as a “workaholic”. She thinks work is very important. She thinks that work will help people feel more complete if they approach it goal related. She does not think you should work only for the sake of it, she thinks you should find something where you can use your passions and your personal strengths. Lara thinks work can be important even when women grow older. She explains how women can be a bit restless and feel emptiness in the future if they do not have a job to go to when as she said “the nest is empty”. She has seen this phenomenon around her more than once.

Suada thinks that work is important to fill up time, but not all time her because she has other important things in her life like family and friends.

When it comes to the rural area Nisrin thinks that work is important because you keep up with society. Bint also says that work is important because, like education, it gives you more knowledge. Zeliha says that if it was not for work she would never see society and never meet other people. This is Elif’s opinion as well. She says work is important because you learn to interact with and meet different kinds of people with different minds and different opinions and it helps you develop your self. She says work is important because it gives you confidence.

Esma thinks work is important even for women because everything is more expensive nowadays and because families need more money. She also says that it is better to work and meet other people than being home alone. This is the answer Mariam gives as well. Bint says that money gives women more power.

#### *6.4.2 Future vision of work*

Nour thinks that work is something very important for herself; she finds herself in work and wants to be successful. She says work is nothing that she has to do as a woman. She thinks that many women in Jordan today want to have a job in order to “find themselves”. She has plans to teach. This is something she really wants to do. She also says this is an easy field for women because you can bring your children to your work and if your child for example gets sick you find understanding from your colleagues because most teachers are women. She also wants to work in a company her mother has started that is making education tools for children. Fatima also has plans to work in the future. She says that it is sad that some jobs are seen as suitable for men and some for women. She thinks that almost every woman that is studying at the university wants to become a teacher. According to Department of Statistics 41.1 percent of women worked with education in 2008 (Department of Statistics, 2008e) Fatima is thinking of working with tourism or she wants to be successful and work with media and have her own talk show on TV. Shada wants to work as a teacher in the future. She is optimistic about the future regarding work. She says that if you are capable, educated and you are clever, if you can speak for yourself and you have a strong personality then it will be no problem to get a job. In ten years she wants, just like Nour and Fatima to have a career and be successful.

Lara is thinking of working with something she really likes in the future. She wants to work with her dream job; she wants to be a Professor and a writer. She has gone into teaching a bit but she will not remain in that field because she thinks like Fatima that teaching is a field almost only for women. Ban has done many different kinds of work in her life and she sees herself as working very ambitiously in the future in a centre for teaching people in creative expression. She is like Fatima interested in media and she is now on her way to starting a radio programme. Suada wants to continue working as a pharmacist, and to be a teacher at the University. She also wants to have time for her families and friends as well.

In the rural area Nisrin wants to work with teaching in the future which Mariam and Bint also want to do. Mariam wants to continue to work with teaching in computer science and Bint



wants to develop her work as a teacher with makeup and hairstyling in the future. In ten years Mariam wants to be married and work. Bint says “In Shala, God knows what happens in ten years”, but she hopes to have a better life. Esma says that she really wants to work as a lawyer and says it is important for her to work in ten years. Because Zeliha is now a trainee she wants to develop her job situation in the future but the career is not the most important thing for her. Marriage is the most important goal in ten years for her. Elif will continue to work in the future but she thinks it will be easier when her children have grown up. When we asked about how she wants her life to look in ten years the most important thing was a good future for her kids.

When all the women we interviewed talked about future and work they all saw themselves working in the future. In the urban area everyone seems to have thoughts about a career and being successful in their work in ten years. In the rural area some women’s priorities were things like being married, having a good future for the children and to have a better life. Some of them took up work as well but not as the first thing and not everyone. In Parsons’ Polity subsystem the actor of the social system motivates and mobilizes to reach the goal in the Economic subsystem. In the Economic subsystem the providing of material wellbeing for the function of the family as a social system is taking part (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007). It seems like many of the women we interviewed in both the urban and rural areas first of all were working to fulfil themselves. The importance of work for the women in the urban areas was for example to learn more about society, to meet people, fill time and be financially independent so that they can buy their own things and maybe save something for themselves. Another thing that seems to be important for the women is that work builds the personality and will help people feel more complete. In the rural areas things like keeping up with society, more knowledge and meeting and learning to deal with other people and power for women came up. Only Fatima in the urban area and Esma in the rural area answered that more women might go out to work to help the family with money. This could be explained from Parsons’ Political and Economical subsystem as, not many women are working to provide the economical welfare in the family. Only two women see the importance of work and themselves as organizing to reach the goal to provide the material wellbeing for the family and support the survival of the system (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007). What economic support to the family from the women’s work actually looks like can may differ from this, but this is about how the women think about the importance of their work and why they work.

