WOMEN FORMAL EMPLOYMENT IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR OF EGYPT

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Abstract

Egypt is an emerging economy facing immense economic as well as social challenges. The 102 million population count can either pose a heavy load to a country struggling to rise to its potential or can offer a workforce capable of economic growth and hence prosperity. It is crucial to realize that by ignoring half of the potential workforce we are forgoing half of the human capital diminishing –therefore- both economic growth and economic development.

Despite the extensive arguments advocating women as a vital labor resource in the economy, women participation in economic activity in Egypt is still subdued relative to men.

It is the aim of this paper to shed lite on the employment setting of women in the private sector of Egypt, the challenges they face in this sector and the vital role they play as supporters for their households despite the discussed challenges. Conclusions reveal that women in Egypt still lack social, economic, and legal tools needed to empower them in order to fulfill their vital role in the economy despite the fact that they are highly educated.

Keywords: Labor Gender Disparity, Labor Market, Women Employment, Women Empowerment, Egypt

JEL Classification: J7, J0, E24, J16, J19, K4

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to shed light on the current environment pertaining to women in the formal private sector of the Egyptian labor market and the challenges they face in this sector. Empowering women and incorporating them as vital members and partakers in the economic environment is not a luxury anymore but rather a necessity. Despite that women in Egypt still lack social, economic, and legal tools needed to empower them in order to fulfill their role in the economy.

Succeeding the introduction, the problem statement and the research methodology are portrayed followed by an inspection of literature review relating to the effect of gender inequality on women labor participation in Egypt. The aforementioned is attempted through a portrayal of the effect of gender parity on economic activity and labor participation. Afterwards, the paper provides an overview of the employment setting for women in Egypt and the apprehensions of maintaining employment in the formal private sector in Egypt. Following the literature review the paper presents the findings of empirical work conducted in Egypt to support the theoretical hypotheses.

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The paper then concludes that the fact that women economic empowerment and agency is widely recognized as a prerequisite to development, is demonstrably acknowledged by the Egyptian State. However, in spite of the sincere exertions of the government, a lot remains to be achieved in order to bridge the women labor participation gap in Egypt relative to global indices.

2. Problem Statement and Research Methodology

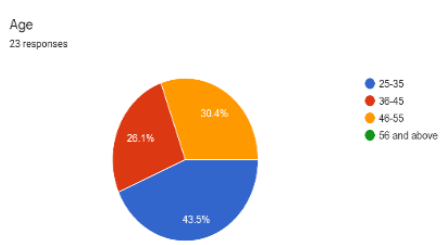
Economic activity that secures own income is deemed essential for empowering women and allowing them agency and supremacy over vital life choices. Although worthy enough as a cause, women economic empowerment is not solely about granting them social justice, it is also about its vitality to the wellbeing of the entire society. According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, the female% to total population in Egypt has registered 49.8% in 2020 (Countrymeter, 2020), yet Egypt ranks among the highest 10 countries in the world with regards to the gender gap (USAID, 2017).

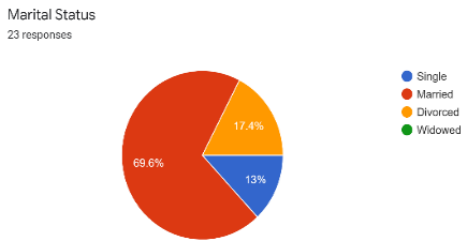
The IMF stipulates that if the female contribution in the labor force is elevated to the same level of the male participation rate in addition to granting them proper access to employment opportunities, this would result into an increase of up to 34% in the GDP of the country (USAID, 2017). Regrettably, in spite of the countless opinions instating women as an essential labor resource in ensuring and accelerating economic growth and development, women participation in economic activity is still subdued relative to men.

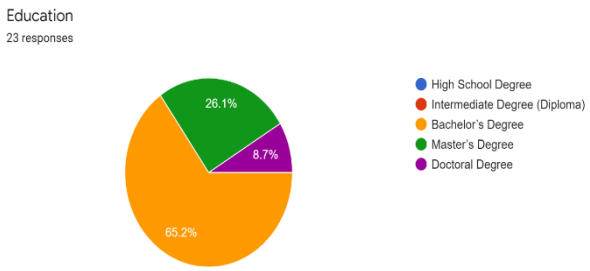
In addition to its situation as an emerging economy -with all the challenges contingent on that- a host of non-economic factors add to the uniqueness of the situation of Egypt: social, cultural, religious -to name a few. The matter that has drawn the interest of a lot of researchers to focus their work on the case of Egypt. Subsequent to its importance, an immense body of literature is devoted to topics pertaining to economic participation of women as a vital contributor to the labor force, particularly in developing countries like Egypt.

