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## **Sudanese Muslim Women At Home; Egyptian Women In The Workplace**

### **A Comparison of Women's Aspirations and Daily Lives In Common Practice in Northern Sudan and Egypt**

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## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <b>Introduction</b> .....  | 3  |
| <b>Women as a Part of the Household</b> .....                    | 6  |
| <i>The Family Unit</i> .....                                     | 6  |
| <i>Socio-Economic Classes</i> .....                              | 7  |
| <b>Women as a Part of Society</b> .....                          | 8  |
| <i>The Need for More Money</i> .....                             | 8  |
| <i>Voting</i> .....  | 10 |
| <i>Health Care</i> .....   | 11 |
| <i>Women's Place in the Workforce</i> .....                      | 12 |
| <b>Women in the Home</b> .....                                   | 16 |
| <i>Purchasing Patterns and Control of the Money Supply</i> ..... | 16 |
| <b>Conclusions</b> .....   | 18 |



## Introduction

Sudan and Egypt have been linked for millennia; their relationship extending well beyond their common border. Their peoples share a linked history. This link is particularly strong in regards to the northern regions of the Sudan. While Egypt's influence has been felt in the country since the Pharaohs, it has been especially prominent since the creation of modern Sudan. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Sudanese and Egyptian independence movements were closely linked, as they both struggled against their British masters, who had actually linked the two nations into a single political unit

Following the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, Egypt would abandon its territorial claims on Sudan, in hopes of allowing the Sudanese to work their way free of the British. Throughout the early and mid 1950s, both Egypt and Britain would seek to exert their influence; the British seeking to control a valuable colony, the Egyptians seeking to reinforce ties and influence with a substantial population of ethnic Egyptians still living in Sudan. Before Sudan had even declared independence on the first of January 1956, civil war had broken out between the predominantly Muslim north, which was highly influenced by their Egyptian neighbors, and the non-Muslim south.

While Egypt and much of Northern Sudan share both an ideological and historic past, Muslim women, an often overlooked segment of the population, express very different opinions regarding their quality of life. The general disenfranchisement amongst northern Sudanese women is expressed in numerous ways: non-participation in voting, poor employment and marriage opportunities, and a generally bleak outlook in regards to their financial future. These numbers are particularly telling when viewed in comparison to their Egyptian counterparts, who express significantly more positive sentiments. While there certainly do exist parallel ideas and beliefs within the two populations, further emphasizing the shared past, the parallels also highlight the differences. Distinct behaviors and characteristics emerge via the comparison.

While Muslim women in Sudan demonstrate this sense of detachment from their community and nation in a multitude of ways, northern Sudanese women do play a more central role within their household than their Egyptian neighbors. Unlike their Egyptian counterparts, Sudanese women are significantly more likely to be involved in



the daily purchasing decisions of their home. Additionally, they more often influence the saving pattern for their home as well.

An analysis of these phenomena occurring in these neighboring nations illuminates two different sets of gender roles. Northern Sudanese women express themselves within a household, but do not enjoy many of the outside privileges and practices of their Egyptian neighbors. This concept is much more in line with traditional Middle Eastern practice, where a woman control's shopping and purchasing daily goods. Many Muslim women in Sudan take a very active role in the daily expenditures of a household. Egyptian women, however, are much more involved in life outside the home, more often participating in activities such as working and voting.

The general perception of Sudan is of a nation struggling to form its identity amidst civil unrest and outside interference. This paper explores how, in spite of sharing some similar characteristics, significant differences persist between the roles and desires of northern Sudanese and Egyptian women, causing Muslim women in Sudan to have a significantly bleaker outlook of the future and their own abilities to influence it than Egyptians. This is coincident with current demographic data that describes a northern Sudanese population with a lower standard of living and lower income than Egypt. Indeed, in analyzing the differences between demographic groups, including age, working and marital status, and financial situation that even more unique circumstances appear. Employment opportunities are low and are likely to remain so for these women.

## Survey Methodology

The Women in Muslim Countries (WIMC) Survey, sponsored by D3 Systems, strives to provide a voice for women residing in Muslim nations and to communicate their opinions and needs to public policymakers and the world. The survey and its results are designed to not only evaluate the effectiveness of current ideology and process but also elucidate the schism that often exists between high-level policy and the daily lives of the people it affects. Once these breaks between purpose and effectiveness are realized, evaluations of contemporary strategies and suggestions for future growth and success can be made. Since 2007, data has been collected from national surveys completed in Sudan, Egypt and 21 other countries.

