

SOCIAL NORMS IN MENA

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December 14, 2021



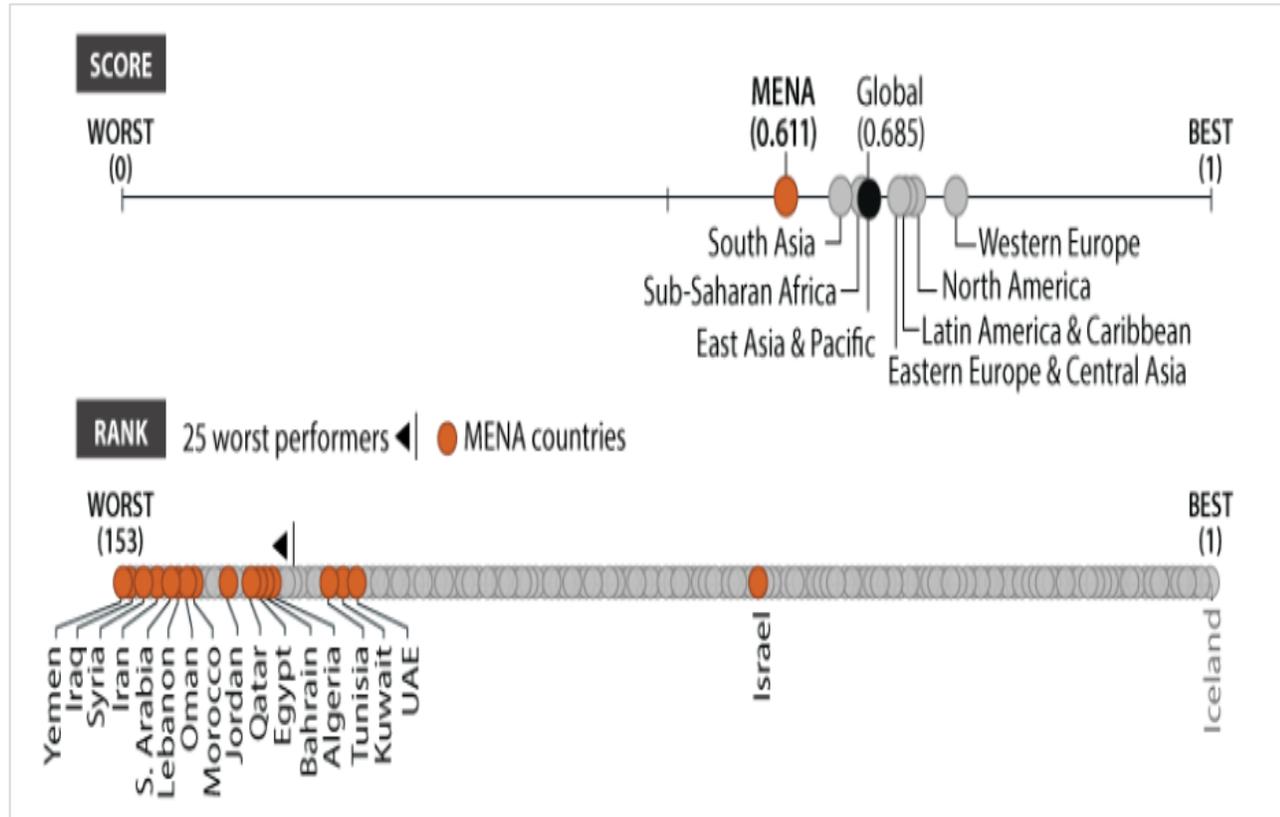


Roadmap

- STATE OF SOCIAL NORMS IN MENA
 - WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOES NOT
 - MNA GENDER INNOVATION LAB'S SPOTLIGHT PROJECTS
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MENA has the lowest score of gender gap index among all regions

Gender gap index, WEF (2020)

