

MEASURING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE MENA REGION: LABOUR MARKET, FIRMS AND HOUSEHOLDS

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Date: June 1, 2022





The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women's Care Work and Employment in the Middle East and North Africa

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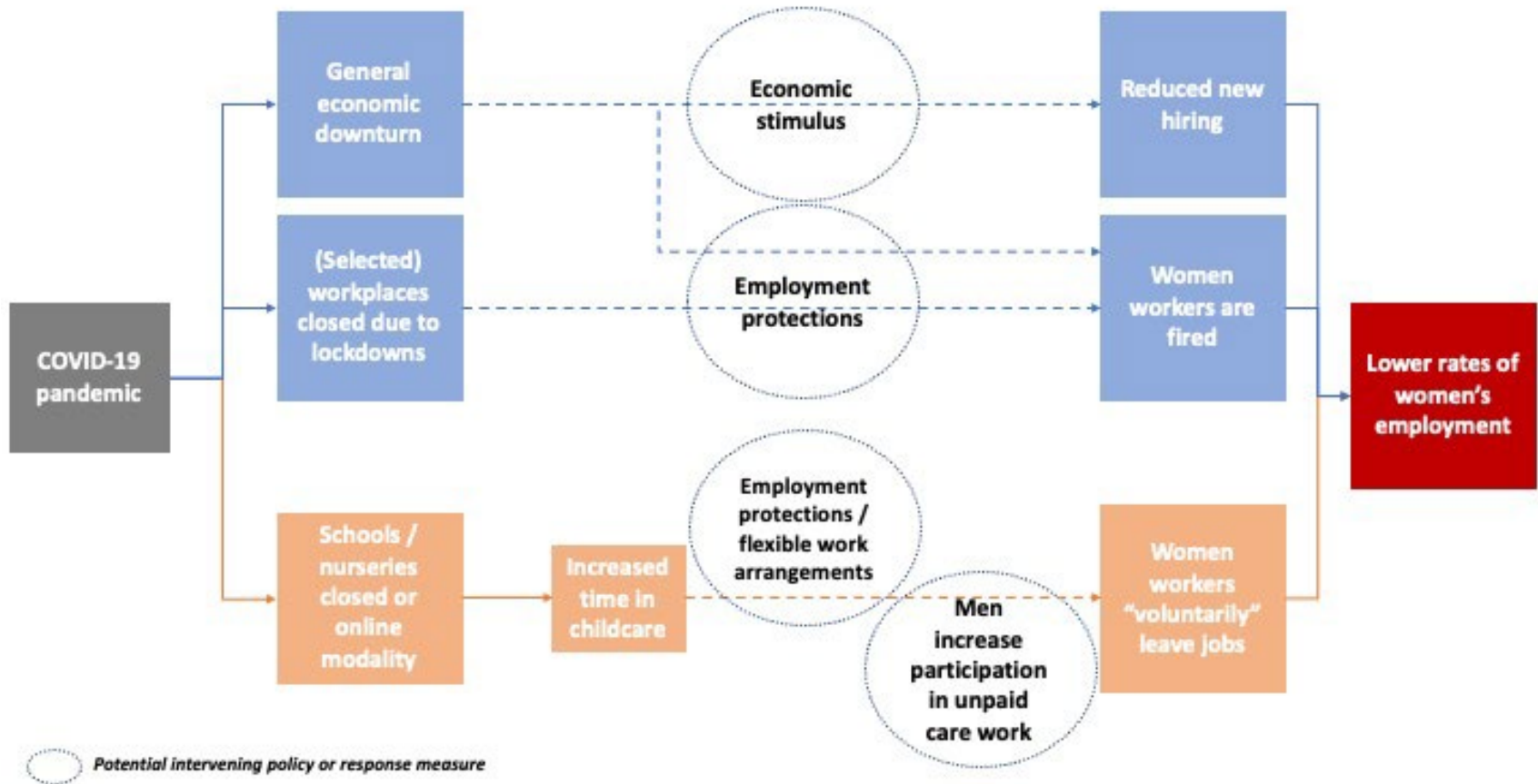


