

**Chapter 10****Jordan: The Case for Equality**

Abla Shobadi, a charming and sophisticated advocate for the rights of women, is from a well-respected family in Amman, Jordan. Her family, the Shobadis, were originally Bedouin, with roots in Syria, Palestine and Jordan. (There are more than 500 members of the Shobadi tribe living in villages in northern Jordan.) While her father was serving as a diplomat for Jordan, she lived in Kuwait, Syria, France, and New York City, attending New York City public schools. Mr. Shobadi is now head of the International Relations Council in Jordan. Abla's sister Rania is a project manager for AMIDEAST in Amman, and her brother Fadi works for the United Nations in New York. Abla's priorities are education first, career second, and personal life last. She is a perfectionist who demands a great deal of herself in her roles as daughter, student, employee, and friend.

Abla graduated from the University of Jordan with a B.A. in Arabic Studies. After graduating, she worked in Jordan for UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Education Fund) and for a United Nations agency for the advancement of women. Moving to the States, she received an M.A. in sociology from New York University in 2000, completing her thesis on Women's Health. Her advocacy for women continued when she worked for a year and a half at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in Baltimore. She focused on human rights, reproductive health, and gender in development, examining the impact of gender dynamics on women's health in India, Pakistan, and Africa.

In May 2001 Abla returned to Jordan even though the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health wanted to extend her visa. However, she was motivated by a strong desire to reconnect with her family and her country and also to promote gender equity in Jordan. In June 2001, Abla accepted a position with UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) in Amman, where she has been working as an information officer. The goal of UNIFEM is "Progress for Women; Progress for All."

Soon after assuming her position at UNIFEM, Abla became aware of the fact that only about 4 percent of women in the Arab world access the Internet, compared to 50 percent of women in the United States. Thus, she suggested a groundbreaking Internet training project for Arab women: Arab Women Connect (AWC). Abla committed herself enthusiastically to the AWC project in the hope that it would empower Arab women by providing them with new information and communication technologies. For her hard work in designing the AWC Website, which is in both Arabic and English, Abla received a promotion. As she told the audience at the press conference for the inauguration, "This Website, the first regional Website for, by, and about Arab women in the Middle East, will break down language barriers so that Arab women can use the Internet in their daily lives."

While working on the AWC project, Abla got to know Abdullah Najar, a professor from the University of Jordan, because he assisted her in designing the Website. Abdullah, who has a Ph.D. in educational technology from the University of Jordan, comes from a respected and conservative Jordanian family. Abla and Abdullah have become close friends, and actually, much more than friends. In fact, Abdullah wants to ask Abla's father for permission for them to marry, but Abla is conflicted about whether it is the right thing to do. She knows perfectly well that marriage to Abdullah would change her life completely. Her plans to become an advocate in Jordan and throughout the Middle East for the rights of women in developing countries might have to be revised. And what about her thoughts of graduate study in the States? "Abdullah can't just quit his job and move to the States, and he won't wait for me forever," she told herself realistically.

Abla realizes that she has already overcome many of the cultural barriers of her society. First of all, she is in the select group of women in Jordan who have a master's degree, and even more unusual, her degree is from a U.S. university. Only in the last ten years has it become acceptable for Jordanian women to study for an M.A. Before Abdullah proposed marriage, she had been leaning toward doing another master's in international development or a Ph.D. in sociology in the States. Now Abla is having second thoughts, mainly because she is worried that if she pursues her graduate studies, she may end up paying a price for putting her career and education ahead of marriage.

One night Abla decided to speak frankly to her parents about her dilemma. "I can't believe I have to make a choice between graduate education and a career or a traditional marriage. Because of my liberal upbringing and your support, I've been free to consider all the alternatives, yet I don't feel truly free."

Abla's mother was annoyed. "You have more options than I had, Abla-- marriage, a career, graduate study. And working in Amman at UNIFEM. You're really quite lucky."

But Abla did not feel lucky. Instead, she felt torn between her cultural values and her modern lifestyle. "Why is this society so slow to accept change?" Abla complained to her parents, not really expecting an answer.

When she and Abdullah met for dinner later that week, they were discussing their future. "I want to do many things", said Abla, "to study, to have a career, to improve the lives of Jordanian women, and I honestly wonder if I can handle marriage, a family, and meaningful work all at the same time. And what about your parents? They may not approve of my career plans. Let's just put off making a decision."

"I'll support you in whatever path you take," Abdullah responded, with warmth in his eyes, "but I won't wait forever."

## **Discussion**

1. What factors should Abla consider in making her decision?
2. What are the advantages for Abla of remaining single?
3. What are the advantages for Abla of getting married to Abdullah?
4. Would it be best for Abla to postpone marriage until she finishes her graduate study in the United States?
5. What benefits would Abla get from having a second master's degree?
6. Should Abla go to the United States for further graduate study?
7. What choice would you make if you were Abla?

## **Case Study Report**

### I. Statement of the problem

#### A. Definition

#### B. Analysis

### II. Suggestions of possible solutions

#### A.

#### B.

#### C.

#### D.

### III. Evaluation of possible solutions

#### A. Advantages

#### B. Disadvantages

### IV. Selection of a solution

#### A. Choice

#### B. Justification