

Stories of Women in the Days of Pandemic

The Effects of Covid-19 on Poor and Marginalized Women
An Analytical Study Based on Fieldwork

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic swept through the world in 2020, after beginning in China at the end of 2019. The world has suffered major health, humanitarian and economic crises. In their assessment on March 11th, 2020 the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that “COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic.”¹

Following this assessment, a number of new infections and deaths were recorded. The virus was transmitted rapidly between countries, and health systems around the world were placed under high stress. Many countries were unable to absorb the large numbers of people infected with the virus.

Due to the spread of COVID-19, most countries took measures to address the impacts, including the closure of airports, universities, schools, malls and places of worship. Furthermore, restrictions of movement were imposed to the point of applying curfews at certain times. There were also many economic repercussions of the pandemic, which affected labor markets in most countries, causing unprecedented job losses. The economic crisis has hurt many people, such that, “1.6 billion workers in the informal economy, that is nearly half of the global workforce, are in immediate danger of having their livelihoods destroyed,” the International Labor Organization (ILO) warned ².

UN Women has stated that the pandemic is likely to increase gender inequality around the world.³ As economic activity tumbles, women who face disadvantages in accessing decent work will suffer more than others. Additionally, this pandemic may make it more difficult for women and girls to access treatment and health care. There is also a growing concern that violence against women and girls is escalating, as women and their abusive partners are kept together, isolated from other people and resources that can help them.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations has indicated that Covid-19 should serve as a wake-up call and an end to “arrogance, and to display a measure of modesty; because global threats require new unity and solidarity, calling for policies to address the social and economic dimensions of the crisis, focusing on the most affected groups such as women, children, the elderly, low-wage earners and other vulnerable groups.”⁴

According to the World Bank, pre-existing gender gaps may intensify the adverse effects of COVID-19. “In fact, there is a high risk that gender inequalities will widen during and after the pandemic and that the gains in women’s and girls’ accumulation of human capital, economic empowerment, and voice and agency that were painstakingly built over the past decades, will be reversed.” To formulate policies that are not gender-blind, it is important to understand the different ways that COVID-19 pandemic and its accompanying economic crisis may affect gender equality outcomes.⁵

In light of the exceptional circumstances that the world faces due to the new COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions that have affected all citizens, especially those groups that suffer from discrimination and gender-based violence in poor societies, the Egyptian Women’s Legal Issues Assistance (CEWLA) decided to prepare this study to monitor its repercussions that affected all citizens, especially in poor societies, and its various effects on marginalized groups that suffer from discrimination and gender-based violence in various (health, economic, political, social, psychological, gender roles and relations) fields.

The study examines the effects of COVID-19 on a sample of poor, marginalized women, and focuses on a set of axes: awareness of COVID-19 pandemic, the economic impacts, the social impacts within relationships and roles among family members, the stress and psychological effects, and violence against women.

1 WHO Director-General’s opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020, [link](#)

2 ILO: as job losses escalate, nearly half of global workforce at risk of losing livelihoods, at: [link](#)

3 Covid19-: Emerging Gender Data and Why It Matters, UN-Women, at: [link](#)

4 UN Secretary General, Remarks to the World Health Assembly, 18 May 2020, at: [link](#)

5 The Coronavirus Is Not Gender-Blind, Nor Should We Be, World Bank Blogs, at: [link](#)

I. Problem and Objectives

Highlight the impacts on marginalized women during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the aim of helping these women, policy makers and all stakeholders, as they try to reduce the negative impacts and increase the ability of these women to meet the challenges they face.

II. Methodology:

To collect and analyze data, we used the statistical method. The study's methodology relied on the following steps:

- Designing and implementing a research questionnaire to measure the different impacts on women who were selected as a sample. The questions posed in the form varied to suit the diversity of the women surveyed. There were also constant questions such as basic data, social status, age stages, etc. Other variable questions were posed according to the type of the target group. For instance, there were questions for working women and others for housewives. All questions were designed simply, so information could be easily accessed and measured. The study also examined the effects and repercussions on poor and marginalized women through several main axes, namely:

- Extent of awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Economic effects on women during the pandemic;
- Social effects, relationships and roles among family members during the pandemic;
- The stress and other psychological effects that women face during the pandemic.

- Conducting individual interviews over the phone; considering social distancing and protection for researchers in light of the current crisis.

- Carrying out a desk review of the various data, reports, policies and procedures issued by the government or different authorities and organizations, whether at the local, regional or global level. The data was then processed and analyzed, findings and recommendations were formulated, and some women's stories were documented.

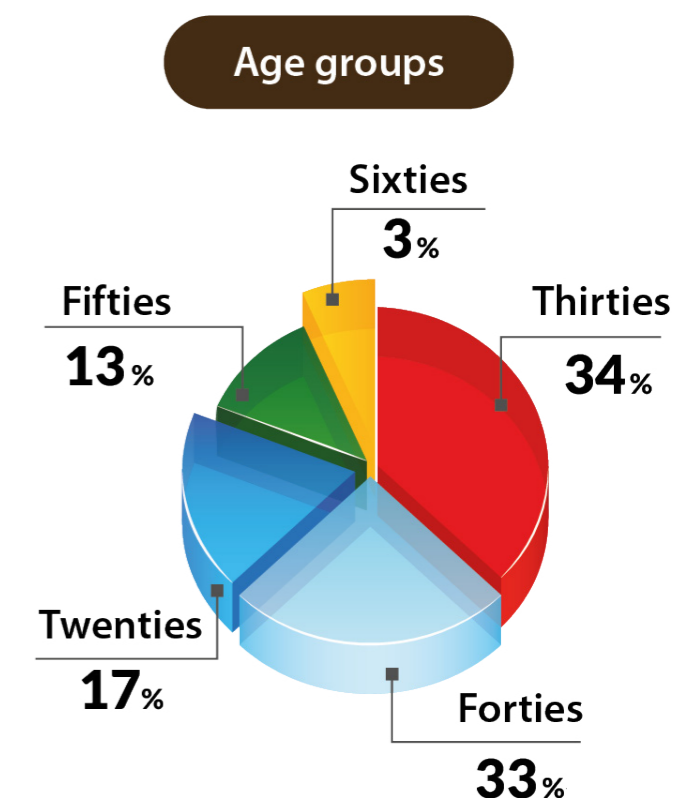
III. Sample

The sample was taken mainly from groups of marginalized and poor women who benefit and/or go to CEWLA, as we were not able to choose a completely random or representative sample of Egyptian women due to political and legal constraints. However, there are similarities between the characteristics of the sample and many poor and marginalized women. The sample reached 121 women from different popular areas in Greater Cairo. It is varied in terms of age, marital status and nature of work.

Sample Characteristics

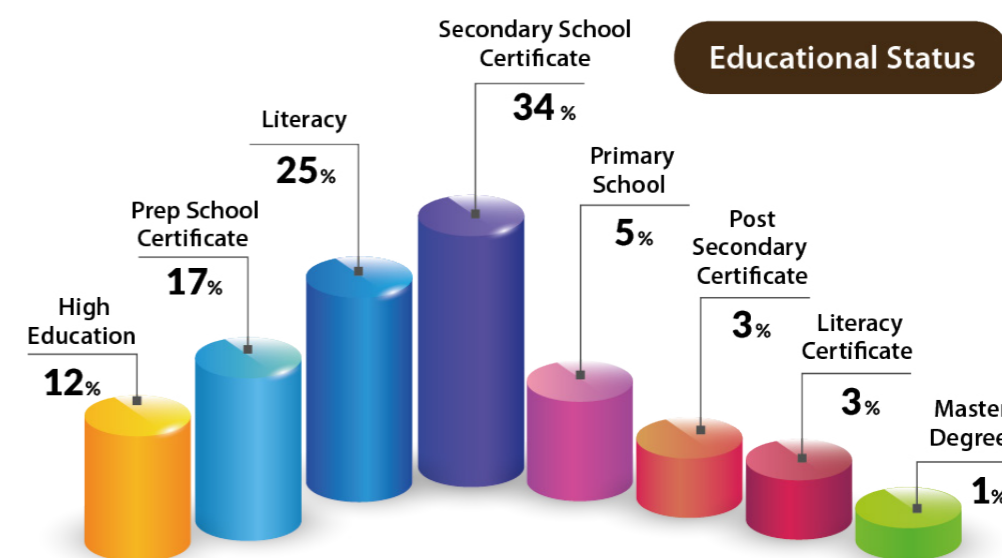
Age groups

The age of the sample ranged from 20 to 72 years old, and the majority of respondents were in their thirties, fifties, and twenties, followed by the forties, sixties, and seventies.



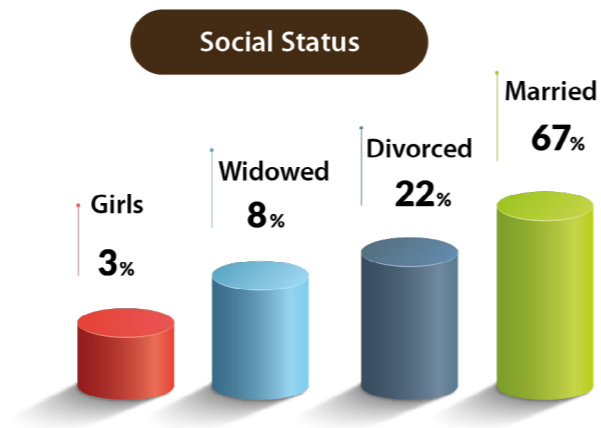
Educational Status:

The educational status of the respondents varied: a plurality (34%) of the respondents had a secondary school certificate, while 25% of the respondents were illiterate. Following these two groups, 17% of the women had obtained a preparatory certificate, as well as those with higher education (12%). The lower percentages of the sample were divided between those that received a primary and post-secondary certificate (5% and 3%, respectively), and finally, the literacy certificate (3%) and master's degree (1%), as shown in the figure below.

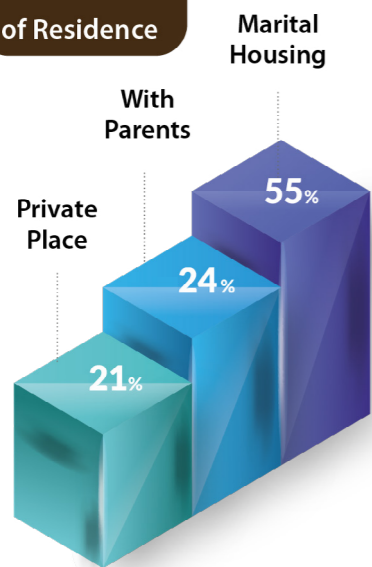


Social Status:

The highest percentage of respondents according to their social status was: 67% were married, followed by divorced women (22%), widowed (8%), and then girls (3%), as shown in figure 3.



Current Place of Residence



Current Place of Residence

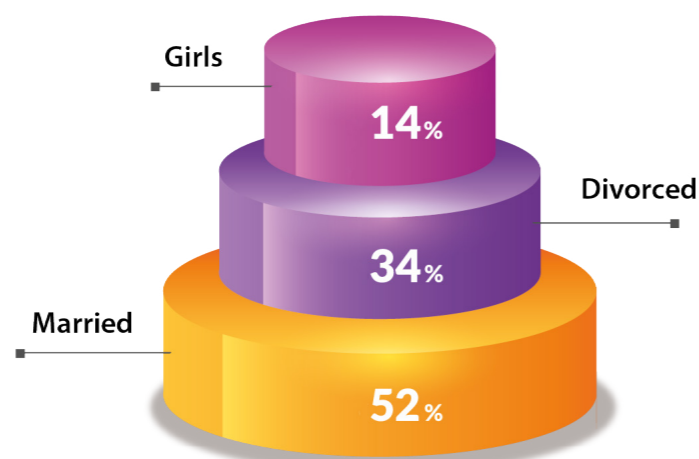
67 of the total interviewed women (55%) live in marital housing, 29 women (24%) live with their parents, and 25 women (21%) live in a private place of their own.

Making a comparison between the marital status and the place of residence, we find the following:

52% of women who live with their parents are still married; they count as 15 women (representing 19% of all married women in the sample). This is due to several reasons: husband abandonment, marital disputes, or the loss of the husband's income and his inability to financially sustain his family during this period. 34% of those who live with their parents are divorced; they count as 10 women (representing 37% of the total divorced women in the sample). Finally, 14% of those who live with their parents are girls; they count as four, i.e. all the girls interviewed live with their parents.

We will later on see the social and psychological effects of violence on some married and divorced women who live with their parents and how this situation affects their children as well.

Living with their Parents



Average Number of Family Members:

The number of family members within the sample ranged from one to nine individuals, with a total of 548 individuals of 121 families, which is an average of four members per family.

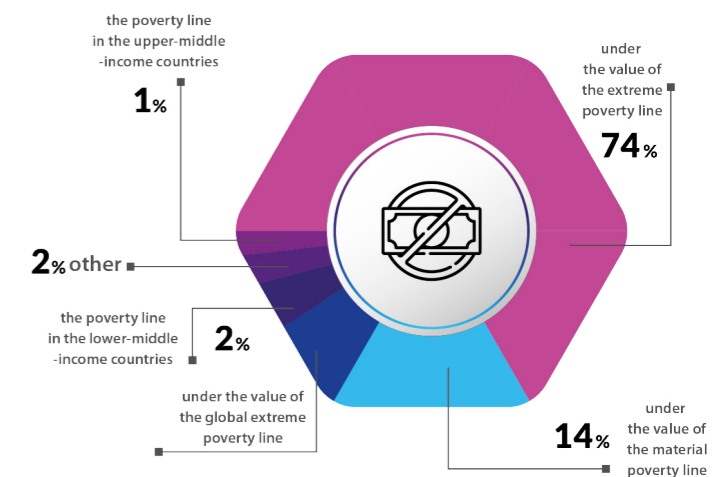
Average Family Size



Income Classification:

According to the Income, Expenditure and Consumption Booklet issued by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) for the period of 2017-2018, the poverty rate in Egypt has increased to 32.5%.⁶ CAPMAS defined extreme poverty as "the proportion of the population whose total consumption is less than the food poverty line". To a large extent, the food poverty line represents the cost of survival, CAPMAS concluded. The relevant data show that 6.2% of the population in Egypt suffers from extreme poverty, and the value of the extreme poverty line per capita is EGP 5.890 (about USD 370) per year, or EGP 490.8 pounds per person per month, 74% of the total women in the study sample fall under this category.

Income Classification



⁶ CAPMAS, Booklet of Most Important Indicators "Income, Expenditure, and Consumption" Survey 2017/2018, Arabic only at: [Link](#)

CAPMAS also defined material poverty as “the inability to provide the minimum basic needs for an individual or a family.” These basic needs are food, housing, clothing, educational services, health, and transportation. CAPMAS set the value of material poverty at EGP 8.827 (USD 550) per person a year, which is equivalent to EGP 735.5 (USD 45) per person a month. 14% of the total studied sample live in material poverty.

The World Bank has set the global extreme poverty line at \$ 1.90/day based on the expenses rate of the year 2011, which had not changed by the end of April 2020.⁷ This value equals about EGP 29.92 per day, or EGP 897.75 per person a month. 7% of the total studied sample of women live in global extreme poverty.

In 2018, the World Bank also set the poverty line in the lower-middle-income countries at USD 3.20, which, by the end of April 2020, equates about EGP 50.4 a day, or EGP 1512 per person a month. This category represents 2% of the total studied sample.

The World Bank has set the poverty line in the upper-middle-income countries at USD 5.50, which equates, at the end of April 2020, about EGP 86,625 a day, or EGP 2598.75 per person a month. This category represents 1% of the total studied sample. Meanwhile, for 2% of the total studied sample the income was above EGP 2598.75 per person a month.

It is worth noting that the mentioned income estimates for the sample individuals were done before some of them lost their jobs or had their income decreased due to the COVID-19 crisis, which we will discuss when focusing on economic impacts.

IV Focuses of the Study

⁷ Nearly Half the World Lives on Less than \$5.50 a Day, The World Bank, at: [link](#)



1 Extent of Women's Awareness About COVID-19



Here we address the awareness of marginalized women about the emerging pandemic, and the kinds of information they have. We also touch upon what they know about the routes of transmission and the symptoms and severity of the disease, in addition to identifying the sources of this information. The precautions that women take to protect themselves and their families from this pandemic are also covered through the interviews. We have extracted information about how and what procedures of prevention they apply, such as household quarantine, and whether they take any preventive actions when leaving the house.

What the Interviewed Women Know About COVID-19

Through phone calls to the target group about their knowledge of COVID-19, methods of infection, symptoms of the disease, its severity and prevalence, the respondent women reported different information, both correct and incorrect. In the following, we will briefly discuss what they reported:

Some women reported that the COVID-19 pandemic started in Wuhan, China, because they eat bats and dogs, and that it has spread rapidly. For instance, one of the interviewed women said: "It is a contagious pandemic and one person may infect 1000 persons." It has invaded the world, especially European countries, has infected and killed many people, and has reached Egypt. They also said that in Egypt we have many infected persons and deaths. One of the facts mentioned by interviewed women was that "deaths may occur within 15 days from the infection," while another said "within 6 days."

Most countries, including Egypt, have taken several measures, including border closures, flight re-

strictions, and the issuance of exceptional decisions, such as a partial curfew. Some of women also added that COVID-19 is not visible to the naked eye, and spreads through the air. It is a small object that enters the body, infects the respiratory system, comes in the throat, then into the lungs, and then a severe damage takes place. It attacks and destroys the immune system. On these calls, women raised concerns that this disease is contagious and attacks the elderly, the chronically ill, and those with weak immunity, in particular. Some women also said that it causes the death of many elderly people. Meanwhile, many women believe that this virus does not affect young people and children. Several women believe that the main cause of the pandemic is God's anger with humans because we mistreat each other.

Those who die, get a poor burial! They put them in a hole. I saw them in the TV. I am not sure if that true or not.

As for the means of infection, some women said that this disease transmits from one person to another. It may also be transmitted from animal to human through air, breath, and saliva from sneezing and coughing, as well as from the absence of general hygiene.

This is in addition to mixing, crowding and contact between people of all kinds, such as shaking hands, hugging, and kissing.

It may also be transmitted by touching one's nose, eyes, or ears after coming in contact with contaminated objects such as surfaces, ground, minerals, clothing, and bags. That is because it remains on objects for a long period and spreads quickly.

Regarding their knowledge of the symptoms of COVID-19, the majority of interviewed women indicated that they are similar to the symptoms of cold and flu, but more severe. Some women said that the corona virus is a type of flu, with more several other symptoms, including: body temperature above 38 °C or 40 °C; shortness and difficulty breathing, sometimes making it necessary to place the patient on a ventilator; severe headache; congestion and dryness in the throat, mouth and tongue; dry cough; sore throat; lung inflammation; sneezing; general weakness; feeling lazy; chest pain; whole body pain; runny nose; diarrhea; vomiting; tremor; stomachache; collapse of the immune system; etc. "If the virus reaches the stomach it is eliminated; it causes lung cell fibrosis; causes clots that block the bronchi," some women said.

There is a near-consensus among the women interviewed that this disease causes death. "Just two days and you would find us dying, God takes our spirit" one woman said. As there is no therapeutic serum for this virus, several women mentioned that some medications for the treatment of flu can be used when symptoms appear, such as Paramol, in addition to some other traditional methods mentioned through social media pages and websites, such as inhaling salt solution used as a rinse after adding some lemon!

On the ways to prevent the emerging COVID-19 virus, women pointed out several points that must be followed to reduce the spread of the disease, namely:

Preventing gatherings and applying social distancing, limiting family visits, ensuring household sterilization, keeping personal hygiene. Also, adhering to the preventive measures that the government indicated, such as staying at home, to contribute to protection from infection and fighting disease. However, this will only be possible if those women have the livelihoods and necessary needs such as food, rent, medication, and the urgent needs for patients and elderly people.

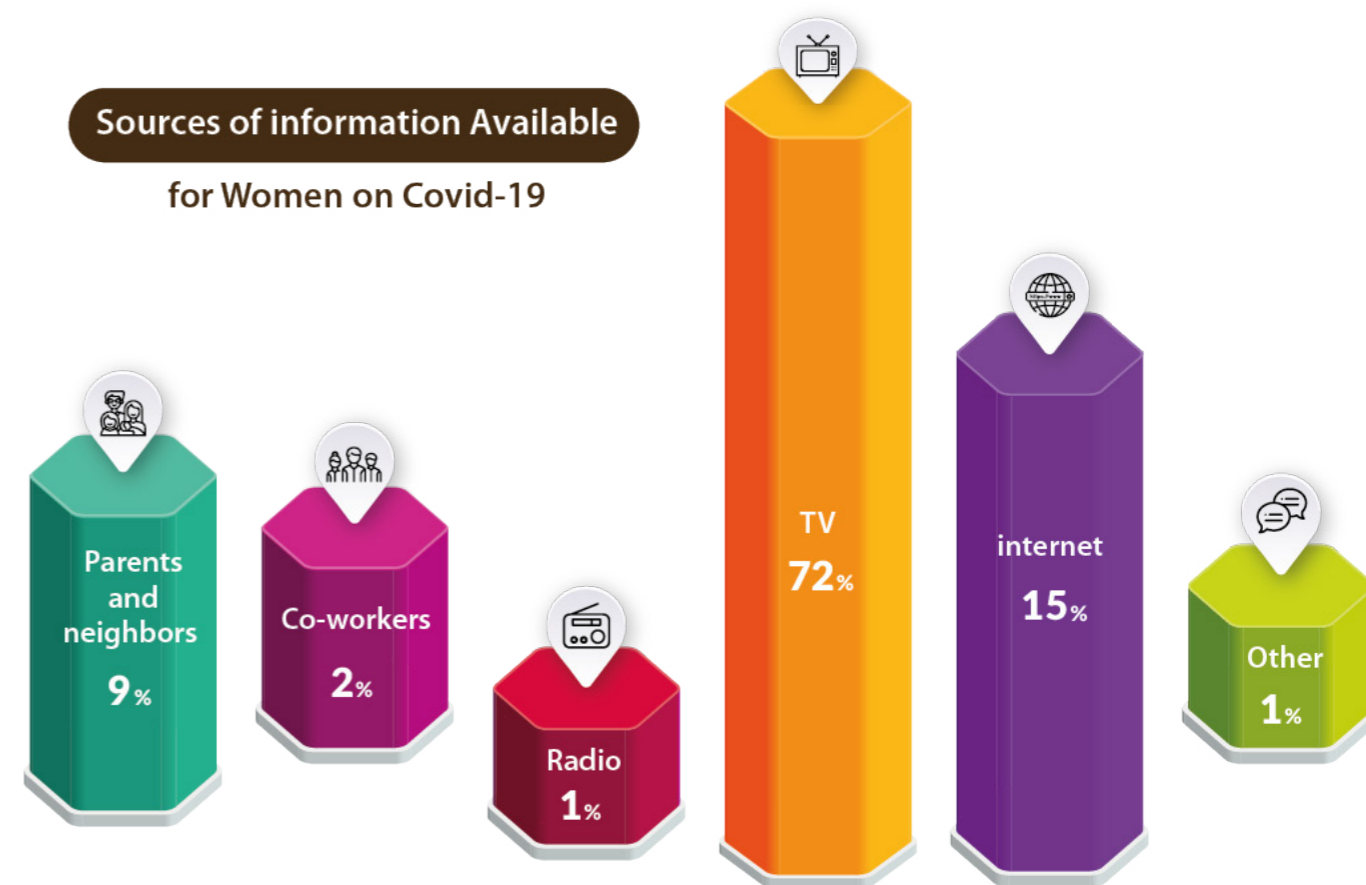
It is the wrath of God because we maltreat each other, now we even deprived from praying in mosques.

