

# In the grey zone

So called 'half-Kuwaitis' discuss the legal, social discrimination they face

By Faten Omar

Being a Kuwaiti citizen makes you feel like you belong to Kuwait, as nationality is a legal relationship between a person and a state. But what if you are a "halfie" and are finding it hard to answer the question "Where are you from?" Those whose fathers are Kuwaiti are automatically considered Kuwaitis but those whose moms are Kuwaiti and fathers are not, they are not granted the nationality, even if they are born here. They are considered 'half' Kuwaiti unlike those whose fathers are local.

Are these so called half-Kuwaitis - from the mother's side - okay with being a "halfie" or do they have problems in feeling a sense of belonging to Kuwait?

Despite having been born in Kuwait and living and studying here, children whose moms are Kuwaiti and fathers are not continue to suffer from laws that refuse to equate them with their fellow citizens. Kuwait Times spoke to the "Grey Area" team, a group focused on shedding light on the grey area where children of Kuwaiti women reside.

The team of 'Grey Area' asked to remain anonymous. One of them spoke about the idea behind the campaign. "My mother is Kuwaiti but my father is not. I realized most of the community is not aware of how half-Kuwaitis suffer to fit in. I'm in a grey area where I cannot feel that I belong to any of the two nationalities," she said.

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The campaign started a year ago, and its Instagram account has received many stories from half-Kuwaitis. "The reason for the campaign's name is that we are not fully Kuwaiti and not fully foreign. When you are under the age of 21, you will be treated as a Kuwaiti in education and are allowed to study in public schools, but after graduation, you're a foreigner in terms of the difficulty of getting a job and the difference in wages with those of Kuwaitis, etc.," she told Kuwait Times.

The four members explained the suffering faced by children of Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaiti husbands. "When we decided to work on the campaign, we wanted to attract young people of the same age group. We wanted to focus on the children themselves and give them the ability to express themselves. At first, we faced some negative comments such as 'women do not have the right to grant citizenship to their children' and 'since they chose to marry non-Kuwaitis, they



should bear the consequences of their actions', but our followers always defend us," they said.

The team is focusing on increasing awareness, and is ready to receive more messages from those who are happy that they have found their voices and someone who recognizes their existence. This is because they feel marginalized, as some consider their case unimportant. The team has also got attention from lawmakers, since they have no legal standing and cannot vote in elections. They have had six discussions in different places over the past period and meetings with campaigns that are trying to make a difference by cooperating to benefit from their previous experiences in raising awareness among people.

Often known as 'half-Kuwaiti' these youth only want to feel the sense of belonging to Kuwait and not feel threatened with deportation any minute or be treated like strangers. "Most of the stories we received are from those who only want to feel stable. They want a decent education and decent jobs. We do not want a kafeel to sponsor us. People want the right to own property. People think that we only want material benefits,

even if you make it clear that you do not want these advantages but merely want to solve other problems related to nationality, residence or jobs. So we are trying to focus on the current generation of young people because they may be able to make a change."

The founder of the campaign told Kuwait Times that being a half-Kuwaiti (from the mother's side) exposes you to bullying. "Especially in public schools, where it also depends on the nationality of the father. Some nationalities are bullied more than others. You also find excellent treatment by some foreigners because you are a Kuwaiti, but you do not belong to them too. The bullying is not from a particular nationality - you face bullying from both parties, making you feel you do not belong to any party! Some children of Kuwaiti women are afraid to reveal their status for fear of different treatment by people."

The team has many goals it aspires to achieve, most important of which is acceptance of society that they are different, provide support to children of Kuwaiti women, change some laws that concern Kuwaiti children and clarify their role in society. Statistics by the Public Authority for Civil Information