This paper aims to offer a perspective on the current situation of women employment in the private sector of Egypt and the role they play as providers for their families. In an attempt to reach this end, the paper implies a scrutiny of the literature, proving that gender inequality adversely impacts women participation in economic activity in general and in the Egyptian labor market in specific. This is in addition to an empirical study that supports the preceding notion through examining: (1) the impact of earned income on women empowerment; (2) the financial contribution of women to the household; (3) the suitability of working conditions in the private the sector for women; (4) the impact of reproductive burden on career choices.

The instrument used to achieve the empirical work is a semi structured guided questionnaire displaying objective multiple choice questions as well as open ended questions to give the interviewees better opportunity to express their points of view and hence a richer insight for the researcher. The questionnaire was administered in Egypt in November 2019 and comprises the participation of 23 women from different age groups, marital status, education levels, and different occupations to display diversity. The criteria for choice are age 25 to 50; holder of a university degree; working in the private sector.







The women interviewed are divided into 3 focus groups and can be categorized into three main professions: education, medical/clinical, and business services. Each focus group had a group leader heading it acting as a liaison and facilitator. Prior to dispensing the questionnaire, the researcher met with each group leader and explained the aim of the research and thoroughly clarified the process of investigation.

The questionnaire has been implemented using Google forms software to enable the retrieval of all responses. The software also allows a separate visibility for each recipient answer to every question on a separate sheet. Google Form Software automatically creates a summary of all the responses making it possible to have all the data input in a Google Spreadsheet, therefore generating quantitative data, displaying visual representation, and facilitating cross analysis. All the questions are displayed on the header first row of the spreadsheet displayed in the same order as in the Google Form.

Research Limitation

The sample size accessible to the researcher is insufficient for establishing definitive statistical conclusions. The small sample size is a function of time constraints since it is not conducted in the country of residence. Another limitation of the sample is that the majority of the participants came from the same sector, namely, the education sector. The sector barely exhibiting any visual disparities relating to equal pay and suitable work conditions which is not the case of other businesses in the private sector. It is important to note here that it is not the intention of the researcher to concentrate on education employment as a representative of the private sector, it is however inevitable owing to the fact that it attracts many women because of the previously stated benefits.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Gender Parity as a determinant of Economic Activity and labor Participation

Despite the extensive arguments advocating women as a vital labor resource in enhancing economic growth and development, women participation in economic activity is still lagging relative to men. Collier specifies four distinctive aspects -hinging on 'social conventions'- that restrain women from properly participating in economic activity. First is the existing discernment that extends beyond the household to the labor market and access to credit and funding. Second is the fact that 'role models' in economic and production activity tend to be highly 'gender-specific'. Meaning that boys tend to follow the example of men preceding them while girls feel inclined to follow in the foots of other women. Consequently, when a new economic opportunity emerges if it is assumed by a man it will automatically, thereafter, be readily available to men rather than women. Third is the distribution of responsibilities and compulsions within the household that falls primarily on the shoulders of women that make them reluctant to surge their burden by more labor outside their domicile. And lastly -and foremost demanding- is the duty of reproduction that is the entire responsibility of women with what it entails in terms of time, physical and mental health strain on them (Collier, 1989:8, cited in Miller & Rasavi, 1995).

Palmer builds on the verdicts of collier and takes the notion of reproduction burden way further as he labels it a 'reproduction tax' on women labor that they have to submit prior to engaging in any other labor activity. In this sense the 'reproduction tax' levied on women not only limits the time at their disposal to participate in economic activity but also confines their choice solely to work opportunities suitable to their household obligations. Evidently, the economic consequent is misallocating a valuable resource exemplified in the forgone opportunity of women productivity, which is a distortion to the market forces leading to extensive economic inefficiency (Palmer, 1991:163 cited in Miller & Rasavi, 1995). Macro-economic policies -thereafter- have been criticized by many researchers for its male bias, Elson calls on policy makers to grant some attention to 'human development aggregates' instead of just "considering the monetary aggregates of productive economy and ignoring the human resource aggregates of the reproductive economy (Elson, 1993, cited in Miller & Rasavi, 1995, P.27).

3.2. The Employment Setting of Women in Egypt

Recent statistics have revealed that 30% of the Egyptian households are entirely supported financially by women in addition to an evident percentage co-supporting their families. In 2018 the Central Agency for Public Mobilization has released statistics stipulating that 14% of Egyptian families are headed by women (El-Behary, 2018).

Currently, employment apprehensions are central to every policy deliberation in Egypt. It is at the core of the economic goals of 'Egypt's 2030 Strategy' that aim to reduce the unemployment rate to 5% (ILO, 2016 A). The unemployment rate has stayed almost constant since 2014 around the 13% figure. However, this figure -like any other aggregate statistics- does not reflect the variations relating to different social clusters in the society. As such the differential employment ratios pertaining to different age groups, ethnic groups, inhabitant groups (urban/rural, upper/lower Egypt, or rich/marginalized

areas) or genders are not accounted for. Of course -needless to say- gender issues cut across all these mentioned categories. This is as women tend to make the majority of those who are likely to be underemployed, to exit the workforce -based on discouragement- and to be among the marginalized social groups.

