POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

MARRIAGE IN THE ARAB WORLD

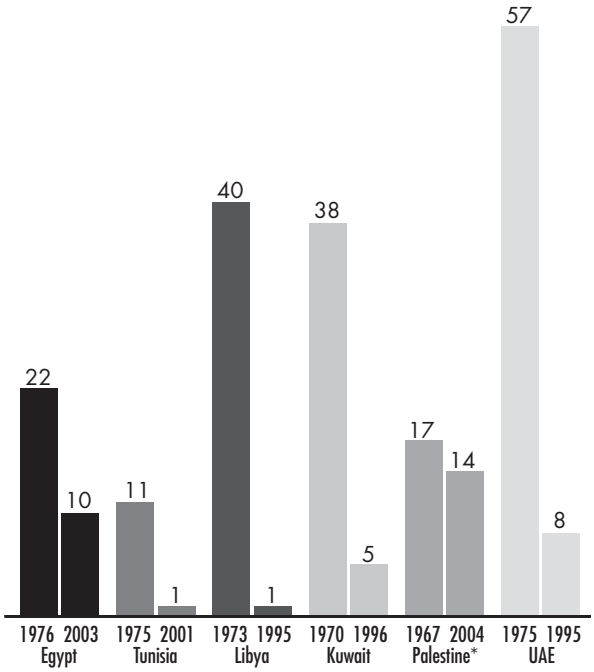
by Hoda Rashad, Magued Osman, and Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi

Families in the Arab world are undergoing major changes as new patterns of marriage and family formation emerge across the region.[1] Universal, early marriage is no longer the standard it once was in Arab countries: The average age at marriage for both men and women is generally rising, and more Arab women are staying single longer or not marrying at all. While these trends are part of a general global phenomenon, they are also introducing new issues into Arab societies—issues that can confront deeply rooted cultural values and raise legal and policy challenges.

Changing demographic patterns of marriage in the Arab world reflect broader social and economic changes taking place throughout the region. Arab economies have increasingly moved away from an agrarian system, which supported both early marriage and an extended family structure. The majority of the Arab world's population now lives in cities and is involved in the industrial or service sectors. Arab youth are more educated today compared with previous generations, and young Arab women are more likely to work outside their homes in paying jobs. These changes challenge women's traditional roles in the household and society as a whole.

Figure 1

Decline in Percent of Women Ages 15 to 19 Who Are Married, Selected Arab Countries



* Refers to the Palestinian population living in Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem).

SOURCES: United Nations, *World Fertility Report 2003*, Tables II.9 and II.11; Pan-Arab Project for Family Health Survey (Tunisia 2001); Gulf Family Health Survey (UAE 1995 and Kuwait 1996); and Demographic and Health Surveys (Jordan 2002, Egypt 2003, and Palestine 2004).

Understanding how Arab marriage patterns are changing is now particularly important because Arab countries are seeing unprecedented numbers of young adults entering their 20s, when the great majority of people worldwide marry and start families. Nearly one in every five Egyptians is between ages 20 and 29, and the United Nations projects that the population in this age group will grow by 20 percent between 2005 and 2025, from 13.5 million to 16.3 million. Some other Arab countries will experience even faster growth in this age group. By 2025, the number of Iraqis between ages 20 and 29 is expected to grow by 60 percent, and the number of 20-to-29-year-old Yemenis will jump by more than 80 percent.[2]

Policies related to young adults, women, and families in Arab countries need to take into account the changing marriage patterns and their social and economic implications. This policy brief highlights current trends in marriage patterns of women in the Arab world, emerging policy issues, and links between marriage patterns and other social and demographic trends.

Marriage and the Family

The family has always been at the center of life in Arab societies, held in great esteem among young and old alike. Families are the main social security system for the elderly, sick, or disabled; they also provide economic refuge for children and youth,

the unemployed, and other dependents. In Arab culture, parents are responsible for children well into those children's adult lives, and children reciprocate by taking responsibility for the care of their aging parents—responsibilities that Arabs generally take on with great pride. Marriage for Arabs is thus both an individual and a family matter.

