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LIFE ASPIRATIONS OF PALESTINIAN WOMEN

Introduction

Over the last forty years, life goals and success have become loaded terms in many disciplines including social sciences, education, and psychology. Most people are filled up with many life goals and expectations; some of these expectations will be positive versus negative outcomes (6).

Historically, aspirations have focused on the career and educational ambitions of young people. However, aspirations are multidimensional, encompassing a range of future desires from personal needs to collective duties (16).

Aspirations usually connote the achievement of something high or great, and address both present and future perspectives. In this sense, aspirations can be defined as an individual's ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals (27). As originally construed by Campbell (8), satisfaction in a given domain depends on the net balance between aspirations and attainments.

Moreover, aspirations do not exist within a vacuum, but rather occur within a social context. Individuals draw their aspirations from the lives of others around them (28). Sociologically, society consists of several communities, which interact with one another in a systematic manner and share stable and organized social relations. They share joint interests and goals governed by a group of values, customs, traditions and norms, which organize their behavior and relationships to guarantee the survival and sustainability of the society. Every group is characterized by the interest of its members in certain behavioral norms based on their own values to distinguish them from members of other societal groups; each group exerts pressure on its members to hold fast to these norms in order to preserve and sustain their group entity (22; 4).

Background and Literature Review

The concept of aspirations refer to life goals and strong desire to achieve something, such as success or distinction, wealth, status, a happy life, excitement and seeing the world. Rogers (29) emphasized that goals and values may be more or less organismically based, and that this was related to psychological health.

According to the online Oxford Dictionary (23), aspirations are the hope or ambition of achieving something. Yet an aspiration is not just a plan a person will start working out knowing with reasonable confidence that it will succeed; rather, there may be a greater element of hope and of not knowing whether it will work out (10).

Furthermore, MacBrayne (21) defines aspiration as an individual's desire to obtain a status object or goal such as a particular occupation or level of education, while Gutrman and Akerman (16) follow Quaglia and Cobb (27) and use a definition of aspirations that reflects the ability to set future goals while being inspired in the present to work towards these goals.

Pragmatism or rationality is also embodied in a definition of aspirations as a future goal in which an individual is willing to invest time, money and effort based on the belief that individuals assess opportunities, constraints and risks, making efficient choices to maximize satisfactions and minimize dissatisfactions (37; 20).

Additionally, Furlong and Biggart (12) note that until the 1980s, there were two main theoretical approaches to occupational aspirations: developmental approaches, where individuals are understood to seek careers compatible with their self-concepts; and opportunity structure approaches, where it is assumed that few individuals fulfill their aspirations, so the focus shifts to the occupational opportunities in a given context.

The definition of aspirations originates in psychological approaches following a social cognitive framework of development, introduced by Bandura (7), based on theories of achievement motivation, which recognize that people have a conscious desire to perform well and reach high internal standards of excellence and a desire to innovate. Besides, in achievement people highly prefer to take responsibility for their actions, set challenging goals, and need a lot of feedback (1; 9; 20).

The theory of circumscription and compromise offered by Gottfredson (13) provides a useful framework for understanding developmental shifts in aspirations. Gottfredson (13) outlines four developmental processes that are necessary for understanding the progression of aspirations and occupational choices as children mature into adolescents. The first process represents the cognitive growth that children experience in their preschool years (ages 3 to 5), in which they progress from magical to intuitive thinking. The second process is the orientation to sex roles (ages 6 to 8). Children at this stage have begun to view their occupational aspirations through concrete, visible attributes including masculine and feminine roles. While the third process involves circumscription, which entails the progressive elimination of least-favored alternatives (ages 9 to 13), as children grow older, they are able to think abstractly and become more aware of status hierarchies. Finally, the fourth process occurs in adolescence (ages 14 and older). In this stage, adolescents consider occupations that would be personally fulfilling but are within acceptable social spheres.

By the same token, Gutman and Akerman (16) argued that aspirations begin to be shaped early in a child's life, but are modified by experience and the environment. Aspirations tend to decline as children mature, in response to their growing understanding of the world and what is possible and to constraints imposed by previous choices and achievements.

Additionally, aspirations can be expressed individually or collectively; aspirations are not properties of persons simply waiting to be uncovered; rather, aspirations are formed at the moment we start to contemplate them; and aspirations are dynamic and aspirations differ from the notion of preferences (10). In this context, Schaefer and Meece (33) indicated that aspirations play an important role in influencing how young people make life choices, how they think and feel about themselves and ultimately their life outcomes.

Moreover, Gutman and Akerman (16) indicated that there are a number of key players in supporting aspirations, particularly parents, whose early influence can be crucial, in addition to schools, which have a key role to play, and the involvement in extracurricular activities may enhance educational and occupational aspirations.

