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**The American University in Cairo**

**School of Global Affairs and Public Policy**

**EXPERIENCES OF EGYPTIAN FEMALE JOURNALISTS WITH  
WORKPLACE GENDER DISCRIMINATION**

**A Thesis Submitted to the**

**Public Policy and Administration Department**

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Public Policy**

**By**

**Mai Ismail**

**Fall 18**

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The American University in Cairo  
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy  
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**EXPERIENCES OF EGYPTIAN FEMALE JOURNALISTS WITH WORKPLACE  
GENDER DISCRIMINATION**

Mai Ismail

Supervised by Professor Ghada Barsoum

## **Abstract**

There is an upward trend in the employment of women in the media worldwide and in the Middle East. Despite their growing presence, women working in the industry continue to experience discrimination, gendered practices and sexist attitudes at the workplaces. This study examines the experiences of Egyptian women journalists. It employs a qualitative approach, building on in-depth interviews conducted with twenty early- to mid-career Egyptian female journalists. These work in state-run, private and independent news organizations whether in print, broadcast or online media. The analysis shows that the experience of female journalists is linked to various factors pertaining to the media environment; the ownership structure of media outlets; and the existence of sexist workplace cultures. Interviews show that women working in private organizations often face the most severe experiences of gender discrimination due to lack of job security and compromised working conditions. Interviewed women working in organizations with independent funding reported less severe experiences. Interviewed women note that they face discrimination in five main areas: discriminatory hiring promotion and wage policies; difficulty maintaining work-life balance; sexist workplace practices and sexual harassment; discrimination in the allocation of important reporting assignments and contentious relationships with leaders including women leaders.

**Keywords:** Gender, discrimination, women empowerment, women journalists, journalism, news media, Egypt.

# **I: Introduction**

Globally, there is a “progressive increase” in the employment of women in media, with women journalists occupying 27% of top management positions in news organizations and 35% of the global workforce in the news media (GMMP, 2015). Women participation in the news media workforce in the Middle East region amounts to 38%, with 50% participation in the broadcast media and 33% in the print media (ibid). Despite the growing opportunities for women journalists in the region with the introduction of satellite channels and the new media, women participation in the media workforce in the region is marred by gendered practices (Mellor, 2013). In her study of pan-Arab broadcast media, Mellor (2013) proposes that hiring policies in these institutions are largely gendered, where the choice of women TV presenters and reporters primarily depends on their physical appearance as a “marketing tool” for the organizations. She added that sexism, persistent gendered practices, stereotypes and inequalities continue to dominate newsrooms in the Arab region (ibid), practices that are completely unmatched with women’s increased presence in the newsroom.

This study examines workplace discrimination in Egypt’s news media through the understanding of different factors like the general political system, ownership of media and sexist organizational culture as contributors to workplace gender discrimination. It also aims to document the experiences of early and mid-career female journalists with gender-based discrimination in news media in Egypt. It examines the experiences of gender-based discrimination against women journalists in relation to the type of ownership of the institutions, whether these institutions are government-owned, private, or independently-financed. The study also examines gender-based discrimination in relation to the type of medium, whether print, broadcast, or online media. The study focuses on early and mid-career Egyptian female

journalists with a level of experience up to fifteen years. The analysis focuses on gender-based discrimination at the workplace and how far it could be a result of institutionalized discrimination against women and the possible lack of institutional policies that guarantee a healthy integration of women into the workplace environment. The research is driven by the personal experience of the researcher who is an Egyptian woman journalist herself. This analysis of the experiences of Egyptian female journalists is among the rare attempts to study how institutionalized gender-based discrimination can impact professional development among women journalists in Egypt.

The following section provides a background on the legal and labor conditions of Egyptian women, with some focus on women journalists as well as the current conditions of media ownership in Egypt. The study later discusses the overarching research questions on the experiences of discrimination against women journalists in news media. I will also discuss the conceptual framework of the study, which looks at workplace gender discrimination with the lens of the media's ownership system analysis. I later examine the recent literature where I investigate a number of themes including gender discrimination in workplaces, women and media, and experiences of women journalists with gender discrimination in workplaces whether globally, or in the Arab world. In this study, the research methodology depends on a qualitative analysis of twenty Egyptian women journalists, with adequate representation of women working in different mediums and institutions with different systems of ownership. The study's participants will be early to mid-career journalists with a level of experience up to fifteen years as professional journalists. Moving to the analysis of the data collected, the researcher identifies five main areas in which women journalists in Egypt experience workplace gender discrimination. These include unfair hiring, promotion and wage policies, difficulty maintaining

work-life balance, sexist workplace practices and sexual harassment, unfair allocation of important work assignments and experiences of contentious relationships with women leaders. The study ends with a summary of the main findings, recommendations and the study's limitations.

## **A. Background:**

Critical approaches towards women rights in the Arab and Muslim world are directly linked to the “national awakening movement” in the late 19th century, with the end of the Ottoman rule (Abdel Rahman, 2008). The activities of the early generation of women rights advocates were confined to charity, making much of this movement limited to rich women in aristocratic and royal circles (ibid.). The anti-colonial movement in the Arab and Islamic world later on created an atmosphere where national liberation from colonialism was the main priority to progressive groups, deeming issues of women liberation as less important (ibid.). Women's acceptance to sideline their demands of equality and independence thus had negative results as the new national governments neglected the quest of women rights and worked on controlling the women movement through establishing unions that work under the new patriarchal system (ibid.). The evolution of the role of women in media, specifically in Egypt since the Free Officers Movement in 1952, can be viewed through these lenses. The media since 1952 has been traditionally controlled by the ruling elites, where realities of women are looked at with sexist and patriarchal lens. While controls over the media has theoretically eased in the 1970s with the introduction of partisan media, and later private TV in the late 1990s, the reality for women in the media continued to be the same. In the following sections, I examine both the system of media



ownership in Egypt, how it evolved, and the new realities created after January 25 revolution, the position of women journalists, and the current legal and labor conditions of Egyptian women.

## **1. Nature of media ownership in Egypt**

The question of women representation in newsrooms in Egypt cannot be discussed without understanding the context of media ownership in Egypt, more precisely: who owns and controls the media institutions in which women work? As the researcher will explain later in the conceptual framework, it is important to look at the structure of the system of ownership of news media, how this structure influences media independence and the resulting empowerment of women in newsrooms.

Traditionally, the state has been the main owner of the press since the Free Officers movement in 1952. In his typology explaining the relationship between media and political systems in the Arab world, Rugh (2004) argues that Egypt's media falls into the mobilization category, where the media works under strict state control, and the state works actively to use the media as a mobilization tool for the sake of ensuring public support for government policies and regime figures. Late president Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized all press institutions in Egypt and founded the country's historical state TV in the 1960s. The state's strict grip over the media reached unprecedented levels at the time as Nasser placed an officer in every newspaper to educate journalists about the principles of the free officers (Dabbous 1994). It was very clear that during Nasser's era, the press became a 'Mouthpiece of the Regime' (Ayubi 1994: 15). Despite the introduction of partisan media outlets where political parties were allowed to own newspapers during the rule of late president Anwar al-Sadat, journalists in Egypt continued to serve the state's mobilization agenda (Beattie, 2001).

With the introduction of satellite media in the late 1990s and the new media in the early 2000s, new avenues were created for journalists in Egypt, as government controls over the media started to ease. Private media flourished, with many businessmen owning private newspapers and TV stations. To respond to the new changes, Rugh (2007) included a new typology to explain the relationship between media and political systems, namely “transitional” media. The new typology described a number of Arab countries, including Egypt, that undergo a possible transition to democracy. This period was also characterized by the increasing influence of social media websites and blogs, platforms that managed to create a space for vocal criticism of state policies. These platforms discussed “taboo” social and political issues (Hamdy, 2009), including torture in Egyptian prisons, judicial independence, labor movements, as well as sexual and religious rights.

The introduction of private media in Egypt and elsewhere in the Arab world, however, did not lead to a freer media system. In her exploration of Arab media magnates, Sakr (2013) explained that business tycoons controlling private media in Egypt and in other parts of the Arab world are widely regarded as “transnational corporate elite” yet they are also “embedded in a national ruling class” (Sakr, 2013: 2285). She argues that the media investments of leading business tycoons like Saudi Arabia’s al-Waleed Bin Talal or Egypt’s Naguib Sawiris are not a result of their commitment to progress, but are rather driven by “expediency” (ibid: 2298). She added: “despite repeating their respective beliefs in free markets and media freedom, both men have remained capable of reaching accommodations with political systems inimical to those beliefs” (ibid).