Motivation

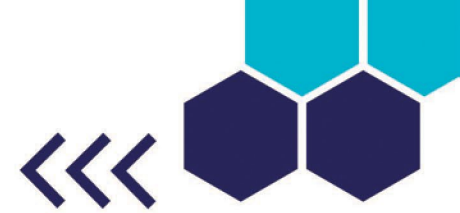


- The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted caregiving arrangements (child care and schools)
 - Women faced a sharp increase in their care responsibilities
- Globally, women's employment dropped, more so than men's
 - The pandemic recession referred to as a “shecession” (Alon et al. 2021)
 - The impact of COVID-19 on care work and women's employment may be more severe in low- and middle-income countries (Kenny and Yang 2021)
- The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region had the world's lowest rates of female labour force participation pre-pandemic (Verick, 2018)
- MENA also had the greatest gender inequality in care work pre-pandemic (ILO, 2018)

Conceptual Framework



Research Questions and Hypotheses



How has the COVID-19 pandemic, and particularly the closure of schools and nurseries, impacted women's time spent in care work?

- H1: During periods when schools and nurseries were closed, time spent on care work increased for women with school-age or younger children
 - Results support H1

How are exits from employment related to care responsibilities?

- H2: The pandemic has caused women with school-age or younger children to exit employment
 - Results do not support H2 (after accounting for pre-pandemic employment, there are not differential exits)

How do changes in employment vary by pre-pandemic type of employment?

- H3: Impacts of the pandemic on women's employment depend on the type of employment they engaged in pre-pandemic
 - Results support H3

Data, Outcomes, and Methods



ILO/ERF COVID-19 MENA Monitor (CMM) household phone surveys

- Five countries (Jordan FCDO funded), five waves from November 2020-August 2021
 - Pooled and country-specific models
 - Focus on women, use panel data (multiple observations for same women)
- Nationally representative of mobile phone owners aged 18-64 from in-person surveys pre-pandemic after the application of weights

Outcomes:

- Report the amount of care “more than usual” during the past week versus February 2020 (logit, woman fixed effects logit)
 - Women in household with children under 18
- Employed in the past week (logit)

Key covariates & controls



Key covariates:

- For care work outcome: Closures metrics from weekly calendar data of school closures (UNESCO database + news/official decrees)
 - Open in person, totally closed, not in session/break, online, partially open
- For employment outcome: School-age or younger children
 - (0) not being married or not having school-age or younger children in the household
 - (1) being married and having school-age or younger children in the household