Covid-19 tells me not to go out because I am old and sick lady and I take medications for pressure and diabetes, so I am vulnerable to be infected!

Sources of information about COVID-19 Available to Women:

As for the sources of information available for women about the pandemic: TV occupied the lead with 72% of the total sample, and the Internet came second with 15%, whether through social media pages or other sites, followed in the third place by parents and neighbors with 9%, then co-workers by 2%, and finally radio and other sources (messages on the phone) at 1% each.

This is in line with many statistics that reflect the high percentage of Egyptian TV viewers, as Egypt has one of the highest viewing rates in the world,⁸ as well as the increase of Internet users in Egypt.⁹



However, although the number of Internet users are increasing, TV remains the primary method of obtaining information, as seen from the sample or in the statistics about TV viewing. This is mainly due to the ease and low cost of TV, especially for poor and marginalized groups, as well as low education and income levels. Thus, according to the characteristics of the sample women in terms of educational level, we find that 25% of them are illiterate, and in terms of economic level, 74% of them are under the extreme poverty line. The illiteracy rate of the entire Egyptian population is 25.8%, of whom 57.8% are women,¹⁰ and 32% of Egyptians are below the material poverty line.¹¹

8 Did the Egyptians Really Abandon the Television? I' da' at, (Arabic Only) at: [link](#)

9 Ministry of Communications: Currently 40.9 million Internet Users in Egypt, Al-Watan Newspaper, (Arabic Only), at: [link](#)

10 CAPMAS, Annual Statistical Book, 2019, at: [link](#)

11 CPMAS, Booklet of Most Important Indicators "Income, Expenditure, and Consumption" Survey 2017/2018, Arabic only at: [link](#)

Precautions Women Take to Protect Themselves and Their Families from COVID-19

In this respect, the sample was divided into two main categories:

The first category followed the protocols of self-isolation and quarantining at home; they do not go out except when necessary. This category represented 29% of the sample. The second category, which makes up 71% of the sample, is represented by those who continue their daily lives as normal, except in the limited hours of curfew.

Although the current situation is precarious, and the possibility of infection is increasing every day, the majority of the interviewed women reported that they, and their family members, have to go out. They cannot stay at home, looking for a source of sustenance just to cover their basic needs.



One of the women stated: "What makes us go out and be exposed to infection is providing the supplies and needs with which we can stay at home! If the needs are provided by the government, people will not go out. I mean, if people are prevented from going outdoors, how can they even buy food, detergents, or medications? The prices are going up, especially the food and the basic commodities. Before you start the curfew, you should provide these basic commodities." "We are left with no choice but to die by disease, or by hunger," added another woman. Many other women expressed their position with similar statements about the plight.

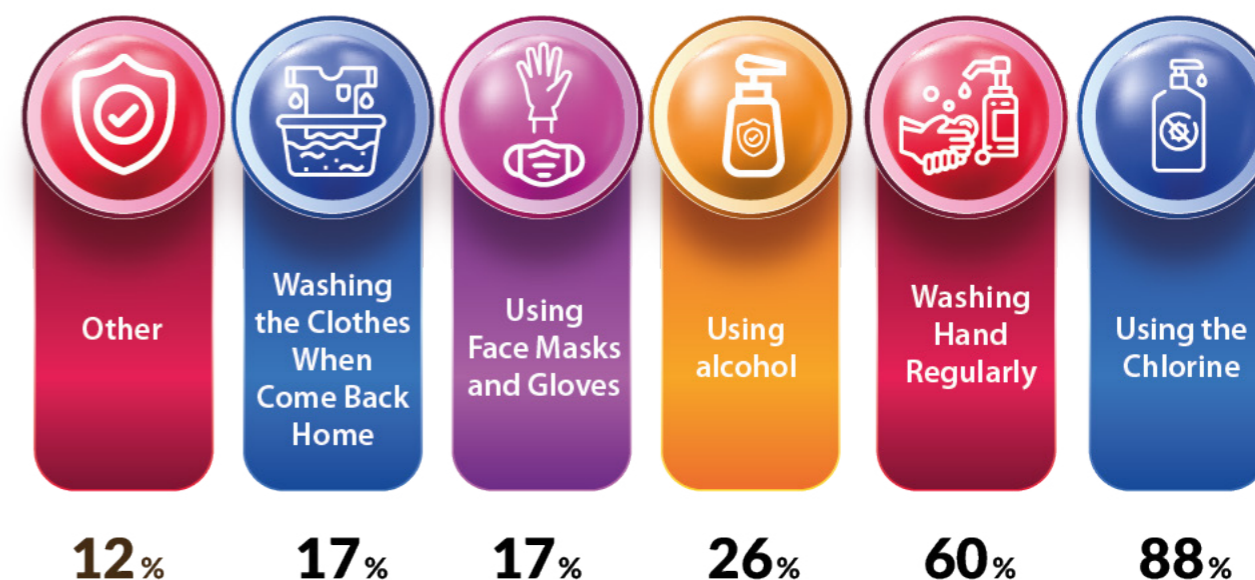
Types of Preventive Actions Women Take at Home and Out

We found that women take preventive measures to avoid infection based on their economic conditions and their information about prevention. The use of chlorine was reported by 88% of the total sample, taking into consideration that most women buy and use popular kind of chlorine manufactured in detergents local shops because it is cheaper. "We buy it for EGP 3 a liter," one of the interviewed woman said.

Washing hands with soap and water was the second most popular protective measure that women take, at 60%. However, they do not do this continuously, as they should after touching surfaces, coughing, sneezing, or using public transportation, etc. Following these preventative measures comes the use of alcohol (26%) and the use of masks and gloves (17% of the interviewed women). Here, we find that the majority of women and their families do not use alcohol or masks and gloves because the prices of these products are so expensive to a wide group of women that they cannot purchase them. "I use chlorine and water in cleaning, but cannot afford buying any other detergents," a woman said. "I do my best to clean and ventilate the house every day, and buy cheap things like chlorine, salt and vinegar, but I can't afford hand sanitizers such as alcohol," another woman stated.

17% of the interviewed women wash clothes immediately after returning home, in order to save their detergents for as long as possible by using as little as possible. Finally, 12% of women reported that they use other things such as vinegar, salt, lemon, and inhaling water with salt, or drinking some hot drinks, such as ginger, cloves, and nigella. These kinds of prevention are popularly circulated. Meanwhile, others mentioned that they clean their places as much as possible; "we do the cleaning and pray God to save us," one woman said.

Types of Preventive Actions Women Take at Home and Out



Preventive Actions in the Workplace

The precautions for women who are obliged to go work varied, within the sample, from one sector to another, in addition to some problems related to prevention.

Women employed in the government or private sector mentioned that there were several preventive actions taken to prevent the infection. The most important of which include banning gatherings as much as possible, and limiting direct contact with the public, speaking through a window. This is in addition to cleaning offices and work places and canceling fingerprinting for companies and workplaces that is usually used for registering attendance and departure. Also, companies are reducing the number of employees in the workplace by following the "shifts system."

We have to buy personal hygiene needs at our expense, each according to their capability: there are those who buy and there are those who cannot buy at all. The office provides us with cleaning supplies for the place only and of course we cannot control the customers who come to the office!

As for the problems they faced, most of the women talked about the absence of masks or antiseptics for female employees, which increases the chance of infection. They also talked about the high prices of these items and how this makes it more difficult for female employees to purchase these items for themselves. One of them mentioned that the director put the attendance register in the eighth floor and her office is on the first floor, which forces all of the employees to crowd in the elevator to sign attendance and leave. This just creates more opportunities for infection.

Women bosses or owners of small projects mentioned that the high prices of detergents, masks, gloves, etc. left them unable to purchase these items for their employees. They consider these things a kind of luxury when they cannot meet such basic needs as food. "The issue of disinfectants is a high burden, when I am barely able to sustain my children, I cannot afford detergents, or any kind of this stuff. However, I clean the shop in the simplest way. Not to mention that the situation in general is frustrating as the job is scarce or not available," stated a woman who owns a hairdressing shop.

Not at all. I don't use anything, not even a face mask, I don't wear it while I'm going to work. How will I work while I'm putting it? Practically speaking, I cannot afford its price, I see it is better to spend this money for my children. People at work let us use chlorine, which burns my hands and my chest. I have chest allergy and of course fear of catching Covid-19, but I have to go work, otherwise, how will I support my children? I swear to God, my hands are full of fissures because of chlorine, which we are forced to use for cleaning.

Regarding women who work for daily wages, most are cleaning workers at homes, restaurants, factories, or vendors. These women try as hard as possible to take some precautions such as using chlorine and putting a scarf, instead of a more expensive mask, to cover their mouth and nose. They use soap and water constantly, but find it difficult to use gloves while at work in case they get a pair from the client! Some clients ask them to wear gloves, and some women take them off after the client walks away. We must wear gloves because the police pass from time to time to check and warn the shop owner if they do not take the precautions during work, it will be shut down," said a woman working in a restaurant.

Other women mention that they do not use any disinfectants or masks because they are expensive and they believe that employers, not themselves, should provide these items. Especially, since their daily wages are very weak, and even enough to cover their basic needs.

People that I work for, as house cleaner, exaggerate too much in using chlorine and similar materials. They force me to do that, and I cannot refuse despite the harm it causes to my skin and hands. If people take mercy of each other, they would spray a little alcohol on my hands ... instead of chlorine, as they do before I step in their house. The most important thing they care for is that they are fine. As for me, it is not important "even if the chlorine would burn me." When I back home, I feel pain in my chest after the long work day of inhaling these caustic substances.

There are some common mistakes to prevent the infection that may cause damage. Some domestic workers, and cleaners are forced to combine two types of detergents, such as "chlorine and Flash" (the active substance of the Flash is hydrochloric acid or nitric) with some chlorine and phenic acid (the phenic is a carbon and hydrogen complex extracted from oils obtained from filtering coal tar, etc) and using them at the same time upon the request of employers. This kind of combination causes toxic interaction and health problems for the worker. According to the WHO, the excessive use of some detergents such as Flash and chlorine for long periods without dilution in certain proportions causes health problems.¹²

As for the government effort to raise awareness about COVID-19, the Council of Ministers and various ministries have released statements and decisions about the pandemic and its varying consequences. For example, the Ministry of Health and Population issues periodic data on the numbers of infected and recovered cases, deaths, in addition to many measures and decisions to confront the crisis.¹³ The government has created a website on COVID-19 which displays its efforts. The website contains also the decisions, statistics, videos, guiding graphics on the pandemic, data and advice from the WHO.¹⁴

12 See Chlorine fact sheet, Regional Center for Environmental Health Action, WHO, at: [link](#)

13 See the homepage of the Ministry of Health and Population, at: [link](#)

14 The official website of the government of Egypt allocated for information on Covid-19, at: [link](#)

The National Council for Women (NCW) has also worked to educate women about the pandemic and how to protect oneself.¹⁵

Although the women who participated in this study have reasonable information about the pandemic, there is incorrect and false information reported by women. This information includes the ideas that the virus resides in the air, flies for a long distance, does not affect young people and children. There is also incorrect information that those who have been infected do not heal and instead, die within a few days, and that inhaling and rinsing one's nose with water, salt and lemon is helpful in preventing the virus ... etc. This is because, at the beginning when the virus was discovered, a lot of information was circulated without scientific validation. Also, the emergence and rapid spread of the virus, created a state of confusion worldwide. TV programs have hosted many specialists and non-specialists who made statements about the pandemic as if they know the absolute truth. There were not enough substantive studies about the virus, as it was still new. Meanwhile, many popular recipes for preventing disease were passed on without examining their usefulness or harm.

Due to this situation, and in order to create a sound community awareness and a correct understanding of the pandemic, there is a need to increase the TV programs that can contribute to raising awareness among citizens with regular updates on the pandemic. Furthermore, this should be carried out through simple and innovative methods to correct the misinformation mentioned earlier. We should designate appropriate programs to educate children and broadcast them on known channels at appropriate times. Thus, TV is the first and cheapest source of information that can be accessible to marginalized and impoverished women. This source is very important to avoid the mainstreaming of hazardous recipes and practices as well as the opinions that stigmatize and discriminate against the infected persons and/or medical workers, and even victims. As we have seen, people were so afraid of the infection that they refused to bury the victims of COVID-19.¹⁶

Here, there has been a wave of stigmatization against those that have recovered from the virus as well as medical personnel and people have deal with them in aggressive ways. Some people have asked medical personnel not to return their homes.¹⁷ Many physicians also faced insulting treatment in transportation and public places due to a lack of correct information about the pandemic and its repercussions. The situation has become worse due to broadcasting false information and rumors, and thus it has become urgent to spread awareness to everyone, especially the marginalized and poor members of society.

15 Launching a Campaign for Protection from Covid-19, a statement by the NCW, at: [link](#)

16 Corona Unmask the Ugly Faces, the Full Story of the Physician of Shubra Al-Bahou, (Arabic only), at: [link](#)

17 Corona Virus: An Egyptian Physician Is Bullied Because of Her Work, BBC Arabic, at: [link](#)

The most important recommendations women raised for increasing awareness about COVID-19, focused on the following points:

- Providing informational messages using clear and simple language to reach citizens of all ages and educational groups. These messages would be broadcasted periodically and intensively through TV advertisements and programs;

They have to address us according to our minds, there is no need for complicated words that they say and we do not understand anything from it!

- Launching campaigns to raise awareness through display screens and advertisements in roads and squares, in addition to displaying posters and signs on roads and vehicles such as the subway and public buses;
- Avoiding contradicting messages and decisions from stakeholders, because it causes confusion among the society. It is also necessary to announce integrated plans to alleviate the damages of the pandemic and its implications for citizens.

We are really confused about the different decisions. Do they want us to stay home, or go out?! Either or, they have to say how we can do it! Otherwise the damage will be more severe than it is now.

- Issuing prompt decisions to officials and business owners accountable and stop them when they expose citizens/workers to the possibility of infection as a result of not taking the necessary protective measures;
- Designing educational messages and sending them via mobile phones in coordination and cooperation with the ministries of health and communications. This will ensure that awareness reaches the largest number of citizens.

2 Economic Impacts on Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic



The ILO has indicated that the economic crisis caused by the pandemic has severely damaged the ability of nearly 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy to make a living (the most vulnerable in the labor market) out of a total of two billion in the world as a whole and out of the global workforce of 3.3 billion people. This is due to the shutdown procedures and/or because they work in the most affected sectors. “As the epidemic and the job crisis evolve, the need to protect the most vulnerable groups becomes even more urgent. For millions of workers, losing income means: no food, no security, no future,” said Guy Ryder, Director-General of the ILO.¹⁸

UN Women has confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused unimaginable human suffering and is likely to increase gender-based inequality around the world. As economic activity stops, women who face disadvantage in obtaining decent work will suffer more than others.¹⁹

ESCWA (one of the regional commissions of the United Nations, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) has indicated that the Arab region will lose at least 1.7 million jobs in 2020 as a result of COVID-19. Thus, ESCWA and its partners estimate that the number of women who will lose these jobs is close to 700,000. Since the participation of women in the workforce in the Arab region is close to 20%, their job loss percentage will exceed twice the rate of the men’s job losses. In another study dealing with the impact of the pandemic on poverty, ESCWA showed that workers in the informal sector would be the most affected. About 62% of active women work in the informal sector in the Arab region; the majority of working women will thus be affected by the expected rise in poverty.²⁰

The second report issued by the Egyptian NCW, that monitored policies and programs responding to the needs of women during the pandemic stated that the spread of the virus poses a serious threat to women’s participation in economic activities, especially in the informal sectors. It is expected to increase gender gaps in livelihoods. In Egypt we find that 18.1% of women are breadwinners, 40.9% of the total non-farm employment of females work in informal jobs, and 33.9% of female employment are in precarious work. Moreover, 6.7% of women work in the industrial sector, 36.4% work in agriculture and 56.8% work in the service sector. Egyptian women represent 70% of the workforce in the paid care sector (especially as teachers, health and social workers). Moreover, the paid care sector in Egypt represents about 28-31% of total female employment, and the odds of women working in this sector are four times higher than that of men.²¹

As mentioned earlier, the income classification of the women surveyed here shows that most of them fall below the extreme poverty line, and that this was estimated before the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, many of them, and their families, lost their source of income or at least the value of their income has decreased.

We will deal with the economic impacts, damages, and repercussions on the reality of poor marginalized women and their families. We will also address the extent of damage caused by the pandemic to their work and the family’s income, and the most important economic burdens that have been added on their shoulders under the crisis. Finally, we will show the ways and means for women to face these new burdens.

18 As Jobs Losses Escalate, Nearly Half of Global Workforce At Risk of Losing Livelihood, ILO, 29 April 2020, at: [LINK](#)

19 Covid-19: Emerging Gender Data and Why it Matters, UN-Women, 26 June 2020, at: [LINK](#)

20 ESCWA and partners Warn: Violence Against Women Has Increase Due To Covid-19, ESCWA, 06 April 2020, at: [LINK](#)

21 Monitoring Policies and Programs that Respond to Women’s Needs During the Emerging Corona Virus Pandemic, the Second Report of NCW, 6 May 2020, (Arabic Only), at: [LINK](#)

The total sample of the study was 121 women, divided according to the work situation into two types: workers - housewives.

The percentage of female workers is 51% of the total sample (62 women), while the percentage of housewives is 49% (59 women). We will address each of them in detail by focusing on how much the income of those women and their families has been affected during the crisis. Here, we shed light on the economic impacts, their implications to women, and how they face these obstacles, as well as the relevant economic policies and decisions taken by the government to reduce the economic burdens on the affected groups.



How the Income of Women and their Families Has Been Affected During the Pandemic:

Here, we show some statistics on the income and how it has been affected, followed by statistics on the vulnerability of income, particularly for women.

Statistics of Working Women:

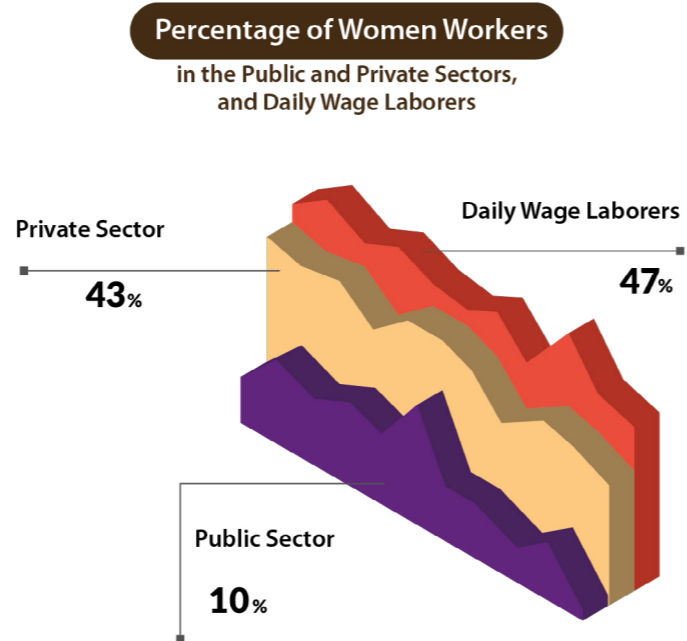
The percentage of working women is 51% (62 women) divided into three categories:

The First Category: female workers in the public sector who are employees in various government institutions and ministries, represent 10% of the surveyed sample.

The Second Category: those who work in the private sector, found in two groups: (1) employees for a monthly wage, whether a part of companies, major factories, or even medium and small projects; (2) employers or owners of small projects such as a supermarket or a detergent store, etc. This category represents 43% of all female workers within the sample.