The eruption of the January 2011 mass protests changed the scene of media ownership, as controls over the media eased dramatically. Social media and independent online platforms

played a major role in fostering political change. Professional online news websites, with the support of social networking websites and citizen journalism, became a powerful medium that transcended the control of the state or business owners running mainstream media outlets. For the first time, the media scene witnessed the creation of news websites owned by individual young journalists and financed independently across the country including Mada Masr (Chang, 2015), al-Manassa, al-Bedaya, al-Mandara, Masr al-Arabiya, just to name a few.

The political changes after 2011 have tremendously impacted how Egyptian journalists perceive their role vis a vis those in power. They played a radical/oppositional role during the one-year-rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, but later “re-assumed” their “traditional and collaborative” role as the country is ruled back by its strong military since 2013 and the fall of former president Mohamed Morsi in 2013 (Issawi and Cammaerts, 2015: 562). With the election of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in 2014 as president, the Egyptian state again assumed its role in controlling the media scene. Since May 2017, the Egyptian government blocked more than 400 critical and independent news media websites, both in Egypt and in the region. A government report by the state’s official Middle East News Agency said the websites were blocked for “supporting terrorism” (Aboul Einen, 2017). In addition, the government took more serious measures to control private media. According to the Paris-based Reporters without Borders, whose website is blocked by Egyptian authorities, the Egyptian government is seizing control over private media by acquiring direct ownership of TV channels and newspapers. A number of institutions are being bought by businessmen with direct links to the intelligence services (RSF, 2018). In a bigger step, a private equity sovereign fund has acquired a number of privately, owned TV stations and newspapers this year (Bahgat, 2017). A pact of restrictive new media laws and the formation of new regulatory bodies whose members are mostly appointed by

the government (Reuters, 2018) means that the media is brought back under full control of the state.

In such a restrictive environment, the rights of women journalists are sidelined. The newly-issued laws did not address the mounting concerns of women journalists. The laws failed to address various issues related to the rights of women journalists including the need to better implement labor laws especially in the private sector. The laws also failed to address other issues including the wage gap, sexual harassment in the workplace and other challenges women journalists continue to face in Egypt. As explained later in the findings of this study, the state has been the main owner and controller of the media in Egypt, often appointing powerful male journalists with close political ties to the ruling regimes in leadership positions. The introduction of private ownership of the media did not lead to better conditions for women journalists at the workplace, with powerful businessmen with strong ties to the ruling elite controlling news channels and newspapers even further. In all cases, the cosmetic changes in the structure of media ownership in Egypt did not yield better results for women journalists.

## **2. Legal and labor conditions of Egyptian women**

Statistics of women employment, participation in the workforce and the pay gap in Egypt reflect an evident gender disparity in the labor market. Women participation in the economic activity is 20% compared to 68% for men, according to the quarterly labor force survey released by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS). Women unemployment rate is 22% according to the same survey, in comparison to 7% unemployment rate for men. Egypt ranked 134 among 144 countries in the global gender gap index released by the World Economic Forum in 2017. The index included four main indicators, including economic participation and opportunity in which Egypt ranked 135, educational attainment with

Egypt ranking 104. Egypt also ranked 99 in the health and survival indicator and 119 in the political empowerment indicator.

On a policy level, gender equality is guaranteed in the Egyptian constitution. Article 11 stipulates that the state is committed to achieve equality between men and women in all political, economic, social and cultural rights (Egyptian Constitution, 2014). It also guarantees the state's commitment to work on ensuring a suitable representation of women in parliament and guarantees the right of women to hold public posts including the judiciary without any discrimination (ibid.). According to the same article, the state shall protect women against all sorts of violence and guarantees women's ability to maintain balance between family commitments and work (ibid.). The state is also committed to guarantee protection to mothers, working women, elderly women and the most needy ones (ibid.). Egypt has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Adhering to a state rhetoric supportive of women rights and equality is notable in the government's public discourse. President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has announced that the year 2017 will be the year of Egyptian women (State Information Service, 2017). Egypt's 2030 vision for sustainable development also carries promising prospects for women. The vision puts the empowerment of women as a priority to reduce gender gaps, increasing the inclusion of women in the workforce, and reducing the number of working women living under the poverty line from 26.3 percent to 12 percent in 2020 and zero at 2030 (Egypt 2030 vision, 2016). On the legal side, amendments to the Penal Code made it possible for women to report on incidents of sexual harassment which are now punishable with prison sentences ranging from six months to five years (Harassmap, 2013). Recent decades have also witnessed major legal reforms including raising the legal age of marriage to 18 for both women and men, allowing Egyptian women

married to foreign men to give citizenship to their children, permitting women to initiate divorce known as *Kholou'*, criminalizing female genital mutilation, and giving mothers equal rights to issue their children's birth certificates (UN Women, 2017).

The state's legal, constitutional and policy discourse, however, seems to be too ambitious, as incidents on the ground may suggest more troubling realities for women. To understand this mismatch, it is essential to look at how the change in Egypt's policy orientation has historically led to compounding the hardships of working women. It is important to look at the advent of the Egyptian state-led modernization project in the 1960s. The state guaranteed a vision for women where they accessed higher education and public sector jobs, in what was coined as "state feminism" (Hatem, 1992). As Egypt shifted to the liberalized economy in the 1970s, work conditions for women in Egypt and the region started to deteriorate. Statistics on women employment in the Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) in 2016 reflect the current conditions. Women are the main victim of the general shift from state-led economic policies to neoliberal economic policies (AHDR, 2016). Women experience a notable gender gap, bear the double burden of employment and household responsibilities, are not taken seriously in the workplace and often face harassment with no laws criminalizing sexual harassment in the workplace (*ibid*).

The dominance of neoliberal social and economic policies as well as established cultural values remain major barriers in front of women employment in Egypt. Egyptian men score 0.9 on the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) scale, which measures attitudes towards gender roles where 0 represents complete rejection of gender equality and 3 is full acceptance (UN Women, 2017). Respondents on the UN Women survey stressed men's economic dominance over women and the need to preserve their rights as sole breadwinners of their families (*ibid.*).

Women generally perform the biggest bulk of household duties, with men having the final decision in household spending, and men's control over women extends to include the freedom of movement and other freedoms (ibid.).

Challenges facing Egyptian women in the workforce are really complicated, with sexual harassment and discrimination being the major challenges facing women in the workplace in Egypt (Ramadan, 2018). A study surveying 58 Egyptian working women concluded that most women experienced sexual harassment in workplaces at least once in their life and that they were harassed regardless of their age, education, attire, or social status (Ezzat, 2016). The study also showed that women work in private firms are more likely to experience sexual harassment than women in public institutions (ibid.). A UN study on sexual harassment in 2013 showed that 99.3 percent of women in Egypt had experienced sexual harassment (Abdelmoniem and Galan, 2017). However, combating sexual harassment does not seem to be of utmost importance for policy makers in Egypt in the 2030 vision, as the vision does not see it as a problem at first place (Ramadan, 2018). The only reference to sexual harassment was in light of its impact on tourism (ibid.). This lack of policy orientation towards ending gender discrimination against women correlates with official statistics explaining that the annual cost of gender-based violence in Egypt is estimated at approximately two billion pounds (CAPMAS and UNFPA, 2015).

Other forms of discrimination against Egyptian women in workplaces persist. There are six Arab countries, including Egypt, with wide gender gaps between men and women (Badran, 2017). Fifteen percent of households in Egypt are ran by women, most of whom work in the unofficial economy (ibid.). The mismatch is also evident in the legal framework put forward by Egypt's labor law and its application when it comes to benefits given to working women. While women employed in the public sector and the private sector are entitled to 90 days of paid

maternity leaves, nursing breaks and unpaid maternity leaves up to two years per child, only women working in the public sector actually receive these benefits (Ramadan, 2011). Women working in the private sector and in the unofficial economy hardly receive these legal guarantees (ibid). The inability to enforce laws further complicates women's work conditions. This better application of labor laws in the public sector and its favorable working conditions especially for women have made the public sector "the employer of choice" among youth in Egypt as Barsoum (2015) noted.

As explained above, women's inability to access the job market is directly linked to the existing structure of social policy and the existing labor market conditions that make it harder for women to take employment-related decisions. As Barsoum (2018) noted, women's decision to work or not are directly related to the existing labor conditions, social policies, and "the intersectionality of different forms of inequality in defining employment opportunities".

Egyptian women journalists similarly face many challenges, as they continue to work in extremely dangerous situations. With the eruption of the protests of January 25 revolution, women have been more exposed to severe spats of sexual harassment and violence in the streets. The incident of the mass sexual assault on CBS' reporter Lara Logan brought the issue to the forefront (Stelter, 2011). But it is very difficult for Egyptian women journalists to openly expose their encounters with sexual harassment at workplaces, an issue that primarily remains confined to the boundaries of their personal discussions (Shams El-Din, 2016). The representation of women journalists in Egypt's Journalists Syndicate, the country's official and most powerful organization that protects the rights of journalists in Egypt, remained very limited (Ismail, 2017). Previous syndicate boards had one female representative, with the current board having no female representatives at all (ibid.).



