In the demographic literature, it is often assumed that one of the ways in which education affects demographic outcomes is through its association with participation in higher status, higher paying work. Furthermore, both education and employment are thought to affect demographic outcomes at least in part because they lead to an improvement in women's status; they offer women the means to reduce the influence of institutions of gender stratification in their lives. An extension of this thinking suggests that government policies that reduce education or employment opportunities for women may also lead to a deterioration in women's economic and social status. With few options open to them, women may choose to invest their time and energy in child bearing and rearing (Palmer, 1991:4).

In this paper I examine the relationship between women's employment and increased power in the home, in the context of one of the Arab Middle Eastern countries, Jordan. The Arab Middle East is a particularly intriguing case from a demographic point of view, because despite high levels of female education over the past couple of decades, rates of female labor force participation have remained low (women's share of the adult labor force was 11% in 1994) and fertility rates high (total fertility rate of 5.6 in 1992) (UNDP, 1995). Many discussions of the subject stress cultural and religious factors as determinants of the low rates of labor force participation, leaving little hope that policy could change the status of women in any way. However, Moghadam (1993) argues forcefully that policy plays a role: that it is the overall development strategy of a country that constrains women's...
labor force participation because appropriate jobs just aren't available. An overview of trends in women's labor force participation in Jordan over the past couple of decades supports Moghadam's view. When the government proactively sought women's participation, mainly in the public sector, labor force participation increased, reaching 14% by 1991 (World Bank, 1993). Since the regional economic crisis of the late eighties, however, government interest in attracting women workers has waned and unemployment rates for women have risen faster than their employment rates.

The economic adjustment policies of the late eighties and nineties have not improved the unemployment crisis and have furthered social inequalities. Adjustment involves decreasing and shifting public expenditures in order to enhance the country's ability to repay its debts, to decrease consumption and to support its export potential; the latter depends on maintaining a comparative advantage by suppressing wages. The change in the real wage in Jordan in 1988 and 1989 was negative, leading Anani (1990) to conclude that "the onus of inflation fell more preponderantly on the shoulders of the middle and low-income groups" (p.6).

In this paper, I use the results of a series of focus-group discussions carried out in Jordan from mid-July to mid-August 1996, to explore the circumstances under which individual decisions about and attitudes towards economic roles reduce the constraints imposed on women by institutionalized gender systems such as the family and the labor market. Focus groups are discussion groups facilitated by a moderator, brought together to share views on a particular subject. Topics and questions are chosen in advance (i.e. the interviews are focused), but there is flexibility.

To ascertain whether and how employment meets strategic gender needs in the Jordanian context, this study analyzes focus group participants' responses to several scenarios representing conflict between traditional gender norms and the aspirations and new economic realities faced by Jordanian women today. The issue of who does the housework and child care when mothers work for pay is the theme of one of the focus group scenarios. In the gender literature, housework has been used to illustrate conflicts that occur within the household between members with different material interests; issues include who does the housework and how, according to whose standards, and more broadly, should women work for wages outside the home or for men inside the home (Hartmann, 1981)? A second scenario asks participants to reflect on these same dynamics but in extended-family households; many young couples spend the early years of their marriage living with the husband's parents until they can afford a place of their own. There is some indication that this kind of living arrangement may be on the increase because of the tight economic times.

A third scenario depicts another situation in which the old and the new come into conflict: when young women consider a job offer in a distant city
or in another country. In Jordanian society, young people, both men and women, are expected to live in their parents’ house until they are married. In recent decades however, many young men have taken jobs abroad due to the lack of employment in Jordan. It is still uncommon for young, single women to do so.

Focus groups are thought to be particularly well-suited to topics like these in which context and social interaction are seen as critical to an understanding of the issues. Although they do not provide definitive answers about population trends or causal relationships, focus groups do provide insights into how people form opinions and how these motivate behavior. The study concludes with a consideration of whether the kinds of jobs available to women under economic adjustment are likely to be ones that will give women autonomy and expand their choice set. One of the rationales for economic adjustment is that the market will fill the gap as the state withdraws from certain activities. Thus resources are encouraged to shift out of the non-tradeables, i.e., goods and services produced that are not traded internationally, or that are produced within the household for its own consumption, towards tradeables, i.e., exportable products or products for domestic consumption that are internationally competitive. It may be more difficult for married women and women in general to make the shift because of their child rearing and home maintenance responsibilities and the lack of adequate daycare. In addition, the type of jobs available to women with reproductive responsibilities tend to be low-paying and involve long hours.