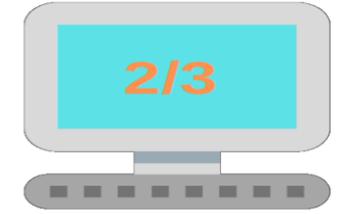
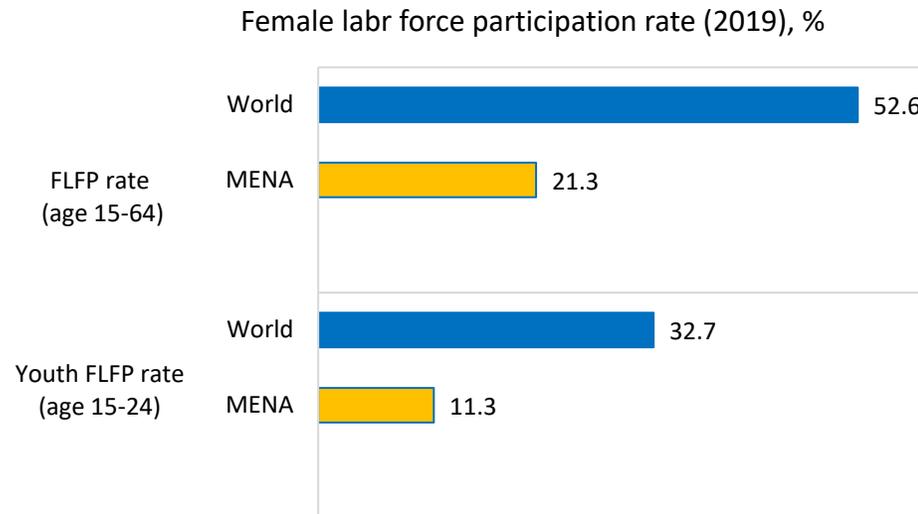


Gender inequality has long been associated with the persistence of discriminatory social norms that prescribe social roles and determine power relations between males and females in society (Sen et. Al, 2007)

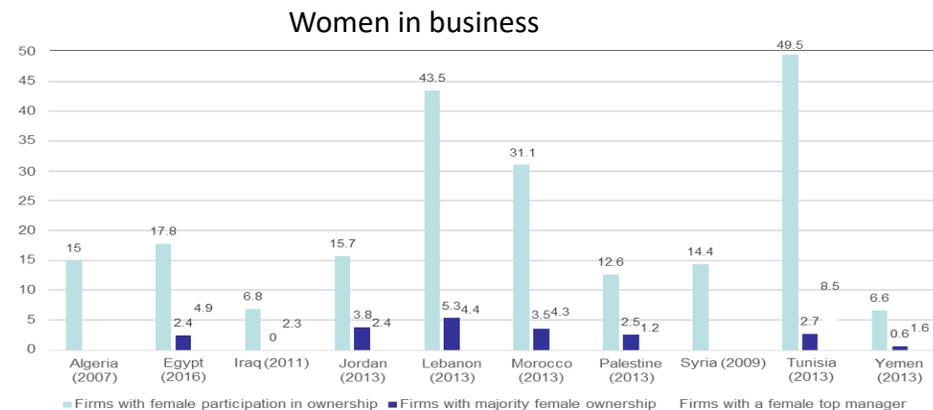
Note. Gender Gap Index ranks countries according to calculated gender gap between women and men in four key areas: health, education, economy, and politics to gauge the state of gender equality in a country. Source: Data from World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2020.

Serious gender gaps still exist: Social norms are a key constraint

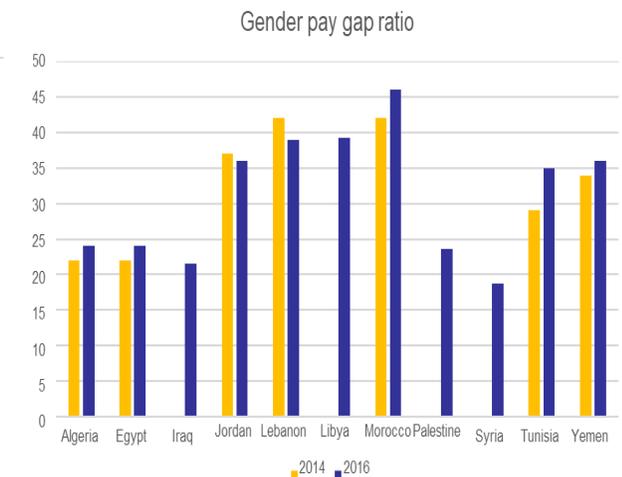
- Labor force participation rate
- Access to digital technology
- Access to financial and digital payment
- Assets ownership
- Legal provisions
- Wages
- Gender-based job restriction
- Women spend six times more on unpaid care and house chores than men