## **B. Research questions**

**This study attempts to answer the following overarching question:**

How do Egyptian women journalists experience gender-based discrimination at the workplace level, and how do these experiences relate to the workplace culture of media institutions?

- How gender-based discrimination is related to factors like the level of experience of female journalists, type of news media ownership and the medium (print, broadcast, and online)?

## II: Conceptual framework

Workplace gender discrimination is defined through looking at discrimination as “a process connected to the larger gender system ... (through) exploring the cultural component of gender ideology, the structural features of sex segregation and formal policies, and the behaviors of institutional actors who apply and enforce such policies in everyday work settings” (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011: 765). Much of the global experiences of workplace discrimination at the news media show persistent gender disparities in the most advanced and progressive journalism cultures, namely in Europe and the United States, and in less progressive journalism cultures in developing countries. More women are venturing in the news media, but this does not mean more empowerment for them, and available literature has not yet explained the reasons of this contradiction.

As a result, the conceptual framework of this thesis focuses mainly on identifying factors that made such discriminatory practices deeply-rooted in the news media industry in Egypt. These factors first include the prevailing restrictive political atmosphere in Egypt, and how its existence had silenced women and made issues of gender discrimination a secondary concern in the agenda of public debate. A second factor influencing workplace gender discrimination in the news media is the conglomerated nature of media ownership in Egypt, meaning the concentration of media ownership in the hands of few powerful and rich men, whether within the state or the business owners. A third influencing factor is the prevailing sexist organizational culture in the media industry, which is largely impacted by the outside patriarchal social order. In the following paragraphs, the theoretical and conceptual foundations of these factors will be examined in detail.

In order to understand how the prevailing political atmosphere impacts women issues and particularly in the media industry, it is important to understand first the relationship between political systems and media systems. There is a plethora of research studying how political systems influence media, which is a foundational concept in the area of political communication. For the case of this study, it is important to look at the work of Rugh (1979, 1987, and 2004). He proposed that the political role of the Arab media is largely influenced by the national political systems under which they operate (Rugh, 2004). He divided Arab countries into three major categories, namely mobilization, loyalist and diverse types (Rugh, 2004). Rugh placed Egypt in the mobilization category, where the political system is in the hands of a small and “aggressive” political group that does not only control access to information and restrict press freedoms, but it is also a system where the ruling elite actively uses the media to mobilize for its policies and political leaders (Rugh, 2004). In 2007, Rugh revisited his long-established thesis and introduced a fourth category which is transitional media, in which political systems are transitioning towards democratic rule. He placed Egypt and other Arab countries in this typology, where he cited a freer media environment during the final years of Hosni Mubarak’s rule, the introduction of new media, and various political reforms (Rugh, 2007). Rugh’s reconsideration to his earlier work seemed very relative following the eruption of what was described as the Arab Spring protests, but recent political changes in Egypt, especially since the overthrow of Muslim Brotherhood’s former president Mohamed Morsi and the control of army-backed President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi since 2013, Egypt fits more into the mobilization category. Suppression of political freedoms, strict controls over press freedoms and less access to information impact the work of journalists generally and affect the experiences of women journalists more specifically. Women are less likely to speak out against sexual harassment and gendered practices in an atmosphere of fear.

Women are less likely to organize or campaign for their social and economic rights inside news organizations if restrictive laws for association and assembly are aggressively applied. The state's swift control over the media means that journalists are less likely to independently organize or seek independent sources to finance their media projects, which leads us to the discussion of media ownership.

The second factor influencing workplace gender discrimination in the news media industry is the system of media ownership. Understanding who owns and finances the news media in Egypt and the existing structure of media ownership can explain the deepening gender disparities in the workplaces. Political economy of the media often refers to “the study of the economic structures of mass media industries” (Riordan, 2002: 5). Media systems in today's world “serve as instruments through which modern capitalism produces and reproduces wealth” (Martin, 2002 as mentioned in Byerly, 2001: 245). To understand gender disparities in the news media, it is important that we look at the position of women in this process of neoliberal wealth production. Byerly (2001) suggests that women's position is usually examined in the macro and micro levels of the giant media conglomerates that control the media in today's world. While the micro level is related to women representation in media content, the macro level examines women position as journalists (Byerly, 2001), which is the focus of this study. The macro-level analysis of media institutions is defined as “activities and structures associated with finance, investment, ownership and related activities, as well as the varied activities constituting policymaking and governance” (Byerly, 2014: 106). In all these realms, women are marginalized in the world of media conglomerates, and this marginalization is the extension of their social marginalization at the first place (Byerly, 2014).

Various studies showed that the news media worldwide is mostly owned by giant conglomerates that are owned and managed by powerful white men. Women limited access to capital thus marginalizes them or pushes them out of the industry. Nagrath (2001) explained that news media organizations that succeed in finding alternative and independent sources of funding are more able to create workplaces that are friendly to women. This also coincides with research done by Reskin (1988), who proposed that policies that encourage more women to venture into male-dominated jobs do not necessarily lead to less discrimination at the workplace level, mostly because men who are in charge of drafting these policies “can subvert these mechanisms or even change the rules by which rewards are allocated (to women)”. As explained above, the media ownership in Egypt is primarily concentrated in the hands of the state or its agents within the business owners, who are primarily rich and powerful men who leave no space for women voices either at the finance, management, or ownership levels.

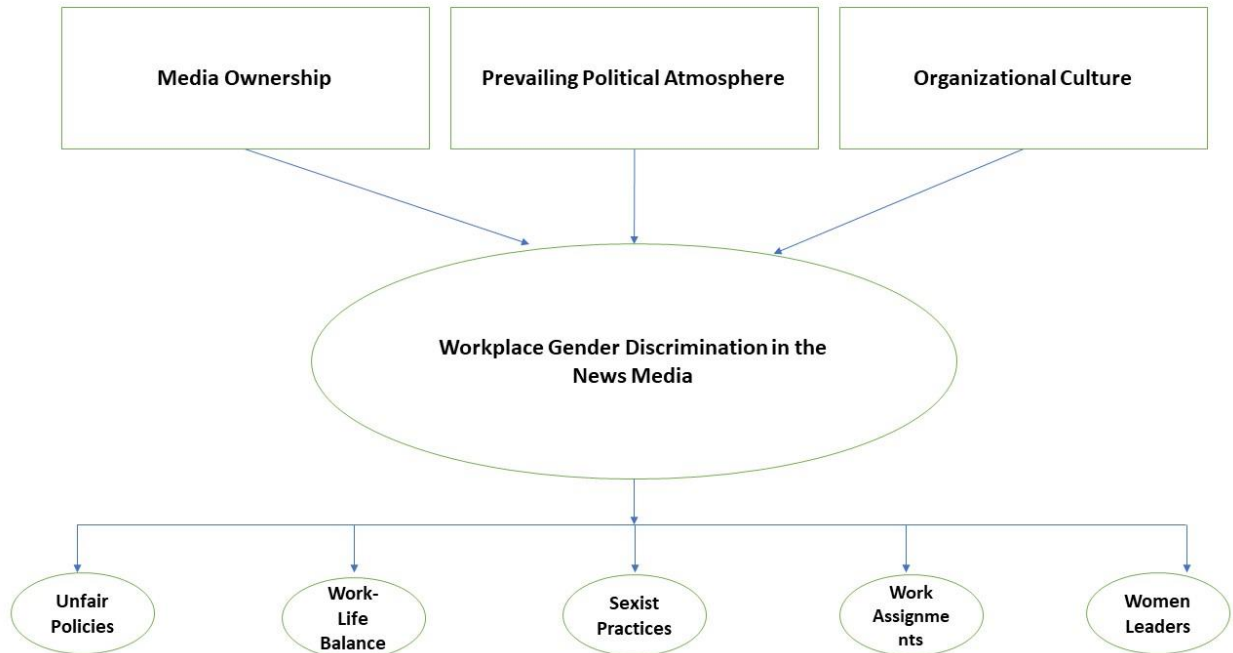
In reference to the social marginalization of women coined by Byerly (2014), it is important to examine the third factor influencing workplace gender discrimination, which is the sexist organizational culture within which Egyptian women journalists work. In Edgar Schein model of organizational culture, there are three important levels that define the prevailing culture of a certain organization. This includes the artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic assumptions (Schein, 2010). While the artifacts are the visible elements and can be felt and touched, and the espoused beliefs and values constitute the strategies, goals and philosophies set out by the organization (Schein, 2010), the basic assumptions remain to be the most important factor related to the issue of discrimination. Schein (2010) suggested that the basic assumptions are the unseen cultural attributes that are usually “unconscious, taken for granted, and are regarded as ultimate sources of values and actions”. At workplace level, the basic assumptions

about gender roles usually shape the experience of women journalists in the newsroom. These assumptions usually control the policies organizing hiring, promotions and wages. It also influences the understanding that women are primarily responsible for domestic work, and hence results in assigning them to work duties that are considered as an extension of their domestic roles in society.