In Arab culture, marriage is also a well-defined turning point that bestows prestige, recognition, and societal approval on both partners, particularly the bride. While young men and women generally choose their own spouses, marriage in Arab societies remains a social and economic contract between two families (see Box 1). Finally, it is also a rite of passage to a socially, culturally, and legally acceptable sexual relationship.

Trends in Marriage

Women throughout the Arab region once typically married in their teens or early 20s. In recent decades, however, early marriage has declined sharply in parts of the region—most notably in Kuwait, Libya, and the United Arab Emirates (see Figure 1, page 1). In the early 1970s, around 40 percent of women ages 15 to 19 were married in Kuwait and Libya, but these figures had dropped by the mid-1990s to 5 percent and 1 percent, respectively. The pace of decline has been even faster in the United Arab Emirates, where the percentage of women ages 15 to 19 who were married dropped from 57 percent in 1975 to 8 percent by 1995.

For the region as a whole, women are marrying later (some in their late 20s or early 30s), and some women are not marrying at all. In Tunisia, Algeria, and Lebanon, only 1 percent to 4 percent of women ages 15 to 19 are married, and the percentage of women ages 35 to 39 who have never married in these countries now ranges from 15 percent to 21 percent. The percentage of women ages 35 to 39 who have never married is a good indicator for measuring changes in the universality of marriage, because the likelihood of a single woman marrying after age 40 is quite low (see Table 1.)

Box 1

The Cost of Marriage in Egypt

Average marriage costs in Egypt are substantially higher than in other societies in which a *dowry* (the transfer of money and gifts from the groom and his family to his bride and her family) is customary. According to one study, the average cost of a marriage in Egypt in the late 1990s was around $6,000—a prohibitive sum in a country in which average per capita income was $1,490 in 2000. One-third of the households in the study were found to be living under the national poverty line. In rural areas, households that had an impending marriage and were living below the poverty line spent an average of 15 times their annual household expenditure per capita on marriage-related costs, while similar households in urban areas spent nine times their annual household expenditure per capita.

Marriage in Egypt typically takes place in stages that involve special and often costly ceremonies. Related marriage costs often include:

- The *Shabka* (or "tying") of the couple with a gift of rings or gold;
- The dowry, partly paid for at the time of the marriage, with the rest held in reserve for settlement in case of divorce;
- Housing for the couple to live in;
- Furniture and appliances for the newlyweds; and
- The *gihaz* (trousseau) of the bride, which includes small home furnishings.

The lion's share of these costs—three-fourths—is covered by a groom and his family, although the increasing expense of marriage and the increasing participation of young women in the labor force has meant that some brides and their families are contributing more money to their marriage expenses than traditionally expected.

Tradition, however, ensures that the cost of a wedding and its related activities in Egypt will remain high. Regardless of the economic situations of marrying couples and their families, the *gihaz* and other goods purchased to set up the newlyweds' home are expected to be new, not used. The groom's side of the family customarily provides the couple's housing (the major wedding expense) as well as any electronic equipment for the household, such as the television or refrigerator.

The rising cost of marriage is in part attributed to the rising expectations and consumerism that have accompanied the opening of the Egyptian economy, which began in the 1970s. The country's high cost of housing and furnishings have had a number of unintended consequences for marriage patterns, such as youth entering into *urfi* (common-law marriages that are unregistered and generally secretive) as well as men marrying women who are older and financially secure.

REFERENCES: Diane Singerman and Barbara Ibrahim, "The Cost of Marriage in Egypt: A Hidden Variable in the New Arab Demography," in the *New Arab Family, Cairo Papers in Social Science* 24 (2001): 80-116; and World Bank, "Building Institutions for Markets," *World Bank Report 2002* (Washington DC: World Bank, 2002): table 1.

