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The Impact of Housing Welfare System on Family Formation and Family Dissolution in Qatar

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This paper highlights the importance of housing welfare system in shaping family formation decision and family dissolution. The paper builds on the notion of the meaning of home as a spatial context in which human existence are performed. The meaning of control of housing space is often linked to the meaning of the family and the concept “ontological security”. Ontological security can be attained more through parental home ownership which leads to family cohesion and child well-being. A very limited number of studies examine the effects of housing welfare system on family formation and family dissolution. Qatari government is now encountering new challenges in the face of rapid economic growth and social transformation in the country. According to a 2011 report released by the Social and Economical Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University, about two-thirds of women either marry late or never get married. The average age gap between bride and groom is dwindling from five years to 2–3 years. The fertility rate in Qatar has dropped from 5.7 per woman in 1990 to 3.6 in 2012. According the Qatar Statistic Authority, the number of divorces per 1,000 married Qataris has increased from 17.4 in 1995 to 19.2 in 2009. According to official data, 61% of divorces took place within the first five years of marriage, and 29% happened before consummation in 2009. What is behind these demographic and social changes and why has the number of never married women and divorce rate increased? Previous studies have explained some of these changes. This paper suggests that housing welfare system is affecting family formation decision and family dissolution in Qatar. How Housing welfare system have affected family formation and dissolution in Qatar is not only an interesting topic but also illustrates how “family policies” operate in a generous welfare state. The Government of Qatar takes a holistic approach in strengthening family cohesion, one of the main goals of the Qatar National Vision 2030 and National Development Strategy 2011–2016. For instance, the government supports programs that reduce economic and social vulnerability Qatari families and provide support systems for families with special circumstances. In addition, the government of Qatar aims to reduce the number of Qatar couples seeking divorce before consummation by 20%

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and after consummation by 40% by 2016. Qatar Housing welfare system has achieved at least two major goals in the last decades. One is the achievement of an urban development process that has urbanized the Qatari population. The other is the improvement of the standard of living of Qatari families. Utilizing a mixed-methods design and given the lack of careful studies and data on the subject, this paper attempts to assess the impact housing welfare system on family formation and dissolution in Qatar. The paper questions the sustainability of current practice and interrogates the ways in which it is open to abuse.

Keywords

Housing, Welfare, Policies, Qatar, Family, Formation, Dissolution