A sexist organizational culture usually has a negative impact on the progression of any organization. Cropley and Cropley (2017) suggested that there is a negative relationship between representation of women in a given work environment and innovation. Innovation among women employees was largely “suppressed” due to the existence of unfavorable organizational culture (Cropley and Cropley, 2017). Masculine workplace culture in Japan is vital in promoting “vertical sex segregation” or the concentration of women in low-level management positions in various sectors (Nemoto, 2013).

I propose that these three major factors influence greatly the experience of Egyptian women journalists with workplace discrimination. The prevailing repressive political atmosphere, the system of media ownership and sexist organizational culture combined shape the realities of Egyptian women journalists. As the study’s findings will later show how these factors produce work environments where women journalists experience discrimination first at the level of institutional policies related to hiring, promotions and wages. They also experience discriminatory practices that increases the double burden, or the difficulty maintaining balance between work duties and household responsibilities. The sexist organizational culture often leads to sexist practices at the newsrooms including sexual harassment and allocation of important work assignments for men more than women. In such atmosphere, women who reach leadership positions are often pressured to produce the same patriarchal practices and further deepen

discrimination against their fellow women journalists. The following diagram explains this conceptual model.



Compiled by the author, building on Rugh (2004), Schein (2010) and Byerly (2001 & 2014).

### III. Gender discrimination and media in the literature

This section reviews the literature using a context review. This type of review is usually used by researchers to link a specific study to a larger body of knowledge or situating it in relation to a larger context (Neuman, 2006). In this review, I attempt to link gender-based discrimination experienced by Egyptian women journalists in workplaces to the larger context of gender-based discrimination at workplaces globally. First, I examine some general indicators of gender-based discrimination at workplaces, then look at how gender issues are discussed within the media field, and finally look at specific experiences of gender-based discrimination in media institutions at the global level and the Arab region.

#### A. Gender discrimination in workplaces

This part of review of the literature looks at the forms that shape gender-based discrimination in the workplace. The literature in this regard tends to analyse three main indicators of discrimination at the workplace level, including the pay gap, women bearing the brunt of maintaining work-life balance and sexual harassment (Bishu and Alkadry, 2017; Blau and Kahn, 2007; Beilby and Beilby, 1998; Roebuck et al, 2013; Welsh, 1999).

**The Pay Gap:** Generally, the pay gap tends to be less in public and non-profit sectors (Bishu and Alkadry, 2017). There are several reasons behind the pay gap in workplaces, including disparity in accessing workplace authority, disparity in access to hiring and promotion, and lack of fair gender representation in the different organizations (ibid.). Even in the organizations that employ high-performance work practices, gender-based pay gaps still exist (Davies et al., 2015). In exploring the gender pay gap in Europe, Arulampalam et al. (2007) found out that the gender pay gap varied significantly across sectors and countries, with the phenomena becoming more visible



on top of the wage distribution (the glass ceiling effect) and towards the bottom (the sticky floors effect). Baguelin (2010) suggests that there are “unobserved” factors that may contribute to the gender-based pay gap in organizations. These include levels of motivation of both male and female workers (ibid.). Females are more likely to accept jobs that disregard non-pecuniary work motivation because they drive their self-esteem from outside work, unlike men, which could eventually explain persistent pay gaps (ibid.). The gender pay gap is also connected to the gender division of labor at the household level (Blau and Kahn, 2007).

**Work-life balance:** Work-life balance is another important area of research in understanding the motives behind gender-based discrimination in workplace, as household responsibilities imposed on women by virtue of their gender roles as primary family caretakers is considered a major impediment to women’s ability to have more influential roles in their workplaces. While men are generally perceived to allocate more effort to work than women because of household responsibilities, Beilby and Beilby (1998) suggested after extensive studies of existing literature that women tend to allocate more time and effort for work more than men. They concluded that women are more willing to work harder and more efficiently for a given level of rewards by looking at research conducted by social psychologists who use equity processes framework.

Selmi and Cahn (2006) argue that most research related to family and work commitment of women focus on women professionals, and assume that women are able to trade flexible working hours and hence less income to allocate more time for household responsibilities. Both argue that research overlooks women who work in service-related jobs, especially in the lower economic strata, hence they do not enjoy the luxury of working less hours with fewer wages

(ibid.). They recommended that it is necessary to include class considerations when discussing work-life balance for female workers and professionals (ibid.).

A study surveying 161 women professionals from three different generations in the United States on work-life balance and women empowerments in workplaces and their leadership opportunities showed that maintaining such a balance is difficult to achieve (Roebuck et al, 2013). Many respondents reported that they preferred to engage less in leadership positions “because the personal cost was too high”, while those who said they managed to maintain the balance identified a number of factors that helped them navigate their way between household and work commitments (Roebuck et al, 2013). A similar study by Weidekamm and-Willer (2012) was conducted to evaluate the extent to which women health professionals in leadership positions in Austria managed to maintain work-life balance. Women health professionals explained that different barriers, including childcare duties, responsibility for family life and “women’s tendency to understatement” all represented barriers against career development (Weidekamm and-Willer, 2012). This could be applied to other similarly-demanding jobs like journalism, which require long and inflexible working hours, unsafe work environment, etc.

**Sexual harassment:** Sexual harassment at workplaces is another area of researching gender-based discrimination in workplaces, as Gutek and Morasch (1982) argued that sexual harassment at workplaces is predominantly a product of “sex-role spillover”. They define it as “as the carryover into the workplace of gender-based expectations for behavior that are irrelevant or inappropriate to work” (ibid.). Women in male-dominated jobs are usually regarded as “role deviates” who are treated differently from other male workers (ibid.). In a study of mental health consequences of workplace sexual harassment and abuse in four university occupational groups

showed that females were subject to higher rates in the faculty group, while males were more subject to abuse in clerical and service groups (Richman et. al, 1999). Women in service jobs tend to develop strategies for coping with sexual harassment, especially when the cost of reporting them would be high (Williams et. al, 1999). But sexuality and hence the experience of sexual harassment usually differ from one profession to another (ibid.). Forms of sexual harassment that are deemed scandalous or may result in sexual harassment lawsuits in some professions may not be regarded the same in another profession (ibid.). Women in male-dominated workplaces are more likely to experience sexual harassment than others in women-dominated workplaces, and women who are deemed “uppity” or showing masculine traits experience sexual harassment more as a form of punishment (Berdahl, 2007).

Many researchers have rightfully referred to the connection between “institutionalized” sexual harassment and workplace culture as an enabling environment for gender-based violence. In their examination of sexual harassment at the organizational level, Chamberlain et al, (2008) suggested that sexual harassment is related to the level of worker power, workspace culture and the general gender composition at the organization. They concluded that most threatening forms of sexual harassment often happen in environments suffering from employment insecurity, physically-demanding jobs and with work groups that are gender mixed (ibid). Similarly, the nature of organizational culture contributes directly to women’s ability to label unwanted sexual advances as sexual harassment and actually report such incidents (Folgero and Fjeldstad, 1995 as mentioned in Welsh, 1999). Women in more “masculine work cultures” tend not to define their experiences as sexual harassment in order to appear as “competent and team players” (Collinson and Collinson, 1996, as mentioned in Welsh, 1999). In such “permissive” work cultures, unwanted, degrading forms of sexual behavior become “institutionalized” (Welsh, 1999).

## **B. Women and media**

When it comes to women and media, there is very little literature on women as newsmakers, as much is focusing on the representation of women in media content. Women are always portrayed in media coverage as weak, sex objects or victims, but very few attempts tried to examine women in the newsrooms and how the negative representation of women in the news content is a result of lack of women empowerment in their workplaces. In their critical introduction of women and media, Byerly and Ross (2006) stressed that much of the scholarship explaining the “conglomeratized” nature of the media industry and women’s location vis a vis the existing structures of media organisations is primarily “gender neutral”. Their assessment is that women continue to work in male-dominated large commercial newsrooms that very much produce and reproduce the notion of wealth to serve the market economy (ibid.,). In that sense, women journalists can only impose a progressive agenda when they work in institutions that are independent from these giant newsmaking machines (Beale and Annette van den Bosch 1998; Byerly 2001; Nagraath 2001 as mentioned in Byerly and Ross 2006). Impacted by the lack of feminist literature, the following are some of the attempts to look at women in the newsroom environment and how their experiences can possibly reflect on negative representation of women in media content. However, it is important to note that all the following literature focuses on western countries, and little knowledge is produced to explore the media industry through the lens of gender in other contexts like the Middle East or the Arab world.

