

Major Trends Affecting Families In The Gulf Countries

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Introduction

The Gulf societies have been undergoing radical changes since the end of the 1970s. The Arab Gulf family is passing through a fast transition that affects its functions, roles, authority and structure. One must start with a preliminary hypothesis that reviews the Arab Gulf family as a basic unit that extends its cultural components from Arab Islamic sources; and as an economic unit that performs a number of economic roles to the benefit of its own members and of society; and as a social unit where social interactions between family members occur within the context of social relations set by values and norms of their culture. When speaking of the nuclear family one might think that it is the same as the Western nuclear family. In fact we must clearly distinguish between the Arab Gulf nuclear family and the Western one. The Arab Gulf nuclear family is in a transitional stage that carries many features of both the Western model and the traditional extended family model. Hence, we are dealing with a nuclear family characterized by extended relations, a condition not present in the Western family.

The Impact of Urban Living on the Family and the Individuals

Rural-urban migration has played, and is still playing, a significant role in urban transformations in most Arab Gulf cities, and has significant impact on the nature and type of urban life, especially at the family level. Changes are also affecting the family and the individual in the context of the current urban transformation.

The discovery of oil led to deep integration of Gulf society in the international capitalist market. That integration exposed Gulf society to the advent of ethnic, financial, technological, intellectual and ideological influences which led to radical changes in the social and economic life of society. The changes transformed most Gulf societies into urban societies. Urbanization rates peaked in most Gulf Countries, reaching 90% in Kuwait, 80% in Bahrain, 85% in Qatar and 70% in United Arab Emirates. (1) The city became the unavoidable reality of life in the Gulf. It even became the only such reality in most Gulf countries (Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) with the majority of the population living in fast-growing cities.

There is no doubt that the urbanization and modernization processes that swept traditional Gulf cities had an impact on family relations and family functions. Changes in these two areas could possibly be some of the most severe and complicated problems facing Arab Gulf societies at the present time. Citizens have moved from living in small-size traditional communities to residing in complex cities characterized by impersonal and secondary social relationships. The structural system of the city as a whole separates the individual from the environment of local community relationships, thereby turning his life toward greater solitude. The architectural system of housing made the house lose its

associative function and transformed it into a consumptive symbol rather than an entity inhabited by a family. The Gulf city succumbed to global values. It witnessed the spread of consumerism, materialist values and personal interests. (2)

Al-Amoudi's study of rural migration into Jeddah city came across rural migration from specific areas into Jeddah, which is the center of urban attraction. Rural migrants to Jeddah are helped by preceding emigrants during the initial period of their settlement. The researcher found out that emigration usually occurs at the family level without long-term planning. (3) Her study showed that the process of adaptation, accommodation and assimilation which the emigrant and his family pass through exhibit minimal interest by the first generation to be integrated into the urban setting. The emigrant and his family are satisfied with establishing relations with residents of rural background as well as with relatives. The emigrant's relations with urban residents are cautious and restricted to neighbors of similar background or to colleagues at work who share the same cultural values. However, as time passes the emigrant interacts with the realities of urban life and with the urban population; and at the same time his contact with his place of origin diminishes, the process of adaptation intensifies. (4)

It seems that the process of adaptation differs from one group of emigrants to another due to the lack of official or institutional mechanisms operating in the midst of the migrant community. It is also due to the lack of interest by the media - mass communication and the press - in the problems of rural - urban migration.

Changes in family structure

Most studies of the Arab Gulf family tend to emphasize its transition to the small size family. Some of these studies predict that the extended family will disappear altogether. That prediction shows that the issue of transition to the nuclear family is open to discussion and to argument, especially as quantitative data show that the average family size is still large. In looking at the transition to a nuclear family, one must keep in mind three facts:

- The extended family is still large in size:
A study conducted in Qatar has shown that average family size in that country is 8 persons. (5) A similar study in the Emirates has shown that the average family size is 7.28 persons. (6) A study in Riyadh revealed 31% of families in that city were extended families, while 69% were nuclear families. (7) The above data indicate that there exists a trend of transformation toward the nuclear family; however it is a slow trend that does not match the volume of urbanization achieved by the cities in the Gulf region.
- The families retain their traditional kinship ties.
- The tribe is still an important authority in determining the behavior of sons and daughters, especially with regard to marital choice. Variable such as tribal

descent, ideological and ethnic affiliation remain very influential in the modernizing Gulf society. (8)