ONLY **2/3** OF WOMEN AND GIRLS HAVE ACCESS TO INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE



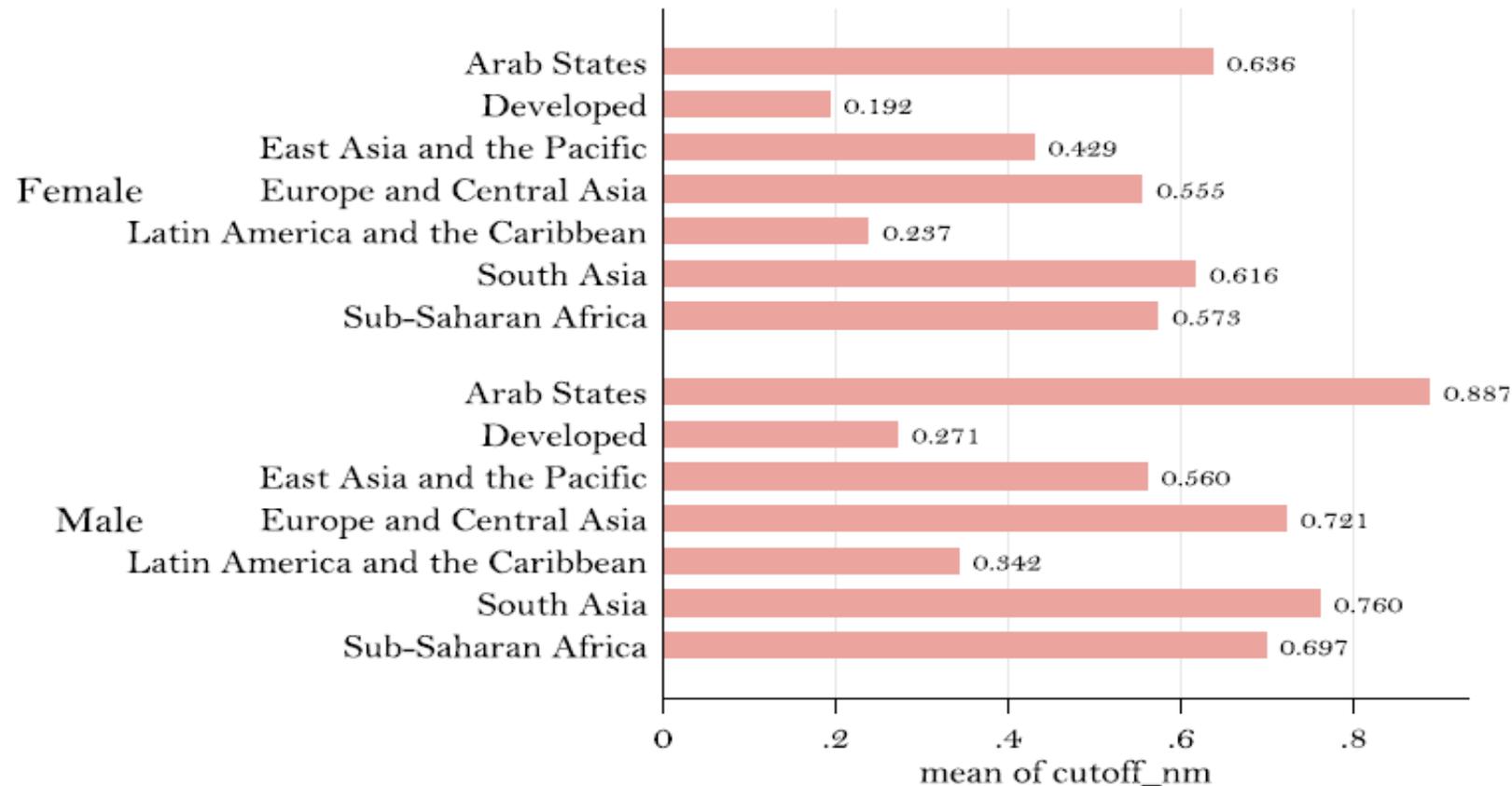
Source: WB Enterprise Surveys



Source: World Economic Forum

Arab States have the highest percentage of biased men toward gender equality and women's empowerment