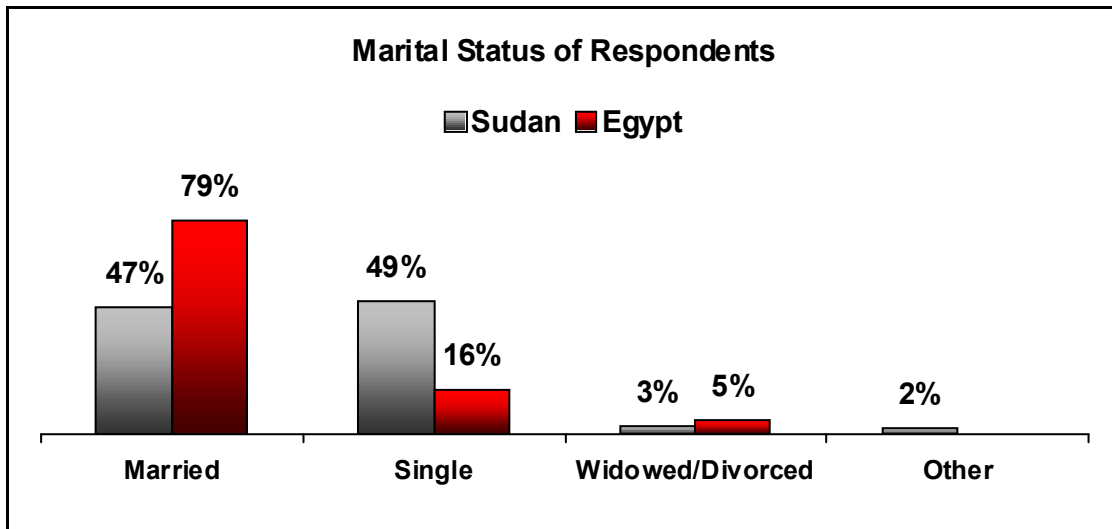
These two surveys consist of interviews with randomly selected women. The respondents were interviewed in person, by native speakers. Sudan had n=692 interviewed and was conducted over the period of July 29 and August 18, 2009; in Egypt the n=500 was fielded between March 10 and April 1, 2007. Each study has a margin of error of +/- 4% and significance testing was conducted at the 95% confidence level. For the purposes of this paper, all analysis will be conducted using only those portions of the population who identify themselves as Muslims. Furthermore, the terms 'Northern Sudanese' and 'Sudanese Muslims' are used interchangeably.

## Women as a Part of the Household

### The Family Unit

In order to understand the different outlooks Muslim women in Sudan face compared to their Egyptian counterparts, their current situations must be first analyzed. In order to see where they are going, it is crucial to see where they are today. Disconnects in demographic and thematic measures paint two very different pictures.

In Muslim societies, marriage is a particularly important event; one that carries with it an especially significant weight. Egyptian women surveyed were nearly twice as likely to be married, compared to their Sudanese counterparts; 79% versus 47%. Both cultures have very low rates of divorce/widowing (5% in Egypt and 3% in Sudan), leaving the difference to those respondents who have never taken the matrimonial vows. Half of Muslim women in Sudan describe themselves as being single; while only 16% of Egyptian women identify themselves similarly.



Base: Egypt n=479, MoSE +/-4%; Sudan n=683, MoSE +/-4%

While many northern Sudanese Muslims describe themselves as being single, these statistics do not translate to more women being the head of their households. With 33%



more women in Sudan responding that they are single, the assumption might be that they would be more likely to be in charge of their own household. That is simply not the case. While the difference in female-led households is statistically significant (8% in Sudan say they are the head of household, compared to 4% in Egypt), this is not the primary reason for the difference.

This theme continues when examining the average household size. Just because a woman is single, does not mean she is alone. In fact, the size of households in Egypt very nearly mirrors that of those in the Sudan. Women who are single still reside with family members, likely their parents, siblings or some other close relative. In both countries, about one third of women belong to a household of 4 people or less. The majority (60% in Egypt, 54% in Sudan) belong to a home that has five to seven people in it. Larger households are uncommon in both societies. Only 9% of Egyptian and 10% of Sudanese homes have more than 7 people living there.

Examination of the structure of families does, however, denote a significant difference in the way children become a part of the family. In Sudan, more than half of the respondents did not have children (59%) compared to only 13% of respondents in Egypt who said they were childless. It is also worth noting that northern Sudanese women also had a very high rate of non-response, with 24% choosing to refuse answering the question. This unwillingness to discuss their children suggests that the topic carries with it some sort of personal weight or significance that Sudan women are unwilling to share.