Taking these three facts into consideration, we can develop a counter assumption to that of definite transition towards the nuclear family. Our assumption is based on the contradiction between the tendency towards modernization and the tendency towards traditionalism exhibited by the Arab Gulf family. There are two conflicting trends in contemporary society. The first stresses the tendency towards the small size conjugal family, while the second supports the continuity of the large size extended family, or the large size martial family. The transformation into the conjugal family does not match at all the urbanization and modernization process that took place in Gulf cities. (9) Although Gulf societies are known for high birth rates, several reasons might make newly established families reconsider the desired family size and think of family planning. Some of these reasons are: new life styles, rising standards of living, better protection for newborns and children, and increase in the usage of contraception. The desire of the new parents to enjoy life would overcome traditional values that considered a large numbers of children as a source of support and pride. However, the new tendency appears most frequently among urban groups who received modern education. The new tendency in birth rates and birth control could take a long time to prevail among the poor.

Family Functions and Values

Family Functions

Changes in the functions of the Gulf family appear to be certain in light of the generalized public social services provided by the state. Public services have replaced traditional services that carry private character. These developments deprive the family of some of its functions. Moreover, changes in the system of economic production caused the family to give up its productive function.

In addition, basic public education offered to males and females is usually accepted in Gulf societies. It constitutes a new and powerful source of socialization that competes strongly with traditional family roles or functions in this regard. The effects of the school and of its requirements are extremely important. The influence of peers, especially during puberty and adolescence, is most serious. Rising standards of living of families have enabled them to provide wide alternatives to their children (particularly daughters) that expanded their world and increased their demands, aspirations and expectations far beyond what existed in traditional society. Contemporary means of communication, in all forms, have increased the knowledge of young people and gave them specific alternatives that put them in touch with peers all over the world, and especially in the West. That contact influences the values, traditions and practices of Gulf youth and complicates socialization by their families. The effects of the transformation brought about by globalization have not been given yet the attention they deserve. We should not be surprised to hear that in one decade or less, differences between the young generation and

older generations in all aspects of life will increase. This warns us of future transformations not only in the concepts of marriage and family, but also in identity, in the meaning of life and in the system of values.

Change in the functions and structure of the family and in the value systems governing its relationships is caused by many influences. One of those is the dependence of Gulf families on foreign babysitters (maids/servants), a dependence which may carry negative connotations because it is associated with socialization of children and of young family members. Some studies justify employing foreign babysitters by the fact that Gulf women need or have the right to go to work, and therefore need someone to care for their children.

This explanation would make sense if dependence on foreign babysitters were restricted to working women. This is not the case. Maids and babysitters are employed by most families regardless of whether mothers are employed outside the home. A study conducted in Kuwait showed that 86% of interviewed women opposed the idea of doing away with the maid-system. **(10)** Another study in Qatar showed that 90% of a sample of women preferred to maintain their dependence on domestic servants. **(11)** These findings indicate that the dependence of Gulf families on foreign babysitters (domestic servants) is not necessarily linked to differentiation in social institutions that led to women's work in some sectors, nor is it linked to expansion of social services, such as education and health, in Gulf cities that led society to seek the help of women in that sector. Most probably, dependence on foreign domestic servants in Gulf cities has to do more with the urban culture that was introduced by the financial provisions resulting from increased wealth.

Excessive economic abundance gave rise to a culture that attributed great social significance to symbols of material differentiation (owning many cars, employing many domestics servants, extravagance in housing, clothing). The more of these symbols the family accumulates the higher its social status.

Whatever reasons are behind dependence on foreign maids, most studies of foreign labour in the Arab Gulf states tend to highlight the negative effects foreign labour has on Gulf society in general, and the negative effects of foreign maids on the family. Those studies focus on the increasing dependence on foreign labour and foreign maids, and on the direct relations that emerge between foreign labourers on one hand, and Arab family, especially Arab youth and children, on the other hand.

Those studies assume that such relations have serious consequences on Arab values and language, **(12)** which in turn could have negative effects on Arab children's behavior. Some researchers claim that the negative effect could engulf the whole family due to the fact that the presence of foreign maids could encourage Gulf men to marry foreign women, thereby reducing chances for marriage of Gulf women. **(13)** Those studies indicate that the Gulf family is facing a problem in its socialization function, especially since most domestic servants (maids) are not trained to raise children or to care for them. They add that the characteristics of the maids, such as education, language, religion and

age, don't qualify them to raise children. This dysfunction in socialization is the major problem facing the contemporary Gulf family. Other changes, such as change in family size and family relations are still connected with traditional frameworks, and so they have not significantly altered family functions. In short, dysfunction in socialization remains one of the damaging and harmful consequences of the vast and sudden growth of urban life in Gulf cities.