Therefore, despite the fact that unemployment poses a critical apprehension literary to every citizen -seeking a job- in any given society, it can be asserted without hesitation that the pursuit is by far more intense when it comes to women who are naturally more venerable in the job market. This is especially true in a country like Egypt where the general consensus is that in times of economic hardship and limited job opportunities men should come first as they are perceived to be more deserving and more entitled while a woman work is perceived as an accessory . Consequently, while male unemployment for the age of 15+ rests on a 6.8% threshold corresponding female unemployment hovers around 21.4% (Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2019).

The labor office – falling under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Manpower – administers all policies initially mandated by the Ministry. It is also responsible for the provision of all services pertaining to employment or required by those who are actively pursuing a job. A survey conducted in 2006 provided that over 90% of workers with a formally paid job received information that aided them in attaining this job via one of the labor offices. That being said, when considering women job seekers, a number of inadequacies have been detected. First, there has been no eminent effort of offering any special services to women especially for those raising infants or young children. Second, no exerted work on toning the employers' requests with the qualification of those listed at the office as seeking a job has been detected. Finally, the lack of provision of any sound counselling to the named women diminished their opportunity in being properly prepared to purse the available jobs (JICA, 2018).

In light of the above, the International Labor Organization has issued a report suggesting the subsequent recommendations to the Egyptian administration in order to boast the employment rate of the youth in general and that of women in particular. The named recommendations include integrating and supporting women through decent working conditions and environments that take in consideration the women role as care takers for their families. Make more information available on the different industries and sectors hiring women as well as enhancing the skills of women and coaching them into becoming competitive enough for acquiring these jobs.

It is worth noting that a number of amendments have been made to the labor law pertaining to women. Examples of these amendments are; the exemption of women from working the night shift in the industrial sector (No. 183 of 2003); granting women with a nursing infant the right to either sign in – to her job – one hour late or sign out one hour early (No. 155 of 2003 and the Child Act); as well as extending maternity leave from three months to four months (No. 126 of 2008). This is in addition to excluding women from partaking in jobs endangering them (Article 90). The legislation also grants women a maximum of two –three month- paid maternity leaves (Article 91) in addition to an unpaid childcare leave for up to six years (Article 94), to be taken once or subdivided for different children (JICA, 2018).

3.3. Gender Disparity in the Egyptian Labor Market

Gender gap is defined by the World Economic Forum as the "difference between women and men as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes" (World Economic Forum, 2017). The Egyptian labor law is gender equitable if not even favorable to women, that being said however, it can pose a hurdle rather than a privilege to many women seeking job opportunities. This is as -in absence of specified female quotas- many employers especially in the private sector are not in favor of recruiting women consequent to their law stipulated rights of maternity leave, nursing hour and childcare service provision. All of which making women a more expensive option to employers compared to men recruits, therefore resulting into more discrimination than support towards women and hence defying the whole essence of the law.

Profound manifestation exists in the literature displaying the humble labor participation of women in the formal economy. The percentage of women participation in labor force as a ratio of the total labor market fluctuates pending the demand of that market that primarily hinges on whether male workers are available to satisfy this demand or not. Although no obstinate cultural norms are detected regarding the employment of women in particular careers, it is undoubtful that consenting their participation in certain fields depends -for the most part- on that is perceived as modest, appropriate and the repercussions of such employment opportunity on her domestic obligations (Dorlet, 2005). It is important to note here that the political ideology -inaugurated in Egypt amid the 1960s- promoting for more women participation in economic activities has not been complemented by support schemes for these women. The state has continued to take women reproductive obligations and domicile duties as given basically as part of their biological disposition (Dorlet, 2005), delegating the entire responsibility of child-caring to women rather than endorsing a 'shared responsibility approach' (Elmenoufi, Ibrahim, Elkashawy 2017).

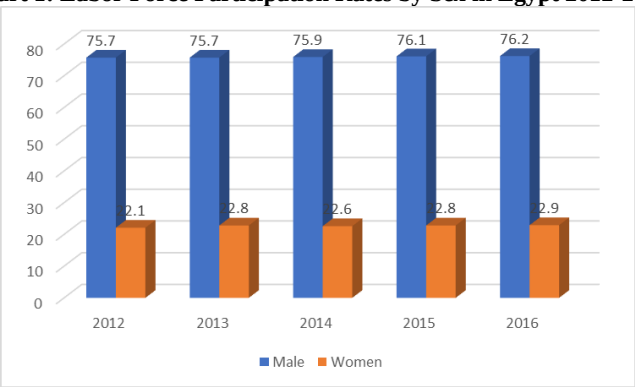
As such through the years little attention has been given to helping women balance their responsibilities at the household with those at the work place in a way that caters for both their productive and reproductive function, the matter that possesses a constraining challenge to women up to this date (Dorlet, 2005). The latter justifies the ILO statistics indicating that only one out of three women leaving work to attend to family related obligations manages to resume work again (Elmenoufi, Ibrahim, Elkashawy 2017).