However, the timing of marriage varies within the region. Although less common than before, early marriages are still prevalent in Oman, Yemen, and (to some extent) Egypt, as well as among Palestinians living in Gaza. Around 17 percent of Omani and Yemeni women ages 15 to 19 are married, as are about 60 percent of those ages 20 to 24 in these countries. Among Egyptian women, 10 percent of 15-to-19-year-olds and 52 percent of 20-to-24-year-olds are married. Universal marriage also prevails in Egypt, Oman, and Yemen, where fewer than 5 percent of women ages 35 to 39 have never married.

Palestinians appear to have a unique marriage pattern: early but not universal. According to the 2004 Palestinian Demographic and Health Survey, while 14 percent of 15-to-19-year-old and nearly 60 percent of 20-to-24-year-old Palestinian women are married, 12 percent of Palestinian women ages 35 to 39 had never been married. However, Gaza and the West Bank have two different marriage patterns. While marriage for women in Gaza is generally early and universal, the opposite is the case for Arab women of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem). One reason for the Palestinian situation could be that only men and not women of the West Bank can marry Jordanians and bring them to the West Bank, which means a higher percentage of female residents of the West Bank will never marry. Overall, more than one-half of married Palestinian women ages 15 to 54 had married by age 19 (see Figure 2, page 4).[3]

Finally, the marriage-age gap (the worldwide phenomenon of women commonly marrying older men) is particularly pronounced in Arab societies. One-quarter of recent marriages in Egypt and Lebanon had women at least 10 years younger than their husbands.[4]

Table 1

Marriage Patterns in Selected Arab Countries

	Year survey was conducted	Percent ever-married women, by age group		Percent never-married women ages	Percent of ever-married women (15 to 49 years old) who married a first cousin
		15–19	20–24	35–39	
Algeria	2002	2	17	17	22
Bahrain	1995	4	31	9	24
Djibouti	2002	5	26	15	25
Egypt	2003	10	52	3	20
Jordan	2002	6	34	13	26
Kuwait	1996	5	42	11	26
Lebanon	1995	4	30	21	18
Libya	1995	1	12	11	43
Mauritania	2001/02	28	60	4	43
Morocco	1996/97	13	39	12	19
Palestine*	2004	14	59	12	28
Oman	1995	16	61	1	34
Qatar	1998	4	32	11	34
Saudi Arabia	1996	7	40	3	41
Syria	2001	11	43	11	29
Tunisia	2001	1	15	15	24
UAE	1995	8	42	3	24
Yemen	2003	17	59	3	31

* Includes Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem).

SOURCES: League of Arab States, Pan-Arab Project for Child Development: Arab Mother and Child Health Surveys (Lebanon and Libya 1995, Morocco 1996/97) and Pan-Arab Project for Family Health (Syria and Tunisia 2001, Algeria and Djibouti 2002, Morocco 2003/2004, and Yemen 2003); Council of Health Ministers of GCC States, Gulf Family Health Surveys (Bahrain, Oman, and United Arab Emirates 1995, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia 1996, Qatar 1998); ORC Macro, Demographic and Health Surveys (Mauritania 2001/2002, Jordan 2002, and Egypt 2003); and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics' special tabulations of the 2004 Palestinian Demographic and Health Survey.

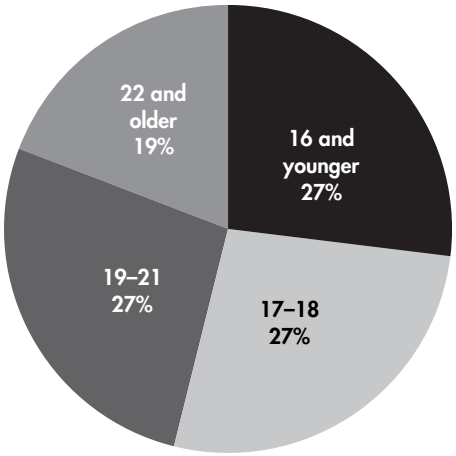
Disadvantages of Early Marriage

Although early marriage is on the decline in the Arab world, the number of Arab teenagers who are married is still significant. In Yemen, for example, the percent of women ages 15 to 19 who are married declined from 27 percent in 1997 to 17 percent in 2003—but this latter figure still represented an estimated 200,000 women. An estimated 385,000 Egyptians 15 to 19 years old also have already married. Traditional values surrounding girls' virginity and family honor play a major role in Arab families' decisions to marry off their daughters at young ages. In a 1997 survey in Yemen, 60 percent of rural women and 40 percent of urban women said the ideal age of marriage for their daughters or girls in general was less than 20.[5]