Family Values

Various studies have shown open disagreement over the nature of change in value systems. Some studies adopt a typical view of transition from traditional to modern values. They point to changes in family roles, including change in the role of the husband. The wife's role and her responsibilities also change with her leaving the house to work or to receive an education. The role of the elder generation is weakened, and the children gain more freedom and become less subordinate to the system of traditional authority. Authority within the family becomes more permissive, and responsibilities are allocated to family members in accordance with their contribution. In turn, the values of marital choice are influenced, whereby the personal dimension emerges in light of more liberal values concerning relations between males and females. All that contributes to changes of woman's status resulting from acquiring an education that gave her a higher social status and an opportunity to participate in decision-making. **(14)**

A second trend appeared: it is based on a more realistic outlook that monitors the contradiction between the transformation in family structure and relations and the persistence of traditional values from one generation to another. The issue here is not merely a value-conflict that might disappear with the triumph of the values of modernization. It is much more complicated since it seems that modernization itself, especially the way it was introduced into the Arab Gulf societies, supports the resistance of traditional values and reproduces them. The findings of several studies show that reference to individualism and liberalism among Gulf women should be made with great caution. These studies confirmed that despite the existence of new tendencies to choose a spouse from outside the tribal kinship, most females find themselves in a situation that does not allow them to come across such an opportunity. Most marriages occur within the framework of kinship. Moreover, although education gives women the chance to leave the house and to work, it does not give them the right of self-determination.

The findings of these studies conclude that education and work as variables do not operate in a vacuum, but under a matrix of specific values that direct the behavior patterns of individuals and the limits of their relationships. Education does not spread the concepts and values of democracy, which is a precondition for the rise of relationships based on participation and responsibility. In reality, education reproduces the traditional systems of social values. **(15)**

Women And Work

Bagader's study, and several other studies, discuss women's work and its significant contribution to family finances and well-being. Saudi males with university education were hesitant in the early 1980s about marrying a working female even if she was a university graduate. However, the situation is radically changing. A working wife is currently preferred to help the husband in meeting the heavy financial demands of the new urban life. Hence, marital life is now based on true and real partnership as far as supporting household needs. The wife now has a say in the living conditions of her family and shares in decision-making. This transformation was not anticipated a few years ago. However, several socio-cultural groups resist it, although developments show that it is likely to expand and become a more widespread phenomenon. (16)

Several studies show that women working in highly technical and professional jobs were able to handle successfully the demands of their work and their private lives as females, mothers, wives and public figures. These roles could be played through the network of social relations; the female can assume her role without having to confront the existing cultural system which appears from the outside as a system that deprives her of some rights, or that places so many constraints on her that do not enable her to live happily. Many educated men do not deny these female roles. It is true that we do not expect the Arab Gulf family life, even among the middle class, in the coming two decades to be similar to middle class family life in industrial societies, where full equality or semi-full equality between husband and wives exist. Also we do not expect the status of women in the family or in society to be the same as it is in industrial societies. Gulf women are more knowledgeable and aware of what they can reach; however, the power of traditions and patriarchy are still effective.

In the year 2000, the rate of economic activity of women in the Gulf region was 46.4% for the age – group 25-44 years old, followed by 39.6% participation rate for the age group 20-24 years old. Kuwait had the highest rate of economic activity or participation for the age group 25-44 years old (57.6%), while Oman had the lowest participation rate in this category (22.2%). Qatar and Kuwait exhibited the highest rate of economic activity for females 25-44 years old (around 61%), while Oman and Saudi Arabia had the lowest rates in this regard, scoring 28.5% and 32.2% participation rates respectively.