Equitable job opportunities for both men and women in the labor market is at the core of gender parity and hence women economic empowerment. Nevertheless, attaining gender equality with regards to economic activity extends beyond being a matter of social righteousness and fairness to an inevitability for economic growth and hence development. Unfortunately, however, Egypt rates among the lowest female participation in labor force amid the entire world where only one in four females is economically active (ILO, 2016 A). Women participation in economic activity in Egypt, therefore, hinges around 23% which is almost half as much as the world's average for women participation in economic activity registering 53% (ILO, 2018). This is while a survey by the Central Agency for Public Mobility and Statistics - in 2019- asserts that female participation in the labor force in Egypt is less than 20.9% compared to 79.1% for males **(**Al-Masry Al-Youm, 2019).

Additional statistics pertaining to workforce participation -in 2015- display substantial gender disparity, where female participation in the labor market register a humble 22.8% resulting into a diminished employment rate of 19.6% Moreover, data indicates that a significant percentage of female employees -amounting to 35%- are unpaid for their work compared to 5% only for males (Ilo.org., 2016).

Egyptian women not only face higher challenges in finding a new job but also struggle to keep it for extended periods of time subsequent to the hardship they encounter in balancing their productive and reproductive roles. This is in addition to the social discrimination they face in the job market, all leading to a 25% female unemployment rate -in 2015- compared to 8.3% for males (Ilo.org., 2016). Chart 1 depicts the gender disparity in labor force participation in Egypt for the period between 2012 and 2016.

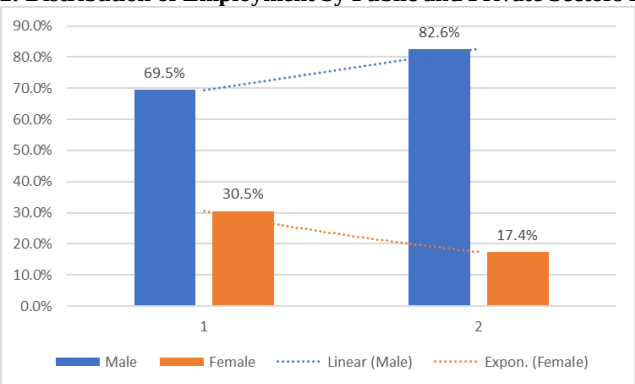
Chart 1: Labor Force Participation Rates by Sex in Egypt 2012-2016



Source: ILO KILM statistics http://www.ilo.org/global/statistics-and-databases/WCMS_424979/lang--en/ index.htm [accessed 30 August 2016].

Furthermore, women only hold 17% of the private sector employment while men hold a substantial 83% of this sector. Likewise, women participation in the public sector employment amounts to 31% as opposed to 69% male participation (ILO,2016).

Chart 2: Distribution of Employment by Public and Private Sectors in 2014



Source: Calculations based on CAPMAS statistics (2014). "Annual bulletin for labor force survey 2014".

Moving forward, in 2017 the Statistical Yearbook shows that male employees have registered 20 million as opposed to only 5.4 million women employees, women participation –therefore- in the labor force has only amounted for a humble 23% (JICA, 2018). Moreover, a comparison between the unemployment rates by gender - in 2016 - has shown an evidently higher unemployment rate for women registering 23.6% as opposed to 8.9% for men.

Nevertheless, what is even more alarming is that 88.9% of those who are unemployed have finished higher education (university graduate or post graduate level), which points out a much higher education level of women compared to men with equal qualifications. What further asserts this notion is the fact that only 3.2% of the unemployed women are found to be illiterate compared to a 6.4% illiteracy rate among unemployed men (JICA, 2018).

Table 1 demonstrates what is previously mentioned as it shows the highest group of unemployed women to be those who hold a university degree or higher amounting to 31.3% in 2017. The figures also show the immense parity in the percentages of men and women participating in the job market despite holding the same academic credentials. All of which confirming the pressing need for the enforcement and timely implementation of the above-mentioned recommendations.

Table 1: Participation in Labor Force and Unemployment Rate by Sex & Education 2017 (in 00s)

Education Status	Total	University Degree or Higher	Upper Intermediate	High School Diploma	Below High School	Read & Write Level	Illiterate
Labor Force							
Total	**294,743**	**56,582**	**13,558**	**5,121**	**39,693**	**28,929**	**53,531**
Males	224,730	35,905	10,236	4,065	32,523	26,053	40,459
Females	70,013	20,677	3,322	1,056	7,170	2,873	13,072
Unemployed							
Total	**34,681**	**11,777**	**1,460**	**200**	**2,728**	**825**	**1,171**
Males	18,530	5,299	613	119	2,336	498	928
Females	16,151	6,478	847	81	392	327	243
Unemployment Rate (%)							
Total	**11.8**	**20.8**	**10.8**	**3.9**	**6.9**	**2.9**	**2.2**
Males	8.2	14.8	6	2.9	7.2	1.9	2.3
Females	23.1	31.3	25.5	7.7	5.5	11.4	1.9

Source: Compiled based on CAPMAS, 2018, Statistical Yearbook – Labor

Another distressing report shows that the participation of women of age 15 and above -in the labor force- is only 22% compared to 75% for men, while globally women account for 52% of the labor force. The same report indicates that women's labor participation between the ages of 15-24 is 20% compared to 53% for men (UNISEF, 2011).