THEORETICAL RELATIONSHIPS

The conceptual framework elaborated by Moser (1993) provides a way of differentiating the empowerment dimension of employment from the basic needs dimension. It is based on the distinction first coined by Maxine Molyneux (1985) between practical and strategic gender needs. Practical gender needs arise from the concrete conditions of women’s positioning within the gender division of labor and within the class structure whereas strategic gender needs refer to the means of overcoming the constraints imposed on women by institutionalized gender systems (Molyneux, 1985; Moser, 1993). Presumably, paid work always constitutes a practical gender need. As the ones primarily responsible for their household’s daily welfare, women are often motivated to take on paid work out of economic necessity; the number of women in this position is likely to increase during times of economic adjustment. The extent to which in meeting practical gender needs work also meets strategic gender needs depends on the type of work. Some employment is more likely than others to lead to a renegotiation in the sexual division of labor, either at the household or community level, and to reduce the influences of institutionalized gender systems in general.
Traditional attitudes which view women as the primary caregivers for children and men as the breadwinners, as well as time-consuming household maintenance tasks, make it difficult for many women to enter formal sector jobs. Ingrid Palmer sees women's unpaid work in family maintenance and reproduction as a 'tax' they must pay before engaging in income-generating activity (Palmer, 1991). When they do take on paid work, women tend to concentrate in low-paid occupations that are predominantly female, often occupations that are an extension of women's work in the home: teaching, caring for the ill and disabled, sewing, cleaning... Often they continue to meet all their household maintenance responsibilities despite the fact that they work for pay outside the home; some even continue to be the primary caregivers for their children. Thus income-generating work per se may do little to enhance women's sense of control over their lives, particularly women of the lower classes (Desai and Jain, 1994; Oppong, 1983). While paid work under these circumstances no doubt meets practical gender needs, it clearly has little potential for meeting strategic gender needs.

One way to meet strategic gender needs through individual-level actions is for women to enter occupations dominated by men. When enough women pursue this strategy, this expands access to economic assets and broadens the set of choices for all women. Even within jobs traditionally open to women, however, there are variations relevant to women's status. Work-related autonomy arises from a variety of job characteristics.

Location of the work seems to make some difference: women who work outside the home are thought to have greater leverage because they cannot combine household maintenance and child care responsibilities with paid work and therefore must negotiate alternate arrangements. If women have some degree of control over the scheduling and pace of their work, they may be more willing and able to assert their interests in renegotiating the division of labor at home. The job's position within the economy may also make a difference; women in jobs that increase the family's access to valued resources, including prestige, may be in a better position to negotiate (Dixon-Mueller, 1993:124). In addition, employment may be more likely to meet strategic gender needs when it provides an alternative source of social identity. The social interaction literature suggests that labor force participation may affect women's status by changing the characteristics of their social networks and therefore the content of information available to them (Bongaarts and Watkins, 1996: note 22, p.675).

The effect of economic adjustment policies on women's status in Jordan therefore depends as much on the composition of the demand for women's labor - i.e., on what types of jobs are being created - as on its absolute level, and it depends on the effectiveness of social safety nets and in particular of credit provision for small enterprises. The three components of economic adjustment programs most likely to affect the composition of the
demand for employment are trade, privatization, and social safety nets (Arcia and Moreland, 1994). First, shifts in trade patterns towards more exports often increases the number of opportunities available to women workers since the export sector typically has a high proportion of female workers in developing countries. Employers' preference for women workers in export-oriented industries or export-processing zones with labor-intensive production requiring little or no formal training has been widely documented through case studies (Cagatay and Berik, 1991). This trend has led some to speculate that employers, under the pressure of global competition, could be substituting female for male workers (Standing, 1989). This increase in demand for female workers is matched by their greater supply as economic adjustment programs lead to a worsening income distribution and more family members among low-income groups are forced to seek employment.

Second, privatization broadly speaking can decrease opportunities for women. Many countries undergoing economic adjustment reduce budget deficits through expenditure cuts. This leads to a greater demand for private sector employment because of low wages in the public sector, but also due to an actual decrease in employment opportunities in the public sector. Yet it is the public sector that has provided relatively more job opportunities and higher salaries for women, especially educated women, and provided employment protection and social security (Standing, 1991). Furthermore, women hold positions at a variety of levels in the public sector and can be found across many occupations (Bakker, 1994:10). As a result, there is a general expectation that unless governments intervene, privatization will lead to a decline in wage levels and/or an increase in labor insecurity (Standing, 1991).

And third, the social safety nets some governments have put into place as a temporary measure to relieve suffering among the poorest of the poor during transition, may affect women's status if they take the form of resources provided directly to women. The extension of credit to low-income women has been one of the most successful types of interventions pursued under the Women in Development rubric over the past several decades. Women have proven to be very reliable in repaying their loans and through their efforts have been able to contribute to their own and their family's well-being.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Study location**

The sites covered in this study were selected to represent different environments in the Amman governorate. Madaba, a town of 55,156
inhabitants located 19 miles southwest of Amman, was chosen because of the diversity of its population and economic base. It includes sizeable refugee and Christian populations and boasts several major factories and a thriving commercial sector. Madaba is also the site of several important tourist attractions: it experienced a 106% growth in visits by foreign tourists between 1994 and 1995 (Doan, in press). Marka, in the eastern part of the city of Amman, was chosen to represent a cross-section of middle-income residents with access to the city's employment opportunities. And Baq'a, a refugee camp just north of Amman was chosen to represent camp residents with access to city jobs but also with employment possibilities in agriculture.

