

MODERNIZATION AND FAMILY STRUCTURE IN KUWAIT

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Abstract.

Individuals traditionally prefer to marry those with whom they share tribal, clan, or lineage affiliations. In this paper we examine the effects of modernization and urbanization on family structure in Kuwait. We examine spousal attitudes towards such cultural and social trends as number of children, age of marriage, bride dowry, and age differences.

Consanguineous as well as non-consanguineous marriages are examined on these variables. The confounding factor of educational level is also analyzed.

The 242 couples (484 persons) included in this study were divided into three groups according to marriage type: (1) 200 persons (100 pairs) in first - and double-cousin marriages; (2) 160 persons (80 couples) in second- and less-than-second-cousin marriages; and (3) 124 persons (62 couples) in non-consanguineous marriages.

The SPSS package was used for data analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to examine the data.

Couples in first - and double-cousin marriages or in second- and less-than- second-cousin marriages tend to marry earlier than non-consanguineous couples. There are significant differences among couples in first and double cousin marriage, second cousin marriages and non relatives regarding age at marriage, bride dowry, number of children, and in their attitudes regarding the ideal age of marriage.

Education plays an important role in spouse selection. This may be an indicator of the changes in spousal selection criteria. The data show that the family structure in Kuwait is affected by modernity.

Introduction:

Consanguineous marriage, a characteristic of Arab societies (Bittles, 1995; Bittles et al., 1991), is related to the existence and spread of the tribes and clans who trace their roots to the Bedouins (Al-Sakawi, 1996). Individuals traditionally prefer to marry those with whom they share tribal, clan, or lineage affiliations. Despite relatively recent social and cultural changes, consanguineous marriage, especially to first and

second cousins, is preferred in many Arab societies (Al-Sakawi, 1996). Bittles (1995) found the main reasons for consanguineous marriage in the Middle East to be family tradition, maintenance of family structure and property and strengthening of family ties, financial advantage, ease of marital arrangements, better relationships between a wife and her in-laws, and enhanced marriage stability and durability.

Consanguineous marriage has an incidence of 20% to over 50% in Middle Eastern societies (Bittles, 1995). In Beirut, in 1984, 25% of marriages were consanguineous (Khlat and Halabi, 1986). Hammamy and Hakkak (1989) found that 46.4% of 4491 marriages in Iraq were consanguineous. Two studies in Bahrain found the incidence of consanguinity to be 31.8% and 45.5%, respectively. Three studies in Jordan found the percentage of consanguineous marriage to range from 39.7% to 52.1% and four studies in Saudi Arabia found a range of 31.4% to 55.0% (Bittles, 1995). In Lebanon, Khlat (1988) found that the incidence of consanguinity is 16.5% among Christians and 29.6% among Muslims. In Iran, consanguinity among Muslims is 24.3% and Jews is 25.5% high compared with other groups. Among Zoroastrians it is 17.0%, among Assyrians 9.3%, and among Armenians, consanguinity is 2.8%. In Israel, consanguinity among Muslims is 39.7% and 28.8% among Christians (Bittles, 1995).

Consanguineous Marriage in Kuwait:

Al-Awadi et al. (1985) found that in Kuwait for 5007 Kuwaiti females 15 years and older the rate of consanguineous marriage was 54.3% with an estimated total population incidence of 52.9% to 55.7%. First cousin marriages (cousins on the father's or the mother's sides) totalled 30.2%. Paternal first cousin marriages constituted 18.5% of the total marriages and 60% of first cousin marriages. Second (cousins on both the mother's and father's sides) and other cousin marriages constituted 20.8% of the total marriages. Non-consanguineous marriages constituted 45.7% of the total marriages. Al-Thakeb (1982) reported that among 526 heads of households in Kuwait, 48% are married to relatives, and 79% married first cousins.

El-Najjar (1996) stated that the paternal uncle's daughter is the most favored marriage "followed by marriage with a paternal cousin of the second degree and, finally, marriage with a more distant cousin who is nevertheless a member of the same patrilineage"; (p. 280). The

paternal uncle's daughter is highly preferred among Bedouins. Because most Kuwaitis are from tribal groups, this partner choice is highly prevalent. In most Arab countries, a man has more right than does anyone else to marry his paternal uncle's daughter.

In Kuwait, the occurrence of consanguineous marriage is related to educational level; consanguineous marriage in Kuwait is least common among the more educated people; (Al-Thakeb, 1982). Only 30% of college educated respondents preferred to marry their relatives while the preference was 68% among illiterates. Socioeconomic status is an important factor in such marriages; 59% of the lower class in al-Thakeb's study preferred a consanguineous union. Al-Thakeb (1985) states that "the ideology of the Western nuclear family has influenced some segments of the population, namely, the upper and the upper-middle socioeconomic strata, the educated, and the young" (P.579).