Hanitzsch and Hanusch (2012) conducted a comparative study spanning 18 countries around the world to examine gender and its relationship to how journalists perceive their roles and practice journalism. The study’s results showed that there are no substantial differences between men and women journalists when it comes of perceptions of their roles. The study

showed that there were no differences between men and women journalists when it comes to putting more attention to audience needs, while male journalists were more believers of their roles as watchdogs than women. Hanitzsch and Hanusch (2012) also showed that male journalists did not favor the importance of objectivity more than female counterparts and women were not more inclined to be more subjective in reporting the news than men.

The question of why female representation in news content is always limited is another area of extensive research in journalism, and a major reason for this limited coverage of women-related news is the male-female ratio inside newsrooms (Whitlow, 1979). Assigning women to cover certain “beats” inside newsrooms inhibits women professional development (ibid.). Despite bigger enrollment of female students in the academic study of journalism, men dominate newsrooms (Ross, 2013). The male-to-female ratio in newsroom is a major determinant of how women are represented in news content and the tone and style of news coverage of women issues varies significantly between women and men journalists (Steiner, 1998; de Bruin, 2000; Melin-Higgins, 2004 as mentioned in Ross, 2013). This is primarily due to the fact that women have different experience of the world and hence bring different perspectives in reporting (ibid.). Untraditional reporting of women issues in the news was linked to smaller newsrooms when there is an equitable representation of women and men journalists (Rodgers and Thorson, 2003 as mentioned in Ross, 2013). In traditional newsrooms with larger representation of men, there is more “conformist” reporting of women issues will emerge (Ross, 2013). Generally, journalism continues to be a “male-dominated profession” in most of the western countries (Frohlich, 2007), and in specific, media in the western world is largely dominated by “white men” despite the fact that women in countries like the United States, United Kingdom and Netherlands are increasingly enrolled in journalism schools in what could be called “the gender switch” (Zoonen,

1994). Magazine and radio journalism, both losing their influence to TV, has been better employers of women, as men moved to “higher prestige” mediums (ibid.). Men in the western news media generally dominate technical sectors, while women are mostly employed in sections that are seen as “extension of their domestic responsibilities” like “children media, education, consumer and domestic programs, human interest and feature sections of newspapers” (ibid., p51).

With the new technologies and the introduction of social media and digitization of news, women journalists are more likely to be empowered and reach leadership positions in the digital news ecosystem (Heckman, 2014). However, these opportunities are easier to access in hyperlocal and small digital projects, while more gender disparities still persist in large digital newsrooms (Heckman, 2014). But research on the impact of digital journalism in creating more female newsroom representation showed different results in Belgium (De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers, 2016). A survey of online journalists in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium showed that digital news outlets did not offer more opportunities for women employment, nor it offered them chances to reach leadership positions (De Vuyst and Raeymaeckers, 2016). Moving to the US, established news organizations had better policies to regulate family leaves, but drafting these policies in emerging digital newsrooms is very challenging, with more “millennial moms” joining these organizations (Goldstein, 2017).

### **C. Global and Arab experiences of gender discrimination in the media**

Experiences of women journalists in developing and developed countries alike show some similarities and differences that are very essential to examine in order to draw comparisons with

the case of Egypt. Generally, experiences of gender-based discrimination in developed countries are linked to institutional policies are less responsive to the needs of women journalists. In the developing world, discriminatory policies and cultural barriers compound the barriers the women journalists face.

In a country like China, women leaders in the media industry in the Guangzhou City revealed that women hold leadership positions in radio outlets more than print and broadcast institutions, as radio is largely viewed as “marginalized” media (Cai, 2010). Women leaders in Guangzhou media also said that while most of their male counterparts reached their positions through a “helicopter landing” approach, i.e. being directly appointed by the government, women leaders reached these positions through a “mountain climbing” pattern (Cai, 2010). Looking at the experience of women media leaders in Ireland, women leaders identified themselves more as “relational leaders” and that their leadership style is “socially constructed in a gendered manner” (O’Brien, 2017). O’Brien (2017) found out that women led their organizations towards more gender equality in manner that it made the news organizations “feminine not feminist”. This means that while women leaders in Irish media succeeded in having more women representation in their organizations, they did not create a feminist organizational culture in news media (O’Brien, 2017).

Women are also underrepresented in Canadian broadcast media, which results in having women less framed as leaders or experts and are less likely to hold a news anchor position (Cukier et al, 2015). As a result, lack of women leadership in broadcast news has impacted the coverage and representation of women in news content; they were less portrayed as leaders and more framed as victims (Cukier et al, 2015). A similar study to examine the work environment inside the Canadian Press News Cooperative , a leading news wire in Canada, explained in the

period between 1965 and 2000, systematic discrimination against women journalists was evident within the newsroom (Freeman, 2016). The male-dominated leadership style within the newsroom promised women of “good but not great careers” (ibid.). Female journalists also struggle with their male news sources in Israel, according to a study conducted by Lachover (2005) who interviewed 32 female Israeli journalists on their experience with their male sources. Respondents said that male sources usually regarded female journalists as sexual objects, weak, and motherly figures (Lachover, 2005).

Experiences of sexual harassment in the newsroom are also a major focus of the literature on discrimination against women journalists in the news media. Between 40 to 60 percent of American female journalists interviewed in a study about workplace sexual harassment said they had direct experience with sexual harassment (Weaver, 1992 as mentioned in Ross, 2013). In another study, more than half of British women journalists and a quarter of men journalists said they had experienced sexual harassment or witnessed discrimination against women (Sieghart and Henry, 1998 as mentioned in Ross, 2013). Promotion of female journalists is generally viewed as “fruit of their sexual labor” in South Africa (Byerly and Ross, 2006 as mentioned in Ross, 2013). Australian female journalists who experience sexual harassment often “downplay its seriousness” in fear of victimization or retaliation (North, 2016). As a result, “a culture of secrecy” highlights the issue in the Australian news media industry (Ibid.). In Indiana newspapers, almost 68 percent of interviewed women journalists experienced sexual harassment, with verbal harassment becoming the most notable form (Flatow, 1994).

The issue of discrimination against women in Arab journalism is not widely discussed in the literature, as much of the work conducted in the area of women and the media focuses primarily on the representation of women in media content. The research often neglects whether



stereotypical representation of women in media content is related to less women empowerment in the newsroom. The literature often lacks a focus on gender balance within the newsrooms, legal and policy frameworks in which women journalists operate, and actual representation of women in leadership and top management positions.

Nicolas (2010) who surveyed the Lebanese media concluded that the increasing number of women hired in media organizations did not mean that they have more influence on the content. For her, hiring more women journalists guaranteed that “they have a presence [in the media] but not a role”. Giving an example of Egypt, Sakr (2002) suggested that Arab and Egyptian media coverage of women issues was primarily negative despite having more women hired and reaching top editorial positions. She argued that more women are hired in the broadcasting sector, with many women reaching leading positions in state-owned television, but none of these measures led to any positive coverage of women issues. Seniority does not necessarily translate to authority over the content (Sakr, 2002). This is primarily due to the fact that decision-making in media institutions is rather in the hands of male leaders and tied to political maneuvers that transcend women’s ability to control content (Nicolas, 2010).

Broadcast journalism is one medium that is widely believed to be an area where Arab women journalists excelled in (Miladi, 2010). Hiring more women in the broadcasting sector, who rose to fame while reporting in conflict zones especially the Arab-Israeli conflict or the US invasion of Iraq, was related to the success of mass movements that push for women participation in all aspects of life and a credibility factor of media organizations (Miladi, 2010). Arab women has increasingly utilised new media either in satellite or internet mediums to push for a more progressive discussion of social taboos, but reporting is still largely dominated by male correspondents (Miladi, 2010). Activists, journalists, and advocates for social and political

change are increasingly and strategically using new internet technologies to push for gendered mainstreaming of taboo issues (Skalli, 2006). However, the impact of such intervention remains to be “subtle and symbolic than openly radical or revolutionary” (ibid.). The Lebanon-based Heya TV is considered one of such initiatives that offer a feminist outlook for women issues and alternative platform for women in the media (Matar, 2007). However, the progressive broadcaster is still believed to be “a small fish in big water” (Matar, 2007). Ayish (2010) suggested an empowerment-based framework to address the environment where women journalists work. He proposes that addressing broader psychological, political, social and economic barriers to female empowerment in the society is integral to have more empowered women journalists. Only fundamental changes in these broader aspects will have a trickle-down effect on women journalists’ empowerment in media (Ayish, 2010).