**Focus group implementation**

Groups of single men, single women, married men and married women were convened in each of the three areas on the basis of characteristics they shared in common and that related to the topic of interest. All participants were either currently working or looking for work; most had a preparatory or tawjihi level of education or a 2-year college diploma. The method used to recruit participants differed from that suggested by American experts (see for example Krueger, 1994:14). Getting people to attend a focus group is always a challenge (Krueger, 1994:89). In the Jordanian context, what worked best was to work through local contacts. For the women’s groups, we worked through local branches of the Jordanian Women’s Union, a fairly decentralized organization known for its diverse, grass-roots constituency. Lacking an analogous organization for men, we worked through work-related personal connections to recruit participants. This ensured that people actually attended since they had been invited by someone in their social network. The fact that people had social ties in common may have in fact facilitated more open communication. In addition, every effort was made to keep the atmosphere surrounding the focus groups as informal as possible and to make participants feel their views and active sharing were critical to the discussion.

I trained a young female university graduate from Amman to moderate the focus groups involving women and a young male university graduate from Madaba to moderate the men’s focus groups. Both had prior experience with field research but no experience leading group discussions. The training took place over a three-day period covering the goals and objectives of the research, the thinking behind the questioning route I had prepared for them to use, the skills of appropriate moderating including clear instructions on which prompts they could use to encourage deeper sharing.

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2. I owe this insight to Dr. Nora Colton.
3. I am grateful to Dr. Tony Sabbagh for these and other pointers based on his experience moderating focus groups in the GCC countries (see "Qualitative Research in the G.C.C. Countries", based on a talk he delivered on the occasion of MERF’s seminar "Crystals into the 90’s" on February 4th, 1987 at the Berysted Hotel, Ascot).
without biasing its content, and how to deal with dominating participants. They practiced on two different focus groups made up of university students from across campus; I did not use the results of those focus groups in the study presented here. A note-taker recorded the discussion at each session; sessions were also taped. The moderators assured participants only first names would be used to ensure confidentiality.

**Group composition**

Although Amman as a governorate has benefitted from recent economic trends much more than other governorates, it has also experienced growing inequalities within its administrative boundaries (ESCWA, 1993). The focus groups included in this study reflect these differences with Madaba and some of the participants in Marka representing more well-off residents, and Baqa’a and the rest of the Marka participants representing those with much less access to resources. The Madaba focus groups included both Christian and Muslim participants, mostly from the city, and some property owners. The Marka focus group participants were mostly residents of a government housing scheme with a mix of returnees from the Gulf and others, many of whom moved from squatter settlements near the downtown. Participants in the Baqa’a groups were all Palestinian refugees. Table 13.1.A in the Annex compares the employment status of the group participants.

In response to the question "over the past 5 years, what changes in standard-of-living have you and your family experienced and what specific measures have you taken to cope", several participants in both Madaba and Marka indicated they had property to sell, or had started a new business and were doing better than before. The vast majority of people however have seen their purchasing power drop precipitously and their standard-of-living go down. Focus group participants were eager to talk about fixed salaries and how much less they buy today than five years ago, about how difficult it is to find jobs, especially if you don't have any "wasta", how carefully they have to budget now and how much they have given up.

Table 13.2.A in the Annex summarizes responses by area and sex. Increasing the number of earners in the household, or the number of jobs existing earners carry, was a strategy mentioned by participants in all three areas. This often involved some family members quitting school earlier than anticipated in order to work. A young man in Marka said he had to work to earn money to re-take his tawjihi “in order not to burden the family”. A young woman in Marka stopped her education in order to help her sisters. Their stories undoubtedly mirror those of many other young people.

Cutting down on meat (to once a week or in some cases once a month), expensive meals, and fruits was mentioned across the areas. Several women mentioned cutting down on gift-giving and social visits, both
of which are important in nurturing the social ties that people turn to in times of need. Further responses in both Madaba and Marka, however, indicated a higher baseline level of resources and opportunities, and more family sources to draw on than in Baqa'a. At the extremes, several participants in the Madaba and Marka groups started new businesses or rented property or took their children out of private schools, whereas the Baqa'a participants voiced a general sense of despair captured in the following account:

"The rise in prices spoiled everything for me. I receive 115 JD and also make 50 JD off the pick-up truck I own. I have 8 people to take care of, six of them my children; the rent on the house is 50 JD... my children are losing weight and their health is worse... I hope God will help us through" (Baqa'a).

Widespread insecurity and pessimism about the future were reflected in all the focus groups.

FEMINIZATION OF THE LABOR FORCE DUE TO ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT?

A look at national level data for Jordan suggests that far from feminizing the labor force, economic adjustment has been associated with a reversal in the recent trend towards increasing female labor force participation. There is neither an increase in numbers of jobs for women nor a change in the sectors hiring them. As in many other countries, the rise in reported female labor force participation in Jordan in recent years, reaching 14% by 1996, was at least at first largely due to growing opportunities in the public sector. Facing serious manpower shortages in the mid-seventies, the Jordanian government introduced a variety of measures facilitating the participation of women, including married women, in the labor force. Many of these measures dealt with improving conditions for working mothers by increasing maternity leave, increasing pay levels during maternity leave, and requiring institutions that employed a minimum number of women to provide day-care centers (Hijab,1988:101).