It is possible that being married without children is a shaming question for those without them given traditional values. Married Sudanese women give a non-response answer twice as often as those who have never had a spouse. This trend is not present in Egypt, where each respondent provided a definitive number of children, or admitted that they had none.

### Socio-Economic Classes

While Muslim women in Sudan may endure lower wage levels, they do not typically describe themselves as being worse off than their compatriots. Egyptian respondents paint a picture of a more stratified economy wherein women believe themselves to fall in

each stratum of society. This influences their dreams, desires and values as measured by the survey data.

One common measure of wealth is a respondent's socio-economic class (SEC) as measured by the type of home a family lives in with relation to their neighbors. This is a more comparative measure of a respondent's position in their society, how they are performing financially, as compared to their peers. While income levels are empirically lower in Sudan, an analysis of the SEC of the respondents suggests that, if not living better than Egyptian women, they are at least as well off on a comparative basis. While the countries have similar percents of respondents in the 'Upper Class' (9% in Egypt versus 11% in Sudan), Sudan's middle class is significantly larger; 57% versus 44% in Egypt. The working classes of both nations make up similar portions of their respective societies; 30% in Egypt and 31% in Sudan.

It might be inferred that from the conflicts and wars that have ravaged Sudan, it would have a large population that felt financially inferior to their neighbors. This, however, is not the case. Indeed, the negligible respondents who actually viewed themselves as being of 'Lower Class' pales in comparison to the 17% of the entire Egyptian population who feels similarly.

It is also worth noting that the socio-economic classes for a country are relative. That is to say, a respondent who would be middle-class in Sudan does not necessarily equate to a middle-class respondent from Egypt. This is exactly the case for the two countries. Egypt enjoys a much higher general standard of living and a middle-class Egyptian has a decidedly better life than a respondent who identifies themselves as being of middle-class in Sudan.

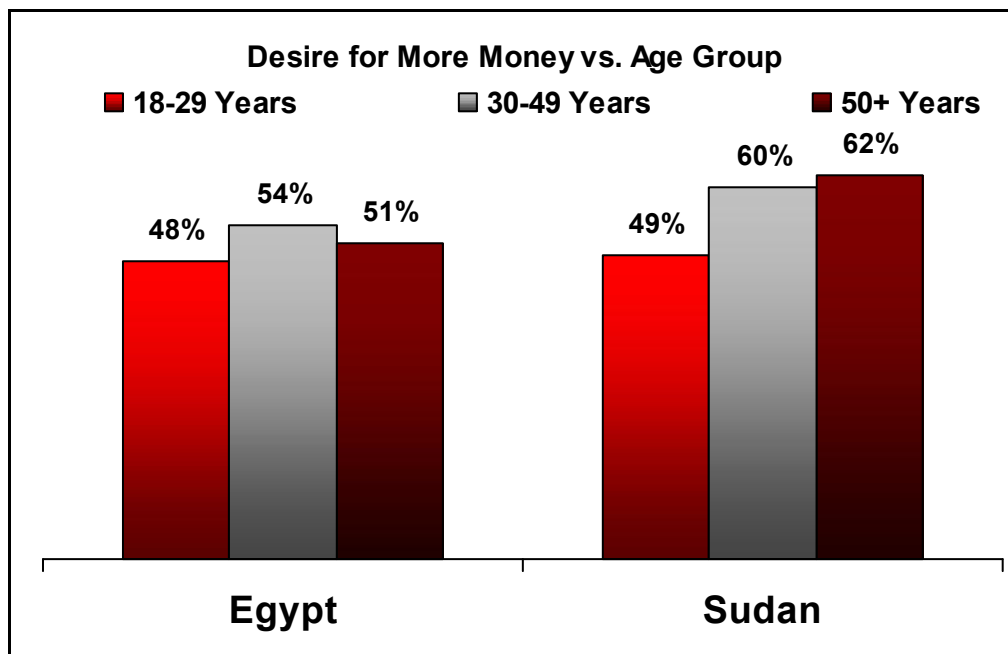
## **Women as a Part of Society**

### *The Need for More Money*

Women in both Sudan and Egypt identify the need for more money or having a greater household income as being the most common element of their current lives that they

would change. In both countries, more than half of the respondents selected this answer; 51% in Egypt and only 4% higher in Sudan, 55%.

