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# ▶ Why Do So Few Married Women Work in Egypt?

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## ► Acknowledgments

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This brief is the result of a collaborative effort between the ILO Egypt Country Office and the Economic Research Forum (ERF) and discusses the findings and implications of an experiment that assessed employer discrimination by sex and marital status for online job postings in Egypt (see Krafft 2023 for further details). The experiment randomized gender and marital status on resumes applying to online job postings. The research examined whether employers gave call backs signalling potential hiring.

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## ▶ In a nutshell

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- ▶ As of 2021, only 13 per cent of Egyptian women were employed
- ▶ Employment rates for married women are substantially lower than those of single women
- ▶ Women often exit work, particularly private sector work, around the time they marry
- ▶ Both demand-side (employer) and supply-side (women, household, and social) factors could contribute to married women's low employment rates
- ▶ There has been limited research to date on the role of employer discrimination in married women's low rates of employment
- ▶ This brief reports the results of an experiment assessing discrimination in employment by sex and marital status
- ▶ For the universe of online job postings, there does not appear to be significant discrimination against women or married women in callbacks, although specific jobs are gender-stereotyped
- ▶ The results underscore the importance of addressing supply-side constraints to women's employment, particularly unequal care work responsibilities

## ► Introduction

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The female employment rate is low in Egypt. In 2021, only 13 per cent of women were employed (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) 2021). Married women's employment rates are only three quarters the level of single women (Krafft, Assaad, and Keo 2022). In the private sector, half of women exit work around the time they marry (Selwaness and Krafft 2021; Assaad, Krafft, and Selwaness 2022; Krafft, Assaad, and Keo 2022). There has been substantial research assessing potential supply-side (women, household, and societal) barriers to married women's employment, such as the "double shift" of caregiving facing women (International Labour Organization 2018; Economic Research Forum and UN Women 2020; Assaad, Krafft, and Selwaness 2022).

There has been much less research examining the role of the demand side and potential employer discrimination in married women's low employment rates. This brief discusses the findings and implications of an experiment that assessed employer discrimination by sex and marital status for online job postings in Egypt (see Krafft 2023 for further details). The experiment randomized gender and marital status on resumes applying to online job postings. The research examined whether employers gave callbacks signalling potential hiring.

## ► Assessing discrimination in job postings and callbacks

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The experiment collected data on online job postings from 13 different platforms listing jobs in Egypt. Data on 4,533 postings were collected. In the experiment, four resumes, randomized across single man, single woman, married man, and married women were sent to 710 of the postings that met the experimental criteria for entry-level jobs (see Krafft 2023 for further details). Callbacks that signalled the potential of hiring – either an interview request or request for more information—were assessed for signs of discrimination.

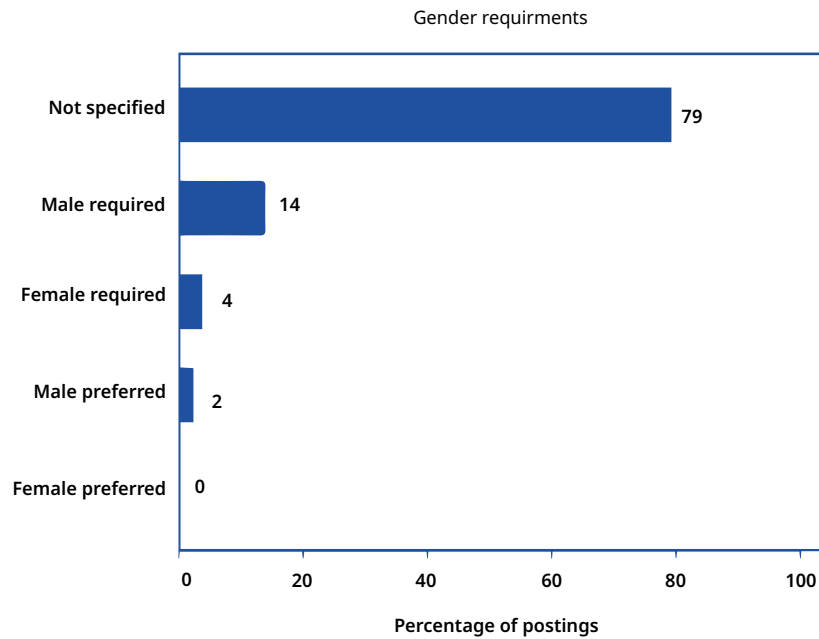
It is important to keep in mind that the universe of online job postings is quite select relative to the Egyptian labour market. For instance, 91 per cent of online job postings required a bachelor's degree, compared to 11 per cent of employment in nationally representative data (Krafft 2023). Postings vastly over-represented professional and managerial employment (66 per cent in online job postings versus 10 per cent of employment in nationally representative data). Postings also came primarily from select industries, such as information and communication technology (ICT), 23 per cent of postings compared to 1 per cent of employment in nationally representative data. The online job postings are types of jobs that have relatively more women than the labour market as a whole. Furthermore, only a select group of Egyptians use online job search. For instance, only 9 per cent of the unemployed had a LinkedIn or similar profile for employers to find (Krafft 2023).