The drive to integrate women in the workforce seemed to slow down by the mid-eighties as the economy took a turn for the worse (Hijab,1988). With the economic adjustment policies that have characterized the late 80's and 90's, public sector opportunities have been shrinking for both men and women, even as the numbers of young people seeking jobs for the first time continues to grow. By 1994, there was actually a higher proportion of women workers in the private than the public sector in the Amman governorate (29% compared to 13.7%; an even higher proportion however, 45%, were unemployed and had never worked) (Kawar,1996:240). A study using the Jordanian government's 1991 Employment, Unemployment, and Poverty Survey, concludes that no new sectors are being opened up for young
women and there is also "a marked decline in what are considered traditional female sectors such as health, education, personal services, and government" (Kawar, 1996:241). There is clearly no evidence of women moving en masse into occupations previously dominated by men.

TOWARDS A RENEGOTIATION OF THE SEXUAL DIVISION OF LABOR WITHIN HOUSEHOLDS?

In an attempt to better understand whether and how women’s paid work affects their status within families in the Jordanian context, the moderators presented focus group participants with a scenario in which both husband and wife work for pay and have a small child. She (or he in the case of the men’s groups) then asked participants what household maintenance activities were likely to be done by the wife, the husband, and who was likely to take care of the child. Participants were also asked how they thought the couple would decide about their finances and about having another child.

In all of the groups, the first response was almost always reflective of the traditional, normative view: that child care and taking care of the home is a mother’s responsibility; the husband is the head of household, the provider. He does not have to work in the home. Even if the wife works, it is her responsibility to make sure her household duties are covered. In response however, others came up with counter examples, either from their own experience or from others they know. From this deeper sharing, focus groups reveal several factors that facilitate the renegotiation of household maintenance tasks when both husband and wife work. One that emerged in several of the groups, the timing of the work day, was a job-related factor not mentioned in prior writings on work-related autonomy; the focus groups made clear it was not just the wife’s schedule that made a difference but hers in relation to her husband’s. The other factors that emerged all had to do with household and community context: presence of the extended family, differences in employment status between husband and wife, availability of child care.

The issue of who did what in the household did not generate much discussion in the Marka group of married women. They were mostly older with grown children. They met in the home of the woman who recruited them, one of the founders of the Marka women’s income-generating cooperative, a group associated with the Jordanian Women’s Union. The three teachers all said their husbands helped with housework but emphasized it was only because they were working; they did not specify which types of household tasks were involved. Two were clear however that their husband didn’t help in front of the extended family. Their responses to an earlier question about who decides what kind of work their daughters can
accept, indicate their feeling that teaching is ideal because it involves only one shift - 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. - whereas most jobs in the private sector require two daytime shifts or night work. Working only one shift allowed them to carry out their responsibilities towards their household and children, a sentiment reflected by teachers around the world.

The other women, all of whom were working at home as part of the cooperative, also said their husbands helped them a lot, although not in front of others. The focus group involving married Marka men, carried out in a private home in the same neighborhood as the women's but through a separate recruitment process, was presented with the same scenario. In response they were more specific than the women about tasks: they mentioned that husbands might do "light housework", as opposed to "heavy housework" like washing windows which men in this region have traditionally done. They might also iron clothes; views were mixed as to whether husbands might help in cooking. This suggests at least some renegotiation of household maintenance activities in the Marka area when women work, even if their work is at home. No one in either group mentioned husbands helping with child care however. One of the men noted the husband might help by "carrying the baby", a way men have always been involved with their children, but that otherwise caring for children was the responsibility of the wife or female relatives or a day care center because "husbands don't know how to take care of children".

In contrast, in the Madaba group in reaction to the scenario there was general agreement that the wife would do all the housework; they too were mostly women whose children were grown. They met in the Jordanian Women's Union facility at the invitation of one of the most active local members, a teacher; since she was single, she did not participate in the group but was present.

"We haven't reached the stage of dividing housework yet; only Europeans do this. My brother-in-law and his wife are doctors and they share housework, but his wife is a foreigner. Whereas my sister works and she does all the housework".

Two of the women had been de facto heads of household, one due to her husband's imprisonment and one to her husband's work being far away. The lone dissenter made the point that it depended on the division of labor in the husband's childhood home. Her husband and brothers-in-law had been brought up by a working mother; they all help their wives with the housework. But she had to quit work because she couldn't find adequate child care... clearly their "helping" does not extend to becoming the full-time caretaker for the children! For her (and others in the group who affirmed her position), child care was the binding constraint, not home maintenance.

The married men in Madaba were recruited separately from the women and met on a different day in a private home in a different part of town. Some were open to doing housework as long as it was a task they knew how to do.
"I support women in order to raise a successful family... the wife is tired after coming home from work too... whoever gets home first prepares the meal for the others" or "I will do everything I can... there is nothing shameful or taboo about it. I enjoy preparing food and it helps motivate my wife when I carry the wash basket and all the heavy things at home".

This suggests that competence was an issue for them. Competence in housework would presumably be developed in the home in which they were brought up since virtually no young people, men or women, live on their own before marriage. Three of the six participants however said housework was the wife's responsibility. Competence was also mentioned in relation to child care which was mostly seen as women's work. Several mentioned being willing to carry the baby but specifically said they didn't know how to prepare a bottle of milk for the baby or give him a bath.

