

# Egyptians' perceptions regarding women economic participation in Egypt

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## I- Introduction

Egypt's vision for 2030 is to achieve a sustainable inclusive growth and development without leaving anyone behind with focus on achieving social integration systematically in order to narrow gender gaps and achieve equal opportunities and rights. Egypt National Strategy for Women Empowerment 2030 was initiated by the National Council for Women through a wide community dialogue with all stakeholders. The strategy was launched in 2017 with targets that are fully aligned with the targets of the SDS and the international sustainable development goals (SDGs) declared by the United Nations for 2030.

The goal of the second pillar of the NCW strategy is to develop women's capacity to enhance their employment options, expand their participation in the workforce, support their entrepreneurship, and realize equal opportunities for women's employment in all sectors, including holding senior positions in both the public and private sector.

With the female labor force participation far below the rate of men, women are not achieving their full potential of economic participation. The gender gap in education has nearly closed, but it is not well translated into labor force and economic participation of women. The objective of this study is to complement the national data by providing insights on how Egyptians perceive the economic role of women in the society.

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The objective of this paper is to uncover the underlying perceptions that may prevent women from achieving the same level of participation as men and capture the barriers, challenges and potentials regarding the participation related to education and employment of women in the Egyptian economy.

## **II- Methodology**

Baseera conducted a survey on Egyptians' perceptions regarding women economic participation in Egypt during the period from October 14<sup>th</sup> to October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2018. The data were collected from a random sample of 1542 respondents aged 18+. Respondents were accessed through their landlines and mobile phones. The data were weighted to represent population distribution by region, gender, and education level. All estimates in this paper are subject to a less than 3%- margin of error.

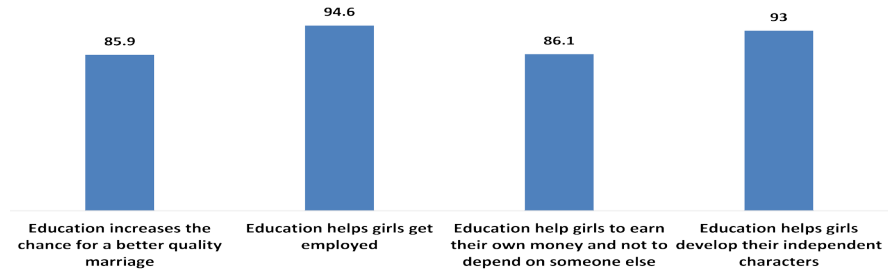
## **III- Main Results**

### ***III-1- Perception of Egyptians regarding girls' education***

Most Egyptians are supporting girls' education, as 87% says that girls and boys should have equal opportunities. A vast majority perceive education as enabler to better life, as they think education will help girls to get a job (95%), to build an independent personality (93%), to get married (86%), and to be financially independent (86%).



**Figure (1): Perception of the Egyptians on the importance of education**



Despite the overwhelming support to girls' education, two in every five Egyptians do not agree on girls traveling to another city to go to the university or on girls studying far from home. Furthermore, two in every three Egyptians do not agree on that girls stay late outside or travel overseas for studying which may be a barrier of social norms that limits girls' opportunities to get a better education.

Another aspect related to girls' education is the perceived limiting scope of disciplines appropriate for girls. Slightly more than one third of the respondents of the survey believe that female higher education should be restricted to few disciplines, as some specializations might not be appropriate for females. Such culture might have contributed in building social pressure to shape girls' preferences to avoid enrolling in disciplines that are male dominated.

In some societies, marriage and education are competing, this is usually reflected in early marriage where girls are deprived from fulfilling their aspirations. One of the questions of the survey address the issue by asking respondents "which is more important education or marriage?".



Most respondents (65%) showed a preference for education, 19% believe that marriage is more important and 16% said that both have the same importance. The attitude of respondents varied according to the gender of the respondent or his/her educational level. The preference for marriage over education is lower among females than males (10% vs. 29% respectively). It decreases from 23% among respondents with less than intermediate education to 10% among university graduates.

To confirm this trend respondents were asked if they would accept to marry their daughters to appropriate husbands who want their daughters to drop higher education. A vast majority (83%) said they will not accept such condition, while 14% said they will accept. Acceptance rate is decreasing with higher educational level of respondents to 7% among university graduates.

### ***III-2- Perception of Egyptians regarding female labor participation***

The support to girls' education is not carried to the economic participation, equality in the right of work is not recognized even among females. Seventy seven percent of all respondents believe that if the job opportunities are limited, jobs must be given to males. Furthermore, 59% see that there are professions/jobs that are not suitable for women. A more conservative part of the society (nearly 40%) does not welcome that women work in a place where all of her colleagues are males and sees inappropriate for a woman to work in a place that is far from home.



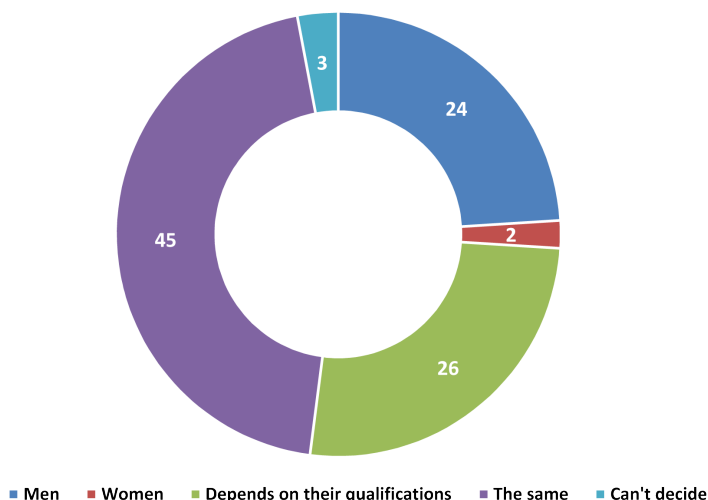
Only 37% agree that women stay late for work and 18% agree that married women can travel or live alone to work.