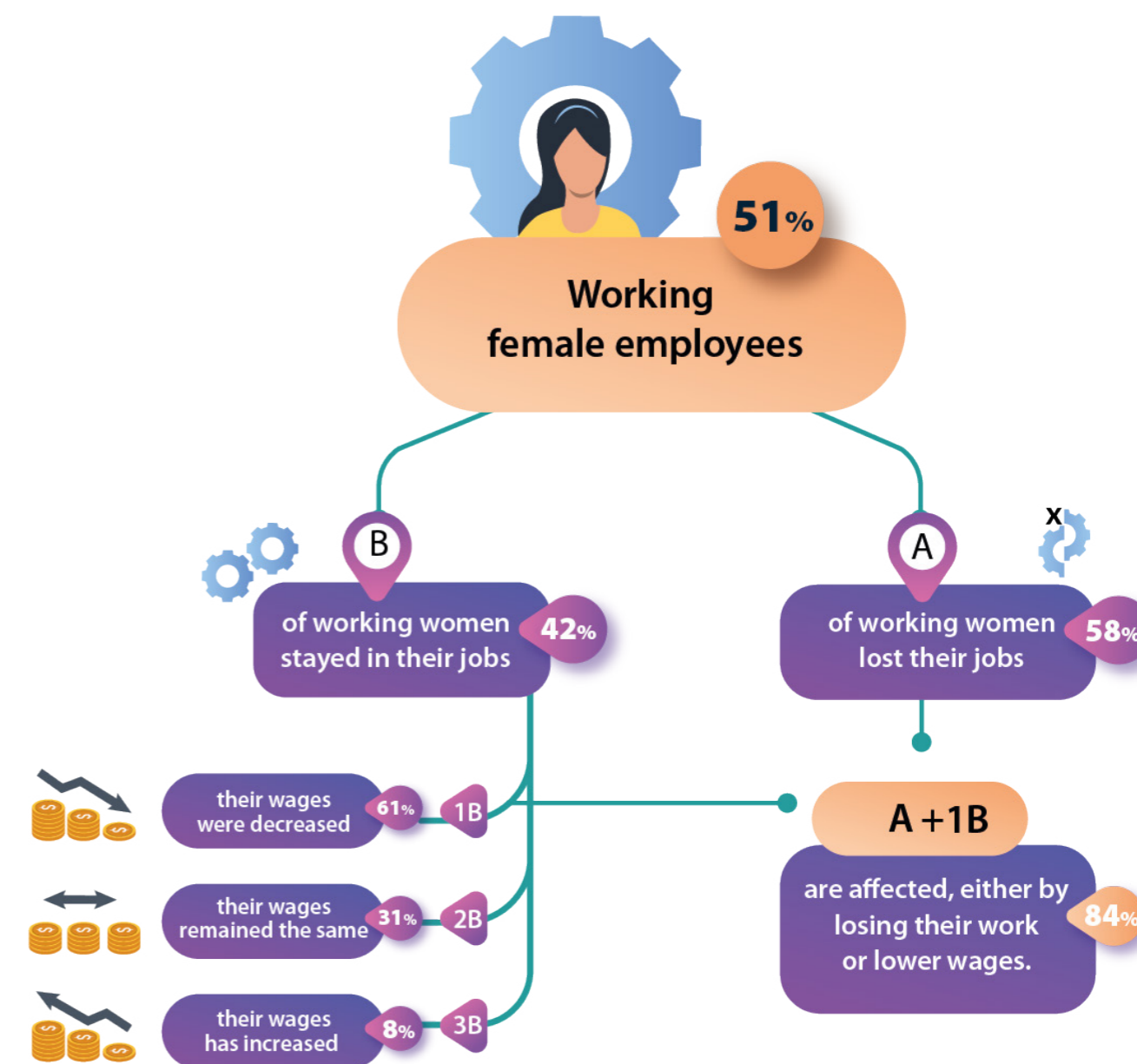
The Third Category:

Workers with daily wages, who are domestic workers, vegetable or bread sellers, etc. They represent 47% of the total workers in the sample.



Total Statistics:

- 58% of working women lost their jobs as a result of the pandemic, while 42% of them retained their work.
- Among those who continued in their job, the wage of 61% of them decreased, while the rest (31%) have been earning the same amount. 8% of those that kept their job have increased their income due to the nature of their work in the field of electronic marketing or detergents.
- 84% of working women have been affected, either by losing their work or by losing a significant value of their income.



Statistics of the First Category:

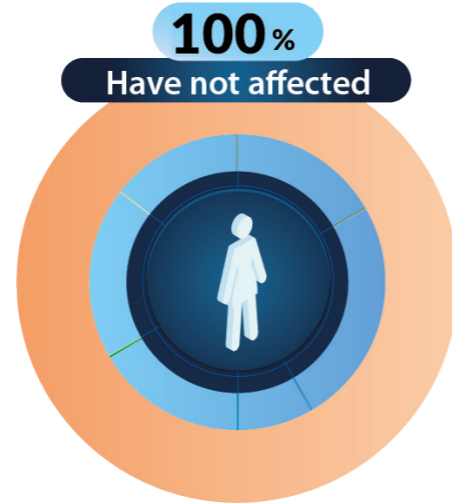
Women working in the public sector who are employees in various government institutions and ministries, account for 10% of the total workers in the sample. All of them reported that they are government employees and thus they retained their jobs and salaries, unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic. They complete their tasks in various ways: some work from home, while others go in part time, in shifts reciprocal with colleagues, where the number of daily working hours has been reduced. Thus, Women working in the government sector are most fortunate, as they did not lose their job or receive a lower wage. This is in addition to having the opportunity to reduce the risk of infection due to social mixing and having to go out every day to work.

Statistics of the Second Category:

Women working in the private sector account for 43% of the total female workers in the sample. They are divided into two types (female employees with a monthly wage with an employer, who represent 74% of women working in the private sector; and employers or a small project owners, who account for 26% of the sample).

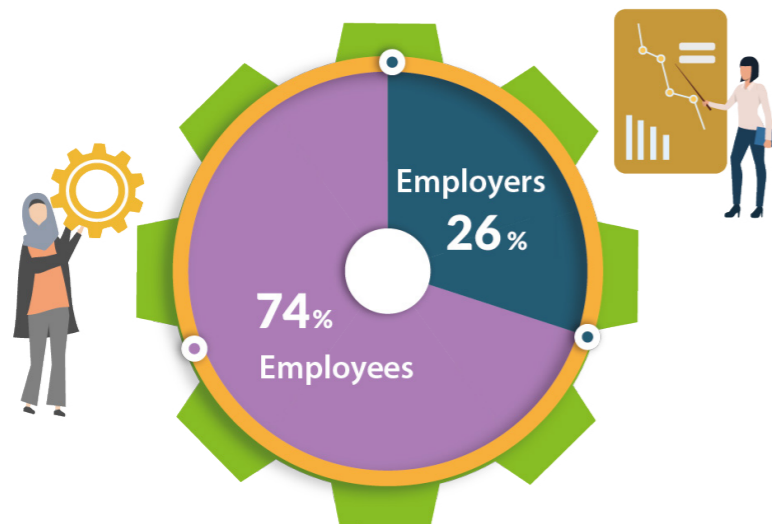
Percentage of Women Workers

in the Public Sectors Who Lost their Job or get lower wage

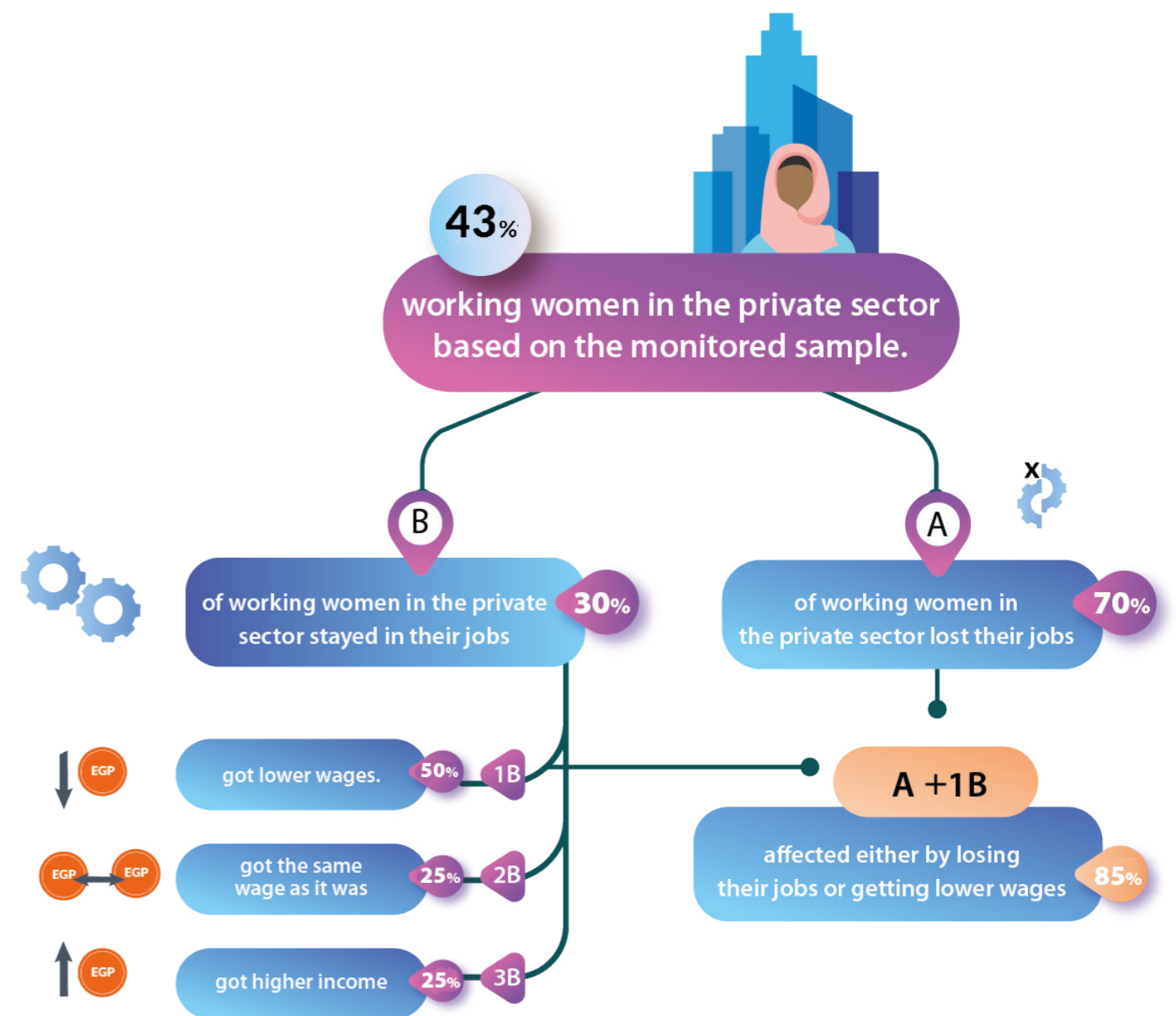


Percentage of Women Workers

in the Private Sectors



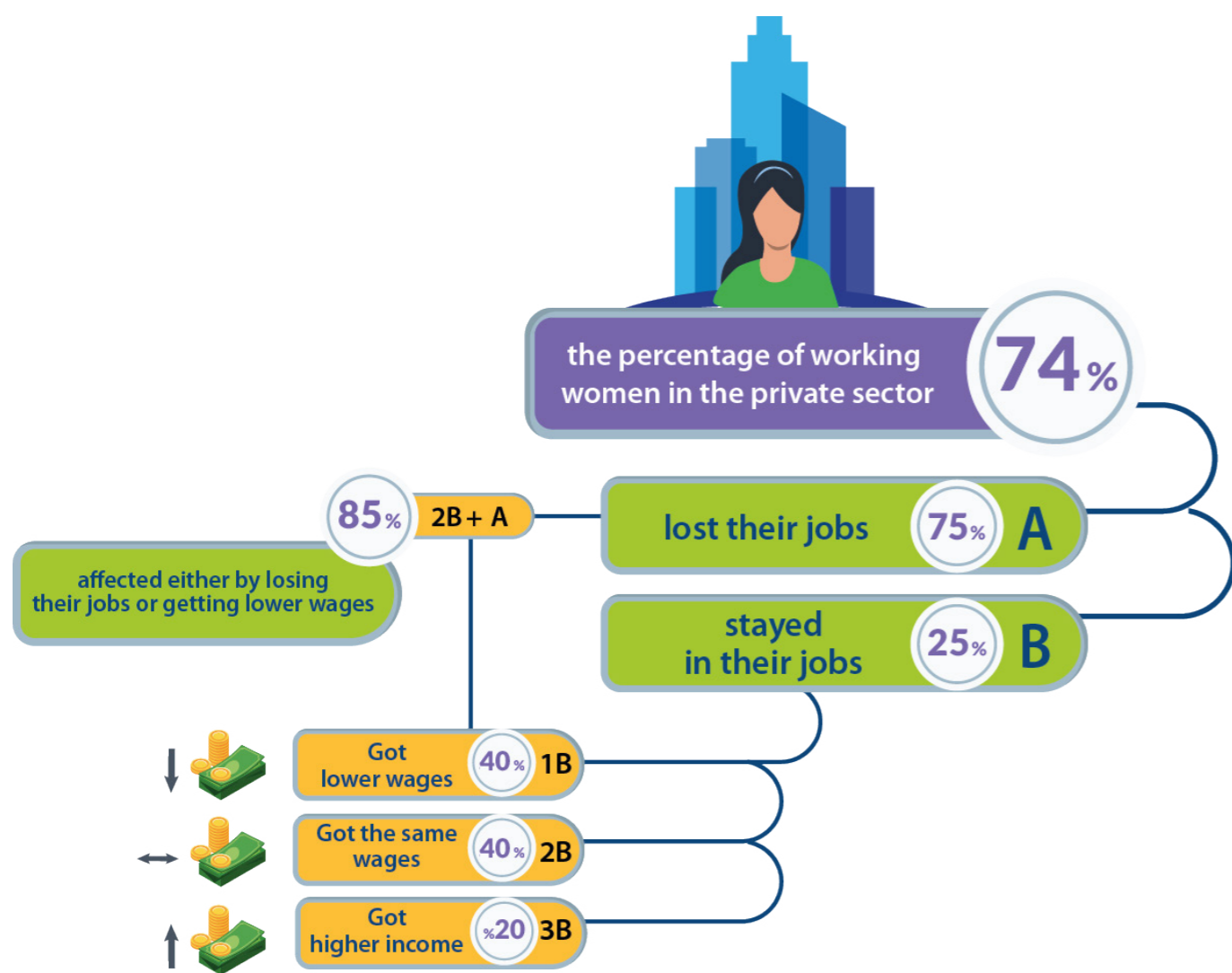
- 70% of the women surveyed who work in the private sector lost their job, while 30% of them retained their job.
- 50% of women who retained their job got lower wages, while 25% of them get the same value as it was before the COVID-19 crisis. Meanwhile, 25% of them got higher income due to the nature of their work in the field of e-marketing or detergents.
- 85% of women have been affected, either by losing their work or getting lower wages.



Women in the private sector are divided into two groups:

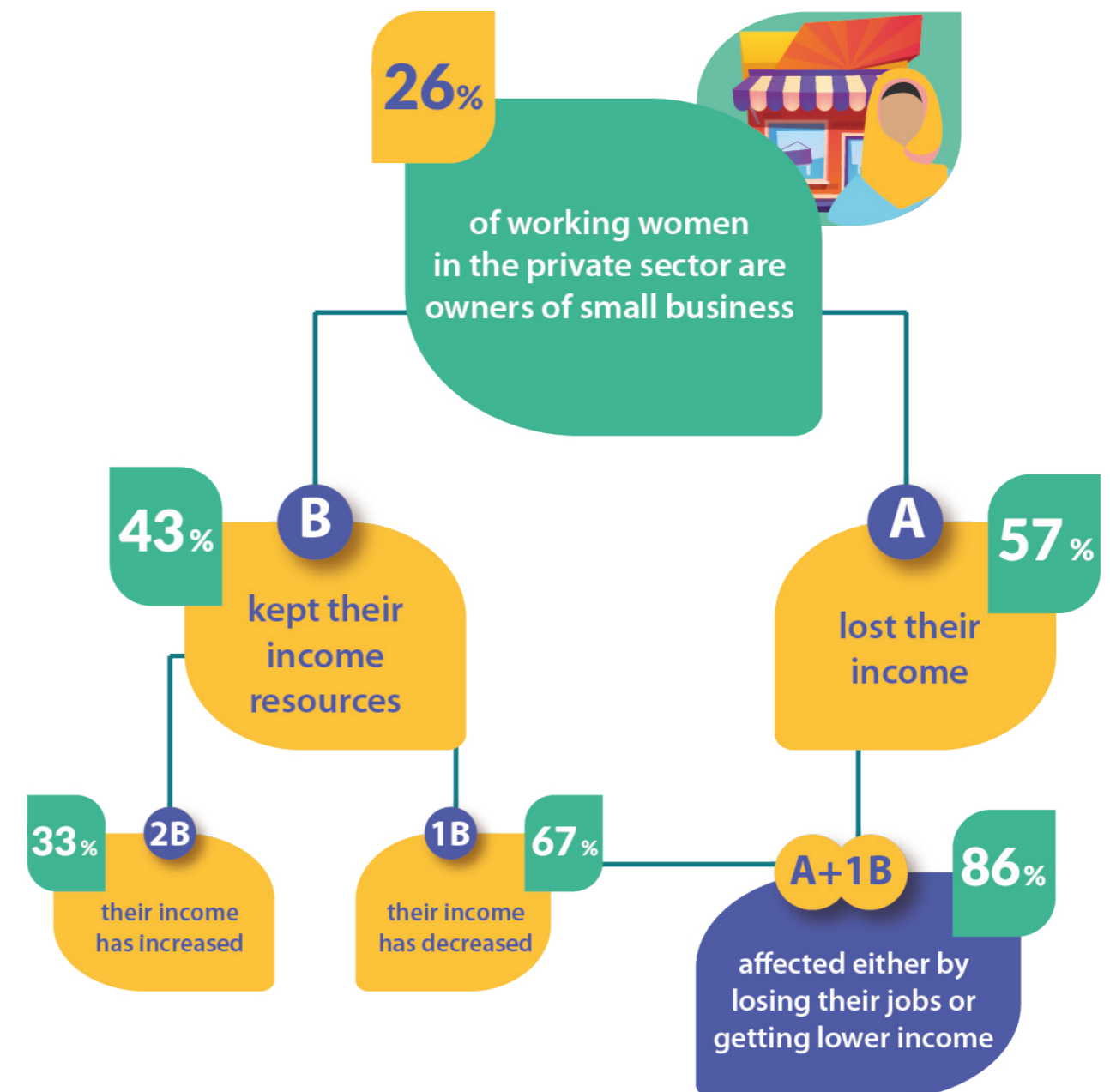
Female employees, who work for an employer with a monthly wage, in companies, major factories, or in medium and/or small projects, who represent 74% of women in the sample.

- 75% of women in the private sector lost their jobs, and the rest kept their jobs.
- 40% of women who retained their jobs, got lower wages, while 40% of them got the same value, and 20% of them got higher income. The last percentage represents only one woman in the sample, who works in the field of e-marketing. She pointed out that due to the curfew, purchases of electronics have increased, resulting in a boost to her income.
- 85% of women employed in the private sector have been affected, either by losing their work or by getting lower wages.



Businesswomen and/or small project owners, such as a supermarket, detergent store, hairdresser, sewing shop, etc. They are 26% of the women working in the private sector within the sample.

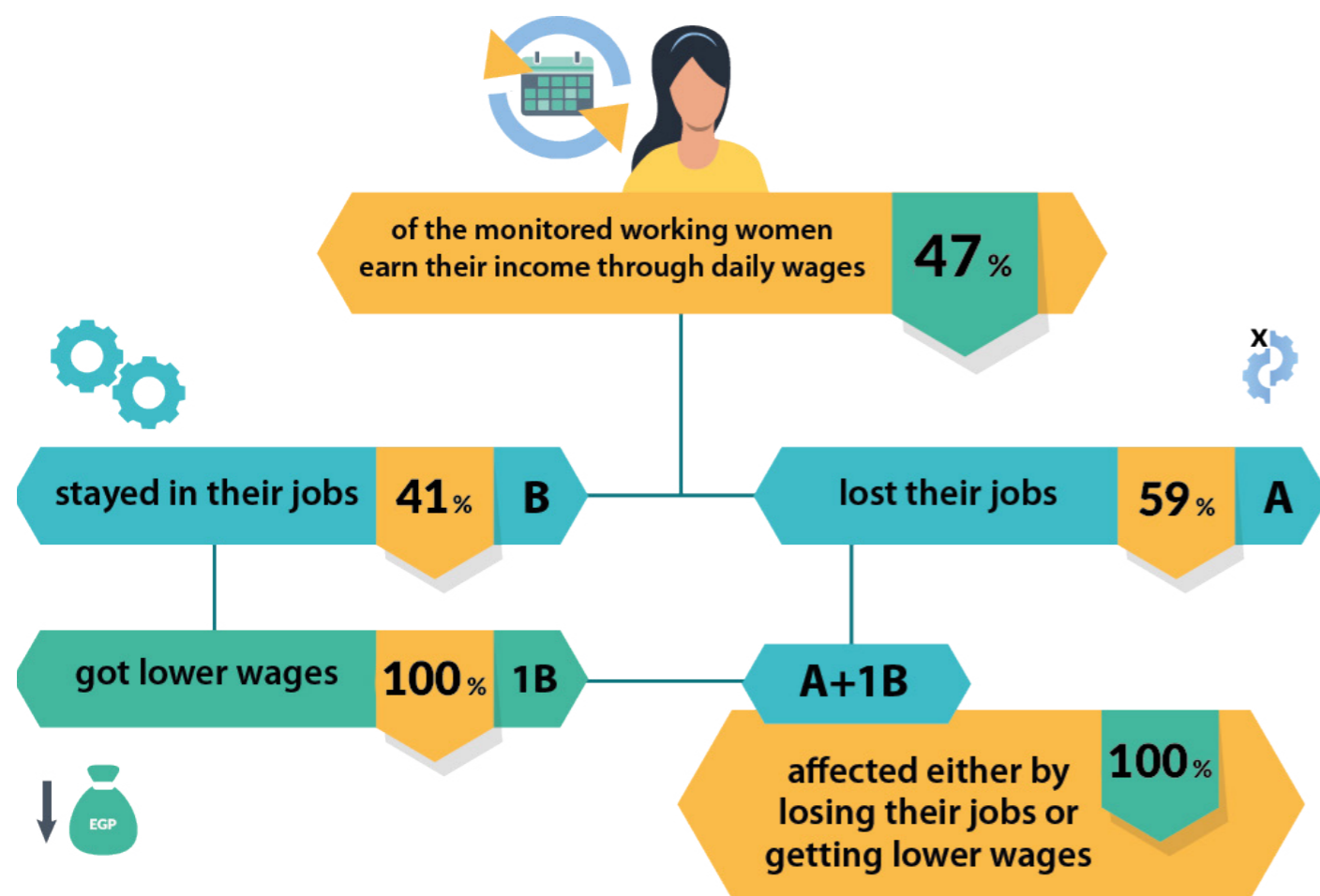
- 57% of women entrepreneurs or business owners lost their jobs: the project was closed either permanently or temporarily until the end of the COVID-19 crisis, while 43% of them have kept their businesses open.
- 67% of the women who retained their business have received a lower income, and 33% of them have received a higher income because they work in the field of detergents. The prices of detergents and disinfectants have increased due to the pandemic.
- 86% of the total women employers or entrepreneurs have been affected, either by losing their business or getting lower income.