The substantially high unemployment rate for women - who have a university degree or above- is not only attributed to the lack of sufficient job opportunities in the private sector but also to the equivalent insufficiency of opportunities in the public sector relative to the increasing number of yearly graduates. In spite of that a lot of women will still be waiting in line in hope of an opportunity opening in the public sector that is known to require less skill level as a criterion for hiring. This is since despite the high degrees some of the women hold, they tend to lack the proper skills that would make them competitive enough in the private sector, i.e. language, computer, leadership skills, etc.

Many business owners claim that finding employees -especially fresh graduates- with the needed skill level and qualifications poses an evident challenge to them. Subsequent to this incongruity, a substantial percentage of the 800,000 graduates entering the job market annually with high degrees experience profound hardship in procuring matching job opportunities (ILO, 2018). Naturally, the situation is more dire when it comes to women seeking appropriate jobs consequent to their confinement with many other social, physical and cultural hindrances.

The immense demand of female graduates for government and public sector employment is also a function of the discernment of the private sector against women stemming from discriminatory social norms discouraging female employment within certain occupations. Additionally, the labor regulation pertaining to maternity leave and working hours preferential treatment elevates the cost of hiring females, further discouraging the private sector from employing them (Mensh, 2003, cited in Dorlet, 2005). As such the public sector becomes their only resort otherwise, they are obliged to turn to the informal work sectors, where they would have to consent to lower wages, low to no benefits or job security together with incongruous work environment.

3.4. The Paradox of the Education Sector

An assessment conducted by the World Bank Gender Unit assesses that the conventionally solid correlation between the education achieved and participation in the labor force is diminishing. This is consequent to a shrinking public sector -traditionally a chief employer for educated women- coupled by frail opportunities available for them in the private sector. Despite the fact that a higher ratio of men is being employed in the majority of sectors, certain sectors remain to be dominated by female employment. Quantifiable research attest that specific sectors are more accepting to women than others, especially to those who are married.

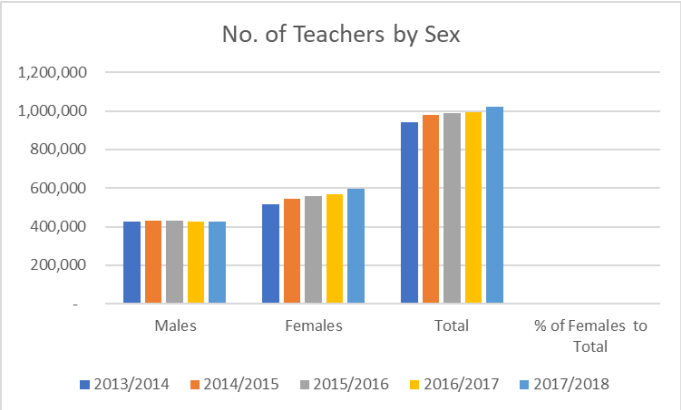
The education sector – that show a substantial demand for women hires – employs 48.1% of women. Table 2 and chart 3 below confirms that women continue to seek more jobs in the education sector where they believe will be more accepted and where the working conditions will allow a more suitable balance for their productive versus reproductive responsibilities. The numbers show a steady increase in the numbers of women employed by the mentioned sector -between the years 2013 to 2018- as opposed to stable to lower numbers of men seeking the same job during the same span of time.

Table 2: No. of Teachers by Sex 2013-2018

Sex	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018
Males	424,999	431,650	430,464	426,056	427,904
Females	517,826	545,415	559,043	566,741	595,929
Total	942,821	977,065	989,507	992,797	1,023,833
% of Females to Total	55%	56%	56%	57%	58%

Source: Compiled based on CAPMAS, 2018, Statistical Yearbook – Education, Data supplied by the Ministry of Education

Chart 3: No of Female Teachers versus Males 2013-2018



Source: Compiled based on CAPMAS, 2018, Statistical Yearbook – Education, Data supplied by the Ministry of Education

4. Findings of the Empirical Research

The findings of the research can be clustered into three distinct themes: (1) the impact of earning own income on women empowerment; (2) the significant role women exhibit as providers for the household; (3) challenges facing women in the private sector of Egypt. The following section will utilize the responses of the sample participants to shed light on these themes in an attempt to better comprehend the employment environment facing women in Egypt and what justifies their limited participation in the labor market. This is while establishing -through the carried investigation- the importance of having a paid job and earning income on attaining women empowerment.