An analysis of the responses with regard to age shows, however, that the responses do not follow similar patterns in each country. In both countries, younger respondents express the need for money less than middle-aged or older respondents. Yet Sudanese women express this need for a better financial situation with greater frequency as they age, regardless of household status. This reflects a changing focus in Sudanese women's lives across time. This cannot be said of Egyptian women, whose focus remains relatively steady as they age.



Base: Egypt n=479, MoSE +/-4%; Sudan n=683, MoSE +/-4%

Egyptian Muslims also show a more balanced approach than their northern Sudanese counterparts when analyzed by their marital status. The percentages of married women (51%), widows (48%), and single women (51%) in Egypt who rated additional money as being the number one aspect of their lives they would change were relatively alike. Sudanese women, on the other hand, were significantly divided in the frequency in which they would express the need for more money, depending on the marital status.



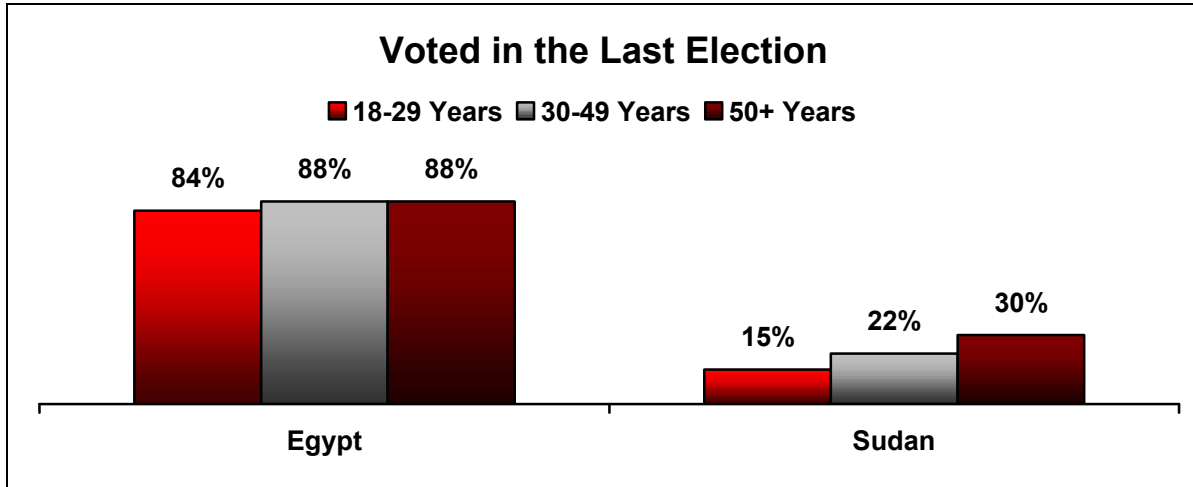
Married women of northern Sudan are more likely than those that are single to choose greater income as the one aspect they would change in their lives, 60% compared to 49%, suggesting that along with marriage, inevitably comes the expense of children.

Widowed or divorced women were more likely still to indicate a strong desire for more money. Sixty-five percent of Sudanese women who once had a husband said that more money would be the one aspect of their life that they would change in order to become happier. Again, the ability to provide for her children would likely be at the forefront of the Sudanese woman's mind. With one parent out of the picture, she would now be forced to provide on her own, or lean on family members for support.

### Voting

Sudanese women further express their disenfranchised detachment when discussing their voting rights. The vast majority of women in Egypt (86%) say that they voted in the last national election or referendum. In the Sudan, one-in-five women (19%) voted under similar circumstances.

While voting habits in Egypt do not show particular trends across age groups, the likelihood of a Sudanese woman to have voted in the past major election/referendum changes significantly with their age. Older women (50+ Years) are more likely to vote than their middle aged compatriots (30-49 Years) and twice as likely as young Sudanese women to have participated in the process. Martial status has no statistical influence on these findings.



Base: Egypt n=479, MoSE +/-4%; Sudan n=683, MoSE +/-4%

### Health Care

Sudanese women also show a stronger sense of trust towards the healthcare system. One common theme through many Muslim countries is the possibility for receiving second-class treatment due to their gender. In Egypt, more than half of the respondents (58%) believe they have been denied healthcare because of their gender. Only one-in-five Sudanese women expressed similar sentiments.

However, when revisiting the topic of what one aspect of their life they would change to become happier, the second most common response (only to the aforementioned need for an improved financial status) was the desire for 'better health'. Egyptian respondents mention this choice significantly more often than Sudanese women. 30% of women in Egypt and 23% of women in Sudan mention better health as the one option they would most like to change.