#### *6.4.3 About having a family and work*

Nour thinks it can be hard to balance the responsibilities for the family and work. She says it depends on how it goes in the family. Sometimes she can question whether she is able to, as she said, maintain two fields and try to balance them without being blamed by one side or the other. The fact that she is going to work in the field of being a teacher she does not think will be hard because as her mother did, she can bring her children with her to work. She thinks it would be different if she worked in another field. The fact that most of the teachers are women makes it even easier she says, because they understand a mother's need when their children for example are sick.

Fatima does not think it is an impossible formula. She thinks it is a personal choice and that everyone has different capacity. It is wonderful for those who can both work and be a mother at the same time. But she says that everyone can't live up to both of those two jobs and that you cannot give up the job of being a mother. Shada says that if you can divide both and be able to satisfy your job and your family, without taking time away from the family it can work. Lara thinks it depends on each one's capability. She says that for those women who can combine both without neglecting one or the other it is good. She says that women in the past who prioritized something over their families were considered selfish. She thinks these thoughts are still alive, especially for women, the family is supposed to come before everything else. She cannot say this is completely wrong. She believes that there have to be some sort of balance between them both. She is completely with women to have a career but sometimes she thinks this will not work out. She is more for women taking care of their families first. She says that as she sees it career can always wait but the family cannot. She thinks that those ideas about the family as a very important thing are big in society and because of that she thinks it is hard for women to put their own needs ahead of the family. Ban thinks it is a very significant thing to do because you cannot separate them. You have to find some kind of balance between them because at the same time she thinks responsibilities in the family are important she will not stop developing herself. Suada also says it will be hard to both work and have a family because of all the responsibilities but she will not stop.

In the rural area Nisrin says it will be hard but then she says she and her husband will share the responsibilities in the house. Esma thinks it will be hard but she says that she must do it. Bint says there will not be any problems because she can organise the time between the family and her work. She can have one of her children with her at work, and her mother takes care of her other child when she is at work. Mariam says like Bint. She must make a schedule

for her time with her family to be successful for both family and work and have a balance between them which she says is not easy. Zeliha says it is not an easy thing to do but if you want to and try hard you can manage to do it. Elif can have her children in the neighbour's house during work hours paying a little amount of money to them. Elif says that to have a family and work is too hard to combine. She believes that how well it will work depends on the husband and how much he is willing to help with the house and family. She says that if she could turn back time she would not have a job, or she would not get married and have a family. Studies have shown that employed women continue to have the main responsibility of the family and the household (Macionis and Plummer, 2007:371). From this Giddens (2003:348) writes that many employed mothers often realize that they have to compromise between different aspects of life.

It seems like there is a norm and that the women put themselves in a gender role in all these cases (Giddens, 2003). In this norm and gender role the responsibility in the family and the home is very important for the women and it seems that she is the one having the main responsibility. At the same time from what we have seen in 6.3.1 importance of work, it seems that work is important as well. All of the women in the urban area say it will be hard to find a balance between having a family and work outside the house. Fatima explains that you have to find a balance between those two jobs and that you cannot give up the job of being a mother. Lara says that it is hard for women to put themselves before the family because they can be considered selfish. She says that she does not think of this as always wrong. With those arguments the women can be seen as naturally being responsible for the house and the family.

Nisrin, Esmá, Bint and Elif in the rural area say it is not easy to balance having a family and work outside the house. Nisrin says that it will be hard but that she and her future husband will share the responsibilities in the house. Bint and Mariam says that they will organise the time so that they can manage to do both. Elif also says that how hard it is depends on the husband and how much he wants to help in the family. She says it is too hard to do both and if she chose today she would choose to have no work or not to get married. It seems like the women in rural area place themselves in the same gender role having the main responsibility for the household as the women in the urban area (Giddens, 2003).

The fact that the women see it as their responsibility to take care of the home and the family shows that their norm is that the women take care of the family and household. This can also be seen as a gender role that has been socialized (Giddens, 2003). Although many of them say

they do not want to have all that responsibility in the future. At the same time many of them find it hard to combine having a family and work because of all the responsibilities.

