Gender, Marital Status, and Labor Market Discrimination in Egypt

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Sector(s): Labor Markets, Gender

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Location: Egypt

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Around the world, women – especially married women – are employed at lower rates than men. Researchers conducted an experiment to investigate the impact of gender and marital status on employment in Egypt by submitting fictitious resumes to online job postings. Resumes for single men, single women, married men, and married women were similarly likely to receive a callback for an online job posting, suggesting there was not substantial discrimination against women or married women. There was, however, gender preference in job listings and women were more likely to receive callbacks asking for more information rather than offering an interview.

Policy issue

Globally, women, especially married women, are employed at lower rates than men. Studies show that married women are more likely to be penalized in the job market with lower wages compared to married men. [1] Most prior research on this phenomenon focuses on the personal and gendered societal barriers married women face when accessing jobs. One example of such a barrier is the "second shift," in which married women are expected to be the primary child caregiver on top of their full-time employment. However, there is relatively little evidence about the impact of employer discrimination on the employment of married women, particularly in developing countries. Does a job applicant's gender and marital status affect their chances of receiving a callback for a job application?

Context of the evaluation

Employment among women in Egypt is low. In 2021, 13 percent of women and less than 10 percent of married women were employed. Half of women working in the private sector leave their jobs the year before getting married, potentially reflecting traditional gender roles in which women are homemakers and men are employed. Whether employer discrimination has a part in married women's exodus from the workforce is unknown in Egypt.

Online job postings in Egypt are generally more exclusive compared to the available jobs in the broader Egyptian labor market. For instance, in 2018, 11 percent of all vacancies in Egypt required a bachelor's degree compared to 91 percent of online vacancies in this study. Professional roles, manager-level positions, and jobs in information and communication technology (ICT) were also disproportionately represented online. These positions are more often occupied by women compared to positions in the broader labor market, although such positions are relatively scarce.

Employer gender discrimination is present on online job platform postings in Egypt: it is common for job listings to be for either men or women only, with jobs for only men appearing more frequently. This is consistent with a survey conducted in 2018 showing that 50 percent of Egyptian employers had a bias against women. [2] Gender stereotyping based on job skills is also present. In 2023, however, nearly no job postings favored single over married applicants.

A woman is viewing a career website on a laptop

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Details of the intervention

Researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to measure employer discrimination towards women, particularly married women, in online postings and callbacks for entry-level positions in Egypt. Researchers sent 2,676 fictitious resumes to 710 randomly selected entry-level jobs listings from thirteen online platforms in Egypt. Public sector jobs, unpaid jobs, jobs for non-Egyptians, and jobs outside of Egypt were all excluded from the sample.

Each randomly selected job listing received four fictitious resumes with each representing one of four identities with a randomly assigned gender and marital status: single male, single female, married male, and married female. If a job description explicitly excluded any one of these identities from eligibility, the corresponding resume was not submitted. The names on the resumes were common Muslim names to reflect the dominant religion in Egypt. Resumes also included poneyhotos to make the gender of the applicant more evident. Names and photos were randomized within gender. Other resume content, such as educational attainment, age, skills, and experience, corresponded to the job's requirements and were randomized within identities.

To measure employer discrimination, researchers collected data on the job listings and their characteristics, then collected data on callbacks received through phone calls or emails between June 2022 and February 2023.

Results and policy lessons

Resumes for single men, single women, married men, and married women were similarly likely to receive a callback for an online job posting, suggesting there was not substantial discrimination against women or married women. There was, however, gender preference in job listings and differences in the types of callbacks women received.

Gender preference: Despite Egyptian labor laws guaranteeing gender equality in employment, the sample of job postings signaled a preference for male applicants. Fourteen percent of job postings required a male applicant, while only four percent required a female applicant. This discrepancy is due in part to specific occupations with frequent male gender requirements, such as security guard roles.

Types of callbacks: Among those who received callbacks, there were some gender and marital status differences in the types of callbacks. The most common positive callback was scheduling an interview (74 percent), followed by asking for more information (20 percent) while 6 percent were instant interviews. Women (32 percent), and particularly married women (37 percent) were much more likely to be asked for additional information than men. This is suggestive of employers being potentially interested in considering married women, but also potentially dubious of their availability or ability to reconcile domestic responsibilities and employment.

These findings suggest that married women's low rates of employment were not due to discrimination at the callback stage. Instead, researchers suggest that married women were more likely to leave their jobs or avoid seeking employment due to gender norms and expectations, consistent with prior research. Policies to increase married women's rates of employment should address multiple constraints, such as unequal caregiving responsibilities and access to affordable and high-quality childcare. Researchers note, however, that the results of the study should be interpreted carefully, as callbacks were measured only for entry-level, private sector jobs posted online.

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Krafft, Caroline. "Why Do So Few Married Women Work in Egypt?" Cairo: International Labour Organization, 2023.

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