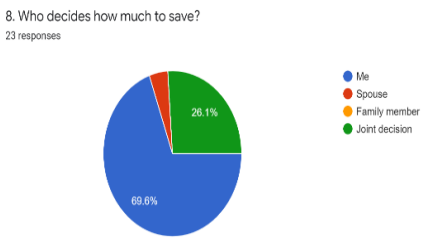
4.1. The Correlation between Earning Income and Women Empowerment

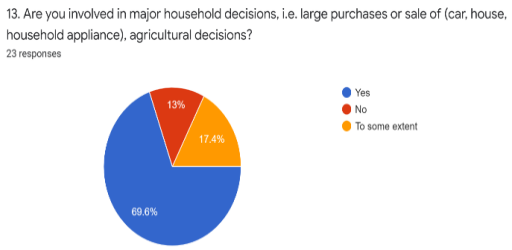
Various studies stipulate the positive correlation between wealth or working for money and women empowerment as manifested in greater participation in decision making. Women undeniably are more empowered when they have access to a paid job that secures a consistent income and when this income constitutes a significant percentage of the total household earnings. In the sample surveyed 95.7% of the women indicated having their own income, 100% of which confirmed that the source of this income is a paid job.

The following indicators will be used to establish the positive relationship between earning income and women empowerment: having a bank account; making decisions

regarding savings; making decisions pertaining to substantial purchases; making reproductive decisions; making decisions relating to having a job and earning money.

All the participants affirmed having a bank account and 87% confirmed that they exercise agency over when to assume employment and earn own income. When asked about saving decisions 69.6% of the women asserted the ability to decide how much to save and 60.9% said they were able to decide when and how to spend these savings, while the rest responded that it was a joint decision with the spouse. Only one participant out of the sample indicated that her husband takes all decisions relating to saving. Moreover, 69.6% of the women stated being able to make decisions regarding purchasing major acquisitions (i.e. house, car, appliances, …etc.). The manifested agency women possess over saving and spending decisions -as conveyed by the data- stems from the fact that these women are earning money and contributing to the household finances. Therefore, it can be asserted that a positive correlation exists between earning own income and women empowerment.

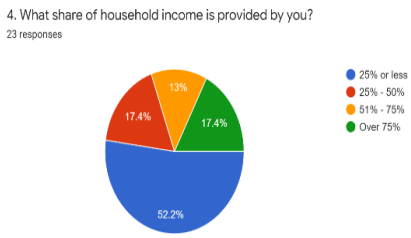


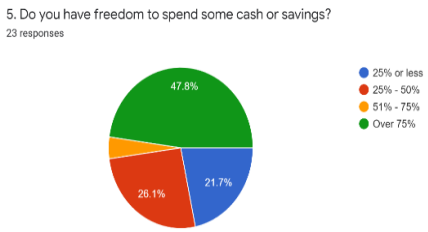


However, when asked about the ability to negotiate reproductive decisions only 56.5% out of the women interviewed indicated that they are always capable to do so while 34.8% said sometimes. Being conservative about discussing such matters is attributed to cultural inclination, nevertheless a financially independent women is more able to make such decisions.

4.2 Women Contribution to the Household Income

The vast majority of working women make substantial contribution to the total income earned by the household. Nevertheless, such significant financial contribution to the earnings of the family does not necessarily translate into supremacy over household decision making. Through the sample a wide range of responses convey full control over the household income to no control at all.

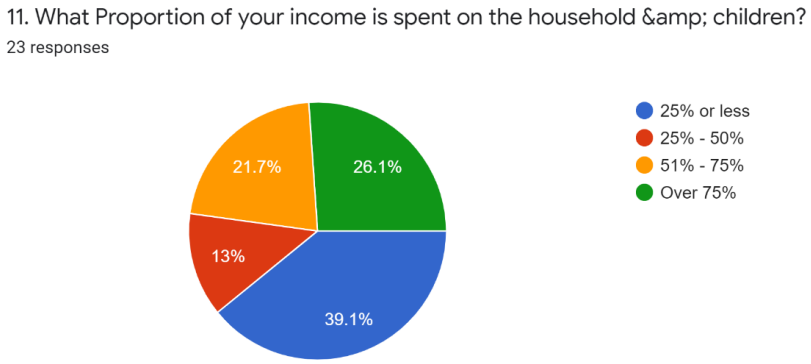




When asked about the share of household income they provide almost 48% indicated providing more than 25% of the family income out of this percentage 17.4% provide up to 50% of the income, 13% provide up to 75% while 17.4% provide more than 75% of the household income. However, when asked about the power they possess over-spending cash or saving 47.8% -almost half the sample- indicated having control over 50% or less of the income out of this percentage 21.7% have control over 25% or less of the income. Moreover, when asked whether they feel comfortable discussing household finances with their spouses when they were not in agreement 21.7% answered: no. when asked why among the responses were: "it felt awkward", "it caused fights and disputes", "he is unclear regarding anything concerning money", "he always perceives it as an acquired right that I support with my entire income."