The norm and the gender role that the family, including the main responsibility for the family and the household, can be seen in the fact that the women find it harder to work because, according to Parsons' Societal subsystem, they want to support solidarity and be loyal to the family system (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2007). This can also be explained from the economic subsystem as women find it hard to take part in this system and provide the material welfare in the family because there seems to be a norm and a gender role that a woman has to put her family first (Giddens, 2003). From Parsons this is a working system, without questioning the role of gender (Macionis and Plummer, 2007).

#### *6.4.4 About the economic responsibility*

Some women we have interviewed already have or want the economic responsibility both on themselves and their husbands in the future. But some women prefer the man to be economically responsible. In those family systems the women have different roles, and the system still works but what about the gender role of the women in those two types of family structures?

In the urban area Nour says that if she is working outside the house and if she wants to participate in the economic part of the family it is acceptable, but she personally thinks that the major economic responsibility should be on the man because as she said, for example, maybe the women have to stay at home and take care of the children for some years. Fatima says that the economic responsibility is up to the one who has the highest salary. If the women are the ones working the economic responsibility is on her. Although this is a phenomenon we have not seen in our research. Shada thinks it is good if the women can help the man with the economic responsibility and says that people who do that are setting a good example of women being equal to men. Lara thinks that if both the husband and the wife are working they should divide the economic responsibility, according to each one's capability, whoever earns most pays most. Like in her own case with a working father and a stay-at-home mum she thinks it is fair to both that her father has the economic responsibility. Ban thinks that both the husband and the wife should be the breadwinner. She thinks that the economic responsibility should be on both divided in the same way. But she says that it is part of the Arabic culture to let the husband be the one responsible for the economy. Suada prefers the man to have the main economic responsibility. She would like to help him with a little amount because she

says only one salary is not enough in Jordan anymore, but she prefers the husband to have the main responsibility for the economy.

In the rural area Nisrin tells us that in her family her father works and has the economic responsibility because her mother does not work. In her future family she says it will be different because both she and her husband will work and then they have to split the responsibilities. Esmā tells us that the economic responsibility in her family is on her father and says that it must be different in the future. She says that it is better to have divided responsibilities. Bint also says that she wants both the husband and the wife to have the economic responsibility which is Zeliha's opinion as well. Mariam thinks that the wife should help the husband with money if he has a job with a low salary, but she says she prefers him to manage the economic part himself the reason for which she did not give. According to Giddens (2003:117) because of tradition the man has had the main economic responsibility in many cultures. Elif says that the economic responsibility is both hers and her husband's.

Both Nour and Suada in the urban area say that they prefer the man to be mainly responsible for the economy in the household. Shada says it is good if the women help the men with the economic responsibility and Fatima, Lara and Ban says the responsibility should be on them both. In those cases both the man and the women are a part of the economical subsystem according to Parsons' theory. They are both working to provide the material welfare of the family.

In the rural area Mariam says that she prefers the man to have the economic responsibility in the household. Nisrin, Esmā and Zeliha says that they want divided responsibilities and Bint and Elif say that they already have divided economic responsibilities in the household.

Through Parsons' social action system it can be seen that in those cases where the women want the man to have the economic responsibility the women have no part or role in the economic sub system of the family when it comes to providing the material wellbeing. This is according to Parsons a working system, but without questioning from a gender perspective, which can mean that the women have a gender role which does not include responsibilities for the economic welfare in the family (Macdonis and Plummer, 2007). In this social system and the Economic subsystem of the family, the responsibility for the system's material welfare is on the husband. In the other cases where the women want to or already have divided economic responsibility in the household, both the man and the women have a part in the

Economic subsystem of the social system. They have both a part and a gender role which includes material welfare in the social system.

## **7. Discussion and summary**

### **7.1 Summary**

In our thesis we have met twelve women living in urban and rural areas in Jordan, a developing country in change. We have seen that double expectations have been put on women regarding family life, education and work. All women want to have a family and get married and they want to have another role outside the house. They can have this through education and work. At the same time they see themselves being responsible regarding family and household. Since the women want to have another role than being a housewife they tend to get married later and with this also having children later in life. Some of them also choose jobs that easily can be combined with family life to live up to both expectations.