Early marriage is generally associated with early childbearing and high fertility, both of which pose health risks for women and their children. Married adolescents are less likely to know about contraceptive methods and sexually transmitted diseases. Very young mothers are also at greater risk than older mothers of dying from causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. And the younger a bride is, the more significant the age gap with her husband tends to be—which exacerbates her disadvantage in negotiating with her husband on matters such as her own health care needs.[6]

Figure 2

Distribution of Married Palestinian Women, Ages 15 to 54, by Age at Marriage, 2004



NOTE: Includes Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem).
SOURCES: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, special tabulation, 2004 Palestinian Demographic and Health Survey.

Finally, early marriage is one important reason that girls leave school, making it more difficult for young women to escape the vicious cycle of poverty, high fertility, and poor health. The highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the region are seen in Mauritania, Yemen, and among Palestinians, where one in every 10 women ages 15 to 19 gives birth every year she is part of that age group.[7]

Consanguinity

One distinctive feature of Arab families is the relatively high rate of marriage between relatives (in particular, between cousins), a practice known as *consanguinity*. Marriage between relatives is particularly high in Sudan, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, where 40 percent to 50 percent of ever-married women ages 15 to 49 are wed to their first cousins. These consanguineous marriages are not necessarily arranged marriages; they may well reflect the wishes of the marrying partners. But marriage between close relatives can jeopardize the health of their offspring, as can marriage among families with a history of genetic diseases.

Education and Marriage

As school enrollments have increased for both boys and girls in the Arab world, the percentage of marriages in which both the husband and wife are uneducated has decreased significantly. Instead, more couples in Arab societies now feature women with similar or higher levels of education compared with their husbands. In countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon as well as among the Palestinians, fewer than one-half of recent marriages fit the traditional pattern in which the husband is more educated than his wife. In these countries, between 20 percent and 36 percent of recent marriages have an educational gap in favor of women (see Figure 3).

More-educated women also generally marry later than their less-educated counterparts. In the United Arab Emirates, the average age at marriage for women with secondary or higher education is 27, compared with age 18 for those with no education. In Oman, those with high school diplomas marry on average at age 25, while those who never went to school are married by age 19 on average. In other countries in the region, however, the differential in age at marriage by education is smaller. In Egypt, the average age at marriage for women who are at least high school graduates is 24—only three years higher than that for women with no education and two years higher than that for women with some elementary or high school education.[8]

Education has some influence on the prevalence of consanguineous marriage. In some countries in the region, rates of marriage to a relative are significantly lower among educated women. In Bahrain, only 18 percent of women with a secondary education married a first cousin, compared with 38 percent of illiterate women. However, in other countries—Oman and the United Arab Emirates, for example—the percent of women married to a relative does not differ according to the woman's level of education.

