

**A preliminary study on the impact of sanctions and war  
on  
Iraqi women's health, social, cultural and educational life**



**A study conducted by the General Federation of Iraqi Women GFIW  
And supported by  
the United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF  
January 2003**

## **A preliminary study on the impact of sanctions and war on Iraqi women's health, social, cultural and educational life**

### **Introduction :**

The emancipation of Iraqi women from all the backward bonds of the past in the times of darkness and tyranny was one of the main goals of the Iraqi state after the July Revolution. As women represent half the society and if they aren't free and aware and educated then half the public will remain underdeveloped and fettered , and any isolation of the woman or decreasing of her complete contribution in the society will deprive the nation from half its offspring and from half its mental and productive capacities , in addition to that , liberating the woman is a central base for raising the new generation and bearing their responsibilities.

The state issued a number of laws and legislations to ensure this course in the field of compulsory education and higher education and scholarships , and in the amendments of personal status laws to guarantee mother and child rights , and in the laws of retirement and social security , also in health legislations concerning basic health services offered to the mother and child .

By that the woman in Iraq achieved qualitative advances in her participation in development plans in the country during the seventies and eighties , but the enforced sanctions and the military aggressions on Iraq affected a lot of women's conditions in various fields , therefore , a lot of the achievements made in the past fell back and registered a decline in the fields of learning and education and the benefit gained from health services to mother and child , and causing by that a number of social concomitant conditions.



### **Objectives of the study**

- Probe in the demographic situation of women in Iraq
- Probe in Iraqi women's health status
- Consider Iraqi women's social and cultural conditions
- Study women's education in Iraq

### **Methodologies**

Desk review of reports and studies carried out over the past years in addition to data collected from consultative clinics affiliate of the General Federation of Iraqi Women as follows:

### **Demographic Analysis**

Revision of data collected from Annual Statistical Report issued by the Central Statistical Organization

### **Health Status**

Revision of findings of the Child and Maternal Mortality Survey carried jointly by UNICEF and the Iraqi Ministry of Health and subsequent studies done by the general Federation of Iraqi Women between ( ) and ( )

### **Economic and Social Conditions**

Revision of data collected from a study conducted by the General Federation of Iraqi Women on “Martyrs Wives” as well as records of consultative clinics of 2001.

### **The Demographic Analysis of Iraqi Woman**

According to the census of 1997 the number of females is (11058922) women who constitute (50.2%) of the total population which reaches (22017982) , while in 1990 it used to be (48.6%) , and the annual growth of the population from 1987-1997 reached the ratio of (3%) .

The rate of females aged 15 years and below declined in 1998 to (40.4%) after it was (44.2%) in 1990 . The decline of the female rate in this age group and also the male rate is due to the decline in women's fertility due to the social and economic changes and the rise in death rate due to war and the sanctions.

As for females in working age , their rate has risen from (52.1%) in 1990 to (56%) in 1998 . The rate of old age females (65) years old and more decreased from (3.7%) in 1990 to (3.6%) in 1998 .

The overall ratio of fertility in Iraq in 1987 was (6.2) newborn/woman which fell to (5.7) in 1992 and to (5.2) for the period from 1994-1997 .

The average number of the members of the Iraqi family increased from (6.5) in 1977 to (7.4) in 1987 and to (7.7) in 1997 .

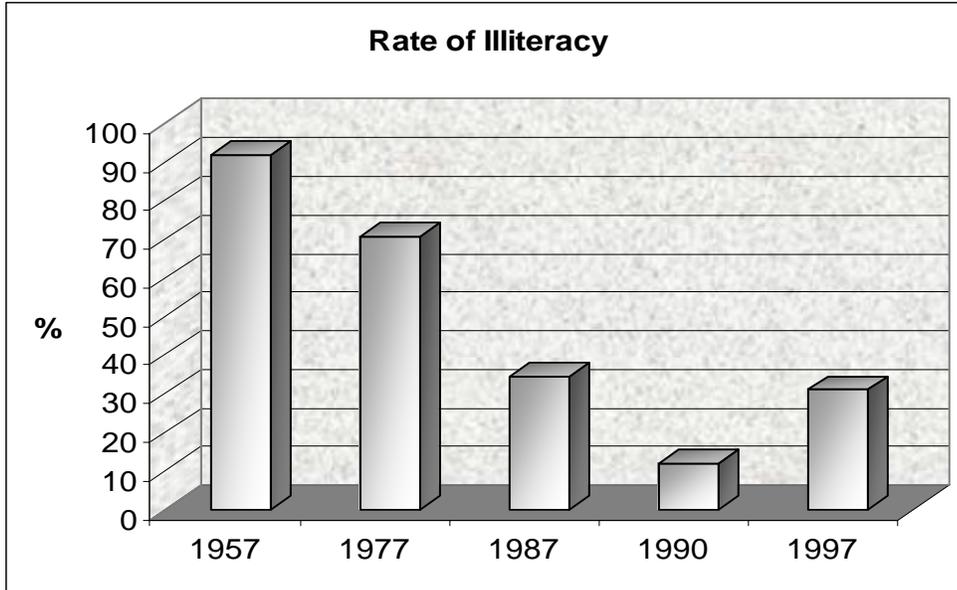
The participation of women in the work force constituted the rate of (40.3%) in 1999 after it was (34.6%) in 1990 . Women form a rate that exceeds (60%) of the total workers of the public sector in the fields of health , governmental management and teaching .