Statistics of the Third Category:

the workers with daily wages, such as domestic workers, vegetable, bread, or cheese sellers, those that have a stand on the street, but have no formally recognized place. They represent 47% of the total workers in the sample.

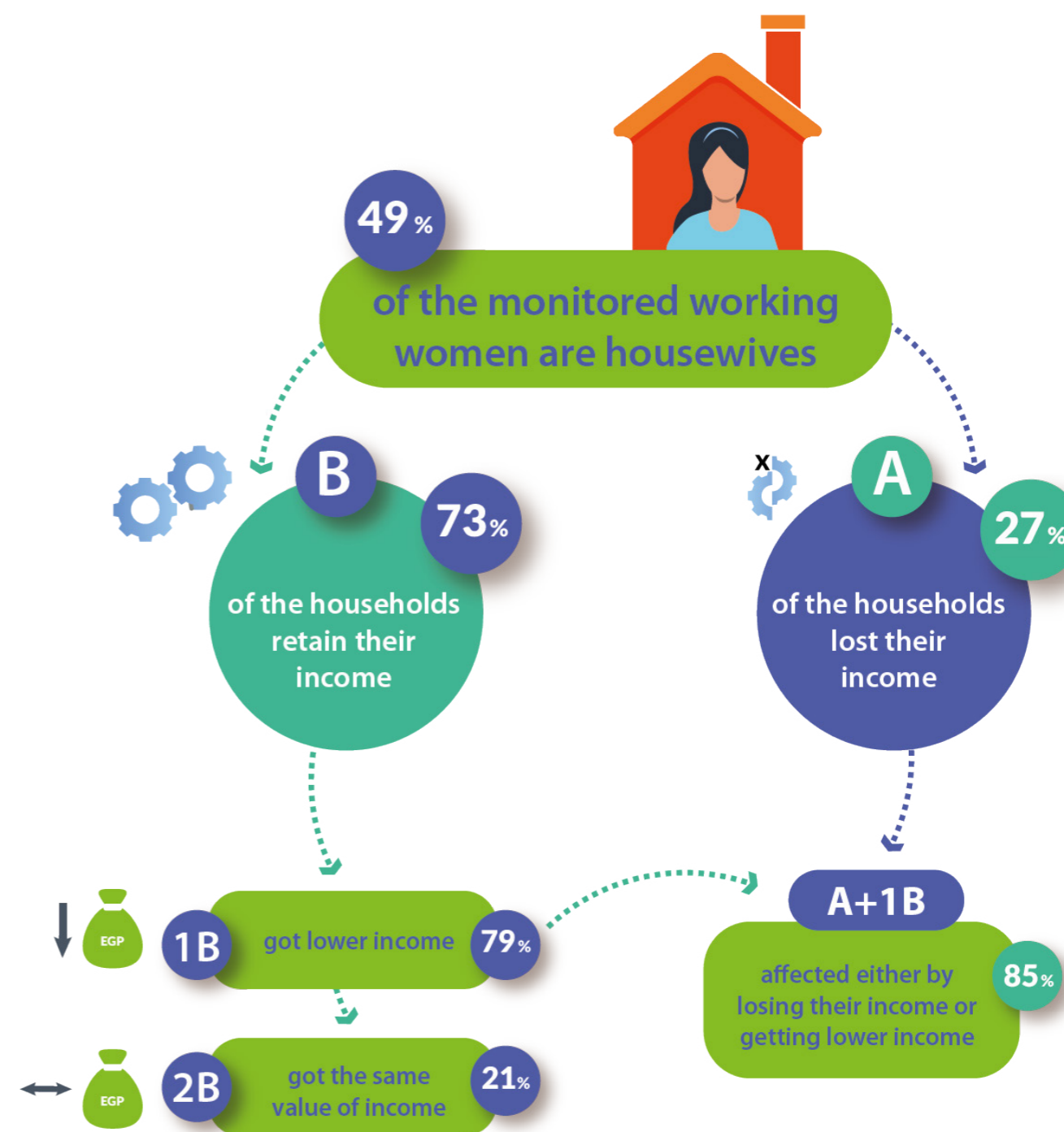
- 59% of women with daily wages lost their jobs, and 41% of them retained their income source.
- 100% of those who kept their jobs get lower wages.
- 100% of women with daily wages have been affected, either by losing their work or by getting lower wages.



Housewives:

The percentage of housewives is 49% of the total sample. The income of their families was affected by the pandemic as follows:

- 27% of the families of housewives lost their income, while 73% retained their source of income.
- 79% of the families of housewives in which the income earner kept their work, got lower wages, and 21% of them stayed the same as before the crisis.
- 85% of the households of housewives have been affected, either by losing the source of income, or getting lower income.



The Economic Effects and their Repercussions on Women and their Families and How They Face Them during the Pandemic

Women and their families suffer from economic effects as a result of COVID-19. These effects have many repercussions for them and their families. In the following section, we review these effects and learn about the methods that women used to confront these obstacle.

Economic Impacts

The women surveyed agreed that there are economic impacts and burdens added to them due to the pandemic, and all groups affirmed that food prices such as vegetables and fruits have greatly increased. They also talked about the new burden of purchasing sterilizers and disinfectants, as well as increasing the burden of school research, instead of the final exams, and how this work was tiresome and costly.

All I can do is to wash the gloves in order to keep them as long as possible. I bought a box of gloves for EGP 150. So my mom and I try not to consume it quickly and use the one longer so my mom and I try not to consume it quickly and use one as long as possible because we have to go out everyday

Thus, the subscription to Internet became obligatory to finish the work. In some cases, parents had to buy education from teachers, libraries, or owners of internet centers. Some women said that the cost of research ranges between EGP 150 to 500, depending on the type of school and education (languages, private, or public).

The burden was not the same for the different groups. Some government employees suffered more due to the necessity of purchasing disinfectants and the other things needed for resisting infection. Female employees in the private sector and/or owners of small business and workers with daily wages or housewives suffered from additional burdens such as the inability to buy medicine or to pay rent and electricity, water and gas bills. "Now we hide ourselves from the agents of electricity, gas, or water when they come to collect the bills. Where from can we get money to pay? We do not have money to eat!" one woman said.

These groups are the most affected by loss of work or getting lower wages. Yet the workers with daily wages suffer the most, and they are trying to survive and provide daily food for their families regardless of the quality or quantity, as well as to avoid eviction from their homes. "I lost my income because the kind of my work; I work as a hairdresser, and all of my customers are afraid to come over to the place. It would take time till the pandemic is over," one woman said. Some shops owners had to shut down their work places and/or lay off their workers. "My income has been affected dramatically; I had to shut down the nursery, where I had two baby sitters, and a teacher. I really pity them as I pity myself. I cannot help, I cannot pay them, I have no money anymore," a nursery owner stated.

For the shops that sell several products, they were significantly affected by low turnout. Consequently, this has affected their income, as well as their families, and workers. Curfew has led to a reduction in work hours, due to the limited time for buying and selling. In turn, this has led to a lack of purchasing, as many individuals only bought the most important basics in small quantities, and thus movement slowed in general.

I sell hair brushes and things like that. People have become more distracted and preoccupied with how to get food and from where. No one has the time to buy such things, this is plus the curfew and fines they apply. I also fear going down the street these days.

On the other hand, there are those whose income has increased; this category is represented by only two women in the surveyed sample. The first works in the field of detergents and disinfectants, while the other works in e-marketing.

Women who work for daily wage suffer more than others from a loss of income or lower wages. "My working days have been reduced, I used to work for the whole week, but now I go for one day only and sometimes it does not happen; the same for the number of hours and the money as well! Even when I get a work order, I usually press myself to finish it in shorter time to catch the public transportation before the curfew; I do not even eat during the most work-intensive hours," a daily wage earner said.

There are many reasons that women in this category have lost work or are receiving lower wages, including people's fear of infection, which has led to distancing from some groups, such as domestic/cleaning workers: one woman said that "people have become afraid of me, and so every time I look for work in any home or even to clean the stairs, they refuse to deal with me because of COVID-19, as if I were the reason for the pandemic!"

The closure of restaurants and shops due to the curfew and lack of demand has also led employers to reduce and/or lay off workers. Furthermore, individuals during this crisis are primarily focused on meeting the basic needs of the family, and so they refrain from buying many goods, which has led to a general stagnation in sales. This, in turn, has affected specific groups such as street vendors. The quarantine in specific areas has led to many women losing their jobs, due to community stigma and fear of infection.

"My son has a gum tumor due to tooth decay and I do not know how to take him to the dentist because I do not have money. I also have a rash and need to see a doctor and have no money for all of this. I am very worried," one woman said. "I would be sentenced to jail because the loan (EGP 3000) I have got from a bank; I did not pay the installment (EGP 465) for a couple of months," said another. A third woman pointed out that "The price of chicken is EGP 38 per kilo." One of the women stated: "I can't buy tools of cleaning, masks, gloves, or such things, I consider them as luxury. All that I can look for is to get food for my children, especially as my husband has no work." Another responded remarked: "If I bought half a kilo of cucumbers, I would be rich!"

I cannot provide food for my children. My old son needs special food because of his health conditions and I cannot make it, so I have to wet the bread for him! I wait for my sister to send me any food, and of course I cannot ask for a specific food.

How Women are Facing these Economic Impacts:

Some of the surveyed female employees, who work in the public sector, said that they resort to selecting some priorities such as buying food and paying their electricity and water bills, and giving up some other needs in order to face the economic burdens during the pandemic.

To provide basic food needs for their families, women working in the private sector rely on low-cost, low quality products in very limited quantities. For instance, they buy not fresh vegetable remnants that are usually sold at lower prices. Meanwhile, they give up buying animal protein such as "meat, poultry, or fish" and replacing it with some other products such as lentils or beans.

There are also some families who were forced to move and live in collective housing. Thus, we find some brothers who moved, with their families, to their grandmother's homes to provide food, and at the same time escaping claims for rents and electricity, water and gas bills, taking into account that the majority of housing units they resort to are really small. There are some women who were forced to sell their family's share of ration goods so that they can collect some money to pay their electricity bills. Yet others resort to borrowing from relatives or neighbors. "I wait to my mother to go to her hometown and come back with any kind of food for my children. I am desperate, and can do nothing!"

Since the largest percentage of this group lost their source of income due to the COVID-19 crisis, some of them usually go out looking for any kind of job or material support that can help in these difficult circumstances. "I go out to find any way to get help or a job and God sends me someone who may sympathize with me," one woman said.

Also, some of them women have given up buying their medication in order to save the price of basic needs of the family; one woman told us: "I suspended physical therapy sessions in order to provide more money for eating."

I have to give up many things that are basic, such as taking the bus to the workplace, and buying fruits for my children. I cannot afford the prices either for the bus or the fruits, that is plus other important things just to save money for basic food.

I do not take the medications so that I can save money for the food and rent!

I sold the bed and other basic things in my house so that I can buy food. When the man who came to buy the furniture asked me why I sell them, I felt shamed and told him that I will buy new ones.

Women who are employers or small project owners face these burdens by reducing the number of employees, as well as the expenses within the family by changing food items and replacing them with cheaper goods. As with all of the aforementioned groups, they do not buy specific goods anymore, such as fruits and meats. Furthermore, some of them resort to borrowing money from neighbors or acquaintances, and postponing the payment of any bills or rent.

Most women who are day laborers resort to knocking on doors seeking help, while reducing the number of their meals. Many women in this category mentioned that they might have to eat only one meal a day to provide food for the children. "Yeah, I eat only one time a day so that I can provide food for my kids," one mother said.

In some cases, women had to sell basic furniture items for food, and others had to sell some personal belongings. One woman mentioned that she had sold her daughter's earrings to buy food.

Members of these families are exposed to many risks, whether health issues such as malnutrition, due to the obligatory reduction in the consumption of proteins and other necessary food items, medicine, or necessary therapy for patients. They are also threatened with losing their housing and basic services due to the accumulation of rental payments and water and electricity bills.

I sold the bed and other basic things in my house so that I can buy food. When the man who came to buy the furniture asked me why I sell them, I felt shamed and told him that I will buy new ones.

As for housewives, many have indicated that they have purchased some basic detergents, such as chlorine, a few times since the outbreak of COVID-19 and then stopped because of the lack of money. They also cannot use masks, gloves or alcohol when going out because they cannot afford the costs of these items. Furthermore, some women had to dispense with some more basic supplies such as sanitary pads. "I dispensed with all personal needs even the bag of "Always" (sanitary pads). I do not buy it anymore. Instead, I keep using old cloth pieces as our mothers used to do! Yeah, I cannot be accustomed to this way, but I have no alternative. We live under unprecedented conditions; I have to put my children and husband on priority," said one woman. Some mothers had to dispense with diapers for their

children and also to give up vegetables, fruits, meat and fish.

There are women who resort to borrowing money from others and knocking the doors of associations, religious and charity places to obtain benefits. "I feel ashamed to ask for help or a box of basic food from charity associations, although some people look for this kind of help and find a good response,"

I can not buy detergents, I use only water in cleaning the house. Even the diapers for my children, I do not change it but after long time because I cannot buy as usual.

a woman said. "I try to appease the landlord as he is angry because I did not pay the rent for two months. I have to wait till I get the pension, meanwhile we started to reduce the types of food that are expensive, and we also reduce the amount of food," another women stated.

We get the ration goods and manage with the least of everything to survive. Even my little daughter I give her milk only once a day before she goes bed. We reduce our meals and quantity of food in general.

Economic Policies and Decisions the State has taken to Reduce the Burdens on Affected Groups during the COVID-19 crisis:

The report from the NCW, monitoring policies and programs responding to the needs of women during the COVID-19 pandemic, stated that on March 26th, 2020 the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 776 of 2020 to establish an emergency benefits fund for workers as well as the formation of a committee for the workers affected by the economic consequences of the pandemic. The committee includes the Minister of Planning and Economic Development, the Minister of the Workforce, the Minister of Social Solidarity (MSS), the Chairwoman of the National Council for Women, the Head of the Information and Decision Support Center, and the Chairman of the Proposals and Complaints Committee of the National Wages Council, a member of the Administrative Control Authority.

The presence of the NCW within this pivotal committee reflects that the government really appreciates the importance of the presence, representation and participation of women in the decision-making process. It is also a positive indication towards taking care of the needs of Egyptian women through designing policies and strategies to respond and mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The committee is concerned with the following:

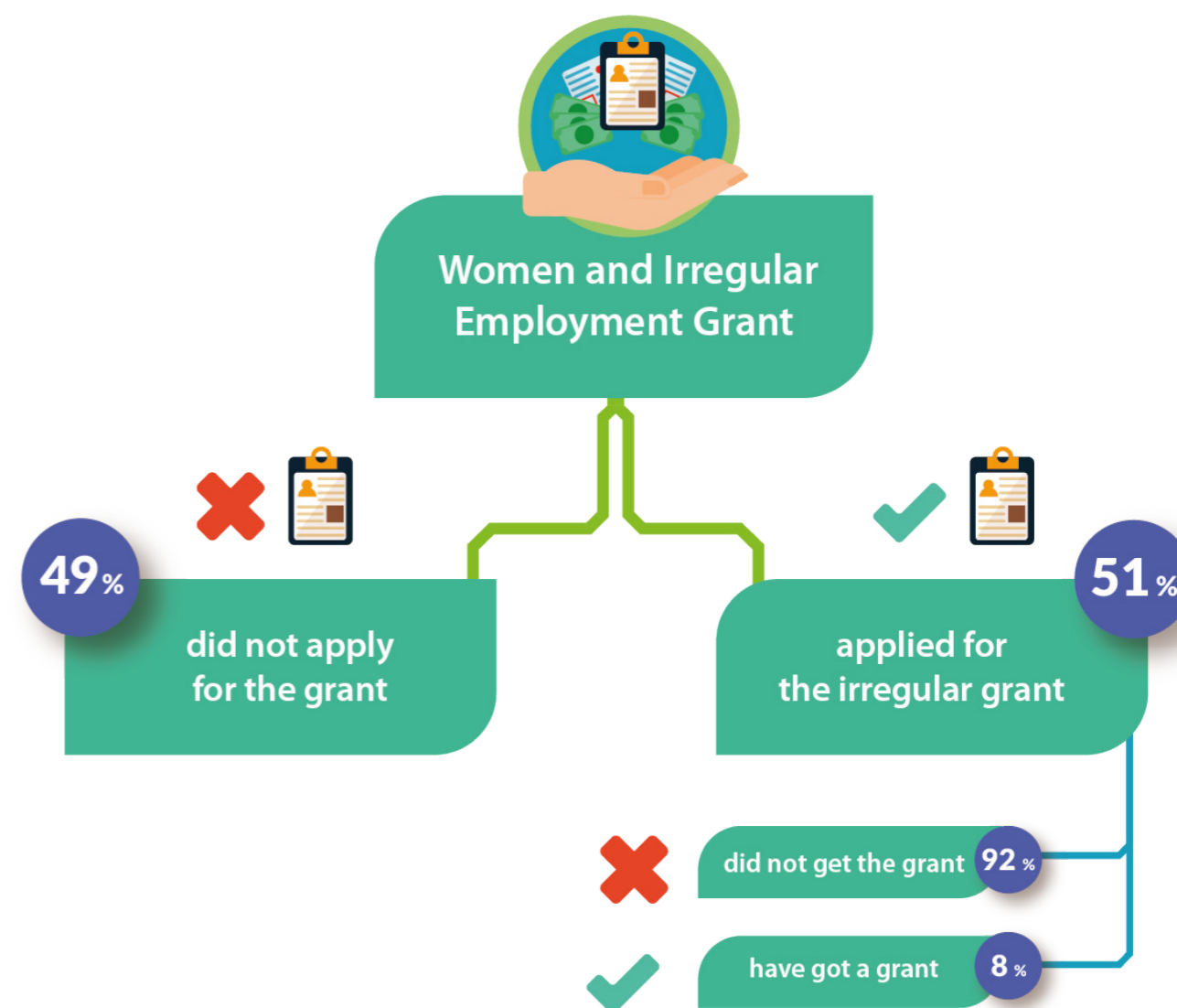
- Collecting data on the workers affected by the economic repercussions of the pandemic, and taking the necessary measures in coordination with various agencies to support them financially and socially to overcome the crisis;
- Coordinating the efforts and initiatives undertaken by financial institutions, companies, businessmen, NGOs and others in this regard in order to deliver the assistance that is provided to those who deserve it;
- Coordinating with the Workers' Emergency Benefits Fund to ensure a unified database of affected workers to guarantee that there is no duplication of benefits;
- Establishing workers compensation policies in the event of a complete or partial suspension of facilities in coordination with the funds and accounts concerned.

The decision to establish this committee is a good response to monitor the economic impacts and repercussions to those who are affected by the pandemic. Therefore, the committee should discuss the challenges and difficulties facing the affected groups, including what women said about their suffering and their families as mentioned above in order to reduce the burden that they bear.

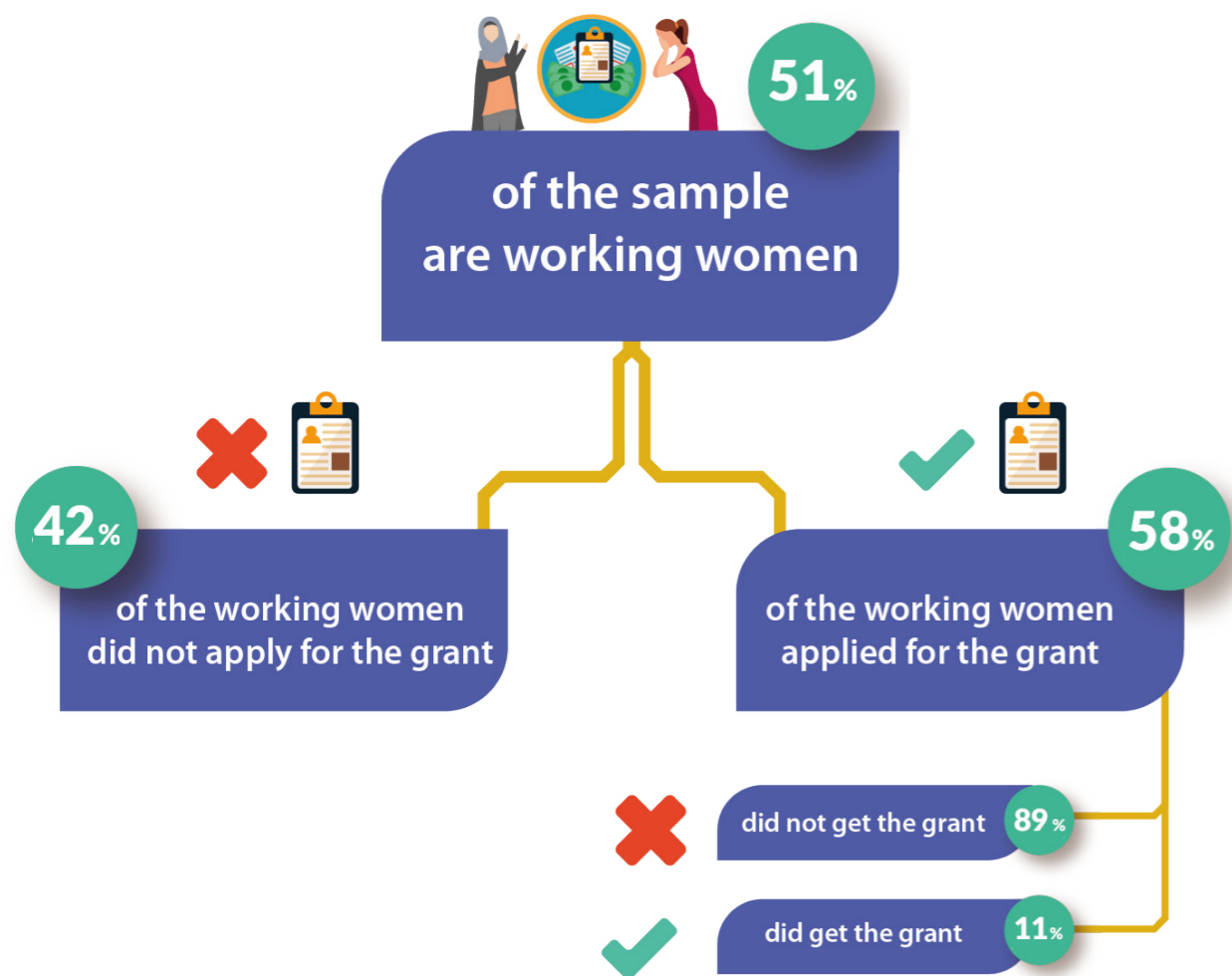
In the following section, we discuss some economic decisions and their impact on the surveyed group of women:

Women and Irregular Employment Grant:

- 51% of the women surveyed applied for the Irregular Employment Grant (IEG).
- 92% of them did not get the grant. Only 8% of the women that applied received the grant.