For each region, the percentage of biased men is greater than the percentage of women, but the spread is bigger for Arab States where the differential between men and women is 25.1%



Note: Biases were measured across physical, economic, political, and educational dimensions.

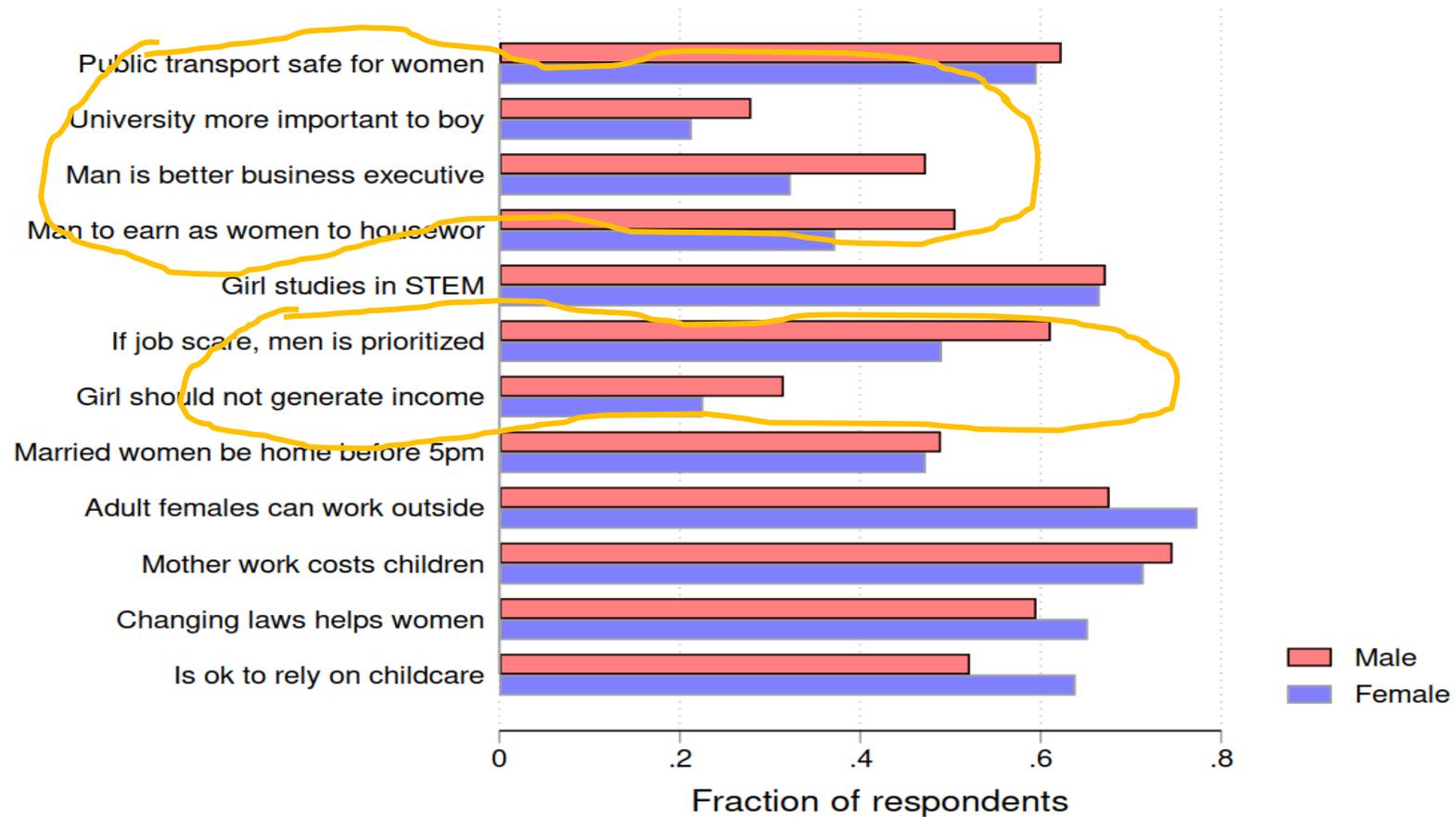
Source: [Tanni Mukhopadhyay, Carolina Rivera and Heriberto Tapia](#) and [World Values Survey](#).