### **Education**

Education is a basic right and a prerequisite for any development plan. The government in Iraq issued a number of laws and legislations for this purpose , one of them is the law of compulsory education in 1976 which includes the joining of all citizens , male and female aged (15-45) , in the centers for the eradication of illiteracy



The law of higher education and scientific research for the year 1987 which guaranteed chances for women to gain scientific and higher education , scholarships and fellowships .



The Free Education Law made available for every one, which made the state ensure all the educational requirements for the students so that their families have less burden thus enabling children continue their studies at all the educational levels.

Because of all these procedures we see that the rate of illiteracy between females has declined from (91.8%) in 1957 to (70.7%) in 1977 and then to (34.5%) in 1987 and to (12%) in 1990. But it returned to (30.9%) in 1997 . The General Federation for Iraqi Women and its role in the illiteracy eradication campaign and in opening centers for girls education and in joining the high council and branch councils of the national comprehensive campaign for the eradication of illiteracy, had a clear effect in deepening the awareness of women about the importance of learning.

The rate of females joining secondary and vocational schools reached (24.8%) in 1997 and (35.2%) in 1987 then it retreated to (34.1%) in 1990 and to (31%) in 2000 .

As for higher education and technical Institutes , the rate of females joining this stage was in 1977 (4.3%) and rose to (6%) in 1987 and reached (7.7%) in 2000 .

On the level of higher education females formed a rate of (22.5%) from the total registers in 1987 after it was (16.6%) in 1977 and their rate became (23.6%) in 1990 and then (35.7%) in 2000 with an annual growth rate of (22.9%) in the period between (1990-2000) .

The number of female teachers and instructors in the teaching system reached (41987) in 1977 which forms (39.6%) from the total of the teaching and instructing staff , then it became in 1987 (111116) which formed (61.1%) of the whole and it reached (129210) in 1990 which formed (66.9%) of the whole , the number reached (141860) in 2000 with a rate of (65.2%) of the whole .

## **Social Life**

First: Family and Legal Consultation Centers :

All Federation branches and through the units of social activities they followed up the family problems , and to advance the performance in this area , centers for the family and legal consultation were established in some branches which include a number of volunteer lawyers and social workers .

In a study of these problems in 2001 which were presented by (39) Federation branches it appeared that the number of problems was (32842) , which means that the rate of problems for every branch is (842) , that is in a ratio of 70 problems /month . The underneath table clarifies the distribution of the main problems.

<b><u>Problem</u></b>	<b><u>Number</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Economic	20227	61.6
Social	4686	14.3
Health	4467	13.6
Familial	2517	7.7
Legal	442	1.3
Civil	265	0.8
Miscellaneous	238	0.7
Total	32842	100%

It appears through the table that the economic problems occupy the first rank which reflects the effect of the economic sanctions and war on Iraq .

The distribution of the economic problems according to their kinds was as follows :

<b><u>Economic problem</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Asking for financial assistance	51.9
Asking for a job	21.4
Need for training	11.5
Asking for a sewing machine	5.6
Large number of children to be supported	2.6
Asking for welfare grants	1.7
Asking for accommodation	1.4
Asking for loans	0.8
Addiction of the husband on alcohol	0.5
Alimony	0.4
Inheritance	0.1
Others	0.08

Through the above problems, it is clear that there is a need to increase the family's income and to provide scientific and effective programs to safeguard the integration of the family.

The social problems presented are distributed according to the underneath table :

<b><u>Social problem</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Welfare grants	17.42
Divorce problems	15.51
Familial and social problems and conflicts	12.42
Custody and attendance	9.99
Marital problems	9.3
Care within teaching	8.26
Alimony	7.96
Inheritance and rights disagreements	6.55
Husband's bad treatment	5.12
Parent's interference	3.76
Husband's desertion	2.92
Others	0.74

Health problems were distributed as follows :

<b><u>Health problem</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
General health problems	76.11
Asking for treatment in the country	11.62
Treatment of infertility	3.47
Asking for medicine	3.13
Asking for free examination	2.09
Incurable diseases	1.92
Neurological diseases	0.51
Treatment outside the country	0.31
Others	0.8

As for the legal and civil problems , they were distributed as follows :

<b><u>Legal problem</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Legal	46.77
Civil	28.04
Miscellaneous	25.08

The consultations that were presented to the centers and their kinds and the percentage of their accomplishment was in 2001 as follows :

<b><u>Problem</u></b>	<b><u>Number</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>	<b><u>Accomplished number</u></b>
Economic	2067	45.23	1995
Social and familial	1991	43.57	1655
Health	373	8.16	360
Legal and civil	138	3.02	108
Total	4569	100%	4118

Therefore , the level of accomplished or solved problems is 90.12% .