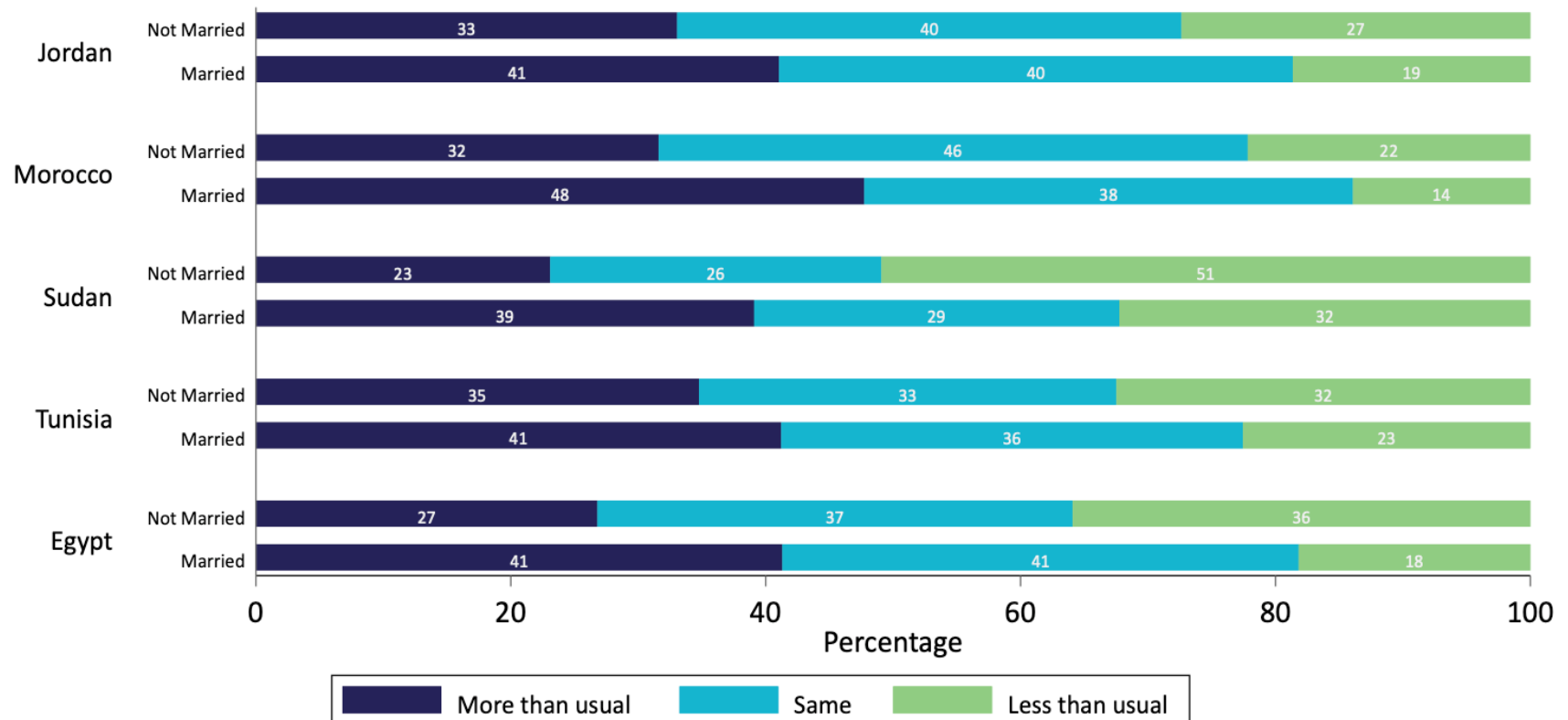
Controls:

- Age (categorically)
- Education level
- Urban/rural residence, administrative level one geography
- Wave of the survey
- Employment models include: initial (February 2020, pre-pandemic) labour market status
 - Public sector wage work, private sector wage work, non-wage work, unemployment (using the broad definition, including discouraged workers) or being out of the labour force (neither employed nor unemployed)