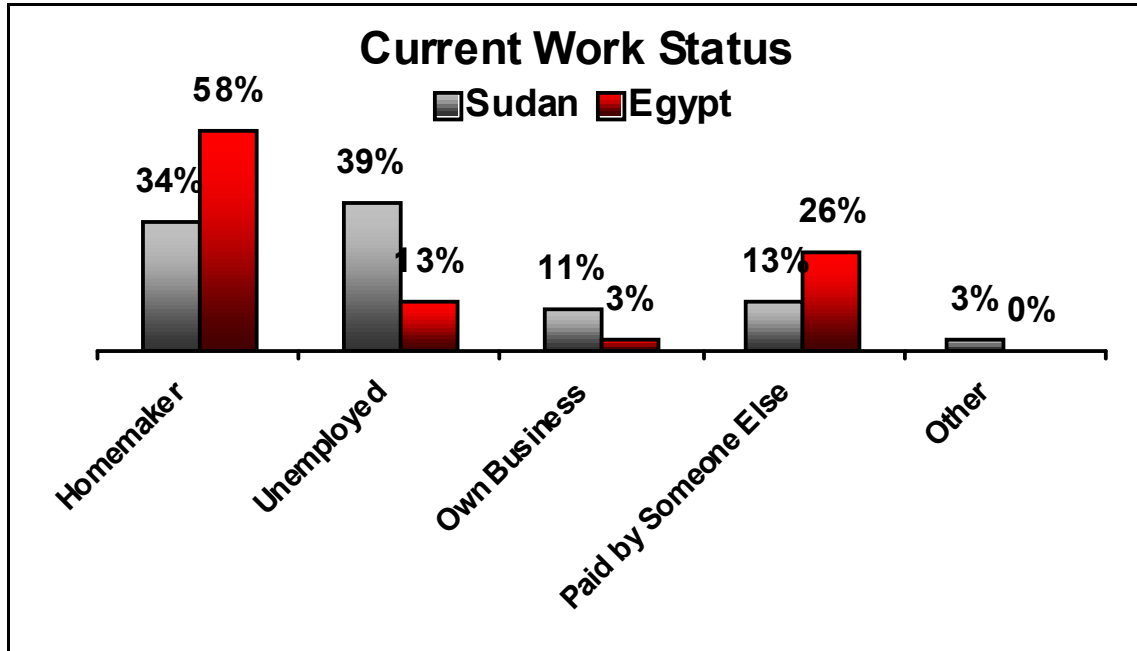


### Women's Place in the Workforce

The women of northern Sudan are significantly more likely to describe themselves as owning their own business; 11% versus 3% of Egyptian women. Conversely, Egyptian women are twice as likely as their Sudanese counterparts to receive pay from someone else (26% compared to 13%).

In Egypt, where the rate of marriage among women is much higher, respondents who are married and remain at home are able to identify themselves as homemakers. They are wives, whose position is in the home. Similar respondents in Sudan are less likely to be married, rendering them unable to be able to label themselves as homemakers as they have yet to establish their own homes.

Of the 71% of Egyptian women who identify themselves as not working, 58% say that they are a homemaker. Only 13% of respondents identify themselves as being 'currently unemployed'. In Sudan the breakdown is the opposite; as many Sudanese respondents said that they are currently unemployed as said they were stay-at-home mothers/wives, 39% and 34%, respectively.