1- MNAGIL's CATI phone survey in 10 MENA countries (June 2021)

- We asked about gender values and attitudes before and after the COVID-19 crisis among other questions
- Survey of 12,366 respondents, distributed almost equally across 10 countries in MENA
- The survey possesses a balanced female and male proportion
- Respondents are aged 18-94 years old, where about half of them are between 18-35 years old
- About 76% of respondents live in urban areas. About 1% of respondents live in refugee camps in Palestine (97% of refugees) and Iraq (3%)

Biased social norms and gender roles are still prevalent MENA

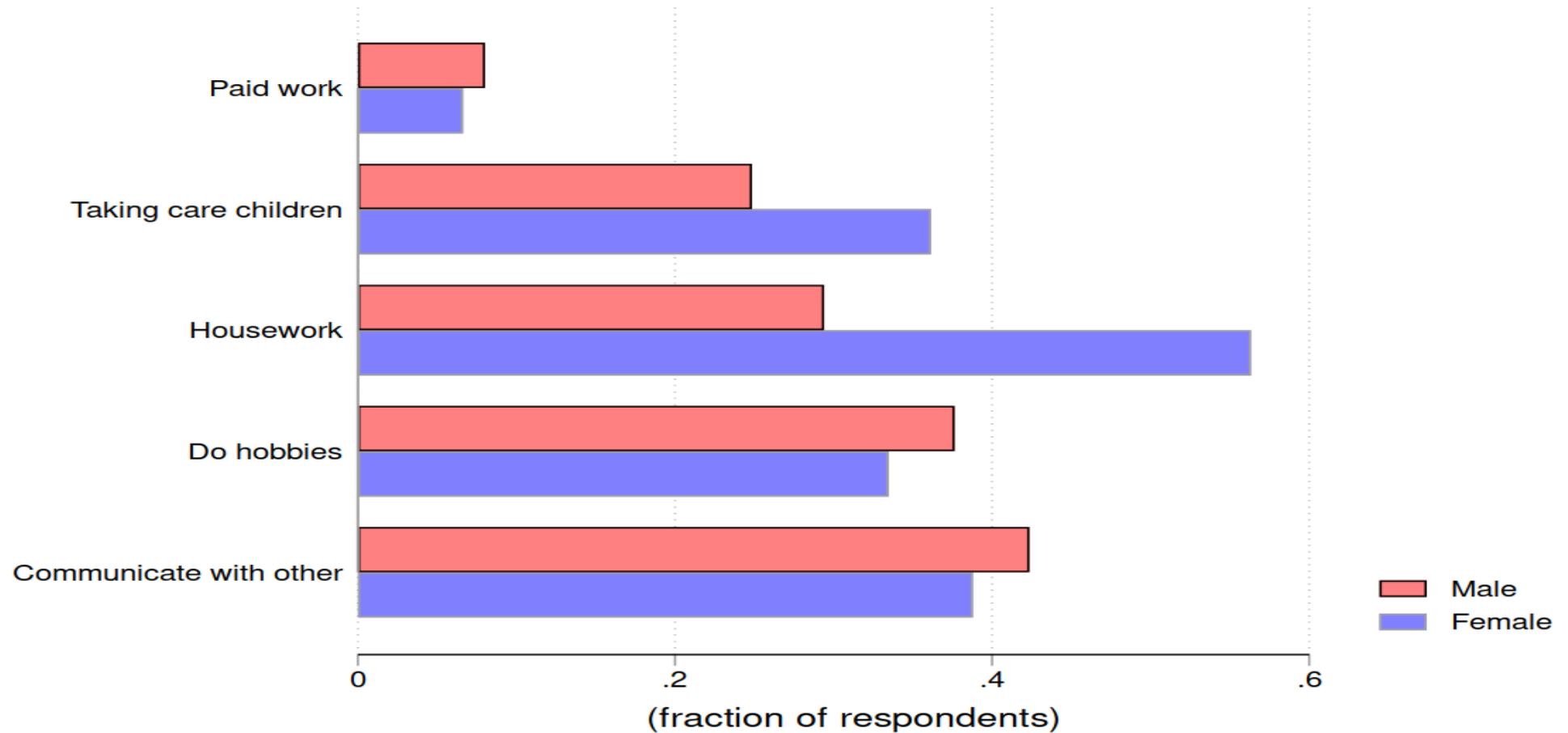
1- Do you agree that the following values were perceived by you or the community?