It is important to note here that despite the aforementioned, earning own income is still among the chief influences enabling women empowerment. This is as 47.8% indicated having control over more than 75% of spending decisions and even the ones displaying less control over financial decision making in the household would not have any power over such decisions if they were not earning money and contributing income.

It is also crucial to signify here that the majority of working women in Egypt seek employment out of necessity rather than luxury as they assume a crucial role as sole providers or co-providers for their families. When women in the sample were asked about the percentage of their income they spend on the children and the household almost 60% indicated spending more than 25% of their income for that purpose. Out of this percentage 13% provide up to 50% of their income, 21.7% provide up to 75% and 26.1% provide more than 75% of their income to children and household expenses. The numbers therefore, clearly manifest that women act as providers for their families which defies the prevailing argument deeming men more worthy of job opportunities because they are bread winners of their families while women's work is merely an accessory to the household expenses.



4.3. Challenges Facing Egypt in Private Sector Employment

Work/life balance is among the principal challenges deterring women participation in economic activity. Conclusions from a Time-Use Survey conducted in

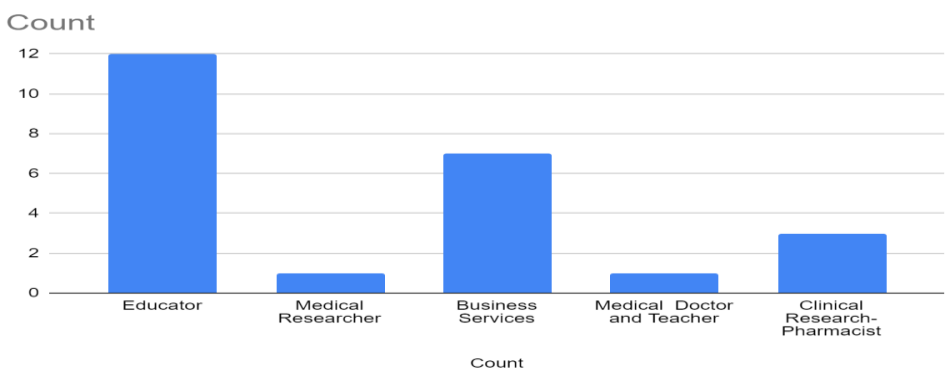
2015 signify that women in Egypt are almost entirely responsible for care taking and housework responsibilities even when they have paid jobs (Zeitoun, 2018). Only 3 out of the 23 participants stated they receive some form of help with household duties from their spouses. Moreover, research show that household obligations assigned to women do not decrease upon their employment (Zeitoun, 2018). In the sample 60% of the married women in the sample stated that they spend 8 to 9 hours a day on their paid job while 50% indicated that they spend 4 to 5 hours a day on housework. This "double burden" can dissuade women from seeking employment and committing to a job as it becomes highly challenging to maintain a career, which explains why a lot of women exit the job market post marriage consequent to household and reproductive obligations.

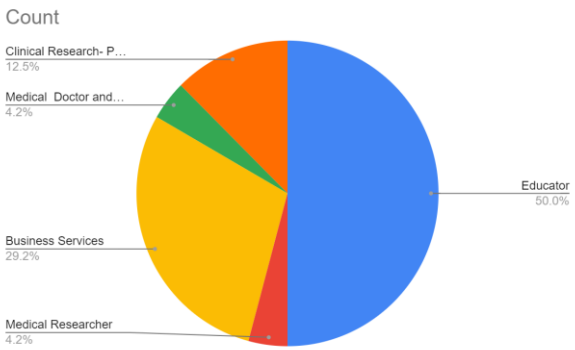
Public mobility is also an important determinant in facilitating women participation in economic activity. When asked whether you are able and feel safe to use public transportation/travel in public spaces 47.8% of the participants replied that they do not and that they actually avoid using public transportation in fear of their safety. Even those who can afford private transportation in Egypt struggle with heavy traffic, overcrowding, harassment, and the cost encountered to go to work, all of which pose hindrances to women participation in the labor force, especially when coupled by the long work hours of the private sector.

Women preference for public sector employment in Egypt is justified by unsuitability of work conditions in this sector for women -especially married ones- manifested in unequal pay, lessened environment safety, harassment, lack of childcare services, and extended working hours. The mentioned apprehensions not only cause women to refrain from labor participation but also influence their career choices if they have to assume employment.

As indicated by numerous studies in the literature, the education sector is deemed one of the most hospitable employment sectors for women even if it operated within the private sector canopy. Although it is not the intention of the research to concentrate on women employed by this sector it is inevitable as 50% of the research participants -although not deliberately chosen-held jobs within the education system consequent to the suitability of the work conditions.