- 58% of working women applied for the Workforce Ministry Grant, 42% of working women did not apply for it.
- 89% of those who applied did not receive it. Only 11% of women who applied received a grant.



As for women who did not apply for the grant, the reasons as follows:

- Did not know about the grant, the place, or method of applying, and the conditions for eligibility;
- Thought the grant is only for men;
- Thought if she or her husband works for the public sector means that they are not eligible;
- Thought that if she is included in an insurance system or have a tax card, she is not eligible;
- Thought if she or her husband receives a social solidarity pension or any other pension, they cannot receive the grant;
- Thought that filing a khula` (divorce-proceedings that she initiated herself) lawsuit against her husband makes her not entitled to get the grant;
- Did not see herself in need of a grant like others are;
- Heard that the grant is just a rumor, and does not believe that it is real and possible to receive;
- Felt embarrassed to apply despite the bad conditions she faces;
- Tried to apply more than once and her ID number was not accepted;
- Went more than once and could not apply because the place was overcrowded, and she feared infection.

Here, it is important to emphasize that the idea of in-kind support for the affected persons through the IEG is a good idea, but there are some challenges in implementation. Due to the reasons mentioned above, the selection criteria and ways of application were not sufficiently clear. This is because the announcement on the IEG was initially for workers who are irregular and/or not registered in the workforce.²² The President Al-Sisi gave instruction to the Ministry of the Workforce to open the registration for all affected by irregular employment.²³ However, upon the request of the Minister, the Ministry did not set conditions or criteria for registration, which made people overcrowded in front of the workforce offices in the different governorates.²⁴ The Ministry of the Workforce then launched a website to register the target irregular employment to avoid overcrowding; however, upon registration, jobs on the site use terms that denote they are allocated only for men: laborer, agricultural worker, driver, mechanical, carpenter, electrician, construction worker, security agents, plumber, blacksmith, welder, tiling worker, painter, fisherman, a boat worker, sailor, and other professions mainly correlated with males.



This led some women to believe that the registration is for males only, as stated in the aforementioned reasons that women reported. So jobs should be feminized or some jobs for women should be added, for example: domestic workers, street vendors ... etc.

The lack of clarity concerning the conditions for application as well as the announcement on the criteria for eligibility made many of those who are not qualified apply to the grant. There were also those that paid EGP 10 or 15 in internet service café and registered randomly, hoping to get a grant or job. They lost this amount of money in vain, and although it is a small amount, for many of them it means a meal. As we saw in the previous statistic, 92% of women who applied for the grant did not get it, in addition to the wasted time in screening for those who did not meet the criteria, and thus the delay in getting paid. The grant was announced on March 17th and the payment started at April 13th, 2020.

The second report of the NCW issued on May 6th, 2020 stated that the Minister of the Workforce announced that 40% of women from 1.5 million citizens receive the IEG.

22 A statement by the Minister of Manpower, 17 March 2020, at: [link](#)

23 A statement by the Minister of Manpower, Steps for Registering Irregular Employment in Manpower Directorates, 21 March 2020, at: [link](#)

24 Register for Getting EGP 500, People Overcrowded In Front of the Manpower Offices, Ahl Masr News, 26 March 2020, at: [link](#)

Women, Social Security Pensions, and Takaful wa Karama:

The Ministry of Social Solidarity announced:

- The expanding the base of beneficiaries of Takaful Wa Karama (Solidarity and Dignity) programs, by including 160,000 new families.
- The benefits of one million citizens distributed to 200,000 families from exceptional cash support for a period of 3 months.
- The start of a mobile insurance pension trial for a portion of Luxor and Port Said pensions within the next month.

Social security pension for several categories, including divorced and widowed women who are 55 years old and have no children or have children over 18 years and get EGP 360 while suffer a disability, which changes according to the degree of disability. The rest of the groups were included in Takaful wa Karama pension. It is a conditional cash transfer program launched by the MSS under the umbrella of developing social safety nets. The groups who are eligible include: families, children, women, people with disabilities, the elderly, and young people. This pension has many conditions and provisions, available on the website that we find on the website of the MSS.²⁵ Within this system, the family receives an amount of EGP 325, while the amount is calculated for children as follows: primary school age EGP 60; preparatory EGP 80; high school EGP 100, and if the child is out of school, the family cannot receive any money.

I hope they reduce the price of the basic bills such as electricity, water and gas, or maybe to excuse some groups from these costs. Everything is expensive, when I say to the seller that this is not the price the minister talked about on TV, he goes angry and laughs at me. "Let the minister sells it for you," the sellers usually say. If they talk about different prices from the real one we buy for, they have to apply a kind of follow-up and prices control.

Although the aforementioned value of pensions is weak in light of the high cost of living and high prices of goods, it helps to support the survival of these marginalized and poor groups. However, we have found that there are some women who are entitled to the pension's benefits, but their pensions have been suspended, and when they inquire about the reason they cannot get an answer. They try directly with the local units and the website of the MSS, on which they get an instant reply: still searching!

Some of them have been in this state for more than 6 months. Urgent action is needed to help these groups in order to get their pensions, especially in light of the current COVID-19 crisis. Some women report that they did not receive the exceptional support, as the Ministry of Solidarity announced, and they confirmed that they did not know that the application for new families was available from Takaful Wa Karama. When they inquired with one of the MSS clerks, she said that she knew nothing about these decisions and that they did not send them any lists with this kind of support.

25 Takaful wa Karama, the Ministry of Social Solidarity, at: [link](#)

Also, opening the application to include new families in Takaful wa Karama program calls for submitting papers from families and making sure of their validity and conducting social research to know the status of these families. This, in turn, takes a long time, and the clerks say they did not receive instructions in this regard. "The problem of ATM card, by which the beneficiary of pensions cash in their money, should be resolved first, before accepting new families" a clerk said.

Divorced Women and Alimony:

On March 15, 2020, Counselor Omar Marwan, Minister of Justice, coordinated with the President of the Supreme Judicial Council, the President of the State Council, the Attorney General, judges, and heads of appeals and courts of first instance, to take the necessary legal measures towards postponing all cases before the courts of all kinds for a period of two weeks. This was to be without the presence of the parties to the case (and not cancellation of any suit) with the administrative work in the courts continuing to fulfill the requests within the legally prescribed dates. However, the period of suspension continued after the initial two weeks as a result of the increasing numbers of infected people with COVID-19.

On May 3, 2020, the Ministry of Justice decided to continue postponing the consideration of all cases. The decision included cases pending before the courts of first instance, and exempted cases related to the family and alimony as well as the handing over of the child to the custody home, taking all preventive measures to protect people from infection. That decision aimed to support women and help alleviate the burden on many women who bear responsibility for their children.

However, with the continuous increase in the number of infections of COVID-19, including the courts,²⁶ it is possible that the cases will be postponed again. This of course was a good chance for some ex-husbands to refrain from paying the alimony for women and children, a situation that got worse with the economic deterioration during the pandemic.

Therefore, CEWLA issued a worksheet entitled "Family Laws during the Crisis of COVID-19," in which it demanded the provision of court services and police departments for family laws through the internet, with a speedy adjudication of judicial cases that fulfilled all procedures at the formal and substantive level. The aim behind this is that plaintiffs can obtain their rights through the courts decisions electronically, meeting the required executive formulas and all procedures electronically. The worksheet also included a suggestion for the Family Fund at Nasser Bank or Social Solidarity to create a way to assist women, whether their alimony issues are still being raised or are dependent on pronouncement of the court's decision, particularly in light of urgent relief for them and their children. CEWLA gave many other recommendations that would lift the suffering of Egyptian women and their children under the current predicament.²⁷

26 The Minister of Justice Decides to Close Nasr City Court Due To the Appearance of Cases with Corona Virus, Al-Youm Al-Sabia, 9 May 2020, at: [link](#)

27 About the Family Laws under Covid-19 in Egypt, a worksheet by CEWLA, at: [link](#)

Women and Bank Loans:

The Governor of the Central Bank of Egypt, Tariq Amer, announced that he is obliging banks to postpone the collection of credit entitlements for individuals and institutions for a period of 6 months. This has come within the precautionary measures that must be taken to counter the effects of COVID-19. This decision includes loans for consumer purposes as well as real estate loans and personal housing, with no additional returns or fines applied to late payment. The central bank obligated all banks to do whatever was necessary to implement the decision.²⁸

According to that decision, the postponing of paying loan and credit card installments is automatic without a request from the clients, but with adding of interest for the six-month delay period. "The bank will cause me to go to the prison, I did not pay the installment (EGP 456) for a couple of months!" a woman said. Although some women are unaware of the decision to postpone the payment, they will face another problem, which is the payment of interests that will be accumulated for the postponement period. It was a priority to cancel the interests under COVID-19 crisis as some Arab countries did; for example, Jordan and the Sultanate of Oman, among others canceled the interest during COVID-19.²⁹

The interviewed women raised a set of recommendations from their point of view to confront the economic effects that are exacerbated due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Establishing a database of the affected citizens who deserve support, to be linked to all agencies (civil registry, social insurance, social security pensions, the workforce ... etc.) so that we have an actual number of beneficiaries without any duplication or omission of those who deserve support. A specific agency should be the coordinator of the support based on the general database.
- Establishing a special fund under the management of this agency to collect and manage all donations announced from the state, Al-Azhar, the Church, businessmen, NGOs, public figures, or others. The assigned agency would announce the numbers of those who are entitled and provides a weekly statement of account of all amounts that entered the fund and all the sums spent.
- Providing support for food, medication, rent, and children's needs for milk and diapers, sanitary pads for women, and sterilizers, based on the number of members of each family.
- Dropping all electricity, water and gas bills are to be dropped from March 2020 until the end of the crisis.
- Negotiating with the businessmen to pay the salaries of the employees for a period of 3 months during which the general closure is applied for a month until the cases decrease and the opening to be done gradually.

- Passing all students, except for those who are in the final years of study, provided that the of this semester are added to the following years, and that high school exams and final year students are held in universities after the end of this critical period of the pandemic.
- Obliging private and languages schools to pay the salaries of teachers and their employees, since they received the academic expenses from parents, and yet they did not pay the salaries of teachers and workers.
- Applying market and price controls to prevent the exploitation of citizens by merchants.
- Resuming payment of all types of suspended pensions, and the alimony of women and their children from Nasser Bank as soon as possible, without waiting for the court decision.
- Deferring the payment of loans without any interests.
- Stopping all bills and payment of loans, and setting an amount that each individual takes by the national ID card or birth certificate, in case of children, for basic needs (solidarity among everyone, for all of us to live), and that we apply a general curfew except for the vital sectors.

28 The Central Bank Governor's Decision to Postpone the Collection of Credit Entitlements, the State Information Service, 17 March 2020, (Arabic only) at: [link](#)

29 About the Postponing of Loans Installments, see Roya News, at: [link](#)

3

Social Impacts, Relationships and Roles among Family Members during the COVID-19 Pandemic



The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that it is important to modify the “social and cultural patterns of individual conduct in order to eliminate prejudices, customary habits, and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or stereotyped roles for men and women. The convention also advocates for a proper understanding of maternity as a social function, demanding fully shared responsibility for child-rearing by both sexes.”³⁰

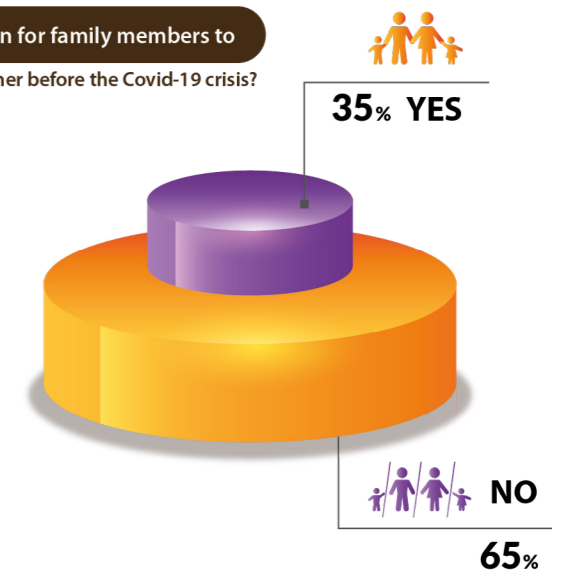
The current COVID-19 crisis and the curfew has forced families to stay at home for a longer time than usual; in this section, we will focus on the nature of social relations and the division of roles between family members before and during the pandemic, and the extent of this impact on the women surveyed.

Social Relationships between Family Members before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic:

Were family members spending time together before the pandemic?

- 65% of families did not have time to spend together before the pandemic.
- 35% of families had time to spend together before the pandemic.

Was it common for family members to spend time together before the Covid-19 crisis?



Referring to the statistical results on how family members spent time together before the COVID-19 pandemic, we find that the majority of respondents, about 65% of the sample, reported that family members did not have time to spend together and had no opportunity to allocate time for family gatherings. Most of the reasons mentioned fell around working conditions. Thus, to increase their income, they had to work for long hours in order to meet the basic needs of the family. One respondent said: “I was not able to spend any time with my children because my job is dazzling with appointments and hours of hard work to increase our income.”

Also, the time that family members spent at home was only for sleeping or eating after long hours of work. Many of them said that the study and tutorials of their children consume most of the day so they have time outside of helping the children with their studies. Some of them mentioned that their “sons and/or husbands” usually prefer sitting with their friends outside the house on cafes, in addition to social media webpages. “My son was always inclined to spend most of his time on his mobile, on Facebook,” one woman said. “Oh my God, the internet take people from each other, each one gazing at his phone, distracted in another world,” another woman said.

³⁰ CEDAW, at: [link](#)

Asked about their opinion on how much this situation has impacted their lives, most of their answers centered around their feelings of guilt, failure and negligence, mainly because they were not able to follow up with their children, in addition to the lack of family intimacy. They wished that there was time to gather. On the other hand, there are some women who do not see a problem with family members not gathering, especially since this is the normal way of life. Instead, the most important thing to do is to look for financial resources for getting "food." Lack of gathering may be in their favor; because it leads to reducing or avoiding hard times of marital discord, or problems between siblings.

It is also important to point out that many women are confused about the concept of spending time with family; many of the respondents defined family time as time to fulfill household requirements, such as preparing food, cleaning clothes, or helping children do their homework.

The statistics indicate that 35% of the women in the study reported that family members were spending time together before the COVID-19 pandemic; often during vacation days or at night after completing work and study obligations. Some of them reported that they were preparing for vacation days in advance to set up several activities for family members at the time of gathering, such as preparing food and sweets that they enjoy together. There were also those who mentioned that gathering time was devoted to consulting each other on matters of life, study, and work. This time was useful to them to learn about their children and their friends and what they do during the days of the week. It also represented a chance to talk about the difficulties they faced and how they can work to solve these issues. Many women indicated that this time would be used to talk about the economic challenges and requirements of the family, and how to overcome the problems of resources and meet the needs of the family, and maybe to watch TV.

Many positive impacts have emerged from families that had the opportunity to spend family time together; these families feel more cohesive, and there is a sense of interdependence and joy. One woman said about family time: "It is usually a beautiful day, I wish it would last for longer." Family time is also a time to speak freely and intimately to each other, which in turn alleviates their feelings of pressure resulting from economic burdens.

During the COVID-19 crisis and as a result of the curfew, there is now more time for family members to spend together, and the consequences are as follows:

- 56% of the respondent women believe that spending more time with the family, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, has both positive and negative aspects.
- 34% of women in the study believe that spending more time with the family, as a result of COVID-19, has a negative impact on them.
- 10% said it has a positive impact on them.

crisis and the curfew, there have been

As a result of Covid19



Women's opinions about the lengthened time families spend together due to the current situation and the curfew, varied between those who see it as completely positive and in the interests of the family, and those who consider it as negative for the family, with no positive aspects at all. However, the largest percentage of the sample believe that the increased time of gathering has positive and negative aspects: "We sat at home more than we used to do, this is a good and bad thing at the same time; good because we sit together and do satisfactory things together, but the bad aspect is that we feel helpless and cannot meet the needs of our children," a woman said.

The positive aspects of spending more time among the family members, according to some of the interviewed women, are that it contributes to improving rapport between family members, and creates more room for discussion, dialogue, and getting to know their personalities. "Discussion and sitting together in general as a family was missing before the pandemic," one woman said. Other women saw that spending more of family time strengthened and improved the relations between their family members, in addition to the availability of time to enjoy and make room for recreational activities at home. Others saw it as an opportunity to rediscover the self and others of family members as well as take care of children: "I improved my skills in some handicrafts and made nice things, matching my colors in a better way," another woman said.

Now I can stay with my children as I ever wished and could not do because of work pressure!

This period also helped to bring out feelings of love, care, and frankness. "My children's relationship with their handicapped brother has improved and they now play with him, which made a big difference with him," a woman said. The positive aspect, according to another woman, is to see her husband at lunch, because this was almost impossible before the COVID-19 pandemic. Others also saw that being at home is an opportunity to protect family members from the pandemic and limiting its spread. Others saw it as an opportunity to build the capabilities of their children and educate them on matters they were not aware about before; such as how to deal with the adolescent phase and the accompanying physical changes.

In this regard, some women also added that they became more caring for the elderly parents during this predicament. "I kept paying more attention to the care of my parents because they are elderly," a woman said. Having more time at home also had an impact on reducing consumption of fast food and relying on home-cooked food to save costs, as several women pointed out.

There are some women who saw that this period made their husbands appreciate their domestic efforts, especially their role in raising their children. "Before the curfew, and because he used to spend most of his time at two jobs, my husband used to think that I did not do anything. But after spending more time at home, he realized how much I suffer with my girls," a woman said.

There is no doubt that such difficult times have negative aspects as well, but the extent of feeling and being affected varies from person to another based on many facts and circumstances. Some women think that being at home with family members has many negative aspects. They do not feel relaxed, and instead, have become more anxious as a result of increased marital disputes and children's problems who now quarrel more than before. The need for food has also increased while income has decreased, which undoubtedly affects the mood and anxiety of some parents, and has driven some families to beat their children and become violent with them.³¹

A number of women add that social distancing and fear of going out and mixing with others have led to isolation of the nuclear family from the larger family. Children in many families suffer from limited spaces to play in; they cannot go out to play as they used to before the pandemic. Where they used to spend time in the street or at some of the neighbors, now "we feel like we are in prison," one mother said.

I mostly face hard time with my children because they are nagging and have a lot of requests all the time! It is also because I have no time I feel like in bad mood because I cannot buy what they ask for.

Many of the interviewed women reported that the negative effects are the result of spending more time with their husbands at home. The lack of understanding and participation in household chores, as well as the increase in their requests, have led to a lot of quarrels and disputes. Consequently, they resorted to isolating and avoiding being in the same place as their husbands. This, in turn, led to more tension in the marital relationship, as well as the growth of the silent treatment and domestic violence.

On the other hand, most men, particularly the married ones, are not accustomed to staying at home. Under curfew, they miss social time with their friends at the local cafes, due to their closure. This situation, with the lack of income and inability to buy cigarettes, has made them more nervous with women and/or children at home whatever the reasons.

Other women see that being at home for a long time under the stress caused by the pandemic has affected their children's comprehension and study capabilities in general. This has, in turn, made children less interested in education, especially with difficulty in distance learning. The situation is made worse due to internet connectivity issues resulting from a lack of income, which causes permanent stress and parental concern for their children.

On another level, we find that this period has negatively affected the grandfathers/grandmothers. There are many grandmothers who have been dramatically affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, the repercussions of social distance and other such measures have had an effect on the grandchildren who used to go to their grandmother's home and spend time with them. "I cannot see my children or my grandchildren because of this plight of COVID-19. They used to come over to my house, but now they cannot, which makes me sad," a grandmother said.

We have two options either death due to the pandemic or because of hunger!

As we mentioned under the economic impacts, some families were forced to move and live with their old families. However, this has social effects relations between family members. Many disputes have arisen, in addition to breaking the boundaries and privacy of many individuals. "My children are small and want to play, and since there is no place where they can get any sort of entertainment or play with their peers in the street, they automatically play at home and sometimes they are hyperactive as a reaction to this kind of imprisonment. This makes my family very uncomfortable with them, and my brothers treat them badly all the time and scorn me as well. But I am forced to keep silent because I cannot find another place. Everyone's tolerance is decreasing," one of the women who had to live with the parents said.

31 UN Rights Experts Call for Urgent Action to Mitigate Heightened Risks of Violence against Children, at: [link](#)

However, some women noted that their family situation has not changed in light of the current conditions and curfew. There is a correlation between this and being used to sitting together or not. Some women mentioned that the conditions did not change much under the pandemic. They have a routine to spend time together, unlike some other families who do not have a good family relationship or are not interested in spending time together. "As if the house is hotel," a woman commented on the conduct of people at home under the pandemic and curfew.

Social Roles before and during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

To understand the extent of the male participation in the domestic duties and housework, we had to first know the percentage of women who live with males.