Care work increased for married women



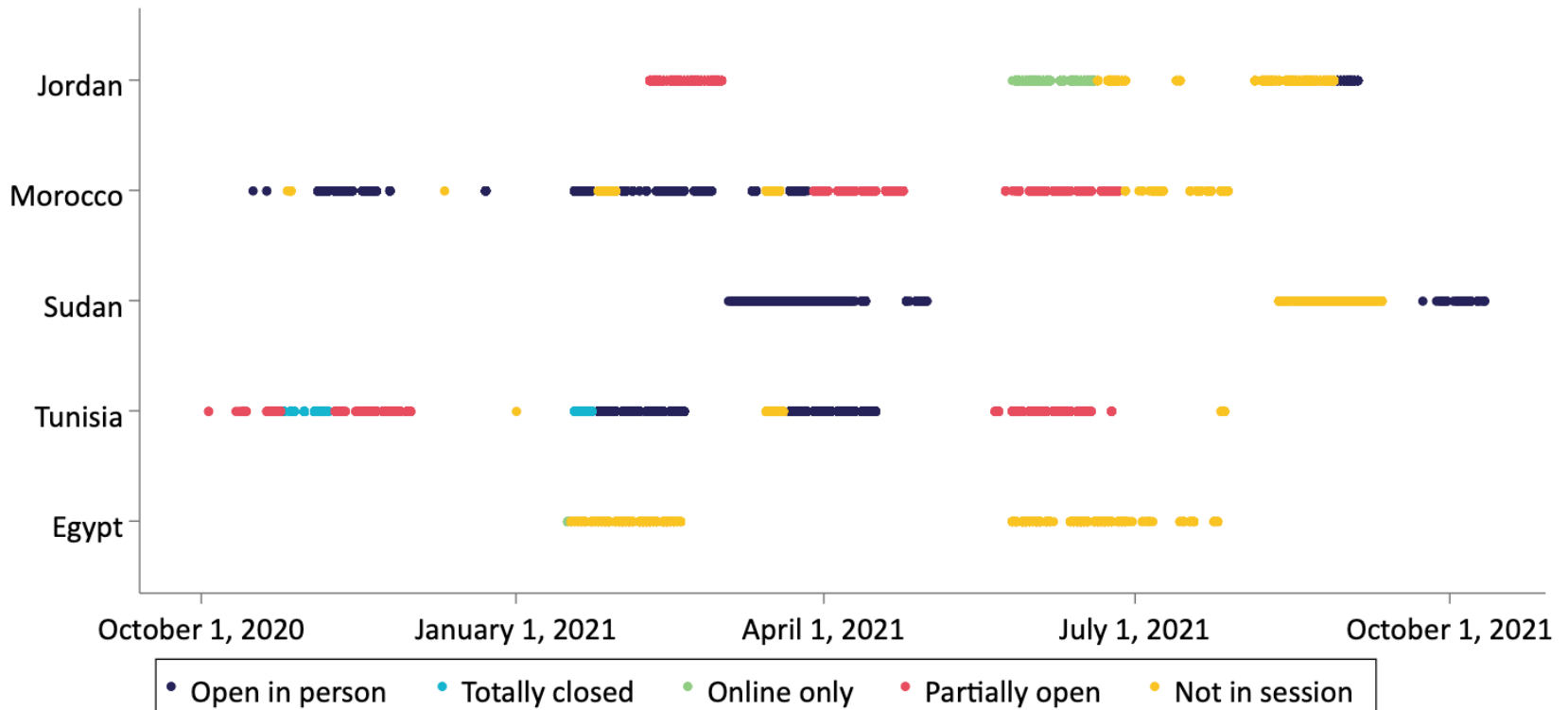
Direct care work: Past week versus February 2020 (percentage), by country and marital status, women in households with children aged 18 or younger



Schools varied in their operating status



Operating status of schools and nurseries by country and date



Multivariate results: care work and closures



Test H1: That during periods of closures, care work increased for women with school-age or young children

- Sample of married women in households with children
- Key covariate: time-varying school status

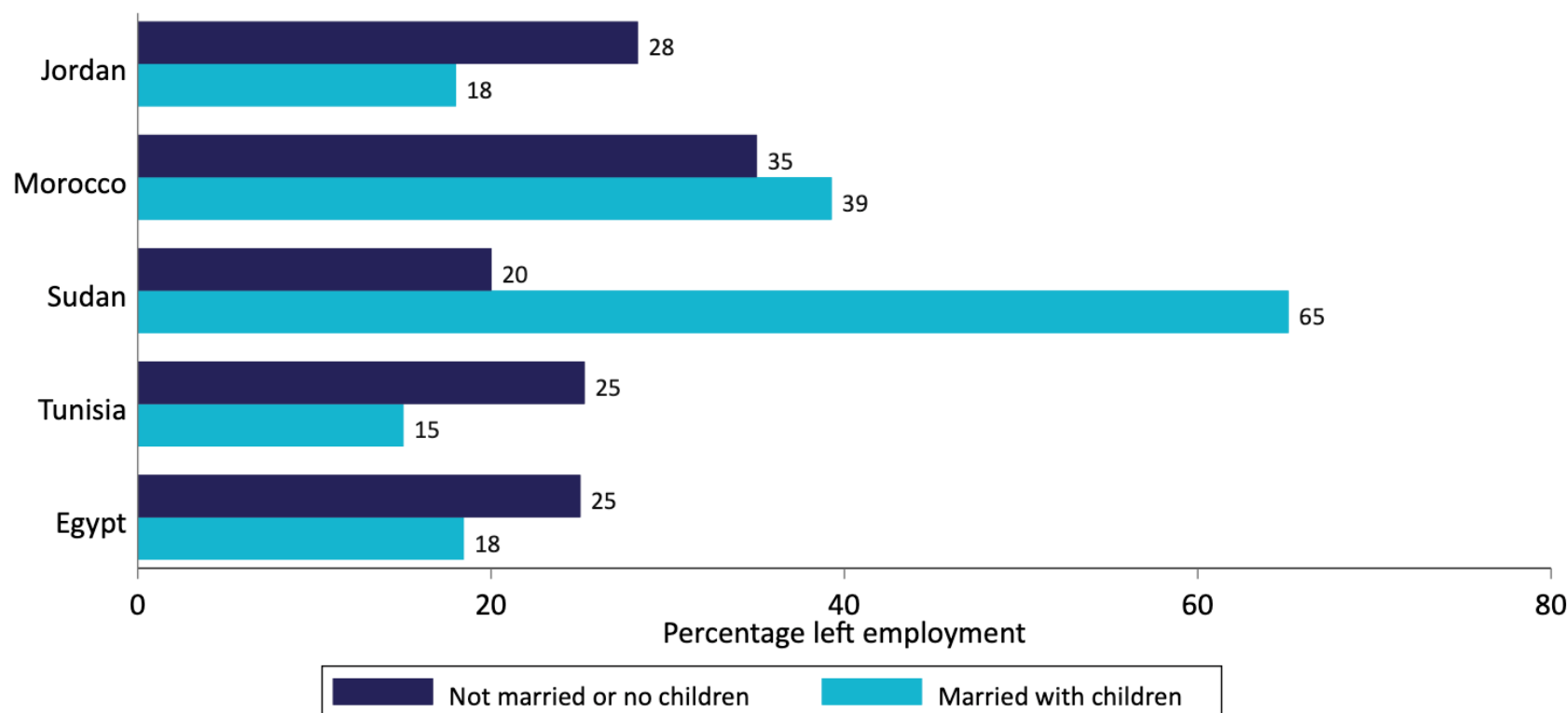
Versus open normally:

- Totally closed schools significantly increased reports of more care (pooled, also in pooled fixed effects, Tunisia fixed effects model)
- Not in session significantly reduced reports of more care, as did online only (pooled fixed effects, Jordan fixed effects, Tunisia fixed effects)

Varying differences across countries in rates of exit for married women with children



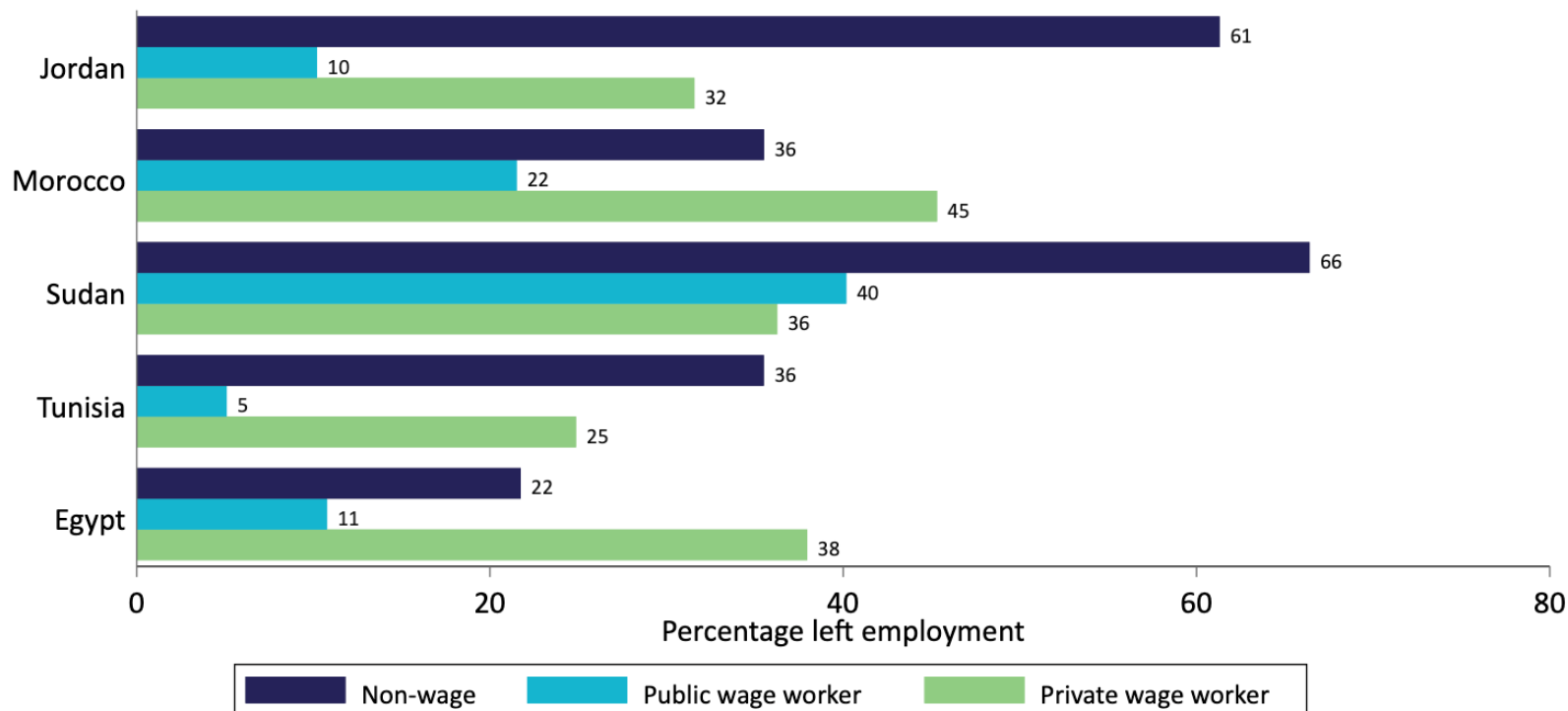
Percentage of women who were employed in February 2020 who had left employment at the time of the survey, by country, marital status and household composition