Some experiences from Arab countries with the challenges facing women journalists in media organizations showed similar results. In Lebanon, Mallat and Melki (2014) surveyed 250 Lebanese and international women correspondents living in the small Arab country and concluded that a number of challenges work systematically to block women entry to news media. These challenges include gender discrimination, sexual harassment and limited legal empowerment (Mallat and Melki, 2014). Structural, institutional and cultural obstacles continue to face women in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Arab world (ibid.). Iraqi women journalists, similarly, witnessed difficult conditions in their work, despite the opportunities offered to them after the US invasion in 2003 to access the job market in the news media (Al-Rawy, 2010). Violence and the state of lawlessness impacted women journalists’ security in the field and pushed them to seek protection inside the ethnic groups they belong to, which impacted their

independence (ibid.). Women journalists who tried to fairly and independently report on the news were rather threatened or kidnapped by rival armed groups in the country (ibid.).

In the gulf region, research on women journalists and the roles they play is very few. Sakr (2008) explained that while the media played a major role as an important space for re-negotiation of women roles in Saudi Arabia, more visibility of women in media content was accompanied by little representation of women journalists in decision-making positions. In the UAE, a portrait of female journalists is pretty surprising, with almost 80 percent of female journalists are expatriates (Kirat, 2004). Women journalists in the UAE tend to generally avoid speaking about critical issues, so their experiences are reportedly happy (ibid.).

Egypt led the Arab world with the number of publications focusing on women-related issues since the late 19th century, but Egyptian and Arab women continue to suffer from a “traditional sexist” approach by male bosses towards them (Abdel Rahman, 2008). Male bosses view their female coworkers as less professional, and consequently tend to send male journalists to conferences, training programs and appointing them in leadership positions more than (ibid.,).

## **IV. Methodology**

In this study, I examine an issue that is not widely discussed in the literature, in a region where interest in research is not very high. Therefore, I choose to use a qualitative technique. Qualitative research is very important in studying “little-known phenomena” (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). The study also employed the technique of using in-depth interviews with female journalists. This qualitative method is known to be the best strategy to investigate “deep meanings of experience in participants’ own words” (ibid. p.10). I examined through these interviews the “individual lived experience” (ibid.) of the research participants.

I conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with twenty early to mid-career female journalists, who work in government-owned, privately-owned and independent news media. These journalists work in print, broadcast and online news media organizations in Egypt. I decided to limit the level of experience of the study participants to be a maximum 15 years of experience. By doing this, I focused on a generation of female journalists who entered the news media job market with the changing structure of media ownership, traditionally starting in the late 2000s. This also gave me the opportunity to examine if gender disparities vary according to the type of ownership. There is also a general perception that working in government-owned news media usually means better job security for female journalists. I decided also to include some participants who work in independent news media institutions, to examine whether independent sources of financing, as explained in the conceptual framework, can be a positive factor in empowering women journalists. In choosing the sample, I had an adequate

representation of women journalists working in print, broadcast and online media. As seen in the literature, women journalists tend to experience gender discrimination more in bigger and more traditional newsrooms. A big and traditional newsroom in Egypt would be typically of a print newspaper, being the most dominant form of traditional media in Egypt. The research has also shown that women journalists in broadcast media are usually judged based on their sexuality and looks more than their professionalism, this is why it is important to see how prevalent these perceptions are within women journalists working in broadcast media in Egypt. The research has also shown that women journalists working in online newsrooms have better opportunities for empowerment and professional development than their counterparts in traditional news media organizations.

In identifying my research sample, I used purposive and snowballing techniques. Purposive sampling is a technique where the judgement of the expert is used for a specific purpose in mind that fits the research criteria (Neuman, 2006). The research participants are often “unique cases that are especially informative” (ibid.). I used my experience as an Egyptian woman journalist myself in this study to purposively employ my research participants who fit the criteria that I put forward in the above paragraphs. I also used a snowballing technique where I asked my research participants to refer me to other potential informants that they think might fit the criteria I put. Snowballing, or “chain referral sampling”, is a non-probability sampling technique where study participants use their “social networks” to recruit other participants (Mack et. al, 2005). The technique is largely used to identify “hidden populations” (ibid). These are the participants who are difficult to reach primarily due to the fact that the research subject is sensitive, and participants are generally reluctant to openly speak to researchers. Because my

research participants may share sensitive information relating to their workplace experiences, it is preferred that I use the snowballing technique in my study.

Ethical considerations were applied as per the guidelines of the American University in Cairo's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Approval of IRB committee have been obtained in November 2018. The data for this study has been collected between December 2017 until November 2018. Part of the data was collected as part of another study on the difficulties women journalists face in reaching leadership positions in Egypt. IRB approval was also given for this study. For the ethical consideration of doing no harm, I ensured the confidentiality of the information shared with me by the research participants. Neither names of the research participants nor the organizations they work for are mentioned. To ensure that confidentiality is not breached by the use of the snowballing technique, respondents who recommend other participants do not know whether the participants they recommended have actually participated in the study nor they knew the nature of the information they shared. Interviews were recorded and saved on a password-secured computer owned by the researcher. Only the researcher have access to these records and coding and transcription was carried out by the researcher only.

## **V. Forgotten femininity: How Egyptian women journalists experience workplace discrimination?**

The results of the study show that Egyptian women journalists experience varying degrees of workplace discrimination. Gender disparities are a result of lack of fair and transparent institutional policies needed to ensure equality and empowerment of women. The results have proven that the severity of these experiences vary dramatically according to the type of ownership of the media institutions. In the following sections, the researcher has identified five main areas in which Egyptian women journalists have experienced gender-based discrimination at the workplace. These areas include: unfair policies for hiring, promotion and wages; difficulty maintaining work-life balance; gendered workplace practices and sexual harassment; discrimination in the allocation of important work assignments; and controversial experiences with women leaders in their institutions.

### **A. Promotions, hiring and wage: The policy is no policy**

When it comes to hiring, promotions and wages, the main factor is that policies organizing these issues either do not exist, as in the case of journalists working in private institutions, or exist but are poorly implemented or manipulated as in the case of state-run media institutions. Journalists in their early careers, whether working in state-run or private institutions, do not have any powers to negotiate their salaries or promotions, and their male colleagues are usually given the priority in getting higher salaries and promotions.

In this experience, an Egyptian woman journalist working in a state-run organization for 13 years said she had to work for five years without a permanent contract. She speaks of the episodes of discrimination she encountered.

*“My boss always viewed me as the spoiled girl who lives in a posh neighbourhood and owns a car. He thought I only come here for leisure. If I do good work, he would publish it without putting my name on it. He has always blocked any attempts to get me hired on a permanent contract. The salaries of people on temporary contracts are called achievement bonuses, and are determined by my boss. He would give me LE150 and give my male colleagues LE450. He always said that men need the money more because they spend on their families. If you are on a temporary contract, you have no rights. You only do what you are asked to do.”* (Journalist working in state-run newspaper, November 2018).

The wage gap noted by the respondent in this regard should be directly attributed to the fact that her male superior views her decision to work as a luxury and unnecessary. This concern has been echoed by all respondents who complained of the wage gap in their institutions. Women’s decisions to work and develop their careers are often not taken seriously, a view stemming from deeply rooted traditions that designates certain gender roles for men and women. Men are viewed as the sole breadwinners for their families and hence they should be given bigger salaries. In the quote, the male manager is clearly undermining the journalists work using a very sexist behavior. Taking women's decision to work less seriously and undermining their efforts are used as tools to justify the pay gap. A similar experience was reported by a woman journalist with ten years of experience in a private newspaper.

*“I always heard these silly words: Your father gives you your pocket money. Do you want to tell us that your salary is enough to cover your expenses?”* (Journalist working in a private newspaper, November 2018).

In this experience, the respondent was at the early stage of her career, not married and living with her family. This usually gives the assumption that unmarried women usually do not equally need the money as men do. These excuses are usually used against women to further deepen the wage gap in media institutions. In private institutions, the situation does not change when women are employed on permanent contracts, they are still paid way less their male



colleagues. A respondent who has been working in a private newspaper for six years says her salary was less compared to other men in the same position.

*“When I was on a temporary contract, I was paid LE3000 with LE300 deducted as taxes. After the permanent contract, my gross salary was LE3500 but my net salary was LE2500 after deducting salaries and social insurance. Since then I received the same salary. In the contrary, my male colleagues are paid triple of what I get.”* (Journalist working for a private newspaper, November 2018).

A lack of transparent policies that define the expected wage scale of every position is evident in these cases. Women journalists have repeatedly said that they have not been aware of any policies on the allocation of salaries, and that they knew of the salaries of their male colleagues via informal means, usually through gossiping, discussions and friendly connections.

The experience of women journalists working in television have shown a different form of the wage gap. We will see in upcoming sections that men journalists are usually given more important job assignments, a policy that has contributed greatly to further deepening the wage gap.

