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THE FREQUENCY OF CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES IN THE STATE OF BAHRAIN

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Historically consanguineous marriages have been practised by different classes among Bahrainis for a long time. Accordingly we decided to study the rate of consanguineous marriages in Bahrain. The study was also designed to see if the frequency of cousin marriages is changing with time, and to ascertain the prevalence of genetic diseases. Standard proformas were completed by 500 young married Bahraini women. The questionnaire included an enquiry about the family relationship of the husband and wife and also the relationship of their parents. This was completed by 500 couples from the recent generation. It also gives information about 100 couples from the previous generation (grand parents). We found that the rate of cousin marriages is 39.4% in the present generation, and 45.5% in the previous generation. This shows a high rate of consanguinity which has decreased significantly with time.

We also found that 53% were in favour of consanguineous marriages, 62% agree that it can cause genetic diseases, and 47.8% agree that it can cause social problems.

The incidence of consanguinity varies from one population to another due to variation in the population structure, the social, cultural, ethnic, religious and economic features (Table 1). A recent study by Bittles shows that at least 20% of the world population favours consanguineous marriages[1]. Many investigators claimed significant effects of inbreeding on reproductive wastage[2-6], while many others have reported little effect[7-9]. These studies found that consanguinity had no effect on the risks of chromosomal abnormality, X linked, or autosomal dominant conditions unless the couple concerned actually have the condition or carry the gene concerned. Autosomal recessive inheritance provides the main problem[10,11]. Diseases with an autosomal recessive mode of inheritance, such as Sanfilippo disease, mucopolysaccharidosis, homocystinuria, cystic fibrosis or deaf mutism were found among these children. It is also likely that the risk is increased for polygenic disorders even though this is difficult to estimate.