Emerging Policy Issues

The Redefinition of Women's Roles

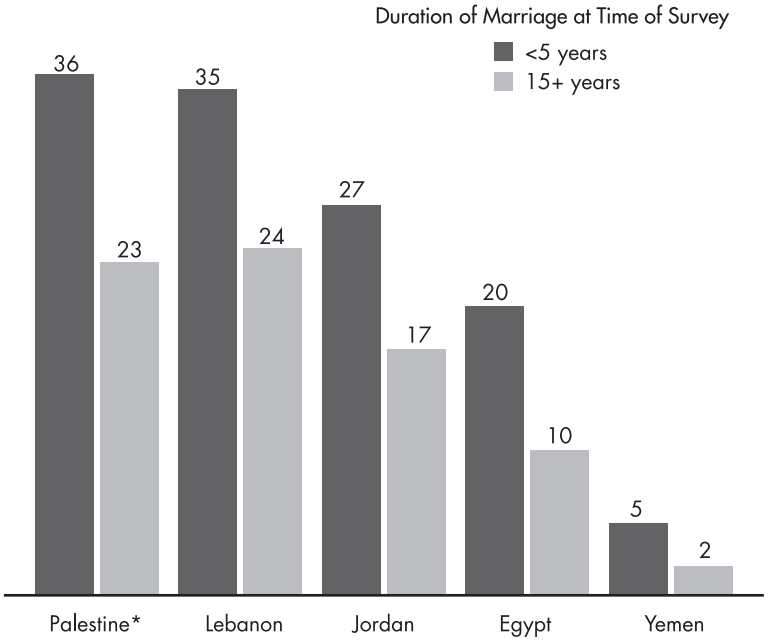
In Arab societies, women's status is mainly defined by their roles as mothers and wives. By "failing" to meet these expectations, single women do not have an easily defined or comfortable niche in society. Single women with no education or job

skills face particular problems in the Arab world because of their lack of financial independence.

However, increasing numbers of Arab women are single, forcing their societies to grapple with a "new" category of women. Successful career women are more likely to escape from the traditional stereotype and find opportunities for self-fulfillment beyond the roles of mother and wife. These women are no longer necessarily portrayed by their family members and society as failures for being unable to secure a partner. Indeed, they are increasingly characterized either as having made a choice to remain single or (at the very least) as good women unable to find a partner because of a limited pool of suitable candidates.

Figure 3

Percent of Ever-Married Women in Selected Arab Countries Who Have More Education Than Their Husbands, by Duration of Their Marriage



* Includes Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank (including East Jerusalem).

SOURCES: Special tabulations done by the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo using Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) for Egypt (2003), Jordan (1997), and Yemen (1997), and by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics using the 2004 Palestinian DHS.

Legal Reforms

The centrality of marriage and its near universality across Arab societies in the past have translated into public policies and legal structures in Arab countries that generally relegate women to a minor role, supported by a male breadwinner. For example, Arab laws usually identify men as the sole beneficiaries for direct transfers and nonwage benefits from the state. Since women are not regarded as breadwinners, working women (unlike their male counterparts) cannot automatically claim family benefits. In Lebanon, a woman cannot claim income tax deductions for her children unless she is the family's sole breadwinner or if the children's father is dead or has a disability.[9] These policies and practices treat women as only wives and mothers, not as individuals.

However, some of these discriminatory practices are now being contested on several levels across the region. The Moroccan government has made the boldest reforms in recent years regarding women's legal rights. In January 2004, it adopted an entirely new Family Law that is both within the framework of Islamic laws and which entitles an adult woman (regardless of her marital status) to self-guardianship and the free and independent exercise of that right. With a goal of promoting gender equality, the new law raised the minimum legal age at marriage for Moroccan women from 15 years to 18 years (similar to that for men). The law also gives women and men the right to compose their own marriage contract.[10] (The negotiated marriage contract is the only chance an Arab woman has to determine her lifetime share of the financial assets from her marriage, as well as compensation in case of divorce.)

Reformists and women activists throughout the region are increasingly using new interpretations of the *Sharia*, or Islamic law, to formulate their arguments for improving Arab women's status and to change personal-status laws that regulate marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. While changes in family laws have for the most part been small, their benefits to women are not negligible.[11]

For instance, after efforts by women's groups and much national debate, the Egyptian parliament in 2000 passed a new law that changed procedures associated with the personal-status law. The law—known as *khul'*—gave a woman the right to initiate a divorce without the consent of her husband if she would give up some of her financial rights. Later, Egypt also allowed children to inherit their mother's Egyptian citizenship when those children's fathers were not

Box 2

The UAE Marriage Fund

As in other oil-rich Gulf countries, an increasing number of families in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) received a boost in their disposable income during the 1970s from that decade's oil boom. As a result, lavish wedding receptions and expensive gifts to brides in the UAE became more and more customary. But the rise in marriage costs (which are traditionally borne by the groom and his family) prompted many UAE men to go outside the country to marry foreign wives and bring them back to the Emirates. The phenomenon of UAE men marrying non-nationals led to the creation of two visible groups with which the society as a whole was not at ease: single UAE women with little prospect of marriage, and children of mixed marriages being brought up by mothers not much in tune with UAE traditions and culture.