Source: MNAGIL's high frequency CATI phone survey in 10 MENA countries

Biased social norms and gender roles are still prevalent in MENA

2- In your community, which of the following have increased since the pandemic started?



Source: MNAGIL's high frequency CATI phone survey in 10 MENA countries

Why are social norms sticky?

- Gender and social norms are embedded in institutions, including policies (e.g. discriminatory fiscal measures, family laws including marriage and divorce, labor laws), the education and religious systems, sectoral services, traditional institutions (local community), the media, and the labor market
- Social norms are maintained through a variety of mechanisms called **REASONS FOR COMPLIANCE**. Approval or disapproval of the reference network. This social pressure to comply can take many forms: when we follow the rules, we are socially rewarded (e.g., accepted, praised, honored); if we break them, we are sanctioned (e.g., mocked, stigmatized, excluded, subjected to violence)
- Social norms could simply be imitated for lack of a better option or information (misperception)



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How to correct biased social norms?

- Even in absence of social and gender norms, science shows that knowing that others are already practicing a behavior is a key condition to accepting it for the vast majority of people
- This is the cornerstone of the pathway to change: a critical mass of people doing things differently, and public knowledge of their choice.
- Conducting opinion polls and disseminating information could be a relatively cheap and effective way of changing norms

I- Providing information: Evidence from Saudi Arabia

- Social norms are a key constraint on female participation in Saudi Arabia's labor market. For example, women are expected to work in spaces segregated from men. Men also have a say in whether women can have a paid job and how much they can work: the existing norm – though not the law – implies that essentially all women need to receive approval from their male guardian, typically their husband or father
- Recent changes in Saudi law have created a more accepting environment for women in the workplace. For example, the ban on women's right to drive was lifted in 2018. Female labor force participation rate increased to 30% in 2020 from 20% in 2018
- An experimental study was conducted with a sample of 500 Saudi married men aged 18-35, recruited from different parts of Riyadh (Bursztyn et al., 2017). The experimental design began with the men attending a 30-participant session composed of individuals from the same geographical area, thus sharing a common social network

Misperception of social norms, even among people from the same neighborhood who know each other

- Around 87% of the participants agreed with the statement: 'In my opinion, women should be allowed to work outside the home. But when given incentives to guess how other participants responded to the question, three quarters of them underestimated the true number, with the average guess being that 63% of the others agreed with the statement
- In the second part of the experiment, the authors evaluated whether correcting these misperceptions matters for household decisions about women working outside the home. A randomly selected half of the participants were given feedback on the true number of agreements with the statement. At the end of the experiment, participants could choose between receiving an online gift card and signing their wives up for a job-matching mobile application specializing in the Saudi female labor market
- In the 'treatment' group who received feedback on the true opinions of the others, the share went up significantly, by nine percentage points, a 36% increase. In the 'control' group who did not have their beliefs updated, 23% of participants chose the job-matching service
- The increase was driven by those who underestimated the true share of supporters of female labor market participation in their session: sign-up rates went up by 57% (from a baseline rate of 21%) when this group was provided with information. Information did not change sign-up rates for those who did not underestimate support by others (a group that had a higher baseline sign-up rate of 31%)