By 1990, of all Gulf countries, Oman achieved the highest rate of female participation in agricultural activity (20%) and in industry (34.7%). However, Oman had the lowest rate of female participation in the service sector (45.3%). Female participation in the industrial sector in the remaining Arab Gulf countries did not exceed 7%. In Kuwait 98% of economically active females were employed in the services sector. Similar rates were also reached in Qatar. (17)

Marriage and Divorce

Marriage

While several studies support the idea that conjugal family became the dominant family form in countries of the Middle East; other findings were: a transformation from totally arranged marriage to marriage based on prior acquaintance between the bride and the groom who later received the approval and the blessings of the family; delay in age at first marriage; and the rise of marriage across religious sects, social classes and ethnic groups. Also observable was the rise of marriage based on romantic love; women leaving the house to work and mixing with men; improvement in women's education; women playing a greater role in public life; and the new phenomenon of breaking the engagement and divorce. (18)

Family transformation has occurred in every Arab country. However, the difference between Arab countries lies in the degree of transformation and in how fast they took place, and in how each society responded to the transformations. Bagader carried out a study on changes in the concept of marriage in Jeddah in the 1980s. He found that some aspects of that concept changed while others persisted or became more traditional. For instance, most marriage contracts included conditions set by the bride, including her right to study, to work, and to have her own house (not to live with the man's parents). In a few cases the wife insisted on the right of divorce if her husband married a second wife. (19) It seems that most young men and women no longer consider marriage as a step that grants them societal membership, although marriage is still an important social matter. Today there are other criteria and other characteristics that confirm a person's full membership in society, such as educational attainment and occupation or employment.

A new phenomenon of remaining unmarried is appearing in Gulf societies; however remaining single is not restricted to females, it involves males as well. The decision to remain single is not because women can't find husbands or men can't afford to marry. It reflects a desire to delay the "marriage project" by males or females until they realize their personal aspirations, such as obtaining the highest levels of education or mastering a certain profession or occupation. Some people may even be too busy with other activities that result in delaying marriage. Gulf societies are suffering from a "spinsterhood crisis", especially among well-educated middle class people, and among those who occupy high-ranking jobs. Such persons, especially females, are often very busy in realizing their aspirations that they delay marriage.

The change in the amount of dowry reflects the effect of rural/urban migration on the one hand and of Islamic movements on the other. The demand of delayed dowry for females in case of divorce expresses new awareness that guarantees for females are required in martial relationships.

Bagader explained in a study of marriage costs in Jeddah how urban life has imposed very costly consumption styles on families. He also pointed to the disappearance of social solidarity that close relatives and friends exhibited during marriage ceremonies, a

solidarity that reduced the financial burden shouldered by the newly married couple. Urban life produced individualism and privacy and weakened communal solidarity. This development left youth on their own and exposed them to severe socio-economic pressures. There is a need for communal action to deal with these pressures **(20)**.

Career persons who decide against getting married, especially females, risking ending up in a lonely life as the extended family disappears. Some divorcees and widows find it more convenient not to remarry, and are satisfied with caring for their children and living on the inheritance or on their salaries. This has led to the appearance of single-headed families composed by mothers with children. The life of such families could be hard, especially if the children are minors and unable to contribute financially to the family, or they are females whose relations and activities outside the home are subject to the pressures of the extended family. The extended family attempts to control their behavior, or to bring them back to live under the same roof. However, as the youth reach adulthood things improve and possibilities for independence exist.

The age at first marriage for males and females was delayed due to the perception that the male should be able to carry the financial burden of supporting a family before he actually marries. The average age at the first marriage is 19-21 years for females and 22-24 years for males.

The marriage age in Qatari society for young males and females has shifted from age 15-19 years to 20-24 years. The latter category represented 43.9% of all marriages in Qatari society in 1999. The next largest age group of those married was 25-29 years old or 22.6% of all marriages. This means that most Qataris who were getting married were of age 20-29, as they represented 66.5% of total marriages in 1999, and those who were of age 15-19 did not represent more than 19.5%. Available data show that 21.3% of the age group 15-29 years old had not married. Moreover, 28.6% of individuals 15 years or older have never been married, according to 1997 statistics **(21)**. Kuwaiti data indicate a decrease in the number of females 15-24 years old who get married or who plan to get married. The ratio has dropped from 82.3% in 1975 to 76.4% in 1999. In contrast, the ratio of females of the age group 25-34 years who were getting married climbed from 11.8% in 1975 to 19.5% in 1999. In numbers, it rose from 428 to 1199 in the same period.