The main goal of this paper is assessing how modernization affects the structure of the Kuwaiti family. This assessment is done by examining three types of marriages; first and double cousin marriage, second and less than second marriage and non - consanguineous marriage. Three major hypotheses were tested:

- 1 - There are significant differences among the three types of marriages in their attitudes and behaviors regarding some family structure variables.
- 2 - There is a significant correlation between couples in consanguineous marriages in their attitudes related to the fertility, while there is no such correlation among couples in non-consanguineous marriages.
- 3 - Education level plays a major role and affects spousal selection criteria.

In this paper we examine the effects of modernization and urbanization on family structure in Kuwait. We examine spousal attitudes towards such cultural and social attitudes as number of desired children, ideal number of children, actual number of children, ideal age of marriage, actual age of marriage, bride dowry, and age differences. First and double cousin marriages and second and less than second cousin marriages, as well as non-consanguineous marriages are examined on these variables. The confounding factor of educational level is also analyzed.

Methodology:

The 242 couples (484 persons) included in this study were divided into three marriage types: (1) 200 persons (100 pairs) in first- and double-cousin marriages; (2) 160 persons (80 couples) in second- and less-than-second-cousin marriages, and (3) 124 persons (62 couples) in non-consanguineous marriages. All participants were aged 21 to 78 years old and all are from the Al-Kandari kin group, one of the largest kin groups in Kuwait. Al-Kandaris migrated in large numbers to Kuwait from southwestern Iran, the eastern coast of the Arabian Gulf, beginning in the early 20th century. Table#1 describes the gender variable and the education level of the sample.

Table#1: Gender and Level of Education Crosstabulation

		Level of Education								Total
		Neither Read nor Write	Read and Write	Elemen- tary	Inter- mediate	Second- ary De- gree	Univer- sity or College Degree	Gradu- ate	Profes- sional Degree	
Men	N	4	11	3	38	40	55	65	26	242
	%	1.7%	4.5%	1.2%	15.7%	16.5%	22.7%	26.9%	10.7%	100.0%
Women	N	20	15	6	14	33	66	86	2	242
	%	8.3%	6.2%	2.5%	5.8%	13.6%	27.3%	35.5%	.8%	100.0%
Total	N	24	26	9	52	73	121	151	28	484
	%	5.0%	5.4%	1.9%	10.7%	15.1%	25.0%	31.2%	5.8%	100.0%

A questionnaire was used to collect the cultural data. Completing the questionnaire took 30 to 45 minutes for each subject. Demographic variables were collected, as were respondents' attitudes on multiple variables. The questionnaire included several variables related to a research project concentrating on the Kuwaiti family structure. A pilot study has been done before collecting data. The questionnaire was prepared with assistance from faculty in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Kuwait University and the Department of Anthropology at The Ohio State University. These individuals read and answered the questionnaire to assure clarity and feasibility of each question.

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked closed questions regarding their age at marriage, the amount of bride dowry (Paid in advance or paid later), ideal age of marriage, number of children, number of desired children, and ideal number of children in the average family. All variables were treated as interval variables and were subjected to ANOVA and correlation analysis.

The SPSS package was used for data analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to examine the data. Descriptive statistics examined general information and helped assess participant's attitudes and behavior. Means and standard deviations were obtained for the quantitative variables. Pearson correlation measured the degree of spousal concordance in the three marriage types regarding their attitudes on desired number of children for their family and the ideal number of children. One-way ANOVA measured attitudes and behavior in matters related to marriage: such as the ideal marriage age for men and women, age at marriage, bride dowry (advance, later, and total), concept of the ideal number of children, and age differences between spouses.

Results:

Before illustrating differences among the three types of marriages with some variables, it is important to discuss the educational level of the sample and how it is related to marriage type. It is vital to see if there are any differences among the three marriage types in terms of their educational level. Table#2 illustrates types of marriages in the sample by education level.

