

## **Egyptian Women: Incremental Progress Towards Happiness**

By James Courtney and Karl Feld  
D3 Systems, Inc. - January 13, 2011

Survey research has a role to play in providing Muslim women with a public voice where custom and culture do not permit them their own. The second wave of the Egyptian Women in Muslim Countries (WIMC) study<sup>1</sup> is designed to measure the impact of women's empowerment initiatives. The findings from this study provide insights into the gaps between public policy and actual practice. Insights from this study are intended to yield a metric for promoting excellence in public policy by informing policymakers on women's attitudes about these policy initiatives as well as provide a measure of effectiveness of the policies.

This WIMC analysis explores the status of women's rights in Egypt afforded by the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It reports on issues faced by women living in the cities of Egypt including: employment, education, economic empowerment, poverty, healthcare, as well as the protection of the

Overall, Egyptian women have seen some improvements in their lives especially in the areas of health care access and household economic decision-making, but true equality within Egyptian society has yet to come to fruition for most women. Social and family pressures and responsibilities continue to stifle higher learning among Muslim women in Egypt. Obstacles to women pursuing an education and obtaining employment are apparent. Despite reporting obstacles to voting, many women strive to cast their ballot. A significant minority of urban Egyptian women report a continuing lack of access to almost all of their CEDAW rights as measured by the survey.

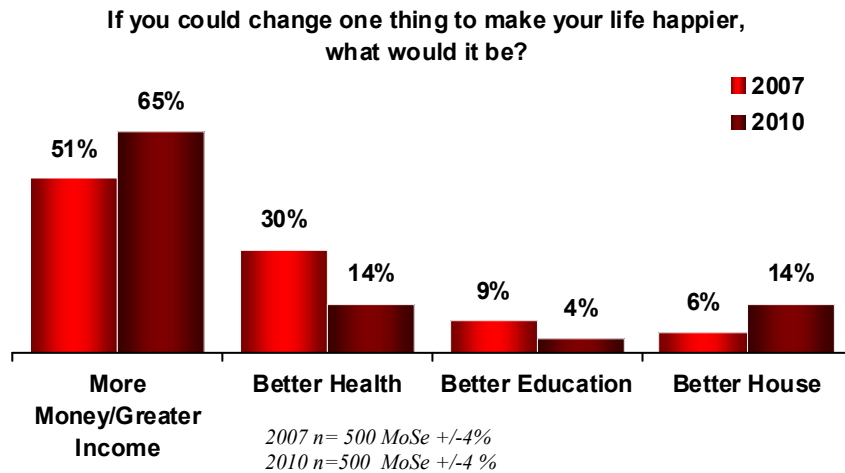
### **Wealth and Happiness**

The WIMC study finds the ability for urban Egyptian women to improve their economic status is increasing in importance to these women. Sixty-five percent of women report "more money / greater income" would be the one thing that would make their lives happier; a 21 percent increase since 2007. Fourteen percent also report that a "better house" would make their lives happier, reflecting a focus on greater material wealth.

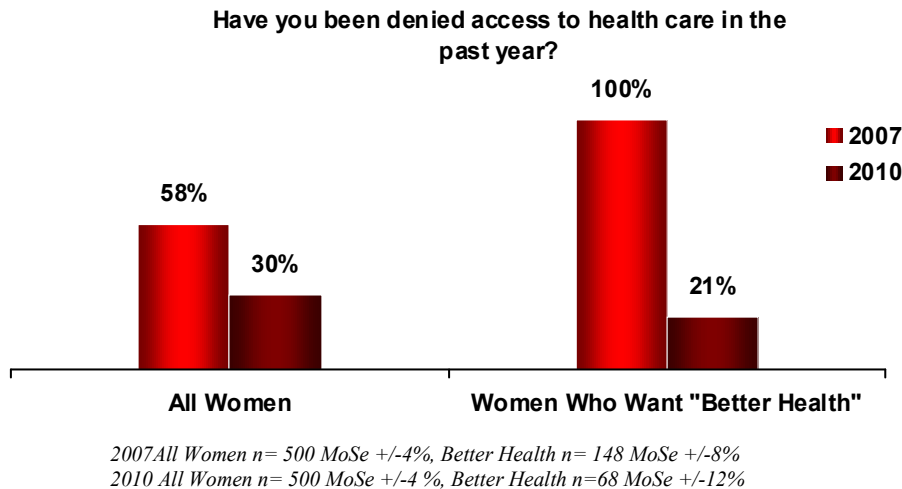
---

<sup>1</sup> WIMC is sponsored and managed by D3 Systems ([www.d3systems.com](http://www.d3systems.com)) and is conducted in 22 Muslim majority countries of the world. Data for the second installment for Egypt was collected from March May 22 through June 15, 2010 from *n*=500 urban women sampled nationwide on a stratified, random basis. Interviewing was conducted in 7 urban areas face-to-face by native Egyptians.