In response to these developments, a presidential decree created the United Arab Emirates' Marriage Fund Foundation in the early 1990s. The fund's goal was to lighten the economic burden of marriage on young couples and to encourage UAE men to marry UAE women. A single man who is a citizen of the UAE and whose income is below a certain amount is eligible to apply to the fund for a marriage grant, with the condition that he marries a native woman from the Emirates.

In return, a grantee is required to make small monthly repayments of the grant. He also receives an exemption of 20 percent of the repayment with the birth of each child. Along with establishing the fund, the government launched a campaign aimed at persuading UAE fathers of prospective brides to accept smaller dowries and less elaborate gifts and ceremonies.

UAE male students abroad have become a natural target for the fund's campaigns. The fund has sent out letters to these students through UAE embassies, advising them to give their studies top priority while also pointing out the positive aspects of their native culture and the fund's readiness to provide them with marriage grants. During the 10 years since its establishment, the fund has provided grants to 32,000 families and has organized 38 group weddings.

Similar marriage funds also exist in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Qatar. While it is difficult to measure the relative success of such schemes, use of welfare funds to promote marriage is an established practice in many parts of the world, including the West.

REFERENCES: UAE Interact (the official website for the Ministry of Information and Culture in the UAE), accessed online at www.uaeinteract.com, on Feb. 16, 2005.

Egyptian—a practice that is still outlawed in many of the region's countries.[12] Another example of recent changes in family laws is in Jordan, where the Jordanian Civil Status Law requires the recording of all official transactions in a *daftar* ("family book").[13] Women in Jordan are now allowed to start their own *daftar* if they are divorced or widowed.

The Economic Burden of Marriage

The joyous traditions surrounding an Arab marriage have combined with the region's increasing modernization and consumerism to make marriage ceremonies and related requirements in Arab countries extremely expensive. Arab young men in their 20s commonly say that they are saving now in order to be able to marry some years in the future. Unfortunately, young people in the Arab world face a tough economic situation. They appear to be the first generation of young people in the recent history of the region that does not necessarily expect to fare better economically than their parents—despite having the largest increase in education attainment over their parents of any Arab generation.[14] Unemployment is high in Arab countries, and it is heavily concentrated among young adults.[15]

Traditionally, the groom and his family are responsible for most of the expenses, including housing, bridal gifts, and ceremonies. Indeed, housing—a scarce commodity in crowded cities—has become an essential requirement for a young man to be able to marry. In the face of general economic stagnation, the persistence of the high costs of marriage is an underlying factor for young people to delay their marriage. While the cost of marriage has typically been a private matter outside the realm of government intervention, it is now part of public debate. Some religious, governmental, and nongovernmental agencies have begun to shape national marital policies in order to lower the financial barriers to marriage. These policies include organizing group marriages and providing financial assistance to young couples (see Box 2).

Nonconventional Forms of Marriage

The high costs of Arab marriage as well as high unemployment and economic difficulties are

blamed for the spread of so-called "*urfi*" (or common-law) marriages among young urban adults in some countries in the region. Generally hidden from the participants' families, *urfi* marriages are undertaken to avoid the difficulties of a standard marriage and give a sexual relationship some degree of legitimacy.

The secrecy surrounding *urfi* marriages puts young women at a particular disadvantage because these women are not able to negotiate the terms of their marriage—a role usually played by families in conventional marriages. Statistics on *urfi* marriages are rare, since there are no official records of such marriages. But in 1998, according to one estimate, there were nearly 10,000 cases of contested paternity in Egyptian courts due to *urfi* marriages.[16] It is also not uncommon for men entering into *urfi* marriages to later deny these marriages, leaving their wives in legal limbo and socially stigmatized.