Table#2: Gender and Level of Education Crosstabulation

Marriage Type		Read and write or less	Elementary	Intermediate	Secondary	University or College	Grad.	Profs.	Total
1 st & Double	N	22	4	28	34	48	60	4	200
	%	11.0	2.0	14.0	17.0	24.0	30.0	2.0	41.3
2nd & Less	N	26	5	19	24	36	41	9	160
	%	16.3	3.1	11.9	15.0	22.5	25.6	5.6	33.1
Non-Consang	N	2	-	5	15	37	50	15	124
	%	1.6	-	4.0	12.1	29.8	40.3	12.1	25.6
Total	N	50	9	52	73	121	151	28	484
	%	10.3	1.9	10.7	15.1	25.0	31.2	5.8	100.0

Most non-consanguineous couples have a higher level of education than couples in first- and double-cousin marriages (type one marriage) or the second- and other-cousin marriages (type two marriage). Around 82.2% of the couples in non-consanguineous marriages have at least a university or a college degree. Slightly more than 12% (12.1%) of couples in a non-consanguineous marriage have a professional degree, while only 2% of those in first-cousin marriages and 5.6% in second and less than second cousin marriages have a professional degree. Non-consanguineous couples are the youngest segment of our sample and have had the greatest access to education. 56%, of the type one marriage sample, and 53.7% of the type two marriage sample have a university, graduate school, or another professional degree. The least educated (those who can only read and write or less) participants were in first and double cousin marriages and the second and less than second cousin marriage groups. They constitute 11% and 16.3% of the sample respectively, while only 1.6% of those in a non-consanguineous marriage have a minimal education. The samples are generally negatively skewed in terms of education level. This is strongly related to the young age of the sample. Younger people have had a greater chance for higher education, both within Kuwait and the Arab world and in Europe and the U.S. Older individuals have had fewer chances to become educated. This is probably most true for older female respondents in our sample.

Among marriage types, attitudes towards fertility have been measured. Respondents were asked what they thought was the ideal number of children in the average family as well as the number of children they desired, to assess if there are differences among the three types of marriage in attitudes concerning fertility and preferred family size. Attitudes regarding family and fertility were measured. The results appear in Table#3.

Table#3: Correlation between couples in each marriage type by attitudes about fertility

Marriage Type	Attitudes Related to Fertility	
	No. of Children Desired in of Your Family	Ideal No. of Children in the Average Family
First & Double Cousin Marriage	.30** (n = 100)	.35*** (n = 100)
Second & less than Second Cousin Marriage	.65*** (n = 80)	.25* (n = 80)
Non-Consanguineous Marriage	.22 (n = 62)	.26 (n = 62)

*** P < .001 , ** P < .01 , * P < .05

Respondents were asked two questions regarding their attitudes toward the number of children: "How many children do you consider most desirable?" and "What is the ideal number of children in an average family?" Couples in first and double cousin marriages show a moderate concordance in answers for the question concerning desired number of children ($r = .30; p < .01$) and for the ideal number of children in the average family ($r = .35; p < .001$). Among second and less than second cousin marriages, concordance is higher on the question for the number of children in the family (.65; $P < .001$), but lower for the question concerning the ideal number of children in the average family ($r = .25; p < 0.5$). There was low concordance between couples in non-consanguineous marriages for both questions.

Table#4: Differences between couples in the three marriage types by sociocultural characteristics and attitudes (one-way ANOVA)

<u>ideal Age of Marriage (men)</u>					
Source	DF	SS	MS	F Ratio	P Value
Between Groups	2	297.04	148.52	17.03	.0000
Within Groups	481	4193.23	8.72		
Total	483	4490.27			
Groups	Mean	SD			
Group 2	23.7	3.1			
Group 1	24.1	2.8			
Group 3**	25.7	2.9			

ideal Age of Marriage (Women)

Source	DF	SS	MS	F Ratio	P Value
Between Groups	2	182.4	91.2	19.65	.0000
Within Groups	481	2232.62	4.64		
Total	483	2415.01			
Groups	Mean	SD			
Group 1	19.9	2.0			
Group 2	20.4	2.5			
Group 3**	21.4	1.9			

Age at Marriage

Source	DF	SS	MS	F Ratio	P Value
Between Groups	2	397.44	198.72		.0000
Within Groups	481	5526.83	11.49	17.29	
Total	483	5924.27			
Groups	Mean	SD			
Group 2	21.1	3.1			
Group 1	21.1	3.1			
Group 3**	23.2	4.1			

Bride Dowry (Advance)

Source	DF	SS	MS	F Ratio	P Value
Between Groups	2	211539264.2	10576932.1	100.29	.0000
Within Groups	481	507298460.8	1054674.6		
Total	483	718837725.0			
Groups	Mean	SD			
Group 1	808	727			
Group 2*	1226	1078			
Group 3**	2451	1328			

* Scheffe test with sig. Level .05

Group 1: 1st & Double Cousin Marriage

Group 2: 2nd & Less than 2nd Cousin Marriage

Group 3: Non-Consanguineous Marriage

Bride Dowry (Later)- in Kuwaiti Dinar (3.3 KD = 1 USD)