Fewer women report social issues such as health and education as being most important to bringing happiness to their lives. Significantly fewer Egyptian women now perceive “better health” (14 percent-down from 30 percent) and “better education” (4 percent down from 9 percent) as things they would change to make their lives happier.



The decline in the desire for “better health” may be attributed to the decrease in the number of Egyptian women who report having been denied access to healthcare in past year; a decline of 18 percent since 2007.

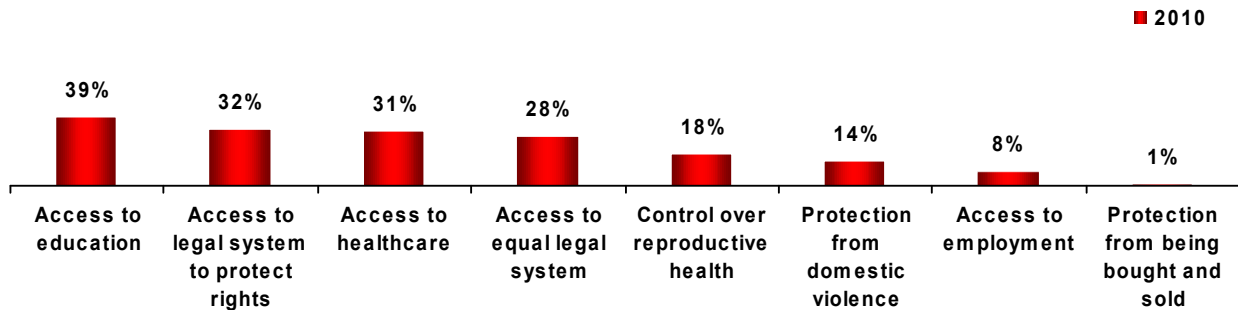


This decline can be further illustrated when tracking those urban women who responded that “better health” would make them happier. Of the 30 percent of women in 2007 who responded

that “better health” would make them happier, 100 percent reported having been denied access to health care. This is in contrast with 2010, where of the 14% women who reported that “better health” would make them happier, only 21 percent report having been denied access to health care. Of the (31%) women who have been denied access to healthcare, 62% also report not having control over their reproductive health reflecting a continuing disconnect between a women’s CEDAW right to reproductive control and access to health care in Egypt.

There are still many Egyptian women who report being denied access to some of the most basic rights besides health care. Roughly one third of women report being denied access to education, the legal system, or health care; nearly a quarter (22 percent) of all women report being denied access all three. It is evident that there is a segment of Egyptian society where women continue to have difficulty exercising their rights generally.

Which of these rights have you been denied in the past year because you are a woman... (2010 Only)?



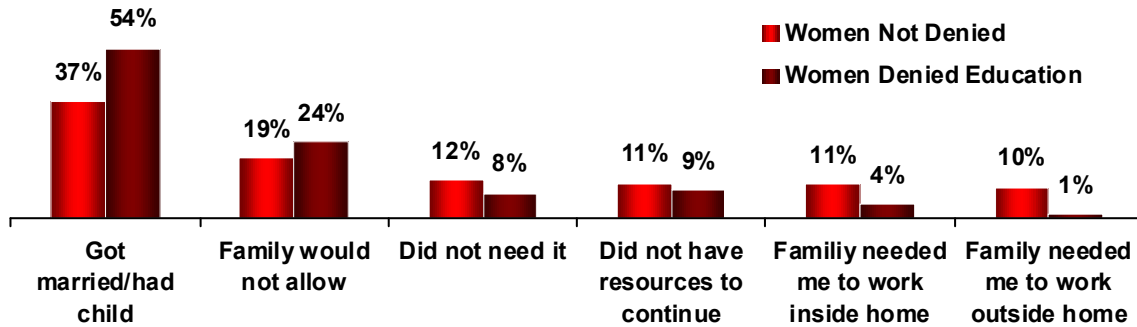
All Women 2010 n= 500 MoSe +/-4 %

## Education and the Family

In the case of education, family roles and status have a tremendous effect on women’s decisions. Family pressures are the number one reason Egyptian women do not continue their education. Women who have been “denied access to education” report having two fewer years of education than urban Egyptian women in general. Among urban women with less than 13 years of formal education (80 percent), those that report being denied access to education say that “getting married/having a child” (54 percent) is the reason for discontinuing their education. In comparison, only 37% of women who were not denied education say that the reason they didn’t continue their education was because of “getting married/having a child”. Another twenty-four of women percent indicate their families would not allow it.



