

Opinions and attitudes of the Palestinian community in Ramallah district towards pre-marital test

Abstract

This study tries to shed light on Palestinians' attitudes towards pre-marital test. Yet the second study in Palestine, it is one of few studies in the Arab World that examine the public's opinion on this issue and their influence on legislations that govern marriage. As mentioned above, this is the second study of its kind in Palestine. The one that preceded it was dedicated to explore decision makers' attitudes and opinion towards pre-marriage tests provided for in the Public Health Law of 2000.

The study aims at exploring the target group's (Ramallah District) level of awareness of genetic and transmitted sexual diseases resulting from failure to enforce the Law. Besides, the study aims at examining people's attitudes towards pre-marriage tests and their willingness to undergo such tests. Additionally, it tries to measure people's knowledge of the negative consequences resulting from failure to abide by laws that regulate marriage aspects.

Qualitative and quantitative descriptive approach was used to conduct the study. Special questionnaire had been designed and distributed on a 600 persons during the period from April to June 2005. Preparations for the study started in January 2005. The sample of the study included school principals, teachers, and families of students at the same schools, social activists, and members of local services committees in refugee camps, members of youth centers, members of village councils, social dignitaries and university students. It was a purposive non-random one.

Data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences program (SPSS). Results showed that people are knowledgeable of thalassemia, congenital deafness and AIDS. Knowledge of other diseases related to pre-marriage tests is poor. Of the different communities that the study targeted, city inhabitants had the richest knowledge of diseases. 68% of the sample have good knowledge of congenital diseases while 25% of the sample know about widespread communicable sexual diseases in Palestine. Among the refugee camp community low percentage of the refugee sample know about these diseases. 95% of sample is convinced of the necessity of the pre-marriage and 98% are convinced of the test and are willing to undergo it. No significant difference in this respect was noticed between the targeted residential areas (city, camp and village).

The provisions of the Law are accepted by people. Parents agree that their sons and daughters equally undergo the tests. Most of the surveyed persons agree that pre-marriage tests decrease the widespread of congenital and transmitted diseases. There is a consensus among the study community that the test is important. They believe that the test must be done regardless of its cost and the social and psychological consequences. Over 60% of the surveyed persons believe that the marriage decisions should not be solely taken by couples, especially if tests reveal that one of them suffers serious disease like AIDS. At the same time others must not influence couples with respect to their marriage decision. They should be informed of the negative consequences if they do not undergo the tests or if they marry while one of them suffers serious disease. It is, therefore, important that marriage is governed by a law.

Most of the surveyed persons believe that pre-marriage tests are not in contravention with the marriage rituals. They believe that the couples should be separated if one of them suffers from serious disease like AIDS or a serious genetic disease. They believe

that couples should not be separated if one of them suffers from less serious congenital disease.

The results of the study had been presented to decision makers. A workshop was also conducted to present the results of the study. Representatives from local NGOs and government organizations participated in the workshop. Participants believed that most of the Palestinian society is convinced of the necessity of pre-marriage tests and stressed the need for a law that regulates them. They recommended that that awareness campaigns be launched to raise people's awareness with respect to congenital diseases and tests required to be done before marriage and pre-marriage test law. Further, this should be carried out along with other steps to raise decision makers' awareness in this regard. Participants stressed the need to use media to educate people about such tests and consequences that may result from failure to do them. Special focus should be given to high school students.