In contrast to females, the ratio of males 15-24 years old who were getting married rose from 46.3% in 1975 to 50.4% in 1999. Married males 25-34 years composed 38.5% in 1975 and 40.9% in 1999. The ratio of females 35-44 years old who were getting married rose from 1.7% in 1975 to 3.6% in 1999. However, the same ratio for males dropped from 7.3% to 6.3% in the same period. **(22)**

Bahrain differs from other Gulf countries in this regard. The ratio of individuals 20-29 years old, getting married dropped from 76.3% in 1988 to 56% in 1998. The percentage of those getting married of the age group 20-24 was 37.3% and of the age-group 25-29 years old was 38.6% in 1988. Equivalent ratios in 1998 were as follows: 41.5% for the aged group 20-24 and 14.5% for the age group 25-29 years old. Moreover, the ratio of

individuals getting married in the age-group 30-34 years old dropped from 12.2% in 1988 to 8.7% in 1998. The same ratio for the age group 30-44 years old dropped from 19.3% to 17.4 during the same period. The majority of females getting married in Bahrain in 1998 fell in the age group 15-24 years old, accounting for 73.8% of females. The majority of males getting married (69.3%) fell in the age group 20-29 years old in 1998. (23)

A study conducted in Saudi Arabia has shown that 71.3% of females 15-19 years old were never married before, thereby putting the ratio of married females in this age-group at 28.6%. Of the age group 20-24 years old 75.5 % were married, while 90.4% of females 25-29 years old were married. Thus, marriage ratio increases with age. (24) The most prevalent age-group for getting married is 20-24 years old for females in Gulf countries, while it is 25-29 years old for males.

At the public level, delay in age at first marriage is an important development that occurs as a result of severe economic causes. However, as time goes on delaying the time of marriage and increase in divorce rate might lead to redefining the importance of marriage or push it to later years, thereby reducing current birth rates, which are very high, and leading to unanticipated demographic changes; for instance, birth rates, and fertility rates among Kuwaiti women dropped from 7.1 in 1975 to 4.2 in 1999, the same rates for non-Kuwaiti women dropped from 5.2 in 1975 to 1.5 in 1999. The fertility rate among Bahraini women dropped from 3.8 In 1990 to 3.2 in 1998, while it dropped from 5.6 t 2.0 among non-Bahraini women during the same period (26).

Moreover, delay in marriage age, accompanied by improvements in nutrition and health care and by openness to world trends, could lead to changes in values pertaining to sexual relations outside marriage with complicated consequences such as teenage pregnancy, prostitution of minors, or rape.

Divorce

Although there are no recent generalized statistics on the rise in divorce rates in Gulf countries over the past three decades some country-specific information is available. Kuwait's figures indicate that the number of divorces have doubled over the past quarter century. The number of divorce cases rose from 1088 in 1975 to 2014 in 1999. However, the number of marriages also doubled during the same period: 3638 cases in 1975 to 6137 cases in 1999. Divorce cases in Kuwaiti society represented 32.8% in 1999.

In Bahrain, available data show that divorce cases were 331 (28.4%) in 1977 and 801 (17.7%) in the year 2000. Although divorce rates in Bahrain society increased by 41.3% between 1977 and 2001, marriage rates increased by 48.4% during the same period. Marriage cases increased from 2181 to 4504.

In Qatar, divorce increased form 376 in 1995 to 391 in 1997, and then dropped slightly to 379 in 1999. These cases represent 36.5%, 31.4% and 29.2% respectively to marriages.

Divorce cases in Saudi Arabia were estimated at 29% of marriage cases in the early 1990's. By comparing divorce to marriages we find the lowest rates in Bahrain (17.7% in 2001), and the highest rates in Qatar (36.5% in 1997), while it was 32.8% in Kuwait in 1999 (27).

Available data show that the highest rate of divorce among Kuwaiti females occurs in the age group under 20 years old. Moreover, divorce rates for women 50 years old or more are one of the highest in the world. The highest divorce rate of Kuwaiti males rests in the age group 20-24 years old. It is worth mentioning that overall general divorce rates for males and females in most countries are comparable, except in Kuwait where the overall divorce rate for males was 5.5 divorces per 1000 married males, compared to 8.9 divorces per 1000 married females. Most divorce cases in Kuwait occur in the first five years of marriage, especially in the first two years for couples 20-24 years old. Statistics published by Kuwait's Ministry of Justice show that 49% of divorced females have children. (28)

Despite relative differences in divorce rates among Gulf countries, local studies agree that the very limited chances given by society to young males and females to get acquainted prior to signing the marriage contract, and possibly after signing it, is a main cause of high divorce rates. Due to the conservative nature of Gulf societies, most marriages are pre-arranged by parents, sisters, brothers, other relatives or friends. It could be, that the ratio of those who marry the traditional way in Bahrain and Kuwait is lower than in other Gulf countries. However, it remains a major way of getting married in the region.