**What reason caused you to discontinue your education (2010)?**



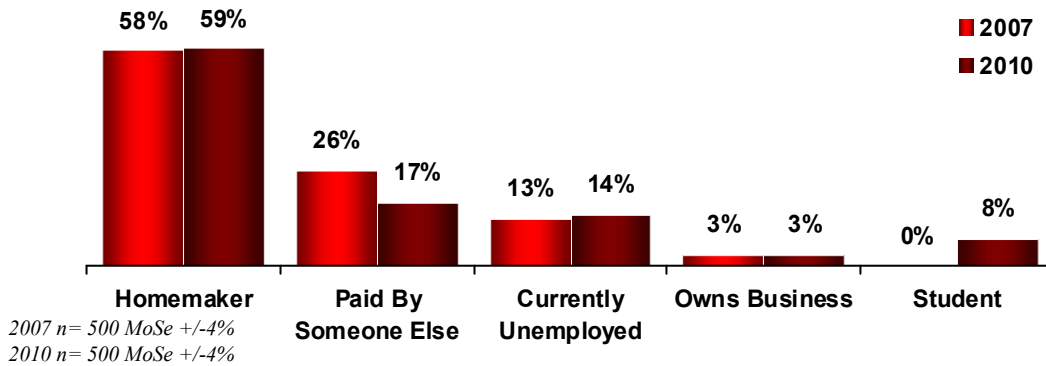
Not Denied Education (Beyond Secondary)= 217 MoSe +/-7 %  
 Denied Education (Beyond Secondary) n= 182 MoSe +/-7%

**Urban Women in the Workplace**

Homemaking in Egypt remains the most prevalent profession among urban women. The percentage of women reporting this as their job status has not changed between 2007 and 2010 (59 percent).

Fewer Egyptian women are now gainfully employed as the percentage of women who report working for someone else has significantly decreased over the last 3 years, down 9 percentage points since 2007.

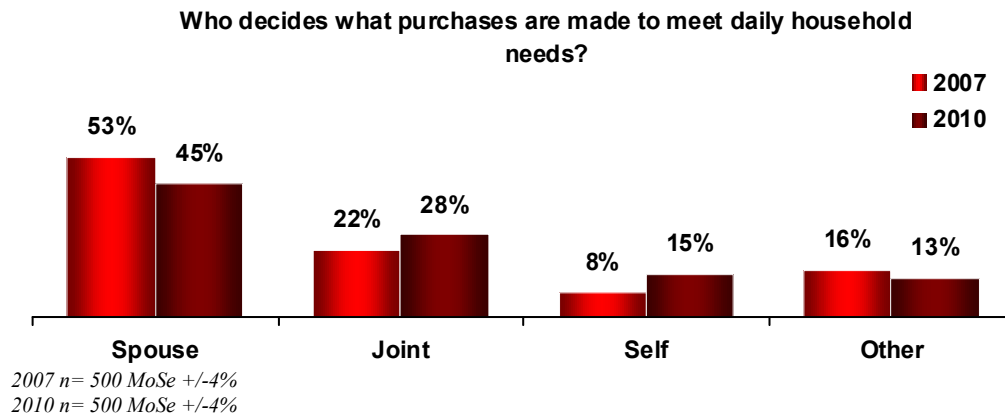
**Which of the following best describes your job status?**



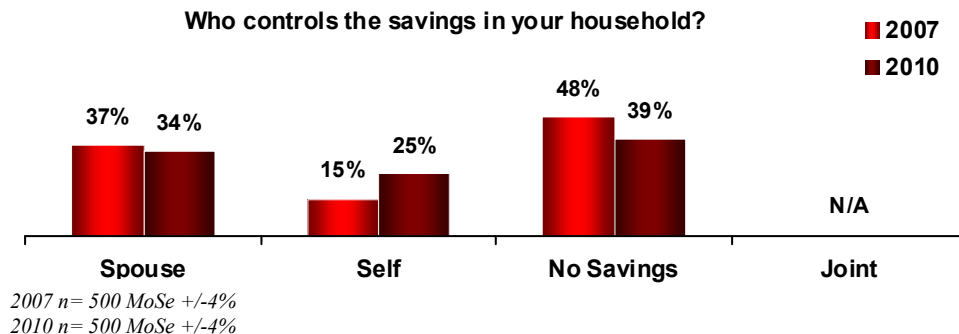
Only half (50 percent) of non-working women claim to be “interested and able” in starting their own business, were they given the opportunity. This suggests that many would return to the work force if they could. Another 43 percent of non-working women report that “other factors prevent” them from taking advantage of any business opportunities.