The Baqa'a married women were mainly younger, with small children. They met in the Jordanian Women's Union facility in the refugee camp, at the invitation of one of the most active local members, herself a married woman. She participated in the focus group along with the others. In response to the scenario, they indicated they felt the husband would help with the housework if his work schedule permitted, but not in front of his mother. The Baqa'a married men were recruited through personal contacts and met in a private home on a different day than the women. They were more specific about what they would and wouldn't do: "the husband wouldn't cook or wash", work traditionally done by women, but "might fix things in the house or paint the walls", tasks more acceptable for men. Only two of the participants mentioned husbands and child care, indicating they might help hold the baby.

In conclusion, focus groups indicate that the timing of the work day for members of a couple may make a difference in whether housework responsibilities are renegotiated. The short hours associated with public sector jobs - usually 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. - have made it possible for both men and women to give a substantial amount of time to household maintenance and social networking. As men move into jobs with longer hours, typical of the private sector, they may become less available to do even the traditional male home maintenance tasks referred to by focus group participants as "heavy housework". If on the other hand it is women who have the longer hours, focus groups indicate there may be more renegotiation of who does what housework; there is no indication however that child care would become more of a shared task.

The presence of members of the extended family came up repeatedly as a constraint to a more equal division of housework. The rationale most often heard was that the husband's mother and sisters would be upset if they saw him helping his wife in a way he never helped them. In response to a scenario similar to the one mentioned earlier but in which the young couple with a small child were living with the husband's family, participants were unanimous in saying the husband would not help with the housework.
However, the deeper sharing that arose in response to this scenario indicated that the wife’s paid work can reduce the influence of the extended family on the couple’s decisions, and open up the possibility of moving out sooner and setting up their own household. Participants were very clear that conflicts over housework and child care, and over control of the budget, are more acute in extended-family households. The wife’s salary, because she is not beholden by tradition to share it with her in-laws, expands the choices a young couple faces and therefore is likely to enhance her status within her own marriage as well.

Focus group discussions indicated that differences in employment status between husband and wife can enhance the wife’s status but might have other consequences as well; especially in the Baq’a men’s focus groups but also to some extent in Marka, the men clearly felt threatened by their wives having better jobs than they, or being employed when they weren’t. Views shared reflected that men could take this as motivation to try harder to find appropriate work, but that some men would take it out on their wives, by divorcing them, or forcing them to quit work and accept a minimal standard of living.

And finally, whether or not acceptable child care substitutes are available may be the critical factor that allows mothers of young children to take on work that will enhance their status in the home and in the community. Although fertility rates are declining slowly, Jordan is still a high fertility society in which the average woman has just under six children over the course of her reproductive years. Focus group participants suggested that mothers and mothers-in-law may not be as available to take on the day-to-day care of young children as they used to be. With the age at marriage rising, the older generation of female relatives is likely to be older by the time the youngsters of the next generation come along... older and more tired. Non-family daycare provision then becomes an important societal commitment.

CAN YOUNG, SINGLE WOMEN NEGOTIATE TO BE ALLOWED TO TAKE A JOB AWAY FROM THEIR PARENTS’ HOME?

The focus groups involving young, single women with at least a high-school level of education indicate that some women who had planned to work have dropped out of the labor market, because of family pressures in one of the areas and due to the “discouraged worker” effect in another. Others, however are still looking, experiencing a high level of frustration and not finding outlets for their ambition and desire to be productive. Education has given them the means to take greater control over their lives but the labor market in many cases has not offered them the opportunity to reap its fruits. The reflections of those who have obtained jobs confirm that work is
more than a paycheck: it represents independence from one's family and a chance to escape the bonds of tradition.

The single women in Marka were recruited through one of the founders of the Marka women's income-generating cooperative, a group associated with the Jordanian Women's Union. It included her daughter as well as other young women they know. Several of the participants were university graduates, others had two-year diplomas or were in training. All but one wore the *hejab* (head scarf worn by Muslim women in accordance with Islamic teachings about modesty).

The first reactions to a scenario asking them what factors would facilitate their taking a job outside of Amman reflected general societal views of what work situations are appropriate for young women: if accommodation with other "good" girls was provided, transportation to and from the workplace, if she was not the only woman working among men. However, after one of the more educated women suggested things were changing, and that only securing accommodation mattered, others reflected a strong sense that they could convince their parents to let them take just about any job if they themselves felt it was right.

"Jordanian society is becoming more liberal than before regarding these restrictions on girls; families might not object to women going off on their own, even to the Gulf" (university graduate - studied Islamic law). The important thing is to find a job (diploma in office administration).

Where the discussion ended up suggested these young women are far from passive followers of their parents' dictates, but rather are able to think for themselves, to perceive themselves negotiating with their parents, advocating for a job they would like to take. They do not disregard societal views on what jobs are appropriate for young women, but stretch these views to meet their needs.