*“Salaries differ according to which program you work for. If you work for a light midday show, like me, you are usually paid less than those who work in prime-time night shows. All women work in the midday shows, while men work in the important shows at night, because women cannot stay late.”* (Journalist working in a private TV station).

Here, it seems that men and women are given their wages fairly, because salaries are determined by how much money one show gets through advertisements. But because women are generally pressured by their household duties and their inability to stay late at night, they usually choose to work in TV shows at midday that usually pay less. A spiral of discriminatory practices here further enhances the wage gap.

While there is a general feeling that there is no wage gap in state-run institutions due to the strict implementation of the labor law and the existence of fair and transparent wage policies, the following experience explains how such policies can be manipulated.

*“Our salaries usually consist of the basic salary and monthly and quarterly bonuses. Bonuses are the bulk of our salaries. Our bylaws give chief editors the full powers in determining how much bonuses should be given to every reporter based on an evaluation of our performance. My boss allocates more bonus money to men. When we complained, he cancelled our bonuses altogether in one incident. As a state-run institution, we can report this to the labor office, but the managers always find their ways in circumventing the scrutiny of the labor offices. We have staff representatives in the management board, but they are the voice of the managers not the employees”.* (Journalist working in state-run newspaper, November 2018).

This testimony challenges the general conviction that state-run institutions offer better work environment for women. In this case, internal bylaws give major powers to chief editors in allocating bonuses, who in turn use it against women journalists. There are no clear performance indicators based on which all journalists can be evaluated. Other women journalists in state-run organizations said that some chief editors give the same bonuses for everyone, while others decide not to disclose the policy they follow in allocating bonuses.

Women working in privately-owned online news websites face similar challenges, with their decision to work are again viewed as luxury.

*“My salary is LE3,000, and the salary of my colleague who sits next to me is LE3900. When we demanded equal pay, our managers told us that men are responsible for their households while women come here to play and leave. When I objected, I was told to leave the job to others who need it the most.”* (Journalist working in a private news website, November 2018).

This experience indicates that women who speak out against discrimination are often threatened with losing their jobs, with these threats increasing if women work in the private sector or on temporary contracts. It also shows the lack of any legitimate ways to channel their

grievances and complaints. Job insecurity and the resulting power distance force many women to surrender at the end.

Women journalists have also referred to various experiences where men were favored in promotions. Those working in private institutions say there are no clear policies on how reporters are promoted, with decisions on promotions usually taken behind the closed doors of the chief editors' offices.

This journalist has been working in the investigations department in a private newspaper for 14 years, without receiving a single promotion.

*"I should have been the head of the department, but they decided to bring a male colleague from another department because I'm a woman. Those who joined the newspaper as interns under my supervision are now managing editors and I have been in my position for 14 years. I get LE4000 and my previous intern gets LE12,000".* (Award-winning journalist working in a private newspaper, November 2018).

In TV stations, especially in private ones, women journalists have complained that women usually are less fortunate when it comes to promotions, with upward career paths usually reserved for men.

*"Men are paid more and have the priority when it comes to promotions. You know what, only men are promoted. Women never get promotions. I stayed in one TV station for ten years in the same position, and my colleague who joined the station five years after I did was promoted as chief of correspondents. His only quality was organizing the schedule of his boss. The only exception for a woman to be promoted is her looks. If she is good looking and cute, she will be promoted. One of my interns, who could not even hold the microphone while we film was appointed as a presenter for a main show, only because she is good looking."* (Journalist working as TV correspondent for private TV station, November 2018).

This coincides with the research done by Mellor (2013) in her study of ban-Arab broadcast media, where she proposes that hiring policies in these institutions are largely gendered and that the choice of women TV presenters and reporters primarily depends on their

physical appearance as a “marketing tool” for the organizations. The correspondent had to quit her job and work in another station, still under similar conditions.

Women journalists have reported varying experiences in getting their pregnancy-related vacations and rights. According to the labor law, employers are obliged to give female employees three months of paid maternity leaves, leaving one hour early for breastfeeding and oblige work institutions hiring more than 50 women to have nurseries at the workplace. Journalists working in state-run media organizations said they managed to get these rights because of a proper application of the labor law, despite noting that their organizations have not provided nurseries at the workplace.

Women’s resistance to discriminatory policies in birth and pregnancy-related rights is always met with rejection, with their legal rights being viewed as only limited to the governmental sector. These perceptions often reflect poor application and understanding of labor laws as well as poor state oversight over private institutions. In similar incidents, women journalists said that their united efforts to work more hours in exchange for taking an extra day off, or their attempts to bring a nanny to take care of their children during work were all rejected by their institutions.

Generally, research participants have explained that their way towards career progression is always marred by difficulties. An evident wage gap, unfair and non-transparent hiring and promotion policies and their inability to get pregnancy-related rights are all clear signals of workplace discrimination systemically practiced at the institutional level. They complained that there are no policies to determine hiring, salaries and promotions and that having successful careers is directly linked to being able to establish good personal relationships with their superiors. They noted that women are less likely to have access to those in power in their

institutions, adding that this accessibility is always linked to women's willingness to offer "unfavorable concessions" usually of a sexual nature.

## **B. Maintaining work-life balance: A difficult mission**

Weidekamm and-Willer (2012) found out in their study of effort of women health professionals to maintain work-life balance that their domestic roles, including childcare duties and responsibility for family life have been the main barriers to keep that balance. Journalism, just like medicine, is similarly a demanding job. Journalists usually have to cover breaking news at any time of the day. They are usually pressured to stay for long hours at night, travel to conduct job assignments in different cities or abroad, or report in very hostile and violent environments. In this study, the interviewed journalists referred to two main challenges when trying to maintain that balance: one at the professional level, especially in privately owned media institutions where labor laws are poorly applied. Another challenge was at the family level where women journalists, whether married or unmarried, struggle to keep the balance between building successful careers and their family expectations of women's gender roles.

Women working in state-owned media organizations have pointed out that flexible working hours have allowed them to maintain a better work-life balance. This journalist who works in a state-owned TV channel, said that working in her weekly morning show has allowed her to have better control over her personal life.

*"I don't have to go to work everyday, this is how I managed to finish both my masters and doctoral degrees. I only come during the day of the show and few other days to film street reports."* (TV producer working in state-run TV channel, November 2018).

All women journalists working in state-run organizations have deemed these institutions as unfavorable work environments, citing routine, state-control, inability of the organizations to

modernize, and sexism. However, they all agreed that flexible working hours and their ability to maintain work-life balance as well as the “respect” of working in a public sector job were the main factors making public sector a favorable choice for women journalists. The notion of respect that a public sector job offers is very clear in the following quote:

*“My family believed for a long time that journalism is not a suitable job for women. So I had to balance between my career ambitions and their expectations. For them, a state-owned newspaper is suitable for women.”* (Journalist working for state-run newspaper, November 2018).

There is a general trust in the public sector as an employer for women and women journalists who work in private institutions say they wish to work in the public sector because it would again give them the “respect” that private sector jobs do not give, which was similarly noted by Barsoum (2015) in her examination of the public sector as the employer of choice among Egyptian youth. This notion of respect for women is generally viewed by families of women journalist as important, a factor that helped unmarried women journalists maintain the balance between their careers and families.

In contrary, unmarried women journalists working in the private sector said it was more difficult for them to maintain work-life balance. This journalist who works in a private newspaper said that work commitments have made traveling to spend the weekend or Eid vacations with her family who lives in the Delta “nearly impossible” .

*“I only take one day off, not two. It is nearly impossible for me to travel to spend one day with my family and come back. In Eid and official vacations, it is an additional burden because sometimes you have to work during these shifts. I cannot spend the vacation with my family and it leads to many pressures and problems with the family.”* (Journalist working in a private newspaper, December 2017).

Unmarried women journalists, like the one speaking in the above quote, have continuously cited concerns about relationship with their families and how they are usually

impacted by their choice to work as reporters. What compounds the burdens of the journalists is the organizations' disregard to the specific needs of women and the organizations' inability to accommodate these needs in their policies.

But in many cases, traditions and patriarchy can stand in the face of women's choices of professional development even if they work in a supportive work environment where their needs are understood and accommodated. This journalist who worked in a news website focusing on cinema has gone through a life-threatening experience because of her inability to balance between her job requirements and family expectations.