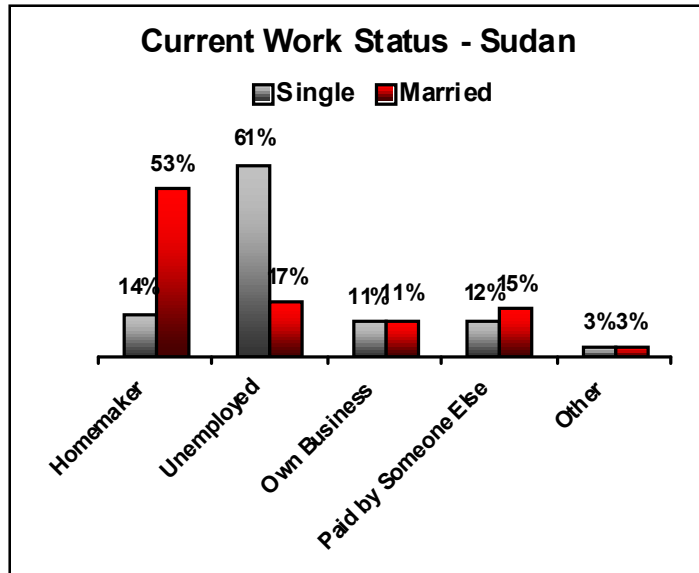


Base: Egypt n=479, MoSE +/-4%; Sudan n=683, MoSE +/-4%

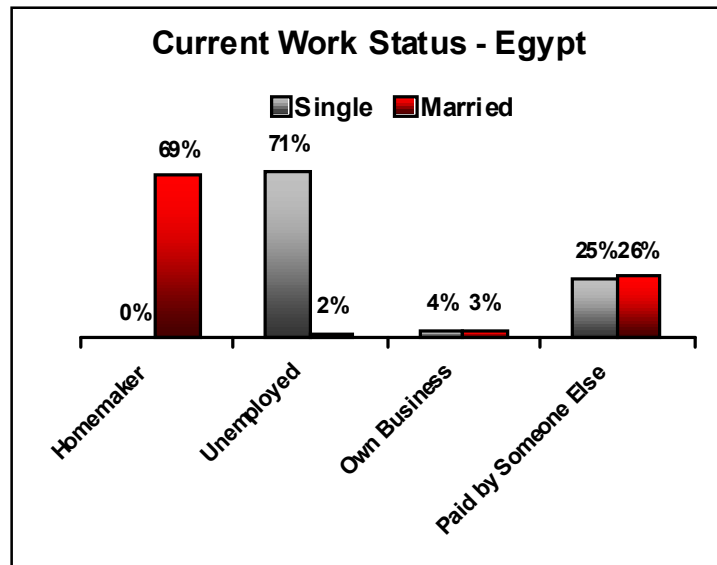
Of those who do work (either owning their own business or paid by someone else) in both countries, women most commonly reply that they are paid directly as opposed to seeing the money given to someone else in the household. In Egypt however, 12% of workers see their wages paid to someone else in their household. Only 3% of Sudanese were in the same situation.

An analysis of the work status of respondents by age groups shows some similar trends, while also allowing for distinct cultural inputs. While significant portions of both nations' young women (18-29 years) have difficulty finding employment, Sudanese women are significantly more unlikely to find work. Fifty-nine percent describe themselves as unemployed, as opposed to only one-in-three in the Egypt.

This distribution disparity in unemployed and homemaker can be described in the marriage and general unemployment rates of the two countries. Egyptian women are much more likely to be married, even at the youngest of ages. Unemployment also is high generally in Sudan. While many Sudanese women are likely to have become married by the time they reach thirty, and in so doing, become homemakers, nearly one



Base Sudan: Married Muslim Women n=236, MoSE +/-6%; Single Muslim Women n=238, MoSE +/-6%



Base Egypt: Married Muslim Women n=396, MoSE +/-5%; Single Muslim Women n=79, MoSE +/-11%

fifth of Sudanese respondents above the age of 29 describe themselves as being unemployed.

In both Sudan and Egypt, there is a significant drop-off in the likelihood of a woman's unemployment as she ages. Once she has reached 30 years of age the likelihood of her continued unemployment drops steeply; falling 41% in Sudan and 32% in Egypt. By this time in Egypt, unemployment has all but disappeared, as older Egyptian women have either found employment or been wed and assumed the role of homemaker.

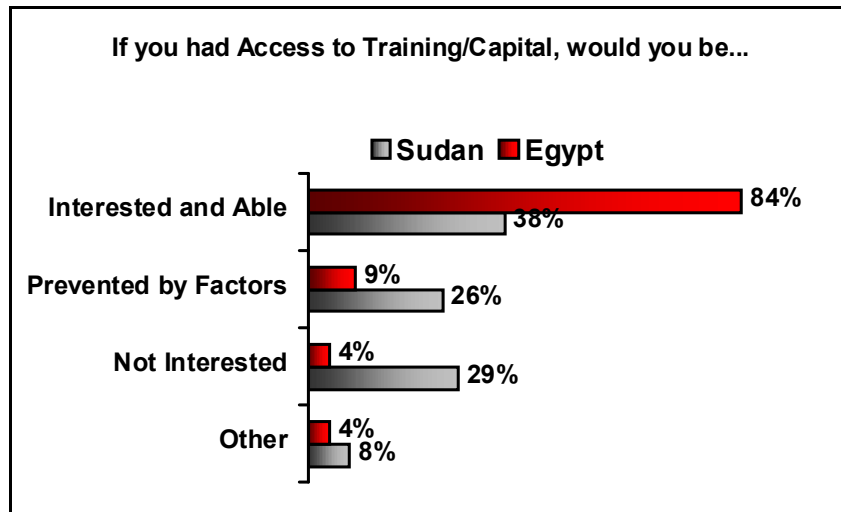
Indeed, a respondent's marital status strongly affects how they describe their work status in both countries:

Sudanese women continue to have a bleak outlook in regards to their current employment, even if opportunities are presented to them. In the scenario that the respondent was provided with startup capital and given access to training, less than half of Sudanese respondents (38%) said they would be interested and able to take advantage of the situation. In Egypt, the number of women who would eagerly pursue this

opportunity is better than double; 84% of women would be in a

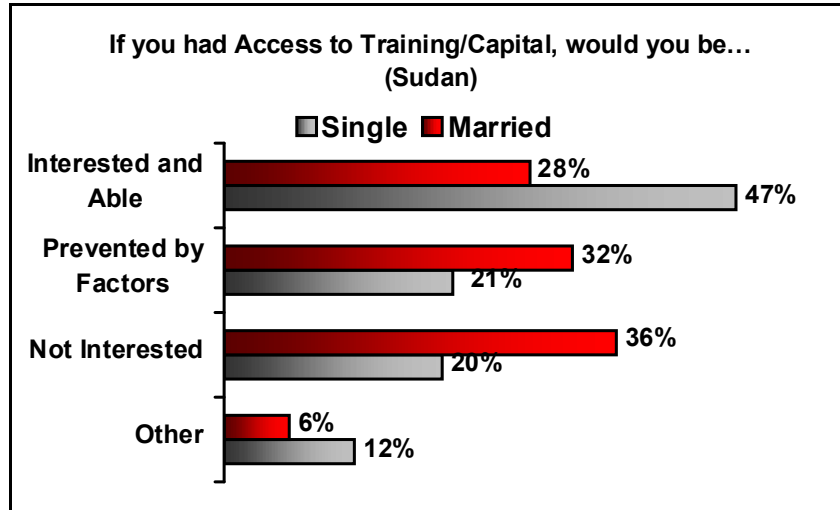
position to take advantage of the situation. Sudanese women not only more often express a lack of interest (29% compared to 4%) but also believe that other factors would keep them from ever taking advantage of the opportunity (26%).

Further complicating the career prospects of the respondents of the two nations, a significant portion of them mention 'better education' as the number one aspect of their lives that they would like to see change. Thirteen percent of Sudanese women and 9% of Egyptian respondents mention this, making it the third most common choice behind finances and health.



Base: Egypt n=479, MoSE +/-4%; Sudan n=683, MoSE +/-4%

Northern Sudan also differs from Egypt in that the marital status of a woman very strongly affects her response to the training/capital concept. While Muslims in Egypt do differ statistically in their responses when compared based on their marital status, Sudanese Muslims are much more likely to be interested and able to take advantage of the opportunity if they are single.

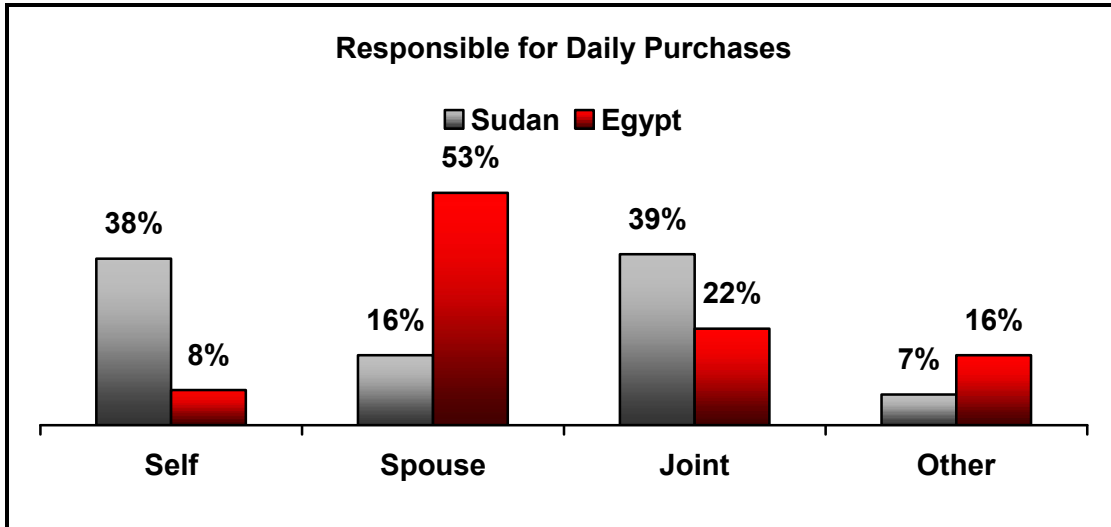


Base: Married Muslim Women n=236, MoSE +/-6%; Single Muslim Women n=238, MoSE +/-6%