Source	DF	SS	MS	F Ratio	P Value
Between Groups	2	17203143.3	8601571.64	33.71	.0000
Within Groups	481	122727040.5	255149.77		
Total	483	139930183.8			
Groups	Mean	SD			
Group 1	173	315			
Group 2	276	513			
Group 3**	638	706			

Bride Dowry (Total)- in Kuwaiti Dinar (3.3 KD = 1 USD)

Source	DF	SS	MS	F Ratio	P Value
Between Groups	2	349306677.7	174653338.8	101.36	.0000
Within Groups	481	828799073.5	1723074.9		
Total	483	1178105751			
Groups	Mean	SD			
Group 1	981	748			
Group 2	1502	1404			
Group 3**	3090	1812			

No. of Children

Source	DF	SS	MS	F Ratio	P Value
Between Groups	2	236.94	118.47	21.28	.0000
Within Groups	481	2677.41	5.57		
Total	483	2914.35			
Groups	Mean	SD			
Group 3	2.8	1.6			
Group 2*	3.7	2.0			
Group 1**	4.5	2.9			

Age Difference Between Spouses

Source	DF	SS	MS	F Ratio	P Value
Between Groups	2	47.51	23.75	1.64	.0000
Within Groups	481	3455.29	14.46		
Total	483	3502.8			
Groups	Mean	SD			
Group 1	2.9	3.5			
Group 2	2.5	3.0			
Group 3**	3.7	5.0			

* Scheffe test with sig. Level .05

Group1: 1st & Double Cousin Marriage

Group2: 2nd & Less than 2nd Cousin Marriage

Group 3: Non-Consanguineous Marriage

Non-consanguineous unions report the highest mean marriage age of men, 25.7 years (SD 2.9); followed by couples in a first and double cousin marriage, 24.1 years (SD 2.8); and couples in a second and less than second cousin marriage, 23.7 years (SD 3.1). One reason for the older marriage ages of non-consanguineous couples is the fact that they spend more time to find a mate. Perhaps they do so at work or in college. Kin marriages occur at a younger age because the spouse has already been chosen by the relatives. Non-consanguineous marriages have the highest mean age for marriage among women, 21.4 years (SD 1.9), followed by second and less than second cousin marriages, 20.4 years (SD 2.5), and first and double cousin marriage, 19.9 years (SD 2.0). Non-consanguineous respondents' attitudes differ from those in consanguineous pairings in having the highest mean ideal marriage age for men and women, 25.7 years and 21.4 years respectively. The highest mean age of marriage occurs among respondents in non-consanguineous marriages, 23.2 years (SD 4.1), while the mean and standard deviation in the other two unions is 21.1 years (SD 3.1).

In Kuwait, as in all Gulf states, the groom pays all the wedding expenses. The bride's dowry, a groom's responsibility, is divided into two parts, the advance dowry (the amount the bride takes during the contract period) and the later payment (the amount the wife takes in

case of divorce). Both dowries are recorded in a formal contract and agreed upon between the spouses' families. These are significant differences across marriage types in the amounts of the advance and later bride's dowry and for total dowry. The highest dowries characterize non-consanguineous marriages for advance, later, and total sums; the respective averages for each category are 2451 (SD 1328), 836 (SD 703), and 3090 (SD 1812) Kuwaiti Dinars (KD). (In 2000 the exchange rate was 1 KD = 3.3 U.S. dollars). The lowest advance, later and total dowry sums typify first and double cousin marriages, 808 KD (SD 727), 173 KD (SD 315), 981 KD (SD 748), respectively. Second and less than second cousin marriages have average dowries of 1226 KD (SD 1078), 276 KD (SD 513), and 1502 KD (SD 1404), respectively. The more closely related are the spouses, the lower is the dowry, presumably on the expectation that the marriage will last.

There are significant differences across marriage types in ideal number of children. The lowest ideal number of children is 2.8 (SD 1.6) for non-consanguineous marriages while the highest ideal number is 4.5 (SD 2.9) among first and double cousin marriages. The mean for the second and less than second cousin marriages is 3.7 children (SD 2.0). More closely related couples desire more children. The more traditional (consanguineous) marriage patterns favor larger families. Furthermore, consanguineal marriages involve younger individuals thereby potentially increasing the amount of time available for procreating.

There is no significant age difference between spouses in the three marriage types. The mean age difference in non-consanguineous marriages is 3.7 years (SD 5.0), in first and double cousin marriages it is 2.9 years (SD 3.5), and in second and less than second cousin marriages it is 2.5 years (SD 3.0).