Equal pay was tested by asking respondents who they believe should get a higher salary if both men and women are working in the same place and assume the same position. Nearly half the respondents believe in equal wage, one quarter believe that payment should be based on merit and one quarter had a sex preference for different payment scheme. Among the last group, 24% said that men should get a higher payment and only 2% said that females should get a higher payment. Surprisingly, when data was stratified by sex, it was found that preference for higher pay for men prevailed among female respondents as well (22% of female respondents support higher pay for men and only 3% support higher payment for women.) When respondents were asked why men should get higher payment, 62% said because he is the breadwinner of the family and another 16% said because he is “the man” and should have his prestige.

When asked about the impact of woman’s work on the family, more respondents believe that it has negative impact on the family as 44% believe woman’s work has negative impact on her family while 23% believe it has a positive impact. A vast majority of respondents (92%) said that the real success a woman can achieve is her success in her role within her family and a similar proportion see that a working mother should leave her job if it conflicts with her family duties.



**Figure (2): Who should get a higher salary if both men and women are working in the same place and assume the same position?**



Most Egyptians agree that working women should get support to raise children such as sabbatical for raising children (96%), flexible hours (86%) and childcare centers (94%).

Furthermore, 30% believe that mothers are solely responsible for their children and 68% believe that household duties of wives should not be financially compensated or is not consider as work. The stereotyping of the division of labor between males and females had its impact on interrupting female's career as a result of marriage. It was found that among females who are currently unemployed, 20% used to work and half of them left their jobs to get married or to care for children.





The perceived division of labor between men and women is manifested in a relatively high percent of respondents (59%) saying that problems might emerge if the wife is getting a larger income than her husband.

#### **IV- Policy implications and recommendations**

The results of the survey suggest that the passion for girls' education is compelled by a strong sense of protection for girls, that seems to continue beyond childhood and is reflected in restricting the public role women can play. Unleashing the potential of females depends heavily on providing a safer public space for girls and women.

This can be achieved throughout:

- Developing school curriculum that advocate against gender-based violence,
- Launching more programs to make transportation safer for girls and women,
- Creating a safer working environment for women in the private sector,
- Addressing the issue of gender-based violence in drama and soap operas,
- Suppressing negative messages that might encourage harassment and blame women for being the victim of harassment in all media contents including social media,



- Producing cartoons and video games for different age groups that include messages to build a positive culture among children and teens to respect and protect girls and women whether in the family environment or in the public sphere, and.
- Producing short videos and make it available through YouTube that contain messages that discourage violence against women and explain women's rights for protection from GBV.

Social pressure and stereotyping can narrow options available to female youth as a large portion of the society perceives some specializations as not appropriate for women. This is not restricted to education only but applies also to a larger extent on type of jobs. There is a need to unlock this authoritarian determination of excluding girls from studying and women from working in certain specializations or professions. The World Development Report states that new jobs are created through innovation and women stand to gain from this technological revolution. Communication strategy needs to propagate for the inclusion of females in all specializations or professions, the following need to be considered.

- Advocating for women who had a record of success in specializations or professions that are considered exclusive for men,
- Producing a series of multi-media materials appropriate for different age groups, to encourage girls to select their career path regardless of the prevailing stereotype and expose girls in an early stage to this content, and,



- Establishing an incentive system to attract girls especially in deprived areas to study STEM specializations,
- Attract more investments in ICT infrastructure in Egypt including better internet speed at lower cost. The flotation of Egyptian pounds makes Egypt more competitive for outsourcing and this can open up ICT sector and have more women employed in the sector
- Affordable and safe transportation to incentivize women to go to work not worrying about their safety or the cost of getting to work.

The perception prevailing in the society of the division of labor within the family is creating family problems. Women work is preferred only if they have financial necessity not as a right to prove herself. When the income of a wife is higher than the income of her husband this could cause problems. Furthermore, the psychological stereotype is creating a glass ceiling that extends to the woman's role in the public space. The dichotomy of a rigid division of labor where men are solely responsible for securing financial resources and women are solely responsible for taking care of the family needs to be re-engineered throughout:

- Investing in affordable child care centers with extended hours to help women balance between family duties and career development,
- Applying incentives and extending legislations to encourage the private sector to open or facilitate child care facilities,
- Emphasizing the necessity of cooperation between husband and wife in taking care of children and running the house in drama



- and soap operas, and suppressing negative messages that might encourage the rigid division of labor between spouses, and,
- Producing cartoons and video games for children and teens that include messages to advocate for supporting working women.

### Box (1): Female workers in “Total” petrol station

Amira, Fatma and Abrar are three young women taking part in a new work experience initiative. “Total” petrol station has started employing women as pump attendants at the station. Although they are university students, and the eldest is only 22 years old, they chose to try a non-traditional job rather than remain unemployed.



Interviewed by researchers from the Egyptian Center for Public Opinion Research (Baseera), the women indicated that their families have encouraged them, because they trust them to make the right decisions. On whether they find the job difficult and whether they are subjected to harassment, the women said that drivers interact with them respectfully and give them encouragement. They added that harassment is not just limited to the workplace, but in this job, because it is a new phenomenon in Egypt, customers are impressed by the experiment and express their appreciation. One of the women even said that working as a pump attendant is better than her previous job as a salesperson. They are especially pleased when they hear customers say: “You’ve left nothing for men to do!”