Several studies have identified other causes for high divorce rates, such as husband's abuse and carelessness, intervention of parents and other relatives, jealousy and suspicion. A recent Kuwaiti study confirmed that limited acquaintance between future couples is one of the main causes of divorce. That study found out that only 28% of divorced females had the opportunity to get to know their future husbands before engagement; they got acquainted at work, university and school, or as neighbours. (29)

The spheres of work, residence and education in urban community provide individuals of both sexes with more opportunities than non-urban community to meet and to get acquainted. Urban communities in Bahrain and Kuwait, as well as urban pockets in Qatar and Dubai, are more receptive of the two sexes getting together and possibly provide greater opportunities for their interaction before and during the period of engagement than newly settled and newly urbanized areas provide.

Globalization and the Family

Globalization processes and the different mechanisms utilized by these processes have contributed to the rise of a new situation whereby the old and the new exist side by side. This new situation has intensified existing social problems and created new ones. It has caused changes in the structures and functions of social institutions, most notably the

family. It has modified the structure, function and role of marriage. Although we are unable to say that patriarchal family in Gulf society has disappeared in terms of continued male authority and domination over family affairs, we can still observe some indicators that signify contraction and retreat in patriarchal family structures.

It is important to emphasize that changes in Gulf family structure and functions were not solely caused by the forces and processes of globalization. However, these forces and processes have increased and intensified these pressures to a great extent **(30)**. Some of these pressures are: entry of Gulf women into the labor market; women's participation in many activities and areas that were not permissible in the past; the changing husband-wife relationship; change in the relationship of parents with their children; the way youth relate to society; the increasing economic, educational and social burden of raising children; the weakening of traditional methods and means of socialization.

Globalized communications play an important and effective role in today's socialization of children and youth. The mother or grandmother is no longer the main agent of raising children or of dealing with them. Issues pertaining to socialization no longer take the form of values and customs derived from adults (elder persons) or from adults' reservoir of experience. Such values and knowledge are derived from books, television, radio and the Internet. These sources are some of the entry gates to cultural stereotyping created by globalization.

Advances in means of communication, which are a product and mechanism of globalization, gave rise to new variables and norms that are determined by the new culture of globalization. Although we do not possess accurate and clear data on, for example, the marriage cases that took place through internet chatting, we do know that many marriages in the Gulf region took place as a result of acquaintance over fixed or mobile telephone lines. The ease by which an individual can own a mobile phone line, men and women alike, even among the most conservative groups and communities did help individuals overcome the barriers of isolation and segregation imposed by society and the family on the relationship of men and women in Gulf societies.

Moreover, although we have no accurate scientific data on the role of mobile telephones in the rise of marriage rates, some newspaper reports refer to the fact that mobile telephones have facilitated contacts among youth of both sexes outside family and societal control. **(31)**

The flourishing and expansion of commercial shopping malls provided the opportunity for males and females to meet. A lot of dating takes place in coffee shops and stores located in modern commercial malls.

Moreover, travel and touristic trips opened the door for sex-tourism to Gulf males who travel to some East Asian countries, and to other countries for this purpose. Travel and tourism also give rise to cases of mixed marriages or external marriages concluded by males and females from the Gulf region.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is considered as one of the major health challenges worldwide. Published figures about HIV/AIDS patients in Arab Gulf States in 1999 were: Bahrain 104(1.45%), Kuwait 49(0.22%), Oman 402(1.95%), Qatar 99(1.44%), Saudi Arabia 420 (0.17%), UAE.12(0.15%). WHO figures indicate that the number of sero-positive individuals may be many times higher. It is assumed that most cases are connected with intravenous drug usage. Although such drug use is not widespread in most Gulf States, drug users have sexual partners and spouses. The HIV prevalence among intravenous drug users is reported to be at approximately 60%, and the trend of transmission moves from male users to their partners, beginning the process of turning the nascent problem into a permanent and growing health crisis.

The Bahrain Health Ministry has formed a committee of specialists to monitor AIDS cases on the island. Steps have already been taken to raise diagnostic standards in the medical laboratories. Training was provided for health workers on diagnosing and treating patients and procedures were laid down for referring cases to concerned committees to give medical and psychological advice to patients. It was found (32) that 94.5% of the Bahraini women in the 15-45 year age group have already heard about HIV/AIDS. When asked about prevention methods, 66.8% of women said prevention was through maintaining the marriage relationship or having a single partner only. Another group representing 24.3% felt that the use of condoms at the time of intercourse ensured a proper prevention for them while another group 24.9% said that prevention was possible by avoiding sex altogether. In general, only 7.1% of those interviewed said they were aware of the three prevention methods. It was also found that 74.9% of the women were aware of at least one method while 25.1% of women were not aware of any prevention method.