## Women in the Home

### Purchasing Patterns and Control of the Money Supply

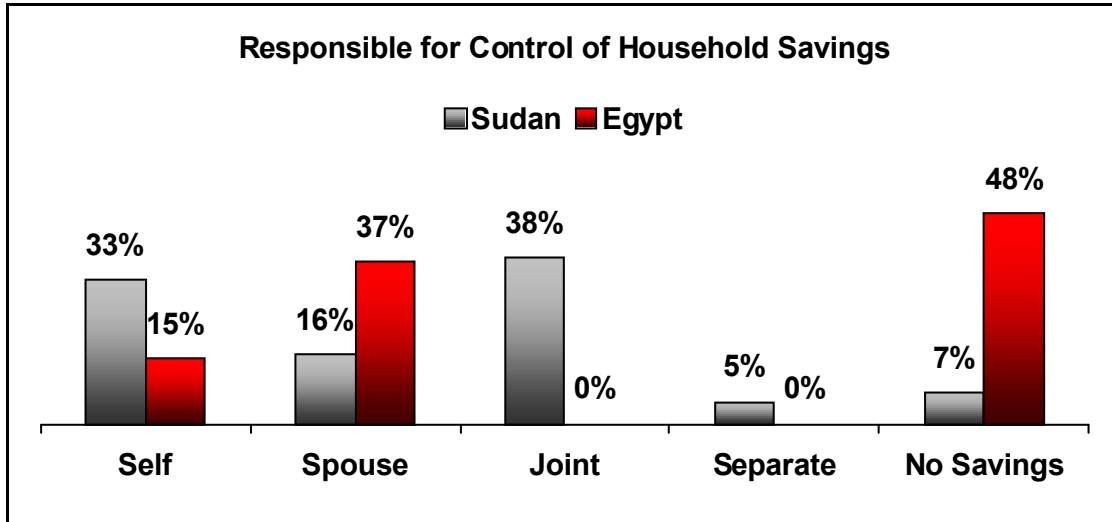
One aspect in which Sudanese women actually outperform their Egyptian counterparts is in regards to how the money in the household is controlled. Sudanese women are nearly five times more likely to decide the daily purchasing habits of their household than their Egyptian counterparts; 38% versus 8%. They are also more likely to be involved in a joint decision making process (39% versus 22%). The majority of respondents in Egypt identify their spouse as making the primary purchasing decisions.



Base: Egypt n=479, MoSE +/-4%; Sudan n=683, MoSE +/-4%

The breakdowns are similar regarding who controls savings in the household. Once again, Sudanese women are much more likely to take part in controlling the financial status of their household. One-third say they, themselves, control the savings of their household, while another 38% describe the savings as being jointly controlled. Only 1-in-6 Sudanese women say that their partner typically enjoys solitary control of the savings. Again, while much of the increased role of Sudanese women can likely be attributed to their being unmarried, married women are still much more actively involved in controlling the savings of a home.

Not a single respondent in Egypt described themselves as having their own separate savings account. However, 5% of Sudanese women express the separation of accounts. The value that Sudanese households place on savings is also significantly higher than those of women to the north. Only 7% of Sudanese respondents said that their financial status does not allow for the accumulation of savings; a significantly different statistic than those women in Egypt, where half (48%) say that there are no savings in the household to control. In both nations, respondents do not mention children, parents or other family members as being factors in making decisions about how savings are applied.



Base: Egypt n=479, MoSE +/-4%; Sudan n=683, MoSE +/-4%

## Conclusions

While the women of Sudan and Egypt share intertwined pasts, their contemporary lives are thematically different. These differences manifest themselves in many ways; financially, demographically, and certainly in their outlooks. The portrait that is painted of the Sudanese woman is a bleaker one than that of her neighbor to the north.

They must continually fight against high levels of unemployment, at every stage of their career. Furthermore, they do not see a way out of this poverty, even when outside forces interact on their behalf. Most Sudanese women believe that regardless of training and financial help, other factors would keep them from attaining financial success, which is what is most desired.

Muslim Sudanese women do generally have a stronger position in their household than their Egyptian counterparts. They are much more independent; often taking key roles in determining the spending and saving habits of their household. Egyptian women more often accept a more secondary role, deferring to their spouse in regards to monetary issues.