## Home Finances and Sharing Responsibility

Egyptian women are increasingly more involved in making household purchasing decisions with regards to their daily household needs. In 2007, more than half (53 percent) of the Egyptian women surveyed reported their spouse made the purchasing decisions for the household; while in 2010, 45 percent of women indicated their spouse made the decisions. The decline in urban women reporting their spouse making the purchase decisions is reflected in increases in both independent as well as joint decision making.

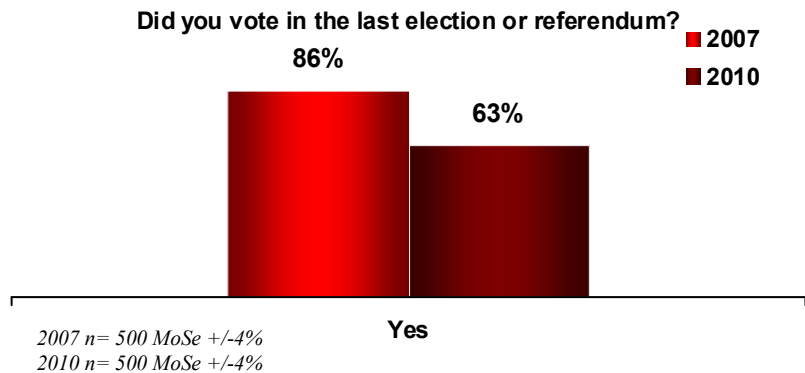


In addition to making purchasing decisions, women are slightly more involved in the control of household savings. Egyptian women are reporting their households having increased liquid assets, as reports of “no savings” have decreased 19 percent to 39 percent in 2010. The percent of urban women who say they control household these savings has increased slightly from 15 percent to 25 percent. Joint control of savings is almost non-existent and has not changed since 2007. None of the women surveyed reported having separate savings from their spouse.

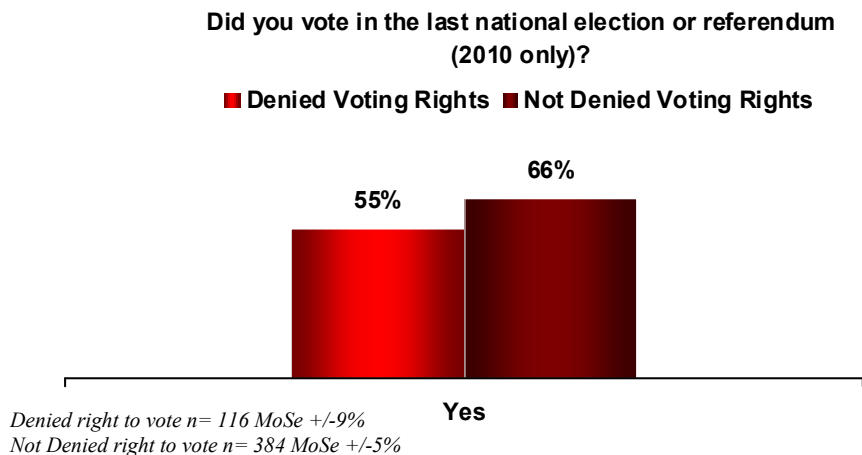


## Voting, Education and Civil Rights

Voting turnout has slipped in the past three years. When asked if they voted in the last election or referendum (Shura Council Elections in June 2010) 63 percent (down from 86 percent) of urban women said “yes” they did vote in last election or referendum.



Egyptian women have reported that even in the face of adversity voting is paramount to them. Half (55 percent) of women who report being denied voting rights say they managed to vote in the last election or referendum. In comparison only 66% of women who were *not* denied voting rights voted in the most recent election. Urban women who report being denied voting rights vote nearly as much as women who were not denied voting rights. While it is unclear whether reporting being “denied rights” reflects a popular response to Egypt’s most recent election environment, or it reflects personal experience trying to cast a ballot, it seems that the majority of women will find a way to vote even under undesirable circumstances.





**D<sup>3</sup> Systems**

designs • data • decisions

GLOBAL RESEARCH SINCE 1985



## **Conclusion**

Over the past three years many Egyptian women have made significant strides in bettering their personal and family lives. While most urban women are still inside the home, they have gained more responsibility when managing household budgeting and purchases. On the other hand family pressures seem to continue to be the leading factor for women not pursuing education or employment. Most women's gains in access to healthcare, while significant, are overshadowed by the continued exclusion of a significant minority of Egyptian women from a multitude of rights and privileges they desire.