In response to a question about misinformation on HIV/AIDS, it was found that 78.6% were aware that the disease was not communicated by an unusual force. Another group of 40.3% said that they realized that the disease was not communicated by mosquito bites. Commenting on the patients' appearance, 56.3% of those interviewed said that patient could look healthy without showing any obvious symptoms. In general, 23.3% of women shared three incorrect pieces of information about how the disease was communicated. A group presenting 88.4% had at least one wrong piece of information about HIV/AIDS transmission.

In reply to a question about the possible transmission of HIV/AIDS from a mother to her baby, 63.3% of women agreed on this possibility. Another group of 76.1% felt that pregnancy is yet another means of disease transmission. Some 57.2% felt that transmission is possible through childbirth. Some 44.1% held the view that transmitting the disease can take place through breast-feeding. In general, 35.7% of women were aware of the three methods of transmission of the disease while 27.9% were not aware of any method of transmission.

As for the negative behavior towards HIV/AIDS infected patients and carriers of the disease, 33.6% of women agreed that a teacher should be removed from the school when he gets infected. Another group representing 12.4% of women only said they would not buy foodstuff from traders infected with HIV/AIDS. On the whole, it was found that 36.8% agreed with one of these behavior patterns while the majority of women, 63.2%, did not agree with this view.

According to the survey results, the great majority of women representing 94.5% said they had already heard about HIV/AIDS but they were not well informed about prevention methods. It was found that 7.1% of the women were aware of the three methods of HIV/AIDS transmission prevention. Some 23.3% of them were aware of the three methods of transmitting the disease. The survey shows that only 21.1% of women had enough information about transmission of this infection and how to prevent it.

This data confirms that educational programmes in this field need to be stepped up to reach all sectors of the community, especially women. Although there is a wide range of educational activities, the school curricula do not take into account raising standards of awareness. In addition, the media and local associations should play an effective role in this area.

Number of cases of HIV/AIDS among Bahrainis

Number of cases	AIDS Cases		A Symptomatic HIV		Total	
	Dead	Alive	Dead	Alive	Dead	Alive
During this period	2	2	2	0	4	2
Previous Cumulative	84	17	28	113	112	130
Cumulative total	86	19	30	109	116	128

Source: AIDS/HIV Surveillance Report, 24 April 2003

Ageing

The condition of older persons in traditional Gulf society did not cause any worries or concern. Older persons were able to keep their economic role and status because getting older meant getting or being more experienced. They held both authority and wealth, in addition to being very influential at the level of the family or the clan. Moreover, religious teachings and the inherited value system urged youth to be loyal to older persons and to sacrifice for their sake.

Caring for older persons did not require any special arrangements, except in rare cases. They lived in the household of their sons, nephews, and other relatives. Their daily lives proceeded according to the lives of those with whom they lived.

Over the past three decades, the Gulf region has witnessed vast and rapid changes and transformations. These transformations were the result of several factors, such as urbanization, technology transfer, educational progress, different patterns of emigration, globalization, changes in the status of women, and the advent of new ideological implications concerning social equality, social justice and human rights. These developments led to contraction or decline in traditional family roles of caring for older persons. They were slow to adapt to the changing circumstances, which led to diminished roles within the family or outside it.

The transformations were accompanied by significant demographic changes, such as an increase in the ratio of older persons to total population, a rise in life expectancy, the rise of work systems that call for a definite retirement age that pushes older persons out of the system of production and guaranteeing them a source of continued income. Moreover, new types of disease associated with old age appear, such as senility, which need special and costly care. Old-age diseases were not known in traditional Gulf societies because average life expectancies were short. The new transformations called for new types of socialization that gave the young generations different perspectives concerning family relations particularly on dealing with older persons. That has led to apparent gaps and problems in traditional relations between older persons and their own young sons and daughters.

Some Gulf countries conceived the need to establish special institutions that care for the older persons physically, socially, and psychologically. Gulf states have passed several laws whose aim is to provide a decent and comfortable life for older persons, and to encourage family members to care for them.

According to United Nations estimates there were about 279,000 persons aged 65 years and over living in the Gulf region in 1975. This number jumped to 818,000 in the year 2000. Projections indicate that this number is expected to be more than four million in the year 2025.