Exits depended on pre-pandemic employment status



Percentage of women who were employed in February 2020 who had left employment at the time of the survey, by February 2020 employment status



Multivariate results: employment



Test H2: Whether employment exits are related to care responsibilities (school-aged or young kids)

Test H3: Whether type of employment (initial, February 2020 labour market status) matters for impacts of pandemic on employment

Results:

- Lower chance of employment for women with children (significant pooled, Egypt)
- Relationship disappears after controlling for pre-pandemic labour market status (counter to H2)
 - Versus public, all other statuses less likely to be employed, differences most significant and substantial
 - Continues pre-pandemic trends as well
- Women with care responsibilities already selected out of employment entirely or into reconcilable types of work (public/non-wage)

Sensitivity analyses:

- Only women employed February 2020 (no significant relationships with care responsibilities)
- Interact type of employment and care responsibilities (only significant is Tunisia, with care more likely to stay employed in public sector)
- Direct effect of school closures on employment for women with children (not significant)

Summary



More care work than pre-pandemic times for married women with children

- Total closures increased care work (H1), but online modality did not (reduced!)

Women with care responsibilities had the same or lower employment rates than other women

But no significant effects of care responsibilities on exit after controlling for pre-pandemic labour market status

- Or limiting to women employed pre-pandemic
- Or directly estimating the impact of closures
- Refuting H2

Exits from employment actually lower for married women with children in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia but higher in Sudan, Morocco compared to other women

- In part due to different types of employment (corroborates H3):
 - Selected out of private sector wage work
 - Public sector in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia and non-wage (especially agriculture) in Sudan and Morocco

Policy implications



School closures created additional care work responsibilities for married women with children

- Underscore the fundamental and persistent gender inequity in care work
- Need to recognize, reduce, redistribute this care work
- Pandemic offers potential opportunity for men to do more care work

Pandemic neither hurt nor helped women's employment (persistently low)

- Women concentrated in certain sectors; helpful during the pandemic but underscores lack of flexibility, employment protections in private sector in “normal” times
- Addressing care work, overall weak labour demand, discrimination, weak job creation important

Fundamental issue of inequitable gender norms

- Male breadwinner/female homemaker paradigm
- Unchanging gender norms across generations
- Schools may be important site for changing norms (Dhar, Jain, and Jayachandran 2022)
- Challenging, but possible – example of shift towards educational equity

*Thank you for
your attention!*



Questions?!