

is around 80% and most families are poor. People who do have jobs are obliged to help their extended families; a mother who needs new clothes for her children for a forthcoming festival will flatter, beg and cajole her male relatives to collect the money. Since trading is hardly considered work, many women will sell something, be it Parisian perfumes or a few vegetables. Some do it for entertainment, some for survival as many households are headed by women.

Men

Visitors from other countries are sometimes shocked by men's attitude to women here, although it's not "un-Islamic." Islam grants men the right to instant divorce on demand, and in this part of the world they take full advantage of it. It is not unusual for someone in their mid-twenties to have been through five weddings and divorces, nor for a marriage to last a matter of only months, even days. A woman normally goes back to her mother when she is divorced, along with any children the father doesn't want. If having dependent children hinders her chances of re-marriage, her mother or another relative will take responsibility for them, bringing them up with her own. For women who are no longer integrated into their families, prostitution might be the only way to feed the children.

It seems ironic that it is an absolute necessity for a woman to get married in order to have any status, and preferably have a child to show for it. Does the bride secretly wonder, during the three days of wedding celebrations, what all the fuss is about? One cynical friend pointed out that since the wife knows she will be divorced sooner or later, she feels obliged to extract as much money for her relatives as possible out of her husband while she has the chance. Hard and materialistic? It's easy to see why.

Implications for sharing the Gospel

The Gospel is good news for women. To my women friends, "Islam is always right." Nevertheless they insist that divorce and polygamy are bad, and think what the Bible says about marriage is good. Stories of Jesus' encounters with women are astonishing, but also good. Discussing religion as such quickly reaches a dead end. But my neighbourhood has discovered from watching my every move that Christians, contrary to popular belief, pray, fast, and don't sleep around. Even single, white, female ones! My national friends and I help each other when we can. I sometimes offer to pray for situations of need, e.g. sick children. I value my friendship with these women, and like to think that it will prepare the way for friendship with a God who loves them, regardless of their perceived lack of value to men, and Who can be relied upon to meet all their needs.

YOUNG WOMEN IN MOROCCO

By H.L.

Why is it that the vast majority of BCC students in Morocco are young men, rather than young women? This phenomenon can no longer be explained by differences in the literacy

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rate, particularly in the cities. Any observer outside a primary or secondary school in a Moroccan city would find it hard to see any great difference in the number of boys and girls entering. Even at university there is a fairly even balance, at least in the Arts and Human Sciences faculties.

Why then, are young women apparently less reachable with the Gospel than their male counterparts? Here are some observations made in my circle of acquaintances, mainly university students, plus a few high school students, all in the age group to which most BCC students belong.

In spite of the fact that many girls look very modern in their dress and sometimes behaviour, they are less "westernized" in their general lifestyle and thought patterns than many young men. One factor which contributes to this is that women spend a large proportion of their time at home, most of them in a very traditional situation, helping in the household and caring for younger children. Whilst boys are generally out on the street from an early age, teenage girls and unmarried women are expected to stay at home. I once interviewed a language class I taught about methods of bringing up boys and girls. Two teenagers in mini-skirts declared that they practically never went out except to school. The same is true of women students at university. Asking my friends what they had done during the summer holidays, most of them said, "Nothing." They had not gone out, visited friends, read books, etc..

The fact that they spend most of their free time at home means that they are far more under the supervision of their parents than their brothers are. It would be difficult for most girls to listen to Christian broadcasts and send or receive mail unless their parents were exceptionally tolerant. Boys, on the other hand, can do more or less what they want, as they often are only at home to eat and sleep. One friend who came to my house regularly to read the Bible with me found it difficult to leave her house as the neighbours always asked where she was going and why.. Even I have had neighbours who have exercised like surveillance over me!

In the female-dominated milieu of the home, conversation concentrates on the household, children, cooking, prices, etc., rather than on more intellectual subjects. This is reflected in conversations with friends at school or university. There is, of course, talk about classes and student problems, but rarely about religious or political issues. Thus girls are unused to thinking about abstract issues or questioning beliefs.

One favorite topic is marriage. I have witnessed more than one lively discussion on whether a young woman should get engaged to a man she has only met one, i.e. should she choose her partner herself or let her parents choose. It is not uncommon for parents to find a suitable young (or not so young) man for their daughter, though she does have the freedom to refuse him. Friendship with a fellow student may well lead to marriage, on the other hand, if the parents agree. In Morocco the police can still fine a couple who are seen in the street together if they cannot prove that they are married!

Girls generally have little experience or knowledge of the world outside their small sphere. Most of my friends have never met another foreigner or known another Christian. Many

of them have next to no idea of what Christians believe except for the little (and that distorted) that they have learnt in Qur'anic classes. Some girls even had no idea what religion I might be expected to follow as a European and a non-Muslim. And these are university students!

In my contacts with many students I let it be generally known that I am a committed Christian and am willing to talk about what I believe. However, I find that scarcely anyone admits to ever having seen the *Injil* or to having had any exposure whatsoever to Christian witness of any kind.

The very few exceptions are girls who are exceptional anyway. One friend, for instance, ordered a BCC course. But she is interested in everything and can hold forth on any subject. But because of being involved in so many things, she has never found time to actually do her Bible Correspondence course. Another girl who has had contact with the Radio School of the Bible also has very wide interests and does not live with her family.

Many are willing to talk about Islam and listen to what I have to say. However, because of the lack of previous exposure and the lack of experience generally in thinking about issues outside their small circle of vision, moving from there to talking about *my* faith is a slow process. Often girls who wear the *hijab* are the most open to talk. They seem to respect me for being a serious believer. One even prefers spending time with me rather than with other Muslims because she approves of my morals!

In my opinion, to reach girls and young women, more Christian women need to move into into situations where they have daily contact with Muslim young people. And we need to pray for young Moroccan Christian girls and women that they would have boldness for a discrete witness amongst those they study and work with.

MUSLIM WOMEN IN DIASPORA

by M.A.

[Although written several years ago, the following article illustrates well the conflict of cultures experienced by second-generation immigrants from Muslim lands to the western world. So many elements of the climate described still prevail among Muslim women in diaspora that we consider it worth printing. Ed.]

Only a very small number of Arabs have become integrated into French culture. The rest are painfully struggling to adhere to their traditional Muslim culture. Although having changed countries physically, they have not changed mentally, emotionally, culturally or socially. This results in unhappiness, frustration, segregation and complexes (inferiority OR superiority), all of which, sadly and perhaps permanently, affect the young people of the family, and especially the young women.

One of my young Algerian friends said, "I must constantly play the game of submission to my parents' strict Muslim code while I am European in my thinking and a rebel at heart. Some day I MUST leave to make my own life. But no matter what I am or do, I will