

## **AUB research reveals how young Lebanese feel, behave**

Friday, July 23, 2010

The Issam Fares Institute Research and Policy Forum on Youth in the Arab World hosted a roundtable discussion at the American University of Beirut (AUB) titled, "Young Lebanese: What they feel, how they behave". The behavior of young Lebanese was researched and analyzed in three separate studies, which were presented by their authors: Charles Harb, associate professor of social psychology at AUB, Jad Melki, assistant professor of journalism at AUB, Azza Baydoun, professor of sociology at the Lebanese University,



and Maud Stephan-Hachem, professor of information sciences also at the Lebanese University. Following opening remarks by IFI Executive Director Rami Khouri who highlighted the importance of research in helping direct policy-making, Professor Charles Harb presented his paper, "Describing Lebanese Youths; a national and psycho-social survey," which investigated young Lebanese identities, values, and their degree of sectarianism, with an emphasis on prejudice, attitudes towards inter-sectarian marriage, and religion. His study revealed there still remains high levels of sectarian bias amongst Lebanese youth, as well as low levels of acceptance of inter-sectarian relationships. According to his research report, Harb found that of the 2,100 participants, two-thirds would not consider marrying someone from a different sect. Highlighting the urgency in addressing these inter-sectarian relations, Harb stated in his report, "While the scores are not completely polarized, they indicate a population readiness for sectarian strife that transcend gender or sectarian differences."

These statistics are closely tied in with data gathered regarding the issue of identity. Unlike the youth population elsewhere in the world, who associate predominantly with their peers and prioritize their individuality, Harb found that Lebanese youth give importance to family, national identity, and sectarian affiliation above all else. "In other words, Lebanese youth are significantly concerned for and identify with their families, Lebanon, and their sect. These results are relatively surprising considering the population surveyed," he concluded.

Professor Jad Melki followed with his presentation, "Media Habits of MENA Youth; a Three-Country Survey," which focused on media consumption and production habits by youth. He found that of the 2,500 high school and university students across Lebanon, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates, a large majority were "highly adept" to using new media. Yet while they tended to use new media as a source of information (both socially and for news), results showed that they were primarily consumers rather than producers, with few using the tools available to them; i.e. blogging. Furthermore, these sources of information were more often than not accessed in a language that was not their mother tongue. News was predominantly accessed in their native language, Arabic, but everything else was usually accessed in English.

Melki's research showed that traditional news media, especially print, seem to be going out of fashion, as the sources of choice lay predominantly with television, followed by only some options of new media, such as mobile texting and online social networking. "The findings indicated weak levels of media literacy and news literacy across all groups, but [in contrast] high

levels of new media adoption and technology savviness, especially among the younger and more affluent participants," said Melki in his report.

The final presentation by Professors Azza Baydoun and Maud Stephan-Hachem was delivered in Arabic for their comparative study, "Young Lebanese Women: Spectators, Readers and Listeners," which focused specifically on how young women access new media in relation to young men. While previous studies have stated that there is a difference in access between young women and men, their study showed otherwise. "Our results revealed the contrary; with the internet now found in every home, girls have just as much access to it as boys," said Stephan-Hachem. "The fact that the internet is accessible across the board means that girls, who tend to stay at home more and go out less than boys, have just as much access to social and new media, as boys."

Furthermore, the study, which looked at boys and girls between the ages of 18 and 23, revealed that while both genders use the same channels, the same frequency, and the same functions of new media, girls focus more on romantic, personal subjects and models, whereas boys focus more on action, public subjects. Their research surveyed 580 young men and women and explored their cultural consumption habits.