In this group characterized by relatively high levels of education, they were clear that some of their difficulty was due to discrimination against women workers on the part of employers. Although they felt empowered, and even reflected a willingness on the part of their parents to let them try work situations that were not traditional for women, the labor market out there seemed closed to them. One reported being denied work as a bank teller or secretary because she wore the *hejab*; she was told clients wouldn't like it and wouldn't feel comfortable interacting with her; others confirmed her experience based on hearsay. Another indicated she had applied for factory work, a last resort since it was not work she was eager to do, but was denied. She observed and others in the group confirmed, that factories prefer male workers because they work the night shift; the law prohibits women workers from working the night shift. Only the two young women training to be a nurse and a seamstress respectively were optimistic about finding jobs.
In the Marka group, this sense of self-efficacy derived from education and motivation towards paid work was associated with fairly innovative views towards the sexual division of labor in the household and who controls the budget. The most outspoken women offered religious rationales for their views and seemed to persuade others in this way. One young woman who studied Islamic law at the university suggested it is tradition not Islam that says housework is women's work; "this is work women do voluntarily and they will be rewarded for it, but they have the right to refuse". Similarly, another young woman indicated it is the husband's religious duty to provide for his family, both his family of birth and his wife and children. The wife however is free to do as she wishes with her salary: « if she helps on her own, she does it voluntarily; this is her free will » (university graduate - nutrition).

Yet another, later in the conversation, qualified this view somewhat and added that if the wife sees marriage as a union in which both partners are equal and in cooperation, she should help her husband with her salary, even if he doesn't ask her to (university graduate - nutrition). These views suggest that women participate in both housework and providing for household expenses out of a sense of responsibility and caring, not because it is prescribed to them by Islam.

The Madaba single women were recruited by a local member of the Jordanian Women's Union, a school teacher who knows a lot of people and is well-respected. Participants were both Christian and Muslim, all of them tawjihi graduates, some of whom also had 2-year degrees. Two of the six were still looking for work. Unlike the Marka participants, these two had virtually given up looking. They felt they didn't get enough support from their families in their search. It is possible that families put obstacles in their daughters' way because there is not an overwhelming economic need for them to work. Picking up on this, the young women, despite their own motivation to work, gave up after trying all the avenues they knew. This is consistent with the literature suggesting that women are more restricted in higher class families than in families with fewer resources.

Both unemployed participants seem to be from families with traditional views of women's and men's roles. One of them characterizes her mother later in the interview as a woman who doesn't allow her husband to work around the house, and talks of her childhood as a time in which she suppressed her demands in order for her brother to enjoy what she had at his age (diploma in secretarial skills). The other reports her family's opposition to most opportunities available to her:

" they won't let me work as a secretary or at a company, they will only let me work as a teacher or in the public sector or in the army, but not in a co-educational environment". She describes herself as "emotionally attached to my family... I can't live away from them".

The more traditional views of the two unemployed participants were associated with greater pessimism about the chances for and outcome of
changing gender roles. Both saw little scope for husband helping their wives, even when both are working. One indicated he would only do so if his mothers and sisters couldn’t see him... "they might say his wife is the boss in the house". The other suggested "the husband might help the children in their studies but not in cooking or in laundry". Men's roles in the intellectual development of their children is encouraged by the Quran and therefore is not a good indicator of change. Both told stories of irresponsible working women: one who wouldn't give any of her salary to help her husband with household expenses even though he was unemployed, and one of a working mother who would leave her child at daycare after she had finished working so she could "rest awhile and do some housework... thus increasing the money paid to the kindergarten". Their negativity however was not picked up by the other participants. The single women in Madaba who were working were more optimistic that husbands would help their wives at home when both were working. Several had observed this in their own families of birth, others' views came out of a sense that this was only fair.

The single women in Baqa'a were also recruited by a staff person at the local branch of the Jordanian Women's Union. They had similar levels of education as the Madaba group: all had the tawjihi and some also had a 2-year diploma or further training. Only one however was working for pay outside the home. This may reflect the social isolation of the Baqa'a camp and networks with more limited connections to jobs. It may also be due to cultural factors whose influence is particularly strong in this homogeneous camp population. It is characterized by a high degree of solidarity among residents but also perhaps more rigid social control. One participant suggested "in the camp, the situation is getting worse for women... the men keep saying the women should stay at home and we will spend money on them" (tawjihi).

One of the Baqa’a single women makes dresses at home, one quit her job when she became engaged, and one, a nurse, was forced by her family to quit in order to help at home. Two report themselves as "looking for work" but also say their brothers refuse to let them work outside the home. Two others are still looking but don't report family-related constraints. All of these women perceive that the jobs available to them are low-paying. But they would all like to work nevertheless; clearly work has benefits for them above and beyond the salary. The two who had to quit expressed tremendous frustration that they were no longer working, no longer had some independence from family. Work for them was clearly not just a financial necessity - although it clearly was that - but also a chance to develop their own networks, their own sources of information, a way to break out of the family at least to some extent. That the break was not total was confirmed by the nurse who indicated her brothers used to check up on her when she was delayed at the hospital.
The women who reported strong pressure from their brothers not to work also had more conservative views about the potential for change in the sexual division of labor when both members of a couple work.

"I have three unmarried brothers living at home and I do all the housework... none of them helps... I am sure when they get married they won't help their wives at all" (nurse - not currently working).

"The Oriental man holds on to his traditions and customs, and he refuses to help anybody" (diploma in accounting - unemployed).