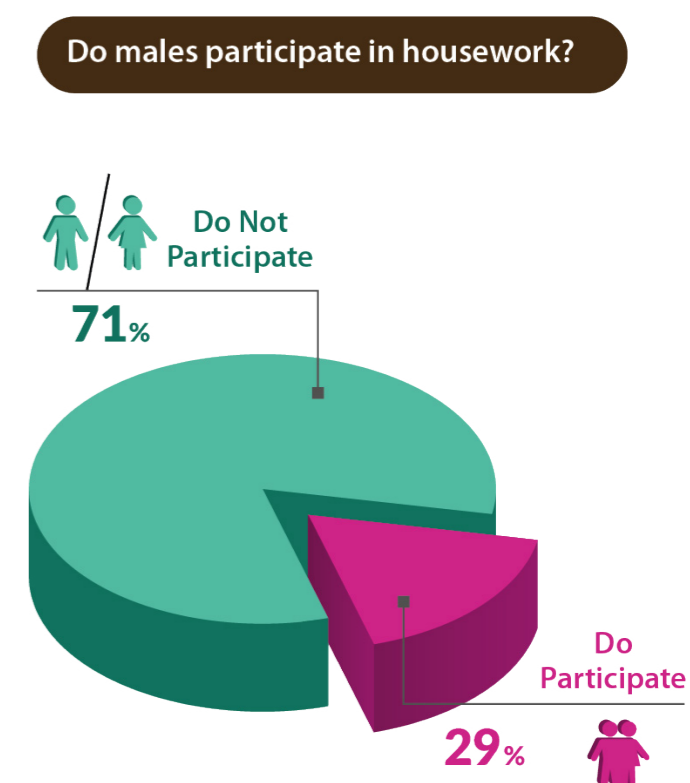
- 74 % of women in the sample live with men.
- 13% of the women in the sample live with men but they are children.
- 13% of the women in the sample do not live with men.

Do you live with males?



Below we address the proportion of women who live with men and whether the latter participate in household chores before the pandemic:

- 71% of the women in the sample who live with men reported that the latter never participate in housework before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 29% of the interviewed women who live with men said that the latter used to participate in housework before the pandemic.



The statistics we have found on extent of male participation in housework before the pandemic indicate that 71% of women in the sample reported that men do not participate, and 29% of women reported that men participate.

Regarding the type of tasks that males participate in at home, some women indicated that the primary task that males perform is shopping and buying the needs of the household, such as food and cleaning tools. Most of interviewed women see that male contributions are simple but very important and appreciated because it gives a sense of solidarity and strengthens relationships within the household. Cleaning the house, arranging their rooms and washing their clothes are of the most common tasks men do, while some women said that they assist in kitchen tasks, including preparing food and washing dishes.

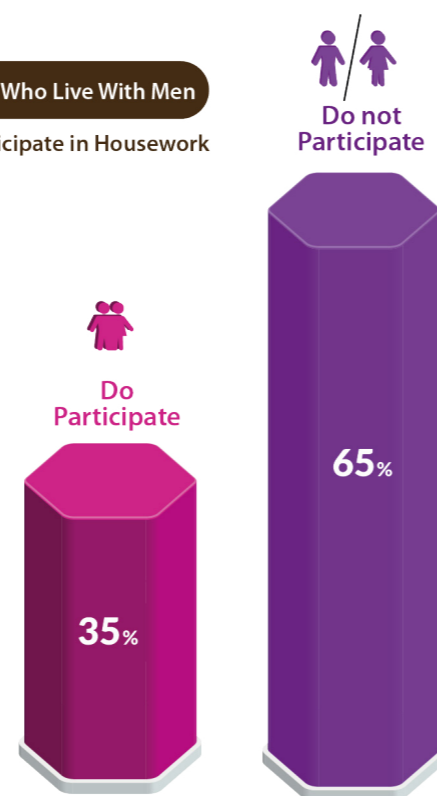
On the other hand, some women see that men assistance in pivotal tasks such as helping children study or fixing any damaged thing at home is a good help. This is because the mainstream societal culture is that women are responsible for raising children and their studies. However, many women claim that sharing the responsibilities at home is condition of falling sick or other circumstances of this nature. "Because I am tired, my husband and children were helping me in washing the dishes, bringing drinking water, folding the blankets, etc." a woman said.

As for the least popular tasks for men as mentioned by women, it is to help to dry clothes. Here, it should be borne in mind that men who perform this role are usually stigmatized by society and neighbors, men and women, as playing women's roles or that "women control them," thus placing men and women in stereotypes.

As for the rate of male participation during the pandemic and their presence for a longer amount of time at home, women responded as follows:

- 65% of the interviewed women who live with men, reported that the latter do not participate in housework during the pandemic.
- 35% of the sample reported that men do participate in the housework during the pandemic.

Percentage of Women Who Live With Men Who Do or Do Not Participate in Housework



If I asked my oldest son to wash his own clothes, he says I cannot do these things, when you get paralyzed I will do my best!

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has affected all areas of public and private life, especially in the gender roles within the same family. The related statistics show that the percentage of women who live with men and said the latter do not participate in household chores is 65% of the sample. They see that the most important reason behind that is mainly the societal culture that places domestic chores on the women's shoulders. Most of men refuse to contribute to household chores because they think that these things diminish their importance and society's respect for them. It is not right for men to do chores. "My oldest son sees that if he assists in the housework, it means that he will not be in control," a mother said.

Some women also confirmed that men depend on them to meet household requests on the pretext that they are present at home more than them. "When I asked my husband to prepare food for himself he said: 'if I have to do that, why on earth did I bring you here! You do not do any job!'" a woman recalled. She sees that being exposed to these situations and responses is very insulting. Some women see this as a men's nature, as they do not have the competence in these kinds of tasks. Others find that growing up and getting accustomed to not participating in housework, and thus underestimating it, is the main reason.

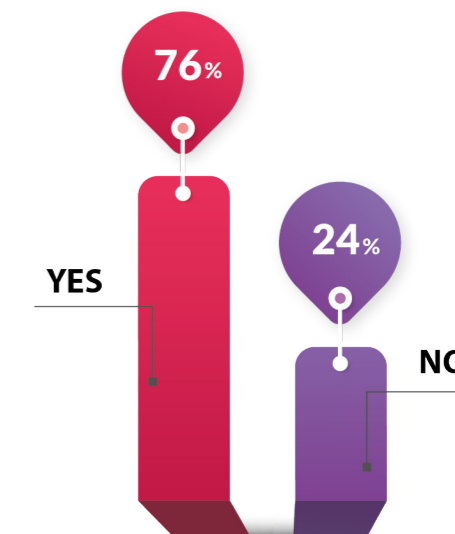
On the other hand, many women in the sample consider it inappropriate for men to perform household chores unless it is necessary such as when women fall sick. Women do not dare and will not accept to ask men to participate in household chores; because they are convinced that these things will damage their manhood.

It becomes even more difficult when the mother-in-law lives at the same house with the son and his wife; because she often refuses to let her son help with household of the chores. The wife is forced to do all chores by herself, even if she works to help the family's economic burden, and that is just to prevent family disputes.

Does the presence of men for longer periods at home without participating in housework increase the burdens on women?

- 76% of the interviewed women feel that the burdens are greater because men stay for longer durations at home without participating in the housework.
- 24% of the sample do not see any increase in the burdens.

Does the Existence of Male Family Members for Longer Time At Home Without Participating in Housework Increase the Burdens on You?



Women who are experiencing an increase in domestic tasks due to men spending a longer time at home have expressed many feelings such as injustice, inferiority, and a lack of appreciation, especially for women who are still working through the pandemic. All of them have agreed that there is an increase in men's requests at home, without taking into account the physical and psychological pressures incurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Not only did they express their personal suffering, but many of them added that this also applies to girls in the family. They suffer from the same phenomenon; "my daughter is in high school and her brothers keep asking her to do things for them while she studies, so I take on this role so she can avoid this extra stress," a mother said.

Other women said that these demands are endless. In addition, men being at home for long periods of time does cause chaos and requires the extra burden of frequent cleaning, which affects women's health and their constant back and spine pain, as well as psychological effects and their constant sense of maltreatment.

Despite all of these burdens that women bear under these exceptionally difficult circumstances, as well as their exposure to physical and psychological risks, most of them do not directly disclose these risks to seek help or reduce their burden. They fear blame and accusations of negligence, that they cannot tolerate their husbands under these circumstances; also, they see no point in disclosing these issues.

My daughter feels the discrimination and keeps saying: why do they tire us? I am very tired and they stay all the time ask for everything without doing any effort!

Men work outside the home, do they have to work inside as well? Shame on women who call for that!

But there is a small percentage of women who find that despite the increase in domestic burdens and physical pressure, they do enjoy fulfilling the requests of their sons and husbands to make them feel comfortable. Additionally, some women divide the domestic work between themselves and their girls only.

Requests and burden at home have horribly increased, however, I can not say no, because my husband always says that I do not bear him in hard times.

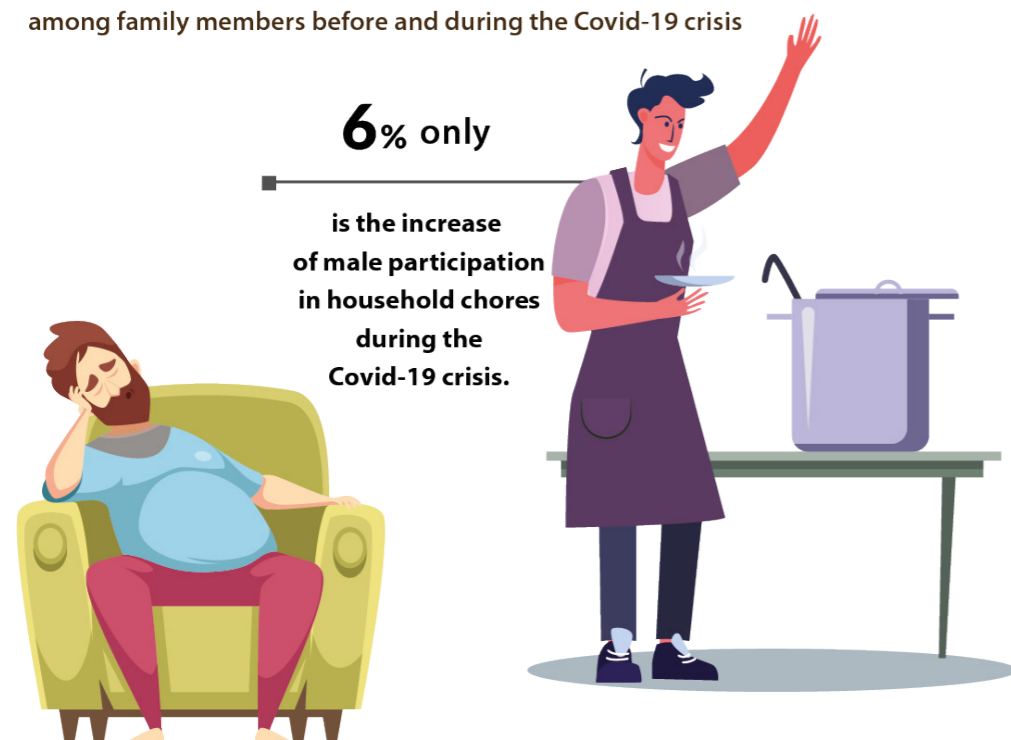
This is clearly the result of societal influence, gender imbalances, discrimination, inequality, and the huge influence of controlling and authoritative institutions such as media outlets, religious and educational institutions, and customs and traditions. It also refers to the role of socialization that perpetuates stereotypes and gender roles and that contribute to women accepting these images and even advocating for them much of the time.

In addition, 35% of the women who live with men indicated that they participate in housework during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is worth noting that, comparing the percentage of male participation in household chores before and during COVID-19 pandemic, we have found that participation has increased by 6%. The tasks that men did before and during the pandemic are very similar, such as shopping and purchasing items for the home, participating in cleaning the house, helping to care for the children, helping children study, washing dishes, and helping to prepare food.

the nature of social relations and the division of roles

among family members before and during the Covid-19 crisis



Some women mentioned men will participate in all domestic tasks, but as they put it: "it depends on their mood, good or bad." However, as we mentioned earlier, there are those who indicated that some household chores are rejected. These tasks are confined to the kitchen, such as washing dishes, or going out to hang and dry the clothes in the balcony. Also, another reason men refuse to do some chores mentioned by women is that they are not good and these tasks, due to their lack of experience. Finally, some men consider their participation in some domestic tasks acceptable, while other tasks are not. This is because they have been raised with specific values and customs preventing them from doing female tasks.

How do women view this participation?

The majority of women see that male participation in housework as acceptable and necessary in order to build a healthy and coexistent life and relationship between the two parties. Participation contributes to reducing disputes between spouses, and reduces the burden on wives. They are thus able to take the rest that they need to continue with life. Some mothers think that the participation of their sons during the pandemic will qualify and help them be more self-reliant in the event of travel, independence or even marriage.

Others view male participation in household chores as totally unacceptable, and that their participation, on the contrary, increases the burden on them. "He enters the kitchen and then we have a mess, I am the one who has to take care of it at the end of the day!" one wife said.

Yes, it is acceptable to me that male assist in housework. My father used to help my mother. Cooperation is a good thing!

As for the governmental measures taken to support women and their families socially during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Many decisions have been issued by the government, including: the suspension of schools and universities, pausing work in kindergartens, reducing the number of male and female workers in government departments and agencies, granting an employee who is pregnant or caring for one or more children younger than twelve years an exceptional leave, and granting leave to a worker who is caring for a child with special needs.

These decisions are good for supporting the family, especially women, because they are the ones who play the largest role in care. However, these decisions are related more to public sector employees, who represent only 10% of the study sample. No government decisions were made to protect female employees in the private sector. Instead, these decisions were left to the discretion of businessmen and employers under unfair labor laws for private-sector employees, and without strong unions that can defend labor rights. This is intersected with the economic dimensions we discussed earlier, which in turn are socially reflected onto the lives of women and their families. The majority of women, those who work for daily wage, were the most socially and economically affected due to the absence of a social protection umbrella to reduce the harm incurred on them.

Recommendations related to the social impacts, relationships and roles among family members during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Broadcasting TV programs that target males/females periodically to educate them about:
 - Methods and mechanisms for building healthy gender relationships within the family;
 - Messages of awareness for both genders about the need to cooperate and divide gender roles at home in a way that achieves justice, equality, and non-discrimination;
 - Educating parents about ways to deal with children during the plight of COVID-19;
 - Producing TV series and advertisements that break down female/male stereotypes within society;
 - TV programs of participatory activities for family members to enhance relations among them.
- Establishing a database with hotlines for state institutions, specialists, and NGOs to provide advice on family relations according to each governorate and publish it through TV channels to reach the largest possible number of citizens.
- Religious Institutions:
 - Deliver sermons on male and female participation in social roles, responsibilities and decision-making at the private and public level.
- **For the Future:**
 - Allowing time to build strong and sound relationships and ties among family members and the division of roles so as to achieve gender equality;
 - Modifying educational curricula to ensure gender justice, equality, and non-discrimination, as well as to break stereotypes;
 - Ensuring that all male and female students participate in sporting activities and training in fields such as housekeeping, industrial, agricultural, student unions and school committees, ensuring that stereotypes of gender roles are changed.

4 The Psychological Pressures and Effects that Women Face during the COVID-19 Pandemic



The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to many changes in the daily lives of individuals, especially after the announcement of the necessity of quarantining at home and social distancing to limit the spread of the disease.

However, staying at home has many psychological effects due to the lifestyle and daily routine changes, in addition to the economic effects and their repercussions on social and psychological life. Most people feel stressed and other negative feelings such as sadness, anxiety, anger and frustration. The crisis is exacerbated, by people absorbed by the news and information related to the pandemic, looking specifically for information about psychological stress and feelings associated with these exceptional events in human history, which may affect and weaken the immune system, and increases their risk of disease with its complications.³²

This is a challenge for everyone, and its impact will be multiplied on women and children in particular, especially the poor and marginalized in societies experiencing gender-based-violence.

The UN has warned of new risks for both children and adults, which may be caused by COVID-19, especially mental illnesses. Millions of children are at risk of death, not because of the new virus, but for reasons related to psychological diseases.

The WHO, the health authority that coordinates global efforts to combat the pandemic, also warned that there is a mental illness crisis looming on the horizon as a result of the "isolation, fear, uncertainty and economic turmoil" caused by the pandemic.³³

Therefore, in this section, we will address the psychological pressures and effects women and their families face during the pandemic, and the sources of support that they resort to for help handling these feelings and the psychological stress.

The Psychological Impact of COVID-19 on Women:

The pressures that have emerged from the pandemic have led to many psychological effects on members of society, especially women. The majority of women that we interviewed through this study, indicated that they experienced different psychological effects. Some of them have become depressed, prefer isolation and avoid dealing even with family members. They also feel the inability to communicate. "I prefer to be alone, I may sleep for long hours because I do not want talk to anybody and feel nervous toward them. Wherever they are I stay far away from them," one women said.

Many women repeated that they suffer from sleep disturbances; some women sleep for longer hours than normal, and some have not been able to sleep for a sufficient amount of time.

Too much tension and stress makes me bite my nails all the time!

32 Psychological Stress Caused by the Outbreak of Covid-19, ASPETAR, April, 1, 2020, at: [link](#)

33 The Devastating Mental Effects of Covid-19, 15 May 2020, at: [link](#)

There were also those who reported that they suffer from other physical symptoms because of stress and frustration, some of whom have suffered from persistent headaches, a fast heartbeat, or general fatigue.

Most women suffer from persistent crying spells, high blood pressure, and high blood sugar; one woman stated that "too much anxiety makes me feel furious, while boils and furuncle spreads over my body." There are several general feelings that women have stated during the phone interviews more than once due to the current conditions, namely:

Fear from infection whether for themselves or their family members; fear of hunger and the future, and living under the control of feelings such as anxiety, stress and lack of safety. "From time to time I find myself charged with bad feelings and feeling like I am suffocating, and I have even had hallucinations," a woman said. Also, many women stated that they could not control their feelings, and that they suffer from anger and are distracted by many bad thoughts.

Some women also feel guilt and negligence towards their children, and this feeling makes them uncomfortable and in constant grief. One woman recalled: "my son asked for a pizza and I had no money. This made me feel paralyzed, sad, guilty all of the time." Another woman remembered a similar bad experience: "I try to hide my feelings and pressure, which makes me feel depressed, although I hide these feelings when my children realize how I am feeling."

The Effect of Stress on the Relationship between Family Members:

Stress affects the relationships between family members and their behaviors. In this respect, women, reflecting on their conditions, focused on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and how much it affected the relationship with their family members. One woman said: "I found myself anxious and screaming all the time in the face of my family and beating the children, even my son has keeps saying that I do not love him anymore, and he is very sad because of this."

As fear and anxiety have passed to children, their sense of safety has diminished. This of course has affected the interaction of children with each other at home and led to increased isolation among family members, as well as disputes and quarrels. "I feel anxious most of time and this affects my children; they become afraid because they are still young and cannot understand that we are stressed; this stress causes tension and quarrels with my husband as well," a mother said.

Many women confirmed that the crisis and resulting current situation of staying at home for long periods without going out and moving, has fired up the feeling of fear, particularly for children. Sometimes children are more nervous and aggressive.

Many women reported that husbands also became anxious, since they feel that they cannot provide materially for their family. Additionally, stress has caused them to lose control of their behavior; thus, the whole family is in a constant state of quarreling. There are some women who have indicated that husbands, due to their inability to buy cigarettes, go furious for the most trivial reasons.

My husband quarrels with us all the time; he is upset because he cannot buy cigarettes, while the children feel bored because they cannot go out.

Most of time I want to be alone, not to talk to anyone, and sometimes I am so emotional and touchy, would fight with anyone approach me. I want to go out, to leave the home, I have to stay a lone for a good time! I scream in face of my children, and they also are stressed and wondering why do we behave with them in this bad manner! "We want to play and have fun with you, but you are angry all the time!" my child said. I feel guilty about my children but cannot control my bad feelings.

Initially, the government should reduce the financial burden on us, such as water, gas and electricity bills at the present time, so it will be making difference psychologically with all of us. I swear God, I feel like I have a phobia of the door knocks, it is conditioned with someone wants money! How disturbing is it when you have no money even for food!

How Women Face the Impacts of Stress in Order to Improve Their Psychological State:

Women have pointed to various sources and methods of support, whether it is spiritual, external, or internal. However, there are many women who reported that they do not know about any sources of support and therefore can do nothing.

The most important sources of support mentioned by women were:

- Spirituality, such as prayer, seeking forgiveness, reading in the Qur'an and supplication.
- Reading the Bible and listening to religious programs.
- Playing games and doing activities with children and family members, like "Let's play Bank of Fortune."
- Resorting to home cleaning and rearranging furniture.
- Communicating with friends and relatives.
- Doing some technical handicrafts.
- Listening to music, dancing, and watching TV.
- Relaxing and sleeping.
- Repeating reassuring positive sentences such as "this is a difficult period, but it will end."
- Following-up on the news.

I do bead works, it kills time and bad feelings!

There is no one to turn to, and people know my problems very well. My problems have no solution!

I am very nervous and anxious. I treat my children badly because of stress!

Stress and other Psychological Effects on Women under Covid-19 Pandemic



Measures Taken by the Government to Support Women Psychologically during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

The Ministry of Health and Population launched two hotlines for psychological support for male and female citizens during the crisis.

In addition, the NCW, in cooperation with the UN-Women, launched the “Our Mental Health is a Priority” initiative, in partnership with several organizations, including the Safe Kids and Chaise Lounge, and sponsored by Egypt Today magazine. This initiative is provided by a number of psychologists and institutions to support the mental health of Egyptian women and raise awareness among male and female citizens about the importance of mental health in general under the plight of the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative comes as an important part of the state’s efforts to educate citizens about the issue.

However, hotline numbers and videos are displayed only on websites, and this is not appropriate for most of women surveyed. Due to low income and educational status, the people that can access these services are the highest income earners, not the poor and marginalized.

Recommendations Related to Coping with Stress and the Psychological Effects on Women and Families during the Pandemic:

- Creating psychological support units for women in health centers
- Broadcasting psychological awareness programs to reassure women and their families and educate them on how to deal with the stress and their children in current situation. This can be through TV, as a large number of women are unable to communicate online due to economic conditions and educational standard.
- Simplifying TV programs for children to improve their psyche and improve their ability to face fear and anxiety.
- Providing free call centers from the government for women to talk and get psychological support from specialists and psychiatrists. These centers should be shown periodically on TV.
- Communicating information about the current state of the pandemic in a simple and clear way to contribute to improving and alleviating anxiety and stress.
- Meeting the basic economic needs of women and their families to alleviate stress and its psychological impacts.