The data indicate significant differences in attitudes across marriage types. Although there is no significant correlation between non-consanguineous couples for the desired number of children and for the ideal number of children in the average family, there is a significant correlation for the other marriage types. Respondents among non-consanguineous couples have the lowest mean number of children.

Summary and Conclusion:

Couples in first- and double-cousin marriages or in second- and less-than- second-cousin marriages tend to marry earlier than non-consanguineous couples (the means are 21.1 years in consanguineous marriages and 23.3 years in non-consanguineous marriages). The younger marriage age of consanguineous spouses may reflect the pattern of arranged marriages between the couples' parents. One of the questions in the sociocultural questionnaire asked respondents if their's was a non-traditional marriage. i.e., were they in a consanguineal marriage. Among the three types of marriages, 71% of non-consanguineous marriages resulted from courtship, while only 2.5% of the first- and double-cousin marriages, and 20% of the second- and less-than-second-cousin marriages resulted from this non-traditional means of spousal selection.

There are significant correlations between couples in both the first- and double-cousin marriage and in the second- and less-than-second-cousin marriage in attitudes regarding the desired number of children ($r = .30$, and $.65$; respectively) and the ideal number of children for an average family ($r = .35$, and $.25$; respectively). There is no concordance for those attitudes between non-consanguineous pairs. There are negative correlation between education level and number of children ($r = -.43$) and between occupation and number of children ($r = .29$).

The number of children per household is decreasing in Kuwait (Abdal, 1996). The decline in number of children seems to be related to education and income levels, and the number of working women. As shown by current data, most non-consanguineous marriage respondents are more highly educated, which is also related to other variables such as income and wife's employment. Differences between couples in child rearing attitudes may be related to modernization, especially if we understand that most non-consanguineous couples are the most recently married of the sample. The data also show a significant difference between consanguineous and non-consanguineous respondents in number of children. Non-consanguineous couples have the lowest mean number of children (2.8). For those in first and double cousin marriages, the mean is 4.5 children, and the mean in second and less than second cousin marriages is 3.7 children. The difference in number

of children is potentially linked to age, income level, and access to an extended family, which would include child care-takers. One of the most important elements that influence the number of children is the woman's job status.

Many studies have examined the effect of working woman on family size in different parts of the modern world such as Singapore (Pyle, 1997), European Russia (Prokofieva and Turakulova, 1994), Italy (Belotti, 1993), and in Eastern and Western European countries and the United States (Calhoun, 1994; Airsman and Sharda, 1993). These studies conclude that working women have less children. On the other hand, other studies suggest that fertility rates remain intact despite the process of cultural change accompanying increasing industrialization, for example, in Saharan Africa (Boserup, 1985), in Chicanos and Puerto Ricans (Kritz and Gurak, 1976), and among Soviet Islamic people (Heer and Youssef, 1977). One possible explanation of these different results may relate to the decision-maker in the household, e.g., whether the husband, wife, or both make the crucial decisions, like the number of children, in the household. Further studies are needed for more clarification for the Kuwaiti population.

There are significant differences among the three types of marriage in some other sociocultural characteristics. Non-consanguineous marriages show the greatest mean of ideal age for marriage (25.7 years) for men and (21.4 years) for women, the largest dowry (advance, 2451 K.D; later, 638 K.D; total, 3090 K.D), and the age at marriage (23.2 years). Attitudes regarding the ideal marriage age for men and women are related to the respondent's actual age when they got married in each marriage type. In general, there is a relationship between the actual age of marriage and the ideal age for getting married for men ($r = .30$) and women ($r = .30$).

As discussed above, greater percentages of couples in consanguineous marriages marry younger, which shows the family's influence in arranging a marriage. In non-consanguineous marriages, a couple selects his/her own partner, and for them education level is an important consideration in determining marriage age. Among non-consanguineous marriage respondents, the ideal mean age for men to get married, 25.7 years, allows for working for 3 years after graduation

from college or university, whereas for women, the mean marriage age is 21.4 years, almost directly after graduation. Dowry (advance, later, and the total) is largest in non- consanguineous marriages, which could be because the money goes to non-relatives.

Education plays an important factor in spouse selection; 82.2% of individuals in non-consanguineous marriages have a university, college, or postgraduate degree. This may be an indicator of the changes in spousal selection criteria. The data show that the family structure in Kuwait is affected by modernity. Education plays a major role in changing attitudes regarding marriage and partner selection. Meeting potential non-kin partners has become more easy as members of the opposite sex meet in college and in the work place. That provides a greater opportunity for one to select his/her partner from a non relative.

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