Traditionally, *urfi* marriages have been religiously condoned as proper if the couple's parents approve of the marriage and there is a public announcement of the ban. Some families in rural villages opt for *urfi* marriages when the bride is too young to be legally married, deferring the official registration of the marriages to a future date. But the public, the religious establishment, and the legal system have generally perceived urban *urfi* marriages as a pretext and cover for premarital sex.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests increases in *muta'a* and *messyar*, other forms of nonconventional marriages in the Arab world. In *muta'a* (temporary marriage), which is practiced by the Shi'ites in southern Lebanon and other areas, couples specify in their marriage contract the date upon which the marriage ends. *Messyar*—mainly practiced in the Gulf countries—is an arrangement in which a man marries without any of the housing and financial responsibility that a standard Arab marriage generally requires of him. Both marital forms are practiced mostly by men who are marrying a second wife. While *muta'a* and *messyar* marriages tend to give legitimacy to sexual relationships and reduce the number of never-married women in society, they introduce other social complications, such as the upbringing of children from such marriages.

Conclusion

Two factors—the growing numbers of young people in the Arab world, and the economic and social realities that surround marriages in the region today—make this an important time to explore both changing Arab marriage patterns and their implications for people's lives and societies as a whole. Marriage has customarily been outside the realm of Arab government policies, but this tradition is changing.

More research is needed for a better understanding of the social and economic phenomena now surrounding Arab marriage. Informed and culturally sensitive policies and programs and their timely and successful implementation are needed to address the needs of young people who want to marry as well as the needs of women who defer marriage or who remain single.

References

[1] The "Arab world" includes members of the League of Arab States, stretching from Morocco in the west to Oman in the east.

[2] United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision*, accessed online at www.un.org, on June 28, 2005.

[3] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, special tabulation, 2004 Palestinian DHS.

[4] Special tabulation done by the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo using the Egypt Demographic and Health Survey (2003) and the Lebanon Maternal and Child Health Survey (1996).

[5] Central Agency of Statistics [Yemen] and Macro International Inc., *Yemen Demographic and Maternal and Child Health Survey 1997* (Calverton, MD: ORC Macro, 1998): table 5.8.

[6] World Health Organization, "WHO/UNFPA/Population Council Technical Consultation on Married Adolescents" (Geneva: WHO, 2003).

[7] Lori Ashford, *2005 Women of Our World Data Sheet* (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2005), accessed online at www.prb.org, on Aug. 23, 2005.

[8] Mahmoud Fikri and Samir Farid, *United Arab Emirates Family Health Survey 1995* (Abu Dhabi: Ministry of Health, 2000); and Fatma Elzanty and Ann Way, *Egypt Interim Demographic and Health Survey 2003* (Cairo: Ministry of Health, 2004).

[9] World Bank, "Unlocking the Employment Potential in the Middle East and North Africa: Toward a New Social Contract," *MENA Development Report* 5 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004): 125-6.

PRB's Middle East and North Africa Program

The goal of the Population Reference Bureau's Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Program is to respond to regional needs for timely and objective information and analysis on population, socioeconomic, and reproductive health issues. The program raises awareness of these issues among decisionmakers in the region and in the international community in hopes of influencing policies and improving the lives of people living in the MENA region.

MENA program activities include: producing and disseminating both print and electronic publications on important population, reproductive health, environment, and development topics (many publications are translated into Arabic); working with journalists in the MENA region to enhance their knowledge and coverage of population and development issues; and working with researchers in the MENA region to improve their skills in communicating their research finding to policymakers and the media.

The Population Reference Bureau is the leader in providing timely and objective information on U.S. and international population trends and their implications.

Social Research Center

The Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo (SRC) was established in 1953 to conduct and encourage social science research in Egypt and the Middle East. The program aims to train researchers and to guide and assist graduate students, scholars, and organizations engaged in social science research in the region. The SRC cooperates with agencies of the Egyptian government as well as with universities and research institutes in Egypt and abroad.