5 Violence against Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Violence is an indicator of an imbalance in the social fabric that needs attention on different levels. It is a mirror that reflects the perception and attitudes of members of society towards each other. As incidents of violence, increase in times of conflict and crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has implications for increased rates of violence against women. Here we focus on domestic violence which is defined as any harmful and violent act that takes place within the family, whether between the spouses or intimate partners, or between other family members, and that causes harm or suffering in psychological, physical, sexual, or even economic and social terms, including physical abuse, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and the use of force and power to control.

In his statement on gender-based violence and COVID-19, the UN Secretary General stated that "For many women and girls, the threat looms largest where they should be safest. In their own homes."³⁴

Many reports state that under the current COVID-19 crisis, women around the world suffer from all kinds of violence.³⁵ The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Dubravka Simonovich, stated that: "Governments must not allow the extraordinary circumstances and restrictive measures against COVID-19 to lead to the violation of women's right to a life free from violence."³⁶

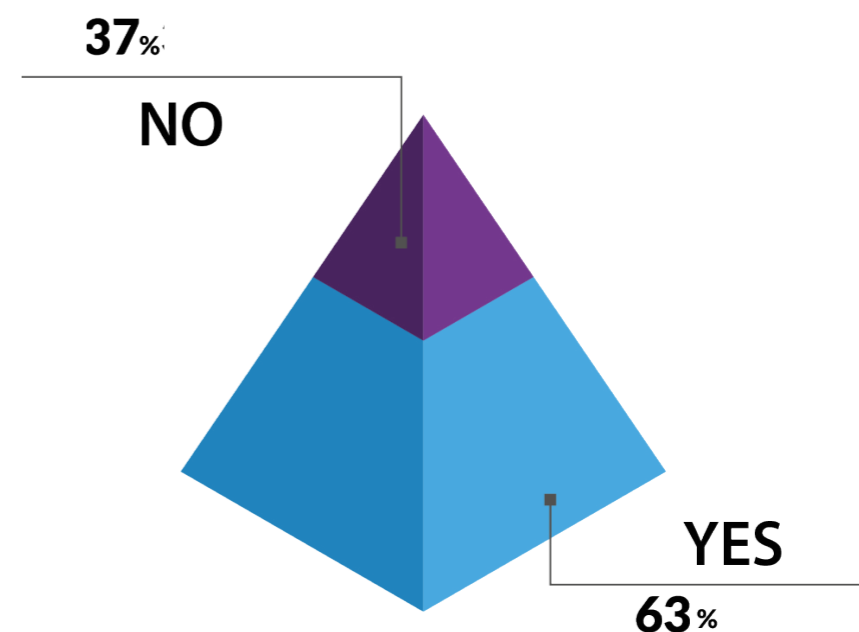
With the continuous global high rates of violence, in this section we address that extent of violence against women included in the study, with an analysis of its causes, and the methods used by women to confront it.

As mentioned earlier, the study's sample reached 121 women. 74% of them live with male family member(s) over 18 years old, and under the current crisis and the increasing frequency of violence, the study recorded the rates of violence against women as follows:

Proportion of women who have experienced domestic violence with whom males live under the Corona virus epidemic:

- 63% of women who live with males have experienced domestic violence, while 37% have not.

Women Who Live with Males
Exposed to Domestic Violence
During Covid-19 Pandemic



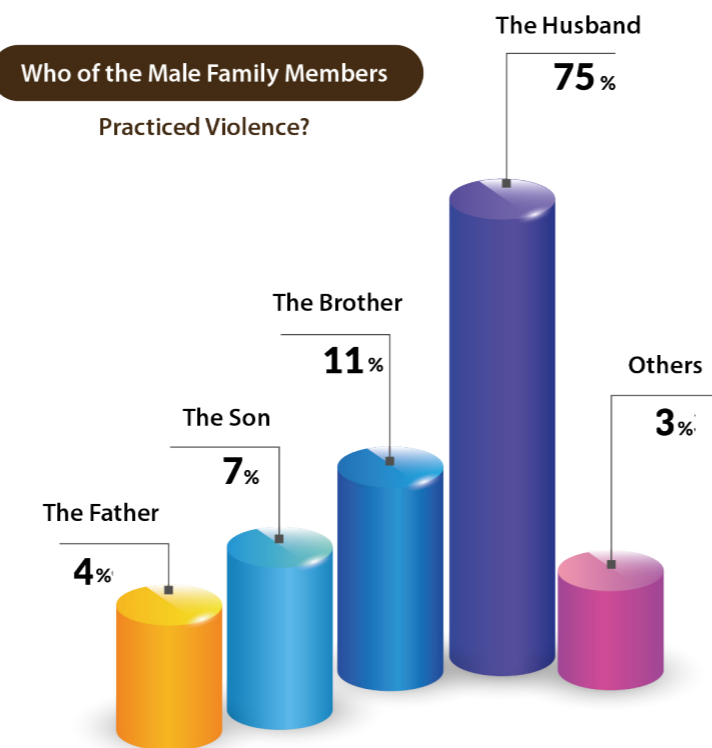
63% of women who live with male family members have experienced domestic abuse



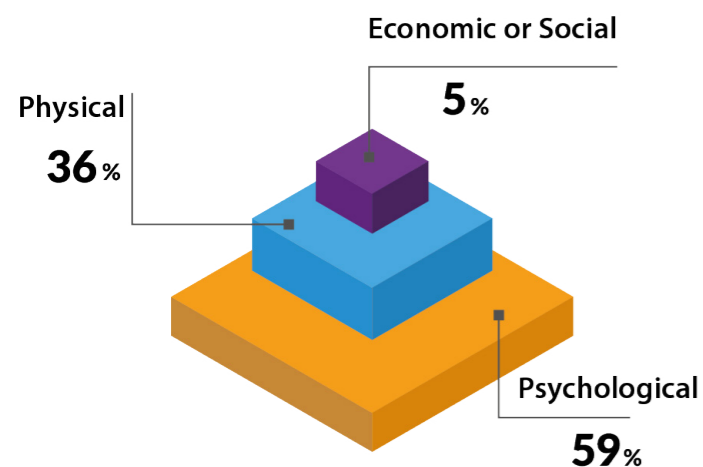
34 Secretary-General's video message on gender-based violence and COVID-19, 5 April 2020, at: [link](#)
 35 The Women's Oasis of Safety in the Time of Covid-19 Pandemic, an article by Dr. Maya Morsi, the head of the National Council for Women, Al-Ahram Portal, 15 May 2020,(Arabic only), at: [link](#)
 36 States must combat domestic violence in the context of COVID-19 lockdowns – UN rights expert, UNHR, 27 March 2020, at: [link](#)

The degree of kinship of those responsible for domestic violence against women under the COVID-19 pandemic:

- 75% Husband.
- 11% Brother
- 7% Son
- 4% Father
- 3% Ex-Husband or Son in Law



Types of Violence Committed Against Women



Types of Domestic Violence Experienced by Women Who Live with Men during the COVID-19 Pandemic:

- Physical 36%.
- Psychological 59%
- Economic/Social 5%

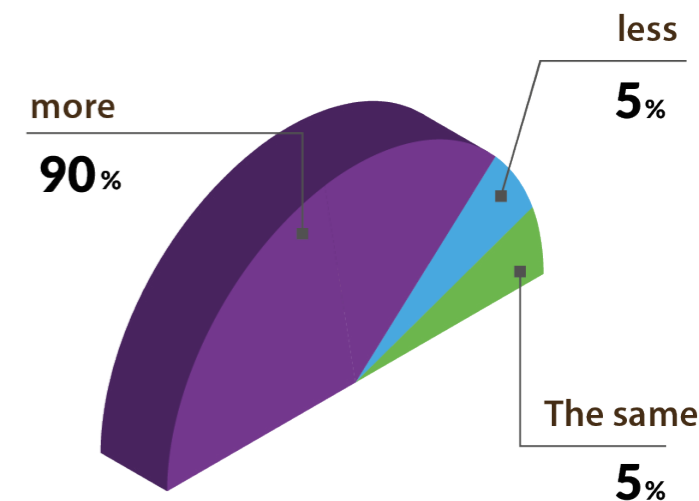
As for battered women before the COVID-19 pandemic:

44% of women who live with men had previously experienced domestic violence prior to the pandemic.

• During the pandemic crisis:

- 90% of them experienced more violence
- 5% experienced the same rate of violence.
- 5% experienced less violence.

The Extent of the Change in the Frequency of Domestic Violence Against Women

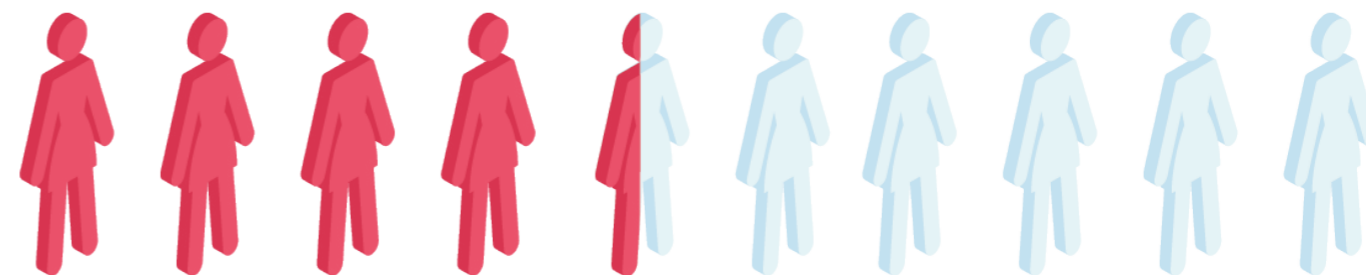


The proportion of women who live with men and have experienced domestic violence for the first time under the COVID-19 pandemic, is one of indicators of increasing and growing rates of family violence to include new groups of women:

- 56% of interviewed women who live with men have not experienced domestic violence before the pandemic, but under the crisis of the pandemic, 42% of these women have been exposed to domestic violence for the first time.

42%

The percentage of the women who have experienced domestic violence for the first time



Women who have experienced domestic violence describe the current situation as a “dreadful nightmare.” Thus, most women who had experienced violence before the pandemic have become subject to multiple types of violence. There are even many women/girls who had not been subjected to domestic violence before the pandemic that are now suffering from it. The increase in violence against women in society is a pandemic other than COVID-19 that we are facing, which kills the most marginalized groups. This is largely due to the curfew and the need to quarantine at home with abusive men in difficult economic and social conditions.

Now, the situation goes worse, I bitterly suffer a lot. My husband beats and insults me, while I cannot do anything or resort to anyone to protect me. He even says that I cannot go to the police because they are busy with the pandemic. The courts too are closed and there is no one can protect me!

As all the stakeholders are preoccupied with finding a way to cure the COVID-19 pandemic, we find many crimes committed against women within the family, taking into account that the complicit societal culture overlooks what happens to women. “He beats me all the time, when I complain to his family, they don’t know how to do with him. They even refuse to let me take action to divorce, and all what they can do is to say never mind, try to hold on and he will be better! You have to forgive to be able to raise the children,” a woman said.

Through phone interviews, women pointed to many different types of violence that they have exposed to. Psychological violence ranked first among the types of violence that women have been exposed to during the pandemic. They reported several forms of violence such as questioning their behavior, defaming them as divorced women, humiliating them, expelling them from home, denying them access to their children, etc. Physical violence was ranked second, it came second, as women reported that they were beaten violently and kicked.

My husband often expelled me and my children in the middle of the night while I was wearing pajamas, and he refuses to spend money on the household even though he has a trade and works in a carpentry workshop, but all his money goes on drugs! Sometimes he refuses to go to work and asks me to find a way to come with money, he once said that he has no children to spend money on them, and that I have find where from I have brought them, and therefore he questions my behavior!

Finally, the economic and social violence represented here in taking over the funds of women by the men in the family. One woman stated that the father was seizing some of her money and forced her to borrow from the banks in her name, which exposed her to legal accountability.

With regard to sexual violence, None of the interviewed women wanted to discuss sexual violence. People often slander women who are survivors of sexual violence and blame them instead of males. Consequently, it is difficult for women to disclose this violence except in the most minimal ways.

The statistics indicate that violence committed by the husband is the most prevalent. “My children see me insulted and beaten with a wire by my husband. I have gone to the hospital more than once because of him. I have several psychological problems because of his violent treatment. At the same time, I have to work to sustain the family and meet the basic needs for my children!” a woman said.

Violence committed by a brother comes second, as the brother usually has authority and control over the woman in the family, even if he is younger than her. “My brother beats me and defames me as a divorced woman,” a woman said. Society views divorced women as notorious and always responsible for the failure of the marital relationship; thus, they are exposed to all types of gender-based violence from members of society, especially families.

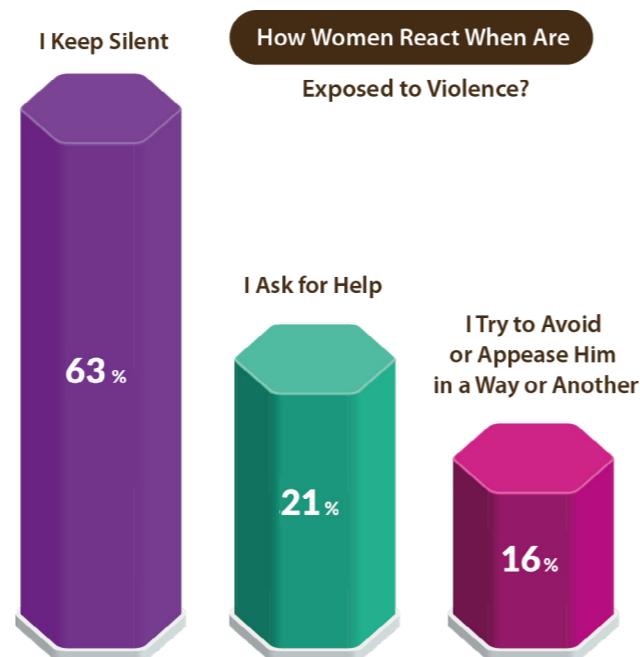
A number of women also reported that parents and children also use violence against them. On the other hand, violence is not limited to members of the nuclear family, but it may also extend to male relatives: “my son-in-law insults me and behaves like he is just kidding with me, and every now and then he says go out of my house and keeps insulting me, while I have no place to go!” a mother said.

The main causes of violence, from the point of view of women:

- A lack of resources, and in general, the hard economic situation due to loss of work or low wages under the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Psychological pressure, anxiety, and stress: “as much as he is stressed, my husband releases his anger on us, particularly if my daughter or I ask him for anything,” one of the women said.
- The curfew, and the need to quarantine at home for unusually long periods led to focusing on the details during interactions at home. Therefore, there were a lot of quarrels. “I discovered that I did not know their behavior, I mean, I discovered that my oldest son swears and is violent in his dealing or talking! He even insults me,” a mother said.
- Some men rely on the women’s current inability to report or prosecute them; police stations are busy, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the quarantine.

The reactions of women when exposed to violence were as follows:

- 63% of the interviewed women reported that they keep silent when exposed to domestic violence.
- 21% of women ask for help when exposed to domestic violence from (family - friends - community leaders - NGOs).
- 16% of women resort to a specific trick or method that can be classified as a smart way to end the situation.



The related statistics indicate that most of women preferred to stay silent and not to report the violence they are subjected to. They reported several reasons for their silence: “I have girls and do not want to cause a scandal among the neighbors;” “because I understand that he is stressed due lack of money and cannot do anything to fix it!”

Also, many women are forced to keep silent by those around them, whether from family, relatives or even sons: “my daughters are the ones who sit me down and silence me saying our father’s hell is better than any uncle’s paradise, we will not be humiliated in anybody’s home!” a mother said.

As for women who seek help, they often resort to an institution to solve the problem according to what women want, whether from legal interventions (consulting, police record, filing a law suit, etc.) or mediation and dispute settlement and negotiation sessions that result in written agreements of the commitment of all parties. However, there are some women who mentioned that they may also resort to neighbors, relatives, or other trustworthy people, but most of them did not experience a positive outcome.

I am tired of being beaten and insulted, I am mentally worn out of this abuse in front of my children. They also might be beaten, so I prefer to keep silent to avoid any further fight!

I usually keep silent saying that the conditions are really stressful to all of us! I try to calm him down, otherwise he would beat and expel me and I have no place to go with my children!

There are several women who report that they resort to some tricks and ways that can change the situation or discharge the stress and/or anger, such as moving away from the place where the abusive person is, or calming him down so that they are not exposed to more violence.

The multiplying negative impacts and increase in violence against women should be noted here. This is due to the weak legislative structure of family laws and other laws that discriminate against women (Personal Status Law - Article 60 of the Penal Code and its uses for disciplining women ... etc.) and the failure to issue a law on domestic violence. Moreover, the CEWLA and many other feminist institutions have called for years to amend some laws or issue new ones.

As for government measures to support women in the face of violence, the Ministry of Social Solidarity announced its willingness and preparedness for any possible case of violence against women through hosting centers.³⁷ Dr. Maya Morsi, the Head of the NCW, said that the services of the hotline for the council’s complaints office were strengthened to accommodate greater numbers of complaints, and that there are multiple protection and reporting mechanisms in Egypt are multiple. She also mentioned the phone numbers of some entities and institutions such as the human rights sector in the Ministry of the Interior, and the hotline of complaints of the Cabinet, complaints of the Ministry of Social Solidarity, among others.

In addition, a package of basic services has been launched for women and girls who are subjected to violence; it aims to provide greater opportunities to receive high-quality basic services, including medical protocols to deal with cases of violence, a case referral pathway, a judicial standards guide, a manual of relevant procedures, a guide for effective police response, a guide for the women’s complaints office, a procedural guide for setting up anti-violence units in Egyptian universities, a training guide for medical providers, a guide for social services and procedural steps in hosting houses.³⁸

Some of these measures are considered good at the level of response to cases, but the media needs to thoroughly announce them through the audio-visual media channels in order to reach all women. It is not enough to only be on websites. The women included in the study sample stated that they do not have any knowledge or information about these procedures, or hotlines.

On the level of prevention, no urgent measures were taken and no laws were issued to address the increasing violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic.

³⁷ Predestinate Policies and Programs that Respond to Women’s Needs During Covid-19 Pandemic, NCW, at: [link](#)

³⁸ The Women’s Oasis of Safety in the Time of Covid-19 Pandemic, an article by Dr. Maya Morsi, the head of the National Council for Women, A-Ahram Portal, 15 May 2020, (Arabic only), at: [link](#)

The Most Important Recommendations Women Raised to Reduce Violence against Them:

- Providing and activating hotlines from state institutions or associations according to each governorate, and advertising them on TV to reach all women, and providing urgent relief to battered women.
- Printing posters with phone numbers for protection from violence, and distributing and pasting them in public places and on all streets to contribute to raising awareness and prevention of violence against women.
- Enacting laws to control family violence, holding those responsible for violence to imprisonment or a fine, and working to implement these penalties.
- Introducing women to the places they can escape to in the event of domestic violence, and activating the role of these places, such as the complaints offices of the NCW, police stations, and the Ministry of Interior units of combating violence against women and equality between the genders.
- The police station should intervene immediately to protect battered women when she sends a distress request, and should educate police personnel on women's issues and gender equality.
- Issuing an immediate decision to imprison the husband who beats his wife.
- Sending text messages to raise awareness and combat violence against women.
- Broadcasting educational messages that combat violence against women through TV programs, series, films and advertisements, on how to prevent this violence.
- Guaranteeing protection and a decent life for vulnerable women in personal status laws.
- Providing religious sermons to prevent and prohibit violence against women.

It is necessary in the legal system to have a place for women in my age, I have lost my entire life with a husband and children, and in the end of the day I was expelled, and when I refused to live with him, I did not have a residence or source of income. I hope there is a law that protects the old ladies who have no place of their own.

V. Findings and Recommendations

General Findings:

- The lack of clear policies, issued decisions, conflicting messages broadcast from the concerned authorities, and failure to take public measures against some officials who may be behind an increase and spread of infection during the COVID-19 pandemic, has led to the presence of a confused, unclear picture of the state's policies and vision to deal with the plight. For instance, there have been calls to staying at home. But then the authorities made decisions to force some groups to leave the house and work on unnecessary projects (construction workers, for example), to pay huge sums to contractors to continue working, to ease the hours of the curfew during Ramadan, and to not hold some officials who held gatherings at workplaces or hospital managers who caused an infection accountable for their actions. The authorities then blamed the citizens for increasing the number of the infections and accused them of underestimating the pandemic and a lack of awareness.
- Women leave the house and are, exposed to the infection, in order to meet the basic needs of their family, not due to lack of awareness or commitment to government decisions.
- Women have an acceptable level of knowledge about the pandemic, but they also have a lot of misinformation about it.
- 84% of all working women have been affected, either from losing their job or from getting lower wages as a result of the pandemic.
- 85% of women working in the private sector have been affected, either from losing their job or from getting lower wages.
- The weakness of the current labor law, and the lack of strong, independent unions that can protect employees/workers in the private sector, have made many women lose their jobs, or a big portion of their wage, while blaming the pandemic for the negative economic impacts.
- The daily wage woman workers are the most affected by the crisis. They are 100% affected, whether from losing jobs or big portions of their wage. This has occurred under the absence of a strong social safety net, and so they have struggled to survive.
- 85% of all female heads of household have been affected, either from losing their work or by getting lower wages as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Basic needs (food, medications, rent, milk and diapers for children, sanitary pads, etc.) are the most important issues for marginalized women, especially during the pandemic, as prices have increased and the markets are not controlled.
- School research assignments are one of the economic burdens that marginalized women and their families have added to their purchasing list. They get it from some teachers or owners of internet cafés, as they cannot do it by themselves due to their low educational level and their inability to do research that the schools asked as a condition for the children to pass the class.
- 92% of the total women who applied for the irregular employment grant did not receive it, 89% of the working women who applied for the grant did not receive it.
- The conditions, methods of application, and selection criteria for the irregular employment grant were not sufficiently clear from the outset, causing many affected women not to access and obtain the grant.
- The pension of Takaful wa Karama (Solidarity and Dignity) was suspended for some women, which affected them badly despite the weakness of these sums. In addition, the clerks of the Ministry of Social Solidarity were not aware of the decision taken made by the ministry they work for to add new families to this pension program, or about the exceptional support for some families during this period, and therefore many women who deserve it did not apply.
- Some husbands stopped paying the alimony as the competent courts stopped with the beginning of the pandemic, which economically affected women and their children.
- Deferring the repayment of loan installments for a period of 6 months is a good decision, but charging citizens for the interest of the delay period even though they cannot pay the installment is an additional burden placed on them instead of helping them.
- The presence of family members for longer periods due to the curfew, with increased burdens and economic pressures, has led to increased disputes and quarrels among family members, and high rates of domestic violence against women and children.
- Some families have become more connected due to being more present during the pandemic and spending family times.
- The prevailing customs, traditions, and culture continue to perpetuate the stereotype of gender roles in society. We have found that 65% of women who live with men bear care and household chores alone without male participation, and 76% of women believe that their burdens have increased because men are spending longer periods at home without taking part in the chores.