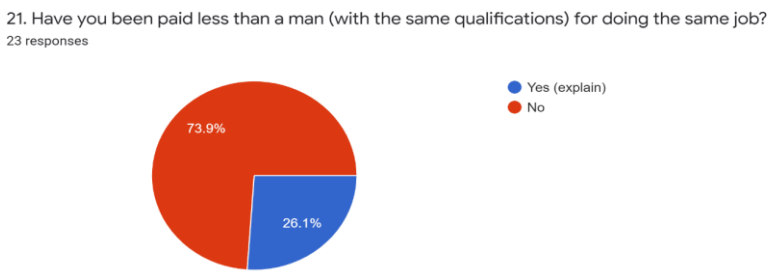
Chart 4: Sample Distribution by Occupation





To achieve insight of the **work conditions** challenges confronting women in the private sector of Egypt the suitability of the following indicators are addressed: (1) work hours; (2) safe enviroment (3) harassment; (4) availability of childcare services. The responses yeild a critical observation, essentially, all the participants proclaiming the suitability of work hours, the safty of enviroment, the absence of harasment and the availability of childcare facilities are all working in the education sector. Participants employed within business services and medical/clinical industries all asserted otherwise. The matter that justifies women opting for employment in the education sector even when they were more qualified for the job offered, which is proven by the fact that some of the teachers interviewed are engineers and doctors and holders of Ph.D.

Lastly, the problem of **unequal pay**, it is well-known that in the labor markets of many developing as well as developed countries, women who are equally as qualified as men are still earning significantly less. Berniell and Sánchez-Páramo postulate that in earning prospects, women have a lesser chance to have formal job opportunities, they usually earn less than men for doing the same work (Duflo, 2012). To combat this injustice, Article 9 in the 2014 Constitution stipulate that the Egyptian State "shall ensure equal opportunities to all citizens without discrimination" therefore contesting any discernment against women. The government as well as the public sector abide by this legislation and enforce equal pay schemes, regrettably however, this is not the case in the private sector. This is confirmed by a study -in 2015- attesting that the private sector pays women 34% than their male counterparts despite the Labor Law provisions stipulating for equal compensation, which evidently demotivate women from seeking employment in the private sector.



There are exceptions -of course- of this predicament as vastly exhibited in the education sector even the privately owned and managed segment of it, which is verified by the research participants responses. When asked whether they have been paid less than a male colleague for doing the same job 73.9% said no while 26.1% said that they do. It is worth noting here that the sample participants affirming receiving equal pay chiefly hold education posts, all indicating that this sector provides more equitable opportunities for women. Those who affirmed receiving less elaborated that they are receiving the same as a male working less or getting the same pay as a less experienced male. Justifications alternated between: "having less negotiating power", "men are stronger in getting what they want", and "Simply we are in man environment, so everything is for men first".

5. Conclusion

Presently, Egyptian women are still constrained by the social and cultural framework stereotyping women role in the public arena in spite of the diversity of their contributions to the economy and the multiplicity of the economic roles they play as orderly, unregulated and care labor. Despite the preceding women's access to employment opportunities - specifically in the private sector- remain limited by work/life balance struggle, challenging public mobility, frail enforcement of labor laws that permit unsuitable work conditions, unequal pay as well as diminished 'gender-sensitive' policies.

In spite of the evident discernment and gender-based milieu women are subjected to in the workplace, Egyptian women bear economic burdens and contribute to spending on the family, either in partnership with men or as the primary breadwinners of the family. Findings of the research affirm that women in Egypt are not working for luxury or merely for their independence but are rather obligated out of the necessity of supporting their families, if not as the sole providers then as co-providers for essential. It is therefore irrational to limit their access to equal labor opportunities based on the predisposition that men are the providers of their families and hence more worthy of claiming work opportunities.

The research shows concrete evidence of the positive correlation between having a paid job thus earning own income and women empowerment. Contributing to the collective income of the family gives women rights to share in vital decision making in the household which is normally not possible for them otherwise. Through making sizeable contributions to the necessities of the household they earn the right to make decisions pertaining to saving, spending, and making substantial purchases.

Through the years -however- little attention has been given to helping women balance their responsibilities at the household with those at the work place in a way that caters for both their productive and reproductive function, the matter that possesses a constraining challenge to women up to this date (Dorlet, 2005). Evidently, women economic participation positively correlates with the adequate recognition and protection of their needs, rights as well as physical and mental security in the workplace, the matter that entails sincere exertions on behalf of the government as well as employers.

Women preference - in Egypt- for public sector employment is justified by the discrimination they face in the private sector, owing to the anticipated higher cost associated with hiring them. Consequent to their reproductive and care taking role employers believe women are not a good investment, which is reflected in diminished growth opportunities and

discriminatory compensation. This is in additions to the unsuitability of work conditions in this sector for women - especially married ones - manifested in extended working hours, lack of childcare facilities, and unequal pay.

Nevertheless, this research detects an exception to the aforementioned apprehensions, namely, in the education field even when it is operated within the private sector. The singularity of the educational sector is that it offers women equal opportunity in recruiting, compensation, and promotion. Moreover, presents decent work conditions in terms of reasonable hours, safe environment, equal pay, and opportunity for growth as well as child-care services. Thus, enabling more participation in the labor market and hence better chances of women empowerment.

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