The size of total population in the Gulf region is expected to increase from 10 million in 1975 to 53 million in 2025. Thus the elderly are expected to account for 9.3% of total population. The ratio of the elderly to total population is expected to increase from 2.7% in the year 2000 to 9.3% in 2025.

Statistics show that there is an imbalance in sex ratios in Gulf countries. The ratio of males to females is very high. In 1995, the number of males in Qatar and the Emirates was double the number of females, while in Kuwait it was 1.84 times. The reason of this huge imbalance lies in the dominance of males among immigrant labourers working in the Gulf.

There is a difference in economic self-reliance between married older males and older females. Statistics show high ratios of widows among older persons in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the Emirates, reaching 47.9%, 65.7%, 55.9% and 65.7% respectively. In comparison, the ratio of widowers in these countries is low: 3.7%, 7.6%, 4.9% and 9.7% respectively. The ratio of divorcees, whether males or females, is also very low. In Bahrain, which has the highest ratio of divorced females, that ratio is 4.6%. The highest ratio of divorced older males is found in the Emirates at 4.2%. The ratio of married older males is generally high, varying between 82.1% in the Emirates and 89.8% in Bahrain.

Total Population, Total 65+ (in thousands) and Percent 65+, 1975, 2000,2025

COUNTRY	YEAR	TOTAL POPULATION	TOTAL 65 +	PERCENT
Bahrain	1975	272	7	2.6%
	2000	617	18	2.9%
	2025	858	113	13.2%
Kuwait	1975	1007	16	1.6%
	2000	1972	40	2.0%
	2025	2974	307	10.3%
Saudi Arabia	1975	7251	218	3.0%
	2000	21607	625	2.9%
	2025	39965	2640	6.6%
Oman	1975	880	24	2.7%
	2000	2542	63	2.5%
	2025	5352	253	4.7%
Qatar	1975	171	4	2.3%
	2000	599	12	2.0%
	2025	779	144	18.5%
U.A.E.	1975	505	10	2.0%
	2000	2441	60	2.5%
	2025	3284	582	17.7%

Source: UN, World Population Prospects, 1999

Conclusion

Most studies of the family in the Gulf region confirm that economic and political transformation experienced by this region since the discovery of oil have resulted in numerous changes in the form and content of the extended family, and have contributed to the rise of the nuclear family. However, it should be emphasized that while speaking of nuclear and extended families in the Gulf we are not speaking in abstract terms.

Although the number of nuclear families in the Gulf states has increased, especially in new urban areas, and although certain characteristics of nuclear families are apparent, such as economic independence or independent residence, these features do not negate the affiliation of nuclear families to their extended families, both at the relational and the ideological levels.

The Gulf family has kept its traditional size. Average family size in the Gulf has not diminished, except in rare cases which exist in urban sectors as a result of delay in relative marriage age connected to women's education and work. The average family includes 6 or 7 persons in most cases. This size is larger in non-urban sectors.

The Gulf family has benefited tremendously from economic transformations. The family's living standard has risen, and technological household machines and tools have become widely available. Economic development enabled the Gulf family to increase consumption, reflected in housing patterns, costs of marriage, types of cars and other lifestyle aspects. Economic and social changes have also produced numerous individualistic values at the expense of collective values, thereby resulting in widening the social distance between couples and their children in particular.

In turn, that has given rise to problems, such a separation and teen-age delinquency. These problems are serious and affect the family's role and solidarity. They also disrupt the economic and human capacity and capabilities of the family. More serious is their effect on the family's cultural identity. Hence, the future challenge facing Gulf society is how to support families engaged in a process of transition.

Average Household Size for Gulf Countries

Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	UAE
6.4 (1971)	6.5 (1970)	-	-	-	5.6 (1975)
6.0 (1981)	6.4 (1980)	-	-	-	4.8 (1980)
6.9 (1989)	8.8 (1987)	6.3 (1988)	6.7 (1987)	7.4 (1987)	7.4 (1987)
5.9 (2001)	7.6 (2001)	-	-	-	-

Sources:

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Total Fertility Rate Per Woman (1978-2001) in Gulf Countries

Country	*1978	**1990	***2001
Bahrain	5.2	3.5	**2.4
Kuwait	6.9	3.9	2.6
Oman	7.2	(*)5.9	5.4
Qatar	6.8	4.8	3.4
Saudi Arabia	7.3	6.1	5.2
UAE	6.4	4.8	3.0

(*)Sources: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. Survey of Economic and Social Development in the ESCWA Region: 1998-1999 (pp. 152-153)

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