In contrast, the Baqa'a single women not reporting strong family pressures against their working volunteered that husbands might help their wives if both worked for pay outside the home, but only if others weren't watching. Several shared stories about brothers and neighbors who helped with all the housework, even cooking and cleaning, to help their wives. These kinds of stories seemed to temper the cynicism of those who were clear change wouldn't happen.

The general view arising out of the single women's focus group in Baqa'a is consistent with the men's focus group: it reflects traditional attitudes assuming a male's responsibility is to provide for his family and the female's responsibility is to raise the children and care for the home. The young men met in a private home in Baqa'a, on a different day than the women, and were recruited through work-related contacts. The single men in Baqa'a were not willing to talk about the household division of labor when both members of a couple work and have a small child. Five of the eight single men in Baqa'a volunteered that they would prefer the wife didn't work. This was not part of the questioning route the moderators were pursuing but clearly was a widely-held view and therefore needed to surface. One however indicated that if she worked as a teacher it would be acceptable because the environment is all-women. Another modified his remarks to tie them to the number of children she has - "she will quit work after she gives birth to three babies" and later "if they are working to save to build a house, it's better if she does not conceive immediately". The other three were consistent in their view that the wife shouldn't work.

Their responses to later questions reveal a connection between their unemployment or underemployment and their need to retain control over their wife's work, or at least to be perceived by others as doing so. In response to a situation in which the wife made more than the husband, they reasoned: "If she gives him a hard time, he might ask her to quit her job", "people will influence the husband and make him ask his wife to quit work to save his dignity". In response to the more extreme case of a working wife and unemployed husband, their reasoning was as follows: "The husband would feel inferior and this might lead to divorce" followed by "the wife might boss the husband around".

In contrast, most of the single men in Marka and Madaba did not appear threatened by their wives working but they were highly concerned
about the effects of their wives working on the care of their children. In Marka only one out of seven single men rejected outright the notion of the wife working: "the husband will suffer for the rest of his life if his wife keeps on working"; a later response clearly indicates he is aware of the positive association between his wife's earnings and influence in the household. The Marka men were also recruited through personal contacts; they met in the same private home as the married men but on a different day. After a lively discussion of who would do what in the household, two others convinced themselves that the male breadwinner/ female home-maker model was better: "I'll never let my wife work; it would be too hard to cooperate".

As for the single men in Madaba, in response to the scenarios about the division of labor, none volunteered that they would object to their wives working. The Madaba single men were recruited through work-related contacts and met in a private home. Most of them were quite open to the idea that husbands and wives should share the housework if they were both working. Most also felt decisions about how the two salaries should be spent should be made jointly. Only two saw any problem with the scenario in which the wife worked and the husband didn't, or the scenario in which he made less than she.

However, it wasn't until they were explicitly prompted "what if the wife doesn't work", in response to a scenario about what factors a couple would take into consideration when deciding whether or not to have a second child, that most of the participants began to express a preference that their wives quit work when the children were young in order to take good care of them. They saw the need for their wives to quit work as only temporary however since most preferred 2-3 children.

In short, the focus groups suggest that continuing high rates of under- and unemployment may indeed lead to a deterioration in women's status, both because of its effect on men and on women. Unemployment is more of a stigma for men than for women because of sex-linked gender role expectations. All of the groups of single men reflected the strong societal pressure they feel to get a job, any job because of the widely accepted expectation that they will save money in order to get married and later to support a family. As one of the married men said: "We are not being fair to the young men. If they don't work, the society will stigmatize them as bad and irresponsible" (Madaba).

The young men in Baqa'a reflected the highest level of despair: several were very pessimistic about their prospects of ever marrying. They saw leaving the country as their only escape. Under- and unemployment among the young single men in Baqa'a, an area of greater economic disadvantage, seems to be associated with a stronger adherence to traditional views about women's and men's roles, and to stronger religious views restricting women's mobility. That these views were more prominent in the focus groups of single men than married men in Baqa'a confirms that
these are a regressive set of attitudes arising in reaction to the failure of
development to reduce social inequalities.

The men's groups in Baqa'a portray the experience of workers with
slightly less education and fewer resources being squeezed out by university
graduates taking jobs below their level; they are facing an economy that has
never had a dynamic informal sector like Cairo, Ankara or other large cities
in the Arab region, hence making it difficult for them to create their own
enterprises. The young single men saw the private sector as having good
opportunities if one had experience and capital. All had considered starting a
small business but none had succeeded. The other opportunities these
young men face are all extremely low-paid hence their despair at ever being
able to save enough to get married. The married men were mostly low-
skilled, low-paid public employees, looking for ways to supplement their
incomes in these times of rising prices and frozen wages. Their efforts
mostly have not amounted to much either due to lack of access to credit or
skills.

For many of the young women work was not only a paycheck, but a
way to assert an identity separate from their families. If there are no
appropriate jobs to even apply to, young women have no opportunity to
practice their negotiating skills with their parents, making it less likely they
would try negotiating for their interests in their future marriage. The focus
groups suggest marriage is what all these young women aspire to. They
expressed concern about men's inability to save enough to marry.
Furthermore, the power some of them seem to find in religion depends on
them having their own income, and in fact depends on their income not
being needed to provide for the basic needs of the family.