Second: The problems of women who attend for their families ( martyr's wives ) .

The General Federation for Iraqi Women carried out a study in 2001 on a number of martyr's wives to examine the problems they face . The features of the sample which were (200) were as follows :

<b><u>Age group</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
20-24 yrs.	1.5
25-29	4
30-34	9
35-39	20
40-44	26.5
45-49	25.5
50 and more	13.5

<b><u>Occupation</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Housewife	52.5
Civil servant	42.0
Private sector	5.5

<b><u>Social status</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Widow	90.5
Second marriage	9.5
Divorcee	Nil

<b><u>Children</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
With children	92
Without children	8

<b><u>Economic level</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Poor	20.5
Middle	65.5
Above middle	6
Well-to-do	8

<b><u>Accommodation status</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Independent	63
With family	30.5
With in-laws	6.5

<b><u>Educational level</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Illiterate	19.5
Reads and writes	8.5
Primary	16.5
Intermediate	9
Secondary	11
Institute	18
College	14.5
Higher education	3

<b><u>Number of marriage years before widowhood</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Less than one year	2
1-4	37.5
5-9	29
10-14	22
15-19	5
20 and more	4.5

From the tables above it is clear that most women of the sample were over 40 and half of them were housewives, most of them never got married again and declare a number of children , two thirds of the sample live in a separate house and at a middle economic class , and more than half the sample have an intermediate education and below :

<b><u>Activity</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
Reading	13.5
Watching television	15.7
With the children and their affairs	48.6
Outings	2.2
Visits	20.1

The kind of activity was related with the educational level of the woman , where half the illiterate and those with a little education were concerned with their children while half the women with a higher lever were interested in reading .

When studying the problems that the sample were suffering from , it was as follows :

<b><u>Problem</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage</u></b>
None	5.4
Economic	59
Social	16.7
Emotional	3.7
Psychological	15.1

From this table we find that the most important problem they faced was the economic one which led to their impoverishment due to the imposed economic sanctions which led to the aggravation of their crisis because of the husband's absence who is the breadwinner of the family , and because of the devaluation of this family's pension in addition to the economic inflation . As for the relationships between the members of these families , it was found that they were good in the small families which lived in a separate house with a middle economic class or more , while the conflict increased in the larger families that lived with the husband's family and at a less than middle economic class .

In a study of the sample's view about the others , the result was as follows :

<u>View about others</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Good people who offer help	19.5
Offer limited help	21.2
Their help is only by words	20.3
Everyone is concerned by his affairs	34.4
Most are passive towards the sample	4.6

Therefore, it appears that the women of the sample were expecting a much larger social support than what they were getting and this shows the rate of their need for others and their attachment to what is offered to them from support and care.

The table also shows that the woman's conception of herself through the others' view of her isn't marked by passivity.

### The Health Field :

The continuation of the sanctions led to the aggravation of such cases as malnutrition and infections and the increase in mortality rate – maternal mortality in 1999 was 294/100000 live birth after it was 117/100000 in 1990 .

The rate of newborns weighing less than 2.5 kg rose from (5%) of the total newborns before the sanctions to (22%) in 1995 then it fell to (12.3%) in 2000 , while the average weight of the newborn was 3.4 kg in 1990 . In a study prepared by the General Federation of Iraqi Women , it was found that (51%) of the women were suffering from anaemia , (31.7%) of married women had a miss-carriage , (9.6%) had one still-born , (5.1%) had more than one still-born , (1.7%) were disabled .|