- Male participation in household chores increased only 6% during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Some governmental decisions were issued to reduce the social burdens on public sector employees, while excluding other groups of female employees.
- Women experience severe psychological pressures as well as psychosomatic syndrome (where they experience physical symptoms but the reason behind them is psychological not physical) as a result of the combination of economic and social pressures and domestic violence against them during the pandemic.
- Violence against women within the family has increased. 63% of women who live with men have experienced domestic violence during the conditions of pandemic, 90% of battered women before the COVID-19 pandemic experienced more violence, and 42% of women have experienced domestic violence for the first time during the pandemic.
- 75% of the women living with men have experienced violence by husbands, 11% from their brothers, 7% from their fathers, and 3% from others (ex-husband, son-in-law).
- 59% of battered women have also experienced psychological violence. 36% of battered women have experienced sexual violence. 5% of women battered during the COVID-19 pandemic were exposed to economic and social violence (males seized their money).
- The legislative agenda ignores the importance of changing family laws and other laws that are discriminatory against women. One of the most important reasons for the increase in violence against women is the failure to issue a law on family violence, as well as the poor economic conditions.

General Recommendations:

- Building a bridge of trust between the state and citizens by presenting clear and specific policies, plans and programs to confront the COVID-19 pandemic, with openness, transparency, and flow of information on the numbers of infected persons, deaths, and medical equipment.
- Observing consistency of the decisions issued by the concerned authorities with the gravity of the status quo, the increasing number of deaths and infected of Covid-19, and the inability of the health system to absorb them, taking into account the marginalized and most needy groups before issuing these decisions.
- Taking the needed measures and declared penalties against any official who causes an increase and spread of the infection.

- Putting together a media plan for the TV that targets all family members (women, men, and children) in simple and appropriate ways for each group, to be broadcasted periodically on several levels:

- Raising awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic and correcting misinformation among citizens.
- Presenting programs on social support and healthy relationships, as well as breaking down gender roles and dealing with familial differences.
- Presenting psychological educational programs on dealing with the stress and pressures caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Providing and disseminating a map of legal, psychological, and social support services providers in the various governorates, to include a display of hotline numbers and addresses of centers for complaints from battered women, whether they are government agencies or NGOs.

- Creating a database of national ID numbers that includes citizens who fall below the poverty line according to CAPMAS' definition, and link them to the state's social protection programs.

- Resuming payment of some social solidarity pensions, as well as Takaful wa Karama (Solidarity and Dignity) of all kinds, which were suspended due to a review of the papers or any other reasons, especially during the plight of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Compensating the affected female and male workers that have lost their jobs or a large portion of their wages.

- Amending the labor law in the private sector to include protection for workers, supporting trade union freedom and opening the way for workers to defend their rights.

- Controlling and monitoring prices in the markets periodically to ensure that merchants do not exploit the citizens. Also citizens should not be charged the interests from deferring the payment of bank installments. The collection of electricity, water and natural gas bills from the poor and marginalized groups should be stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Activating the anti-violence units in the Ministry of Interior, and easing access to them with rapid response in case any incidents of domestic violence are reported.

- Increasing the number of hostels for battered women to include and cover all governorates. Also working to activate these units role and improve the capacity of their workers, while facilitating procedures for hosting and protecting women. Allocating an annual budget that guarantees the quality of the services provided within these hostels.

- Working to automate and develop the justice facility, to facilitate procedures, ensure the continuity of the litigation process, and provide services to citizens, in addition to reducing the chances of infection and the spread of the pandemic.

- Adopting a law for the personal status of Muslims and non-Muslims based on equality, justice, fairness and the best interests of children, and working to expedite its promulgation.

- Issuing the Domestic Violence Act.

VI. Women Telling Stories



Story No. 1

My story begins when my father decided that I have to marry anyone may come over to our house. Although I was still a little girl; he decided that even without making sure that the person is good and he would taking care of me or not! Our father used to discriminate between us, the sisters, and our brother, just because he is a man, this in turn what spoiled my brother and now he is in prison.



As a result, I am now 33 years old and divorced with three children for who I totally responsible. Thus, the most important problems with the father of my children were that he did not bear the responsibility of the children and refused to spend on the family and left the whole burden on me! I used to work to assist in sustaining the family, but the problems were really increasing to affect the psyche of the children, while I found no support from any of my relatives. On the contrary, after I got divorced I have been living with my father and sustain him too, because he is too old to work, and has no source of income. He even used to make me take loans for himself without any kind of appreciation. On the contrary, all the time he makes me feeling guilty that I do not do much for him, while he disturbs me and my children.

The burden has become too heavy, especially after I lost my job within a collective layoff, took place in the factory I used to work for, because of the crisis of Covid_19. I would go crazy, I don't know how can I sustain my family, nor how I will pay the rent, especially since my father is getting more pressure on me because of the tight situation and because I cannot give him any money as I used to. At the beginning of the crisis, I gave him EGP 100, and he said, "I want more, you cheap". I did not have more. Can't he realize that I cannot repay the loans that I could be imprisoned for? I tried to apply for the employment grant through the internet, where I paid EGP 10 in a local cyber café, but after calling their call center to know the date of receipt, they said I have to raise a formal grievance because my request was refused.

I feel guilty because my children supposed to be happy and get what they need. I cannot provide them with their requests, but rather I feel nervous and find myself raising my voice a lot and treating them harshly when they ask me for anything I cannot provide. Especially my little son when he asks for any candy I beat him and feel regretful and sympathize a lot with him and weep saying, it is not fair that all circumstances plus my reactions to be against him.

I usually prepare foods that cost not much but they never like. When they ask for any desert I feel sorry because I can't provide any. Since I learnt to work with beads in CEWLA, where they provided me with the needed materials, I started working at home and made lanterns with beads, and other good products. I try to sell these handmade products in any store or library even for a less than their value in order to cope with the needs of my children. A lot of thoughts occupy my mind, such as when these materials finish, what can I do?

Story No. 2



People are afraid of me, every time I look for a job in any home, even if the work is to clean the stairs, they refuse to employ me. This is mainly because the area I live in is quarantined because the Corona virus, "they treat me like I am carrying the epidemic and spread it by myself." Of course, my situation and my life became more difficult.

. I used to work as a cleaning worker in a school before the Corona Virus crisis, and I was getting EGP 1000 (USD 60) a month, and of course they gave an order to us to stay home when the schools closed. Thus, I no longer have any source of livelihood! Even my husband as if he were not exists, does not spend money on the family; on the contrary, he is satisfied with giving orders, while I cannot say no. How do I manage this kind of hard life? Who would be listening to me? This is my second marriage, and I cannot ask for a divorce. I am unable to endure the divorce for the second time. I am also afraid of how people see me.

In the past, my family decided to take me out of school before I finish high school because they would not be able to bear the burden of my education. I wanted to complete my education; however, because of the poor treatment of my brothers and the troubles they used to make with me because I go to school, I submitted to the decision and stayed home. In the beginning I thought that I would be living a simple and comfortable life, but I was always subjected to insults, beatings and cruelty from my brothers. They treat me like a servant, and this of course is what increased after my mother passed away. I used to escape from my big brother going to any of my neighbors or friends. That is because he kept trying to harass me. As for my other brothers, yeah, everyone thinks only about his own interest. In order to get away from all the shit and humiliation that I suffer from, I agreed to marry for the first time, said maybe I have some privacy, and find someone who spends on me and caring about me. Unfortunately, all these ideas turned out to be an illusion. Where a new tale of beating, insulting, and humiliation began, for the most trivial reasons! I gave birth to two children, hoped that my husband would be better in treating me when he is a father, but unfortunately he did not change. On the contrary, he became worse than before and started drinking alcohol and bringing his friends to the house to drink with him. When it happens that one of them molested or me, he does not say a word as if he does not exist. Even, if I complained, he would hit me and says what the hell is going with you? What they going to do with you? Nothing! His mother too has no problem with that because these bad companies spend money when they are at our place! This is of course in addition to what I was exposed to in front of people because of the humiliation by mother in law.

I have no parents whom I can complain to. So, I went to CEWLA, where I got help in getting divorced from my first husband, and he vowed before them not to hurt me. Thus, he used to threaten me that he would do that in the worst ways to deform my face.

After the divorce I got a job, in very harsh conditions, as serving at homes. I was cleaning the stairs, saving some money till I had been able to get an apartment for my children. I could not return to my family's house and my brothers to humiliate me and my children. I also was afraid to stay with my older brother because of his attempts of harassing me.

After a while, I met with a person who was younger than me, I found him interested in me and my children, and thus he asked to marry me. Because of the social judgment of people on a divorced woman, where they have no mercy in their criticism of me, especially when I go to work daily, and also my fear of my ex husband who reappeared once again, where he and his family threaten me that they will take the children away from me and make them leave the schools to exploit them in any informal works, I agreed to marry again, and I thought that the new one would protect me. He lived with me and my children in my own apartment, but unfortunately he turned out to be worse than my ex husband, insulting me because I was divorced, and refuses to spend money on the house, and he says "you have to be grateful that I married you while you are divorced, and defamed in the eyes of people?" This is in addition to cheating on me with women in the same region we live in, which makes me ashamed of myself and my situation.

My children see how I am beaten, and insulted. More than once I went to the hospital because of beating, torture and insult, which led to psychological problems. I took medications, but when I discovered that the treatment causes a long sleep, I gave up because I have to go to work in order to cover the expenses of home and children. I felt despair of my life, "If I had family and support, I would not have suffered all this pain."

Now I am 38 years old and I feel depressed and suffocated and frightened of everything in my world. If I go with the second divorce, I will find the worst from the people. All these problems make me wish I am dead, but I always change my mind because of my children, where I feel sad for them, and I wonder where they will go, and who will bring them up, they have no father, nor uncle or anyone who fears for them.

I often go down the street. My children and I sit in any corner, crying and saying, "The street is more merciful than my house, my husband, and my family."

Story No. 3



I feel sad for myself having to buy some of the remaining rotten tomatoes due to the lack of money, especially when I see others buying fish, chicken and meat. I cry because I have nothing. Sometimes I had to buy half a kilo of chicken wings. Once, I felt a desire to eat fish, and I saw fresh and delicious fish, but I didn't have the money to buy.

Corona virus ruined our home I swear to God!

We pray this crisis to be finish! The livelihood became possible for one day and not possible for many days. We say, God, how come a kilo of garlic to be for EGP 10, and where do I get money? This is before even thinking about the other items we need to eat, such as vegetables, oil, rice, etc!

I got married to a man who gets his income from daily work, and I used to work as a cleaning worker in a mosque. Now, we both lost work due to the curfew and the Corona virus. Even the people who my daughter and I used to work for, doing services like washing rugs or stairs, have become afraid of us and refused to deal with us, fearing of infection. As for my husband, he spends most of time, looking for any livelihood from the repair of electrical devices such as a washing machine or a stove, but he often returns before the curfew hour empty-handed. I can no longer borrow money for being unable to return it, while I am alone, and I have no one can help me. Even my siblings are all involved in their own lives and hard conditions too.

My son once went out and came back with EGP 10 (less than one USD), and of course he wanted a meal or even to prepare a low-cost meal like Koushari, but the few pounds were not enough. All what I could prepare for him was French fries, and he kept silent. However, I feel sorry and agonized for my children.

My daughter, a bride, prepares herself for the wedding. However, she is not happy; she cries a lot because she cannot buy anything. We are afraid and anxious all the time. We are close to a holy month, Ramadan, and holydays after, which needs more resources for the children to be feeling fine like their peers, but actually our house contains nothing. Meanwhile, I feel tired all the time, and this is reflected in my psychological state as well.

My husband, in turn, has also become tense and intolerant to me. He always feels like suffocated and uncomfortable, and I have to be silent and understand his case, because he is in this situation due to many pressures and his inability to meet the needs of the family. When a man sits at home, the problems increase, especially when he feels unable to meet the needs of his home. He is not even able to meet the needs of food, and therefore this is reflected in the anger that his wife is the first one has to face and bear. I feel that the coming days are more difficult.

Oh, I wish if they let us move and to end the curfew. God will make whatever He wants. We will not die except by the will of God, even death has cost us dearly. I am now 52, sick with pressure and diabetes, and I suffer from polio and cannot afford to buy my medicine. Then, what can I do? Everything that occupies my mind is food and sustaining the family and I don't know how can we get them.

Story No. 4



Is it necessary for one to go on illegal actions in order to live? Or what is the matter?!

The lady to who I used to go to work in cleaning services, kicked me out when she found me not wearing gloves and a mask; she said "you come from the street bearing infection," although I was covered in a scarf. Frankly, I couldn't buy such things, so I hope if she could buy them for me instead of kicking me out.

People started spraying chlorine on us before we got to work inside their houses. The most important thing is they are fine and safe, no matter how we would live. When I left her home, I cried in the street, where I found an old man who works as doorman. He patted me on my shoulder and brought me a bag of chips, biscuits and cola, and then he told me that I can go to his house, and that he will give me food, meat, and money. I immediately pushed him away, and I went home. I thought he wanted to show solidarity with me against this situation of distress, and I thought that someone else would have agreed to go with him to his house. It's really ridiculous to be under this kind of pressure while I am looking for work! I am tired, I become like crazy talking to myself, fighting with whoever. I can't sleep; I feel too much pressure and anxiety, blaming myself for feeling that I have to do more for my children. I live with my children in my mother's house, after we left the apartment to my husband before the crisis of the Corona virus. He used to insult me, beat me, pull my hair, etc. Sometimes I felt that I would die in his hands, but I cannot ask for a divorce because I am afraid my brothers will prevent me from going to work, and then I cannot find someone to sustain my children. So I accepted to remain married to him, but separated, and he can marry another woman whenever he wants. He finds no problem in this situation, particularly when I waived my right to alimony.

As for my brothers, they always shout loudly with me and question my morals, and whenever I find a job that brings me a livelihood, they laugh at me and speak indirectly that this work is dishonest. I am naturally unable to respond to them, and they do not know that I often get offers to accompany men in exchange for money and I always refuse. Now my situation has changed, my income has greatly changed, and as soon as my children go to sleep, I get crying and sometimes I beat myself. Sometimes I have to borrow money to be able to provide for the home and children. The prices of everything have increased, especially electricity and water, and I had to sell things from my house to pay the bills for these services. Even this is not enough!

I need someone who sympathizes with me and pats on my shoulder. I wish there were like psychological hearings, such as what CEWLA was organizing in the past, so that I can speak to someone, and I feel comfortable and not alone.

Story No. 5

Before the Corona virus crisis and the curfew, our time was very short, and yet we could spend time together and enjoy eating together for even two hours. Now, my husband is in one place, and my children and I are in another. We can no longer be together, see each other for a little while.

My husband and I had a job and a livelihood. Currently, he left work, and I was a teacher in kindergarten, and when it is shutdown with the Corona crisis, I now spend all my time at home without work.

Of course we could not pay the rent of our apartment. So I had to go live with my family, and my husband also had to live with his mother. We were unable to gather in the house of my mother-in-law because of problems between me and her. The same with my father's house, we could not be all together because it is not big and it will not suffice for all of us.

Of course children naturally want to play, but because there is no place where they can have any entertainment, and they cannot go to the street, they spend all the time playing at home. Sometimes they are like hyperactive because they cannot tolerate this confinement. This causes my family a sense of distress from my children and their noise. My brothers, in turn, always shout at them and deal with them harshly. They also annoy me with bad words and I always have to be silent because of the circumstances and indeed "people have become unable to tolerate each other!" My children and I do not feel comfortable, so I suffer many problems and screams, I even fight with my brothers sometimes and with my children at other times. Sometimes I beat my children harshly, in order to ease my brothers' anger; keep screaming at them and prevent them from playing, which makes the children in distress.

The burden of house works has also increased, because everyone became present all the time under the conditions of the curfew, and therefore the requests became many, I bear them alone, and they never end. I cannot fulfill all these requests, but since I live in my family's house, I cannot refuse to serve them because they sustain my children and me.

Sometimes when my children want anything, I feel suffocated because I cannot meet their needs, and do not know what to do! One time, my son wanted to eat chicken, so I decided to buy a quarter of a kilo, but the money was not enough because the prices had raised that I can not afford. I could not ask my family. I think it is enough that we live in their house, and I cannot stand myself and feel disgusted by this life.



Story No. 6

We have been recently obliged to give up many things and needs. I personally can do without all my personal needs; even the sanitary pads, I no longer buy them. Instead I use old cloth. It is true that I cannot get used to it because in my entire life I have not used it, but I have no other solution. We live in conditions that we have never experienced, and I find myself look for meeting the needs of my children and my husband rather than mine.

As for food, there are foods that no longer enter our home, such as fruits and sweets. We also can do without meat and chicken, and instead go with Koushari, lentils, and French fries.

Because of the Corona epidemic, life became very difficult after my husband was expelled from the factory where he does work as a tailor. Everything turned upside down, all things became complicated and completely against us. We used to be fine financially. Now, we suffer lack of money and income, in addition to the health state of my husband; he is a heart patient who has recently had surgery and his condition has recently deteriorated. An open heart surgery is required. So his medication is the most important thing I have to cover. From time to time, I try to borrow some cash so that I can buy the medicine. But for how long I will continue to borrow, my debts have become huge, especially since we live in an apartment with rent and the rent has to be paid, without which we will leave the apartment. Even when the school asked my little son to conduct a research instead of end-of-year exams because of the curfew and Corona thing, we cannot continue due to the lack of internet service, as we cannot even pay a small amount to recharge the package off internet.

I swear to God, I am nervous and tired, everything due to Corona has become negative and make us afraid and anxious all the time. Before Corona, we used to sit together when my husband come back from work, and have some fun as a family. Now, we spend all day at home but without sitting together. Each of my children sits alone, depressed and frustrated because they cannot ask for any kind of entertainment or money; as they see the conditions we live in.

Now, all the time I take charge of cleaning the house and preparing food. Of course, the burden has become heavier, especially because all of the family members are staying home, and my old son refuses to help in the house works, because he sees that it is a shame to do such work and always says this is not my specialty; this is the work of women! He sees that he is a man and not of his dignity to do such work. I am confused about his position, and cannot help with that complicated situation!

I wish the factory owners could compensate people even for a small portion of our needs. They may take out a portion of what they accumulate of money to help people who are in difficult circumstances, at least for buying food.

It is also assumed that there will be some mercy from the authorities concerning the financial burdens, especially the bills of electricity, water and gas. Thus we do not have money or work. I always wish there is a kind of monitoring and controlling prices in the market because everyone's deals are based on their own desire without binding rules. They exploit the impoverished people.



Story No. 7

The situation is now worse, and I am suffering bitterly. My husband treats me more insultingly, and beating me more than ever. I can no longer move, go to work, or seek protection from anywhere because of the Corona epidemic and the curfew. He even confirms that I will not find anyone to take care of me; especially since the government is busy with more important issues. "The police you were seeking protection of, is no longer exists to assist you. There are not even courts operating. If you are not satisfied, you can leave the house." He always says.



Yes, he always used to treat me with insult and beat me, even before the Corona epidemic, that is because he uses drugs even in front of children. I often tried to help him to get healed. Thus, I used to save money through the circular saving scheme with some friends, to provide money for his treatment. I also borrowed money, and went to clinics, but in every attempt to treat his addiction, he goes back to use drugs. Also, due to the drugs, he used to kick my children and me in the middle of the night with pajamas.

In any case, he refuses to spend on the family, although he is skilled in his craft and earns well, but almost all his income goes to drugs, which also often causes him to refuse to go to work. He used to say, "you have to manage to earn money, I am not the father of these children; think carefully about who is really their father?!" This kind of words is usually accompanied with suspecting my behavior! When I complained to his family, they were unable to do anything and of course they did not want me to go through the divorce process, and all they could do was saying some words of compassion and showing formal solidarity without trying to solving their son's problems.

I relied on myself and looked for work, until I became a saleswoman in a store so that I could provide for the home and children. I am responsible for them in all their matters, from schools fees, studying, food, and treatment in case of illness, etc. Before the crisis of Corona, I worked in a garment embroidery factory, and I used to leave my children at their grandmother's house, until I discovered that their cousin was sexually harassing my little son and the boy in turn was doing the same with his sister. But CEWLA helped me tackle this problem and provide us with a possibility to see a psychiatrist.

Still, my problems with my husband remain endless; on the contrary, it has increased because now he is taking more dangerous drugs like Voodoo and Strokes. He beats me harder, resulting in injuries. All of this is happening in front of the children until their psyche is severely affected and they became frustrated all the time. They hate their father and hate

me too, to the extent that my son denounces any scene of a father who deals well with his children, and says that all of this is ridiculous and lying. "If the reality is so, why did you not marry a good father like those who appear in the soap operas or like our friends in school?" They always blame me and I also blame myself, and I am afraid of divorce because I do not have a place to live in, especially since my family puts a condition that if I get divorced I have to leave the children and of course I do not want to leave them.

I feel fear for my children. One day, when I was way back home I found my son about to jump from the balcony; trying to commit suicide. The neighbors gave hand to save him, while his father was sleeping without any consideration for our children. This is in addition to the swearing with divorce without any responsibility.

The owner of the factory fired me and even the works I was doing from home have been stopped, and I found her telling me not to ask for work anymore, that is because I live in a quarantined area and she is afraid of dealing with me, otherwise, as she ridiculously thinks, she will be infected!

Even the divorce decision that I used to think of before Corona, is now more difficult, because I have nowhere to go! I have to live with someone who does not have any necessity in my life and the lives of my children. On the contrary, it is dangerous for us.

Stories of Women in the Days of Pandemic



Centre for Egyptian Women Legal Assistance

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