### **7.2 Discussion**

In our study we could see an interesting difference in how the urban and rural women talked about children. In the urban area the women perceived having children as obvious as the women in the rural areas. Most women in the urban area wanted to have education and a career before having children. They also wanted to continue working after having children if it was possible. In the rural area the women did not have so much to say about having children. We registered it as the women answering the question about having children as obvious. We registered as if they did not perceive it very important to have higher education and a career. When the women in the urban area talked about future, on the other hand, everyone seems to have thoughts about a career and being successful in their work in the coming ten years. In the rural area some women's priorities were things like getting married, having a good future for the children and to have a better life. Some of them took up work as well but not as the first priority and not everyone

We think that it is more common to look at differences when exploring another culture than your own. What we have thought a lot about is the similarities between the stories of the women we interviewed and the Swedish debate about equality. We experience that education and having a career are important aspects in the life of many Swedish women. We can feel that many Swedish women wait with marriage and having children because of this. Even in Sweden, as we experienced it, in Jordan, the older generation views it as you have to have children. We experience that you as a woman in Sweden may feel that you carry the main responsibility regarding children and household. For women in Sweden it is obvious to work and we experience that women in Sweden also may feel pressured in balancing the roles

between working and having a family. This is something that we found in the stories of some of our interviewees as well. For example, our interviews show that many women plan to become, or already, are teachers. One of the women says that it is profitable for women to work as teachers because it is easy to bring the children along and you get more understanding for being a mother because many teachers are women. Other interviewees also mention that teaching is a field only for women. This choice of occupation, then, seems to be one way for women to navigate through their everyday life; living up to expectations at work outside home and, at the same time, having responsibilities for taking care of children and household.

What differs in Sweden is that it is not possible to live on only the man's salary and we experience that the society is built on the grounds that both men and women have to work. While working, kindergarten takes care of your children and makes the system of both man and women working function. When we look at men in families around us today their role in taking care of children and household have increased from before. Today men have the possibility to be free from work and still get paid in ability to stay home and take care of their children. Nowadays it seems to be more obvious that the man takes care of the household. Still in Sweden, just as we experienced in our study of Jordan, we think there is a conflict facing women when it comes to balancing responsibilities of the household, children and work. We can see that some women still see the responsibility regarding household and children as being theirs. In Jordan, according to our interviews, two of the women in the urban area think it is more functional if the one who has less work outside the home has more responsibilities at home, which one woman in the rural area also mentioned. The latter scenario, of women working outside the house while the man has the main responsibilities at home, is something we have not seen in our research. We could see a distinct pattern that women in our study thought that they are more suitable to handle the family and household. One of the women said that women are more biologically aware of what the house needs. Some mentioned that the woman is the one who should have the main responsibility at home.

In further research we suggest it would be interesting to compare women in Sweden and Jordan about their views on their role in family, education and work in a changing context. It would also be interesting to look at Swedish and Jordanian women's perceptions of each other to see if they think of any similarities or differences in their role in family, education and work; it would be exciting to see which those could be.



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# Appendix 1 -Interview guide

Age:.....

Civil status:.....

Religion:.....

Studying Higher education: Yes / No / Have studied

Work: In the home / Outside the home / No

Can you please tell us about your background?

## Family

- Who is your family?
- What does your ideal family look like?
- What are your views about marriage?
- How do you feel that the responsibilities should be divided in the family? (Economic, household, children).

## Education

- What are your views about education?
- If you are not educated, would you like to be educated some day?
- What do you think about combining education and family?
- If you have education/if you would like to be educated/ when you are educated, would you work then?
- If you have or if you intend to have children, would you like them to be educated at a higher level?

## Work

- What are your views about working outside the home?
- If you do not work outside home, would you like to work outside the home sometime?
- What are the opportunities for you to work outside the home? (Easy to change? Range?)
- What do you think about combining work outside the home and family?

## Other

- What do you want your life to look like in 10 years? (Regarding family, education and work).

## Appendix 2 - Agreement

April-May 2009



School of Social Work

**We are writing a report about how women in Jordan experience family life, education and work. We are therefore going to interview women.**

**This document is to confirm that your identity will not be shown to anybody and will not be used in our research. You will be anonymous and we will treat your identity with the highest confidentiality.**

**Best Regards**

**Julia Eklund**

**Sabina Chrstrup**

.....

.....

**Interview person**

**Date.....**

**Name.....**

**Signature.....**