The Aspiration Index introduced by Kasser and Ryan (17) was the most established measure of life goals. The 104-question scale assesses two broad aspirations: extrinsic life aspirations include wealth, fame, and appearance, while intrinsic life aspirations include personal growth, relationships and community contributions. The Aspiration Index is a flexible tool, different

versions of which (15; 17; 18; 19; 31; 35) have been commonly used to evaluate the hypotheses central to the self-determination theory (30).

Life aspirations constructs have received increasing attention in social sciences, psychology and educational studies in recent decades. In a recent study, Schewel (34) finds that aspirations to stay is generally positively related to being married and having children and negatively related to having only primary level education, while gender, age, household financial situation and rural/urban settings are not in themselves significant predictors of the preference to stay for young adults. The study of Toshinori et al. (38) suggested that adolescents' communality aspiration is important in maintaining secure attachment and indirectly subsequent healthy psychological adjustment.

Furthermore, Conradie and Robeyns (10) did not find any evidence of adaptation of the women's aspirations, and argue that the absence of such adaptation might be a result of active capability selection, reflection, deliberation, and the exercise of agency throughout the action research program. While, findings of Romero et al. (30) showed that high scores for subjective well-being are related to high scores for intrinsic aspirations and, to a lesser extent, to low scores for extrinsic aspirations; intrinsic aspirations are mainly related to positive indicators of well-being, whereas extrinsic aspirations are mainly associated with negative indicators; and intrinsic/extrinsic aspirations can predict subjective well-being.

Additionally, the study of Graham (14) found that while girls aspire to go to college, there may be some threats to their ability to attain or complete those aspirations. While Plagnol and Easterlin (26) concluded that at the beginning of the adult life course women are more satisfied than men with both their financial situation and family life; at the end, they are less satisfied.

To sum up, aspirations are personal and dynamic concept; aspirations may mean different things to different people and they are formed and develop in response to different socio-cultural environments and circumstances (20). In spite of extensive studies on aspirations worldwide, the empirical test of such assumptions of Palestinian women is clearly needed. Women constitute a high and increasing proportion of the Palestinian society, with around 50 percent of the continent's total population currently women.

Purpose and Scope

Life goals and values are cultural specific; measures of aspirations were secured for both Palestinians in general and women in particular. To address these issues, an attempt was made in order to get an accurate understanding of aspirations among Palestinian women.

The present study will enable us to determine the extent to which aspirations predict well-being; how many aspiration domains exist among Palestinian women; and if aspirations were associated with current demographic breakdown variables. The study is considered to be the first of its kind, to the author knowledge, and one of the leading studies that demonstrated how aspirations are influenced by the reality of women's daily lives in the Palestinian occupied society.

Definition of Terms

Aspirations: aspirations is a strong desire to achieve something high or great (16).

Women: the term women, refers to females over fifteen years of age regardless of their social, legal status, race, religion, class or any other factor.

Limitations

The population of the present study was limited to females over fifteen years of age, in the West Bank, Palestine during 2017.

Hypotheses

Taking into consideration the set objectives, questions, and variables of the study, the study addresses the main hypotheses:

There are no statistical significant differences at $\alpha \leq 0.05$ in life aspirations of Palestinian women according to their age, religion, marital and work status, number of children, place of residence, and educational level.

Delimiting variables to the scope of the study based on participants' demographic characteristics include age, religion, marital and work status, number of children, place of residence, and educational level, in addition to the life aspirations index.

Methodology and Design

The current study used a quantitative approach using a questionnaire, appropriate to the exploratory nature of the research.

The overall sample composed of three hundred eighty-four women over fifteen years of age randomly selected. The sample size was calculated using the sampling website (<http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>), sample size calculator, with a margin error of 0.05. The target population consisted of Palestinian women in the West Bank during 2017, which included 673244 women (25).

Instrumentation

Index of a 30-item scale used to measure women's aspirations that was developed by the researcher, based on Aspiration Index introduced by Kasser and Ryan (17), taken into consideration the cultural appropriateness in the Palestinian society. 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither, disagree and strongly disagree) was used to measure responses. Participants were approached in the West Bank by trained researchers and were asked to complete the questionnaire. The interviews were conducted in the household with women who were more than fifteen years of age. The sampling survey instrument sought background information about participants' age, religion, marital and work status, number of children, place of residence, and educational level.

Validation of the instrument proceeded in two distinct phases. The initial phase involved a small focus group session (N=24); while the second phase involved the implementation of a pilot study (N=45) to validate the survey using exploratory factor analysis. Factor loading for all items exceeded 0.60 (0.62 to 0.83), which means that those items were suitable in measuring every item of aspirations of Palestinian women.

The reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha and Guttman split-half coefficients to ascertain reliability and consistency of the survey. Cronbach's Alpha and Guttman split-half for the survey instrument was 0.86 and 0.84, respectively, indicating good reliability and consistency.

The demographic breakdown of the participants were age, religion, marital and work status, number of children, place of residence, and educational level. In total, three hundred eighty-four women and three focus groups were interviewed. Respondents were between 15 and 68 years of age (M 33.48, SD 11.32); and the vast majority (87%) were Muslims. As for marital status, the majority (67.2%) was married; and having on average of 5.05 children, with a range of 1 to 15 (SD 2.97). Half (52.3%) of the participants were rural, 31% urban, while the remaining 16.7% were from refugee camps. Almost 58.3% of the participants had a college or undergraduate degree; and only 22.4% were employed.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data analyses were undertaken using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20. The questionnaire items were rated on a 1–5 Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree). The highest score indicates a stronger level of life aspirations. Descriptive statistics gauged level of life aspirations among the sampled population. Additionally, the following statistical techniques were measured Regression, T-test, One-way analysis of variance, Tukey test, Cronbach's Alpha, Guttman Split-Half Coefficient and Factor Analysis.

The mean score of life aspirations scale as reported by the sample of three hundred and eighty-four participants was moderate (M 3.56, SD 0.44). The total score showed that almost 71.2% of the women indicated moderate level of life aspirations. Furthermore, findings revealed the indicators of life aspirations of Palestinian women ranked in a descending order as follows: “I go to realize my goals by myself” (M 4.09, SD 0.87); “I put for myself life goals and work to achieve them” (M 4.05, SD 0.86); “I have the ability to carry responsibility” (M 4.03, SD 1.04). Moreover, the Palestinian women indicated that they “tend to support innovation and change in their life” (M 4.01, SD 0.97); “realizing that success needs continuous hard work” (M 3.96, SD 1.00); “expecting success in what others fail attaining” (M 3.90, SD 0.90); and “keep busy thinking of my future” (M 3.84, SD 0.91). Furthermore, participants indicated that they are seeking to have a distinguished role in the group duties given to them (M 3.83, SD 0.97); they have clear objectives in life (M 3.81, SD 0.99); and they like to start something nobody has done it before them (M 3.80, SD 0.94).

Furthermore, the study explored demography breakdown over life aspirations of Palestinian women with the aim of identifying any differences. Findings show that religion and work status do not indicate any significant differences. However, it was revealed that marital status, place of residence, educational level, number of children, and age are significant variables. In relation to marital status, the differences were in favor of single women (M 3.67, SD 0.46) compared to (M 3.52, SD 0.43) for married participants: F-value was (6.190 P=0.000). As for place of residence, the differences were in favor of refugee women (M 3.80, SD 0.38) compared to urban and rural participants, the average means were (M 3.64, SD 0.41), (M 3.44, SD 0.44), respectively, F-value was (18.323, P=0.000).

Furthermore, differences were found in educational level in favor of well-educated women (M 3.66, SD 0.40) compared to (M 3.29, SD 0.40) for less-educated participants: F-value was (13.789 P=0.000). Finally, findings indicated that there is statistical significant negative correlation between age, number of children and the average score of life aspirations among Palestinian women (Beta-value was (-0.223 P=0.000) and (-0.136 P=0.026), respectively).

Discussion

Findings of the current study showed that Palestinian women indicated a moderate level of life aspirations. This is considered a normal result consistently with the devalued and subordinated position of women in the Palestinian Arab society. Patriarchal ideology is deeply rooted in the Palestinian society, where the notions of father and brother are prevalent. According to these notions, male dominance supports the structure that keeps men in positions of power, authority and control. This allows for a larger space for males compared with females in relation to nature of social ranks, roles, freedom, participation in decision making, responsibility, large scale engagement in labor market and development of potentials and skills (2; 5).

In a recent report introduced by The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (24) in the anniversary of the International Women's Day, findings revealed the prevalence of traditional social norms and gender inequalities in the Palestinian patriarchal society; the high fertility rates, the continued rise in literacy among women despite the rise in literacy rates among females over the last decade. Palestinian society has yet to adopt laws prohibiting women marriage before the age of majority, namely, eighteen years of age, in addition to the direct and indirect intimate partner violence; the gap in the participation rate and average daily wages between men and women. It follows that women would likely experience a moderate level of life aspirations.

Findings show that married women scored lower life aspirations than singles, and an inverse relationship was found between number of children and life aspirations. Consequently, with increased number of children, women have more family responsibilities and deal with different problems including economic issues under the difficult living conditions prevalent in the Palestinian society and new challenges, which would agitate the stability of the family and decrease their life aspirations.