The Center's research program is multidisciplinary and combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to inquiry. It strives to inform policy formulation and implementation while contributing to knowledge in the social science disciplines.

Current research includes studies of population and fertility, a broad spectrum of development issues, the role of women, urbanization, poverty, social epidemiology, maternal and child health, water and sanitation, and the environment.

MENA Policy Briefs

Marriage in the Arab World (September 2005)
Islam and Family Planning (August 2004)
Progress Toward the Millennium Development Goals in the Middle East and North Africa (March 2004)
Making Motherhood Safer in Egypt (March 2004)
Empowering Women, Developing Society: Female Education in the Middle East and North Africa (October 2003)
Women's Reproductive Health in the Middle East and North Africa (February 2003)
Finding the Balance: Water Scarcity and Population Demand in the Middle East and North Africa (July 2002)
Iran's Family Planning Program: Responding to a Nation's Needs (June 2002)
Population Trends and Challenges in the Middle East and North Africa (October 2001)

These policy briefs are available in both English and Arabic, and can be ordered free of charge to audiences in the MENA region by contacting the Population Reference Bureau via e-mail (prborders@prb.org) or at the address below. Both versions (except for the Arabic version of *Population Trends and Challenges*) are also available on PRB's website (www.prb.org).

[10] Zineb Touimi-Benjelloun, "A New Family Law in Morocco: Patience Is Bitter, But Its Fruit Is Sweet," accessed online at www.arabwomenconnect.org, on June 21, 2005.
[11] It should be noted that Tunisia's family law, which goes back to that country's independence era, remains uniquely progressive in the Arab world for its outright legislative prohibition of polygamy and abolition of a husband's right to his wife's obedience.
[12] Diane Singerman, "Rewriting Divorce in Egypt: Reclaiming Islam, Legal, Activism, and Coalition Politics," in *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization*, ed. Robert Hefner (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005): 161-88; and Lama Abu-Odeh, "Modernizing Muslim Family Law: The Case of Egypt," *Oxford University Comparative Law Forum* 3 (2004), accessed online at www.law.georgetown.edu, on June 28, 2005.
[13] World Bank, *Gender and Development in the Middle East and North Africa: Women in the Public Sphere* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004): 125-6.
[14] Philippe Fargues, "Women in Arab Countries: Challenging the Patriarchal System?," *Population and Societies* 387, (February 2003), accessed online at www.ined.fr, on Oct. 24, 2005.
[15] World Bank, "Unlocking the Employment Potential in the Middle East and North Africa."
[16] Gihan Shahine, "The Double Bind," *Al Ahram Weekly On-line* 397 (Oct. 1-7, 1998), accessed online at http://weekly.ahram.org, on April 18, 2005.

Acknowledgments

The research for this report was conducted in collaboration with the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo (SRC). Hoda Rashad, director of SRC; Magued Osman, former director of the Cairo Demographic Center (CDC) and currently director of the Information Agency in Egypt; and Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi, director of the MENA program at the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), prepared this report with assistance from PRB staff. Ayesha Al-Rifai of Al-Guds University in Jerusalem contributed to the discussion of the Palestinian marriage patterns and reviewed the brief.

Special thanks are due to Marwan Khawaja of the American University in Beirut, Diane Singerman of the American University in Washington, and Nadereh Chamlou of the World Bank, who reviewed this brief and made useful suggestions. Thanks are also due to Sara Adkins-Blanch, Lori Ashford, and Nancy Yinger of PRB (who commented on and edited different revisions of this brief) and to Eman Mostafa of SRC (who worked on data tabulations).

This brief has been funded by the Ford Foundation office in Cairo.

POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU
1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 520 ▪ Washington, DC 20009 USA
Tel.: 202-483-1100 ▪ Fax: 202-328-3937 ▪ E-mail: popref@prb.org ▪ Website: www.prb.org