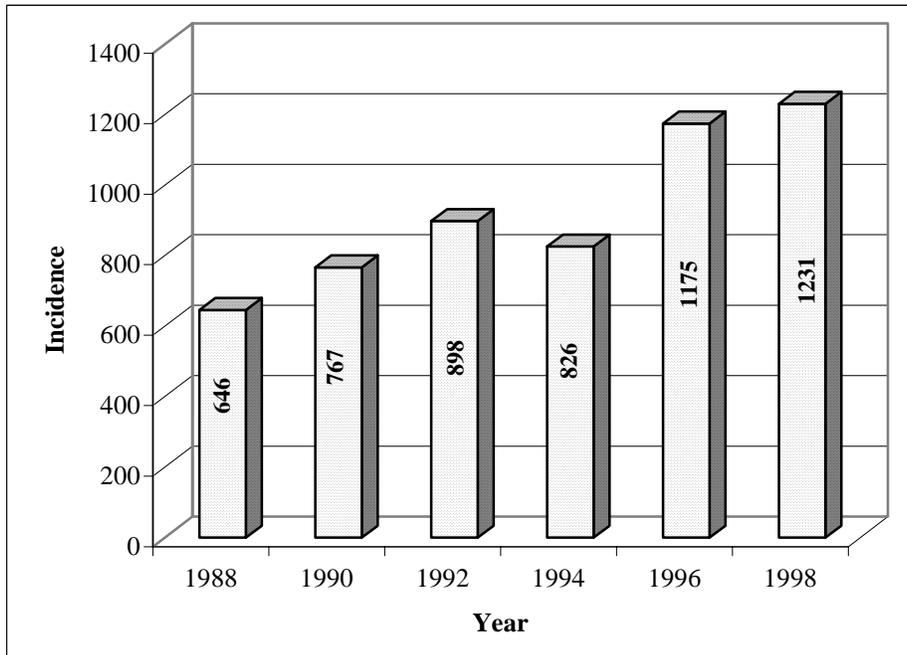
Also because the United States , in its aggression against Iraq used depleted uranium in a quantity that equals (300-350) tons which caused an increase in the cases of miss-carriage and sterility , goiter , congenital



abnormalities like eye deformities , mongolism , enlargement of organs , head enlargement, trisomy , also scaling of the skin .

The rate of killer cancer cases increased (6) times than it was before like , leukemia , lymphoma and bronchogenic carcinoma ( lung cancer ) and between females the rate of breast cancer increased were the no. of cases has increased 2 folds since 1988 , Were 36% of these cases occurred in age groups below 35 years.

as shown in the table



Because of the enforced sanctions and the subjection of the infrastructures to the aggression , this led to an increase in infectious and transitional diseases and the appearance of some diseases like cholera . On the level of mother and child health care services , we see that the specialized centers became (640) in 1998 after they were (360) in 1987 , (11) obstetric and pediatric hospitals and (9) hospitals for gynecology , obstetrics and infertility .

Female doctors in 2000 were (38.4%) and female dentists were (59.4%) and female pharmacists (69%) , and females in other health professions were (34.7%) .

The General Federation for Iraqi Women established (25) clinics for obstetrical health and Iraqi family planning .

The number of females who benefited from these services in 2001 was (117596) . It also contributed in health teaching and education through seminars , meetings and training sessions in addition to the transmission of T.V and Radio reports and messages .

### **The Cultural and Information Field**

The rate of women working in the mass media increased , where the number of female journalists in the union for journalists reached (200) women who represent (5.7%) , in addition to that , there are (3) editors . It is also noted that (50%) of the total students of the department of information

are females and the union had adopted some procedures to accomplish its educational and informational goals like :

1. Conducting cultural forums for women in Baghdad and the provinces . Since the cultural forum for women in Baghdad – Al Resafa was established and then another one in Al Karkh and then establishing conventions were conducted for a cultural forum for every province , this made them (16) cultural forums , aiming towards enabling innovative women and in all scientific , literary and artistic aspects to find opportunities to develop this creativity and to increase the education of local women by their intellectual , cultural and scientific accomplishments in what serves woman's causes and her needs .
2. Issuing Al-Gender weekly newspaper in 2002 which aims at broadening knowledge in the concept of Gender and considers the newspaper as one of the communication media that provides a chance to offer the culture of Gender and the activities associated with it . The number of issues published until March 2003 were (35) issues .
3. Issuing the woman's magazine since 1980 which stopped in 1991 then was re-issued in 1999 , and which is considered one of the important means of the union to reach society and women . It is also the first step that led to establishing ( Woman's House for Journalism and Publishing ) which cares about all the publications that concern women . It also participated in training a lot of female journalists and media personnel .
4. The number of subjects issued about the woman in the daily Iraqi press from (1996-2001) was (7443) subjects . The daily newspapers also published from (1999-1/7/2001) (1857) articles and reports written by women and (1647) written by men , these dealt with various aspects of the life of the woman and her aims and achievements .
5. Radio and T.V. programs : the union had specialized radio programs like ( With You My Lady ) , ( The Sun of Prosperity ) , ( Ishtar ) , ( She , the World ) . There were also television programs like ( The Woman's Horizons ) , ( Mirrors ) . In addition to that there are variety programs in the radio and the televised messages and films about the woman and about the union's news and activities . But most of these programs stopped because of the sanctions and the lack of resources , although , these programs were some of the important means to increase women's perception and education and in all aspects .