...Saudi men privately support female labor market participation while failing to understand that others do too

- To assess the validity of the initial findings, a similar anonymous online survey with a larger sample of about 1,500 married Saudi men aged 18-35 from around the country. About 82% of men agreed with the same statement on women working outside the home used in the main experiment
- When given incentives to guess the responses of other survey respondents, 92% of them underestimated the true share. These are stronger misperceptions than in the first experiment, perhaps because they were not being asked about their own neighbors' opinions
- To assess whether participants might have felt under pressure in the first experiment to say what they thought the experimenters wanted to hear, half the participants were assigned to an elicitation procedure that provided a 'cover' for their opinion on women and work. The authors find a very similar level of agreement with the statement
- Finally, they find that beliefs about other participants' true opinions were very similar to the guesses about others' answers in the main experiment

Lessons learned

- **Long-term impact on real labor market outcomes.** Wives of treated participants were significantly more likely to have applied for a job outside the home (up by 10 percentage points from a baseline level of 6%) and to have been interviewed for a job outside the home (up by five percentage points from a baseline level of 1%)
- **Change in perceived social norms is persistent:** treated participants believe a significantly higher share of their neighbors in general support women working outside the home. Finally, the persistent change in perceived social norms might spill over to other behavior: treated participants were significantly more likely to report that they would sign up their wives for driving lessons
- **The study shows that randomly correcting these beliefs** about others increases married men's willingness to let their wives work outside the home (as measured by their costly sign-up for a mobile job-matching service for their wives)
- **Three to five months after the main intervention, the wives of men in the original sample,** whose beliefs about the general acceptability of women in the workplace were updated, were more likely to have applied and been interviewed for a job outside the home
- **Including boys and men in changing social norms is crucial**

II- Cash transfer effects on social norms: Evidence from Egypt

A cash transfer program was launched in 2015:

- **Takaful** or Solidarity provides conditional family income support aimed at increasing food consumption, reducing poverty while encouraging families to keep children in school and providing them with needed health care
- The **Karama** or Dignity part of the program aims to protect Egypt's poor elderly citizens above 65 years of age and citizens with severe disabilities and diseases as well as orphans. These vulnerable citizens receive a monthly pension of 450 EP with no conditions
- To date the program has covered 3 million households, approximately 10% of Egypt's population with about 88% of the program's beneficiaries are women headed and the rest is headed by men (or 12%)

Findings suggest cash transfers did not shift social norms

- IFPRI (International Food Policy Research Institute) impact evaluation of Egypt's national cash transfers program (January and April 2018) found that women who had received the cash payment and whose families seem to have benefitted from the transfer reported reduced autonomy and that they made fewer decisions

Possible reasons:

- Do women have less autonomy despite attaining a modicum of economic security that they had not had before becoming beneficiaries?
- Do they express autonomy in terms of non-decision-making behavior?
- Is the problem that the poor do not really have many options to choose from and therefore decision-making is not a relevant signifier of autonomy?
- Women already make most decisions independently, decisions are made jointly, or because, even if the transfer goes to the woman, she is not the one who will decide how to spend it

Lesson learned

- **Cash ownership increases in the female recipients' self-esteem** and confidence
- **Less arguments induced by financial stress**, and accordingly less domestic violence, translating to a more stable upbringing atmosphere for the children
- **A sense of empowerment and hope** due to the secondary results of their children receiving education and better access to nutrition and health
- **A mixed result on intra-household decision making power (Agency)**, since the transfer is targeted to women



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Two MNAGIL projects' interventions to shift social norms

1. Assessing the impact of providing access to nurseries on female labor force participation in Egypt using a randomized control trial by **Hala Elbehairy** (J-PAL MENA)
2. Can providing gender dialogue sessions address gender-related norms and limit the risk of expropriation of cash grants by husbands and other household members? Experimental evidence from gender-sensitive cash grants and trainings in Tunisia by **Nausheen Khan** (DIME, World Bank)

Thank you!



<https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/mena-gender-innovation-lab>