CONCLUSION

So what do focus groups tell us about the likelihood that economic
adjustment policies will lead to a deterioration in women's economic and
social status? First, to understand the potential of paid work to lead to
changes in the sexual division of labor in the household, one must look at
women's work in relation to their husband's. Analyzing the nature of
women's economic roles in isolation may give insights into the extent to
which they meet a practical gender need. Discovering that the type of paid
work women do leaves them time to fulfill their household maintenance and
child care duties - teaching being the prime example - tells us that this type
of work meets a practical gender need. A job can be seen to meet a practical
gender need if it pays somewhat more than the cost of obtaining child care
substitutes, or if the work environment meets with society's approval. In an
Arab society such an environment would be all-women or one in which there
was enough ongoing social interaction to ensure that women employees
would not be left alone with men who had power over them.
The focus groups reported on here suggest several factors that might allow women to meet strategic gender needs through paid employment. First, if they work longer hours than their husbands, women may be able to negotiate a shift of some of the household maintenance tasks that they typically take on. The short hours associated with public sector jobs have made it possible for both men and women to give substantial time to family care and social networking. The expansion of the private sector brings with it longer working days for both men and women. Under such a regime, men will become less available to do even the traditional male home maintenance tasks. At the same time, women's need for others to take on their household maintenance and child care responsibilities will increase.

Second, because women are not expected by tradition to share their income with their husband's family, having a salary of their own may facilitate a renegotiation of the sexual division of labor in an Arab Middle Eastern context. This would mainly pertain if the woman's income was not needed to meet the household's basic needs, and could make the difference between living in an extended-family-unit or living as a nuclear family. Extended-family living tends to increase the pressure on the couple to follow social norms even when members of the couple themselves see wisdom in change; it also reduces the intimacy several participants mentioned as critical to couples working out any conflicts over who does what tasks.

How likely are any of these scenarios under economic adjustment? Experience elsewhere would suggest not very. If anything, wages for all but a limited group of educated professionals are likely to fall under privatization. A woman may well make more than her husband but together, they will be lucky if they cover the household's basic expenses. Having both members of a married couple work at low-paying, low-security jobs is unlikely to change their access to resources at the community level. Furthermore, it may actually make renegotiating the sexual division of labor at the household level more difficult. The focus group discussions indicate that male unemployment is highly associated with men's need to maintain power over women's work. As a result, in households with the least access to resources women will take on paid work no matter how low the pay, out of economic necessity. Unless men or the state pick up their reproductive tasks, child care in particular, it is likely that children will suffer. In any case, women's status is not likely to be improved. Among the near-poor and the middle class, the lack of economic opportunities will leave women little choice. Furthermore, there may be an increase in extended-family living in Jordan, a trend that has been observed elsewhere during times of economic adjustment (Elson, 1994). This is more likely to affect the middle and lower-middle classes than the poor or very poor since extended families among the latter cannot afford to take in other family members. Among these social classes, couples may therefore experience more pressure to conform to social norms regarding gender roles and the allocation of labor.
It is not clear how young women will channel their energies in the face of continuing high unemployment rates. Opportunities to do meaningful work outside the house are limited to paid work; no mention was made in any of the groups of opportunities for community management work, an area in which women around the world have always been active (Moser 1993). While women’s community management work often grows out of a practical gender need, just the fact of organizing to collectively provide a service can meet a strategic gender need by putting women in contact with others, broadening their communication networks.

REFERENCES

ANANI, J. (1990), "Economic Adjustment with a Human Face: The Case of Jordan". A study commissioned by UNICEF.


## ANNEX

Table 13.1.A. – Distribution of participants’ employment status by group and area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Madaba</th>
<th>Marka</th>
<th>Baqa’a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single men:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>own account</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public sector employee</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private sector worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student/in training</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married men:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>own account</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public sector employee</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private sector worker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single women:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployed</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public sector employee</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private sector worker</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piecework at home</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student/in training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married women:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unemployed</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>own account</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>public sector employee</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>private sector worker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piecework at home</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13.2.A. – Distribution of responses to question "What specific measures have you taken to cope with the current economic situation?" by focus group in which they were raised

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men's focus groups:</th>
<th>Madaba</th>
<th>Marka</th>
<th>Baqa'a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased number of family members working</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looking/taking 2nd job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on meat/fruits/expense meals</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on non-essentials (not otherwise specified)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit school</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started a business</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on meat/fruits</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on non-essentials (not otherwise specified)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started a business</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on buying clothes</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave up buying/building a house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent out/sold property</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought clothes at second hand shops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on social obligations/gifts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broke engagement to be married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s health deteriorated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women's focus groups:</th>
<th>Madaba</th>
<th>Marka</th>
<th>Baqa'a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on buying clothes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on entertainment/trips</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on non-essentials</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on meat/fruits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowed money from family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased number of family members working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borrowed money (not otherwise specified)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought second hand clothes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on expenses</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought supplies in small quantities</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut down on gifts/social visits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took children out of private schools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quit school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No longer able to save</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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