## ► Gender requirements in job postings

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Discrimination can occur even at the posting stage. A number of job platforms commonly listed jobs as for men or women only. Figure 1 shows the listed gender requirements of job postings. Requiring

► Figure 1. Gender requirements of job postings (percentage)



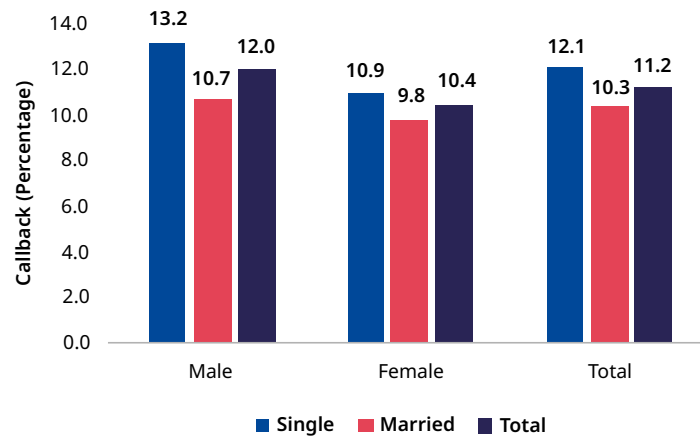
Source: Author's calculation based on job posting data (batch 1). Observation is a posting.

men was more common, as 14 per cent of postings listed male required, and 2 per cent male preferred. Only 4 per cent listed female required and less than 1 per cent female preferred. Almost no job postings (N=5, less than 1 per cent) had a required marital status, all single. Specific occupations were gender stereotyped. For instance, security guard postings almost all required men while business support jobs often required women.

## ► Callbacks do not show significant discrimination

The results of the callbacks do not show significant discrimination against women or particularly married women (Figure 2). Positive callback rates averaged 11.2 per cent overall. Rates were slightly higher for men (12.0 per cent) than women (10.4 per cent). Rates were highest for single men (13.2 per cent), followed by single women (10.9 per cent), married men (10.7 per cent), and married women (9.8 per cent). These differences were not statistically significant in multivariate models. There thus does not appear to be significant or substantial employer discrimination against women or married women in the labour market segment of online job postings.

► Figure 2. Callback rates (percentage), by gender and marital status



Source: Author's calculation based on resume data and callback data

## ► Forbidding gender discrimination in postings could backfire

The analyses did not find significant gender discrimination in callbacks. However, there was a clear gender preference for men in postings. Egypt's labour law guarantees gender equality in employment (World Bank 2022), making such gender preferences illegal. Potentially, the government could require job sites and employers to remove gender requirements from job postings. However, as the discrimination literature underscores, removing information can actually backfire and increase disparities in the labour market (Agan and Starr 2018; Doleac and Hansen 2020). As well as gender discrimination in postings, postings show age discrimination that needs to be addressed (Krafft 2023).

## ► Promising news for a selected segment of the labour market

The findings that women and especially married women are not significantly discriminated against in callbacks are surprising. The results must be considered with some caution, as they only apply to the universe of online job postings, which is very select. Similar research with online postings in Turkey and Tunisia did not find discrimination against women, on average, and did find some potential favouritism of women in certain segments of the labour market (Balkan and Cilasun 2018, 2019; Alaref et al. 2020). Different segments of the labour market may have different discrimination. Indeed, a list experiment and asking Egyptian employers directly about gender preferences in hiring showed 50 per cent of employers discriminated against women (Osman, Speer, and Weaver 2021). However, fewer employers in ICT and fewer large firms discriminated (Osman, Speer, and Weaver 2021).

Although the findings only apply to a select segment of the labour market, they are potentially promising for the long-term prospects for limited employer market discrimination more broadly in Egypt. If Egypt



were to have substantial structural transformation into larger firms and more professional and ICT work, the results could potentially generalize to a larger segment of the Egyptian labour market.

## ► Addressing supply-side constraints to women's employment

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The results of the study suggest that women's, and particularly married women's low rates of employment are not due to discrimination, at least in the callback stage for the select segment of online job postings in this research. The absence of constraints observed on the labour demand (firm) side of women's employment points to supply-side explanations as the major drivers of women's, and especially married women's, low employment rates in the market segment this research studied. The results are consistent with other research showing women often leave private sector work the year before they marry (Selwaness and Krafft 2021). Gender norms that emphasize women's role as caregivers and men's as breadwinners (Hoodfar 1997; El-Feki, Heilman, and Barker 2017) may be driving this dynamic.

Women's "second shift" of care work if they work outside the home is substantial (Assaad, Krafft, and Selwaness 2022). For instance, 85 per cent of women and 98 per cent of men in Egypt said "changing diapers, giving baths to children, and feeding children should all be the mother's responsibility" (emphasis added) (El-Feki, Heilman, and Barker 2017, 47). Policies need to recognize, reduce, and redistribute care work (Economic Research Forum and UN Women 2020). Redistribution within the household is particularly needed, as gender inequity in care work is high. This redistribution requires substantial changes in gender norms. Programming and policy can change gender norms (Bicchieri 2017; Cislighi and Heise 2018; Levy et al. 2020; United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2020).

Policies that try to reduce or redistribute care work must be carefully designed. Efforts to provide childcare and reduce women's care responsibilities must ensure childcare is adequate along a number of dimensions, including quality and hours of operation. Married Egyptian women with young children who were offered child care subsidies rarely took them up or worked; concerns with the quality of care may have limited use (Caria et al. 2022). Similarly, an effort to expand pre-primary education and increase female labour force participation in Algeria appears to have backfired, actually reducing women's employment, potentially due to the short (half-days) of care offered through pre-primary (Krafft and Lassassi 2020).

Policies to help women and especially married women work may have to address multiple constraints as well as be carefully designed. Married women are very time constrained; addressing time constraints in terms of commutes, child care, and marketization of other services, such as ready-made meals, are all important complements, given existing gender inequity in care work (Assaad and Arntz 2005; Krafft and Assaad 2015; Ehab 2018; Economic Research Forum and UN Women 2020). These reductions in care work will have to be paired with redistribution of care work to men through norms change in order to effectively reduce the constraints on women, and especially married women's, labour supply.

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