Moreover, findings revealed that refugee women had higher life aspirations than urban and rural participants. In fact, 1948 is a key date that is unerasable from the collective memory of Palestinians, the year when a country and its people disappeared from both maps and dictionaries (32; 4). Additionally, education is highly valued among Palestinian refugee women as it provides them with full awareness of the Nakba, which retained in their collective memory. Those refugee women consider education as an important mechanism by which they seek to develop their potentials, interact with others to advocate their just cause and defend it on international arena. Undoubtedly, education is a significant stage in the formation and development of one's personality; it represents a critical turning point in the women's life, which fulfills their life aspirations, meets their abilities, preferences, and interests (2).

Furthermore, findings revealed that well-educated women scored higher life aspirations than less-educated participants. In fact, education plays an important role in communication skills, social integration, and life aspirations. It also fulfills social interaction that contributes to the development of women's personality, reinforces their abilities in learning and thinking, making decisions and holding responsibility, which increase their life aspirations. In this context, Firjani (11, 3) points out that the benefits of the essential role played by higher education in the development of backward societies are much higher than the anticipated economic calculations. Higher education plays a substantial role in the formation of a higher level of human capital in the society. Higher education institutions lay the groundwork for the cognitive revolution of knowledge and sophisticated abilities, namely, higher levels of human capital, which are the main backbone for progress in this century.

The study results also revealed that religion and work status do not indicate any significant differences over life aspirations of Palestinian women. This indicates that life aspirations are not very much influenced by these variables and are more likely to be affected by other factors other than religion and work status.

Finally, an inverse relationship was found between age and life aspirations: life aspirations decline substantially among aged Palestinian women. This relationship could be linked to the fact that life aspirations are influenced by both individual and the surrounding environment; mainly, life obstacles and barriers, expectations and reality of the life possibilities, and choices and achievements. In this context, Leavy and Smith (20) indicated that the formation of aspirations tends to begin early in childhood, and aspirations are adapted and changed in light of new expe-

riences, choices and information, including an individual's awareness of their own abilities and the opportunities open to them. By the same token, Schwandt (36) indicated that young people strongly overestimate their future life satisfaction, while the elderly tend to underestimate it. In fact, it is difficult for Palestinian women to expect a lot in the Palestinian patriarchal society. The findings of the current study are similar to some findings in the related studies and contradict with others as well.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Life aspirations are considered key factors in shaping personality that brings a lot of positive impact towards the individuals and the society. According to Plagnol and Easterlin (26), both the environment close to the individual and the broader societal context influence life aspirations formation.

The present study provides new findings in terms of studying the content of women's life aspirations in the Palestinian patriarchal society. The implications of the current study will be helpful for sociologists and feminist counselors in many prospective. Consequently, a lot needs to be done in terms of women reality and aspirations. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations can be made:

1. Empowering women in the Palestinian society is an essential component to promote their life aspirations.
2. There is a need to address the Palestinian curriculum with life aspirations issues as an important mechanism in achieving good educational outcomes.
3. A comparative study of life aspirations in terms of gender issue is recommended in the Palestinian society.
4. A cross-sectional study for more understanding of life aspirations components as a basic human need in different cultures is needed.

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ბასამ იუსეფ იბრაჰიმ ბანათი
პალესტინელი ქალების ცხოვრებისეული მისწრაფებები
რეზიუმე

წარმოდგენილი ნაშრომის მთავარი მიზანი იყო პალესტინელი ქალების ცხოვრებისეული მისწრაფებების გამოკვლევა. აღნიშნულ კვლევაში მონაწილეობდა იორდანიაში მცხოვრები 385 ქალი. კვლევის შედეგები მიუთითებს, რომ პალესტინელი ქალები ავლენენ ძალიან მოკრძალებულ მისწრაფებებს. განსხვავებული აღმოჩნდა ოჯახური მდგომარეობა, საცხოვრებელი ადგილი და განათლების დონე; ცხოვრებისეულ მისწრაფებებში საპირისპირო კავშირი დაფიქსირდა ასაკსა და შვილების რაოდენობას შორის. აღნიშნული კვლევის შედეგები საინტერესო იქნება სოციოლოგებისა და ფემინიზმის შემსწავლელთათვის.

Бассам Юсеф Ибрахим Банат
Исследование жизненных устремлений палестинских женщин
Резюме

Основной целью данного исследования является изучение жизненных устремлений палестинских женщин. В исследовании приняли участие 385 женщин, проживающих в Иордании. Результаты исследования показывают, что палестинские женщины проявляют скромные устремления. Значительные различия были обнаружены в семейном положении, месте проживания и уровне образования. В жизненных устремлениях наблюдалась противоположная связь между возрастом и количеством детей. Результаты этого исследования будут полезны для социологов и исследователей феминизма.