*"I used to cover news related to cinema and arts, and my sources usually work late at night. I told my boss that it will be very difficult for me to come home very late. Because he believed in me, he decided to hire a taxi driver who is tasked with taking me home at night. One day I was covering a festival which ended very late. I came home at 2am and my father beat me so hard. I have never been beaten like this before. He beat me so hard that he almost broke his hand and my face was covered with blood. I submitted my resignation the second day." (Journalist working in a private news website, November 2018).*

Here, the challenge goes beyond maintaining balance between job responsibilities and family expectations. While work-life balance is usually faced by women unable to meet the needs of their jobs and household responsibilities, this quote shows that even unmarried journalists can face more serious consequences for choosing to work in a demanding job like journalism. Women journalists who are not married are expected to follow a certain social conduct, or else face life-threatening consequences including crimes of gender-based violence. Her decision to quit her job explains the sacrifices of women journalists not only to keep their jobs, but also their struggles to ensure their personal safety, dignity and well-being. The journalist explained that it is too difficult for her to challenge her father's patriarchal authority. Social pressures that women journalists can face at the family and household levels are often

used by male superiors to justify discrimination against women at workplaces with the assumption that journalism is a job for males only. Many of the interviewed journalists said that their inability to maintain work-life balance has pushed them to office-based jobs, freelance jobs or led to their complete withdrawal from the job market. It is important to note that women journalists are not just expected to balance between their careers and household responsibilities, but rather pressured to also balance between their career choices and the society's patriarchal norms that impose certain behaviors on women. Failing to meet this balance can result in dangerous consequences like the above experience.

The experience of this woman journalist working in a local private news website in Upper Egypt offers a deeper insight into women's decision to accept less rewarding jobs.

*"I live in a small village and I have to take three minibuses to move from and to work everyday. It is impossible for me to come late to home, it will harm my reputation and I won't get married. Journalism is a job with a very bad reputation in my community. People never accept seeing girls traveling and talking to strangers all the time. In addition to this, I get paid so little. My father always wondered why I should continue working in this job. I had to accept working in office-based jobs and do less field work unfortunately. My male colleagues progressed and some of them even moved to Cairo in better jobs. I can't even think of traveling alone to Cairo." (Journalist working in private news website in Upper Egypt, December 2017).*

In this quote, the journalist spoke about how journalism can be threatening to her reputation as a woman living in a conservative society like Upper Egypt. Worrying about being unable to get married and her inability to go back home early have forced her to work in less rewarding jobs, in comparison with other male journalists who managed to escape the marginalisation in Upper Egypt and find better opportunities in the center. Burdens of maintaining work-life balance for unmarried journalists go beyond the need to carry out their traditional household duties and extend to balance between their careers and their family and society's expectations of what a woman's proper behavior should be. Unmarried women



journalists may not have husbands or children to take care of, but they have families, reputation and honor to protect. In this quote, the journalist is pressured not only to respond to pressures by her family to come home at a certain hour, but also to pressures by her neighbors and members of her closer community. It reflects how patriarchal norms cannot coexist with a difficult job.

Married women journalists, on the other hand, have spoken of their struggle in maintaining work-life balance, with their failure to do so impacting either their careers or their relationships with their partners. A journalist working for a private newspaper said that she was hired on a temporary contract when she had her first child, and because she cannot take the paid maternity leave, she asked for three months of unpaid maternity leave.

*“But I have to cut my vacation when my son was two month old only because they were hiring some of us on permanent contracts and I did not want to lose this opportunity. I had to leave my son at a nursery because my mom lives in another city and she can’t take care of him.”* (Journalist working in a private newspaper, November 2018).

While some of the journalists working in private institutions said they did not face resistance from their organizations in taking their maternity leaves especially if they are hired on permanent contracts, all of the journalists working in private institutions said they struggled to get their rights relating to pregnancy and children.

*“I tried to negotiate with my boss to leave one hour early for breastfeeding my daughter or taking one extra day off but he refused. He said that we work in a private institution not in the government.”* (Journalist working in a private online news website, December 2017).

The experience of this woman journalist reflects the extent to which the poor application of the labor law in the private sector deepens the struggle of women in maintaining work-life balance. Employers in private media institutions link such legal rights with public sector jobs only. The following quote further highlights such struggles before and after marriage.

*“Before marriage, I used to work for almost 20 hours per day. My bosses liked me at the time. When I got married, they started to put me in trivial job assignments because I had to work only for the eight hours designated for me to get my son from the kindergarten. My bosses started shaming me for leaving early, they started telling me that I’m half-correspondent. One of my bosses told me that I work in a TV station not a charity, and that I’m the ownership of the channel and that he has the right to use me whenever he wants.”* (Correspondent working for a private TV channel, November 2018).

In this quote, news organizations often view workers’ right to only work during official hours and refusing to work for extra hours as a matter of luxury. The employer believes that committing to the usual working hours is only limited to charities. Such perceptions reflect the harsh realities lived by women journalists working in the private sector and the poor application of the labor law. The journalist had to eventually quit her job in this TV station and work in another TV station in an entertainment show with flexible working hours.

Other women choose not to sacrifice their careers, which often result in going through unsuccessful marriages.

*“I was engaged to a colleague who works in the same institution that I work for. Being a journalist himself, he said he will support me as he understands my job obligations. But everything changed after our engagement. He started objecting to me coming late from work, traveling for field assignments or speaking to certain sources. I decided to end this relationship. Women journalists usually need to choose between their careers or their personal life, we can’t have both.”* (Journalist working for private newspaper, December 2017).

Many of the women journalists interviewed in this study referred to problems they faced, not only with their partners, but with their employers once they decided to get married. Many of the respondents said they were automatically banned from covering certain assignments or were explicitly told that they will not be hired on permanent contracts. Such policies have pushed many women to delay the decision of marriage.

Those who said they managed to balance between their household duties and work requirements often had to keep such balance on the expense of their personal wellbeing.

*“I was pregnant in my eighth month when I worked in an investigation to cover a major train accident against the advice of my doctor. I have been working for 14 years in the investigations department and I never asked for any exceptional treatment to fulfil my household duties. I have committed myself to spending an equal amount of time with my husband and kids. My husband is not always happy and sometimes problems arise, but I’m very good at solving them.”* (Journalist working in a private newspaper, November 2018).

This journalist here believes that demanding flexible working hours is a form of an exceptional treatment. The organizations’ reluctance to accommodate women’s needs to maintain work-life balance has pushed women not to ask for their legitimate legal rights in fear of losing their jobs. Instead, they decided to maintain the balance even if it meant sacrificing their own peace of mind.

*“I’m a single mother and I have no one else to look for my child. Before marriage, I used to work in the news department in a newspaper. After having my son, I had to leave my job and work in a news channel where I work on an entertainment show aired at midday. I have to do this to take care of my son. I have never been proud of any work I do now, I’m in a state of professional depression.”* (TV correspondent working in a private TV station, November 2018).

Keeping the work-life balance is a difficult mission for women journalists. Whether married or not, journalists are always put between a rock and a hard place, where they have to choose between a stable family life or a successful career. With the exception of state-run organizations, private employers are usually reluctant to offer flexible working hours for women. In the very rare cases when women’s needs were accommodated by the employers, women journalists struggle with their families. Not only do they have to balance between their jobs and practical household duties, but they should conform to the societal expectations of gender roles and what a women’s proper behavior should be. Those who rarely managed to maintain this balance said this usually came on the expense of their personal comfort and wellbeing.

## **C. Gendered practices and sexual harassment: Sometimes coping, sometimes resisting, but always failing**

Few month ago, a female fashion editor filing a sexual harassment complaint against her powerful boss has taken the journalism community in Egypt by surprise. May El-Shamy, who worked at Youm 7 pro-government newspaper have officially accused the paper's managing editor of sexual harassment, allegations that he denied. Shamy told the Washington Post in October that she is proud of what she did, only one month before prosecution ended the investigations in the case due to insufficient evidence. With her powerful boss in charge, Shamy was banned from entering her workplace, technically losing her job. The following data shows Shamy's case is not an isolated incident.

The experience of this journalist working in a state-run newspaper explains the extent of such power relations. One of her former chief editors had a history of sexual harassment based on which he was temporarily suspended from work.

*"We were surprised to see him promoted to be a chief editor. We were very scared because he was known for sexually harassing women when they are alone in his office. Me and my colleague used to run a weekly entertainment section which he cancelled and we knew he did this on purpose to force us into meeting him in his office. We would never be alone with him in the office, we usually asked his secretary to be with us. Once we met him alone, he moved from his office and sat next to us. Every time we move away, he would come closer. We came to a point where we were technically glued to the wall and we had to run away. There is no way to report him. He was suspended for a little and was then promoted to be a chief editor. All what I can do is to avoid being in one place with him. If I'm in a situation where he actually sexually harasses me, I would beat him immediately." (Journalist working in state-run newspaper, November 2018).*

This experience shows that the existing organizational culture and the lack of institutional policies do not support women to confront sexual harassment. Her coping strategy is usually limited to constantly avoiding any interaction with her boss. But what is more important here would be her thinking to beat him if she feels a direct threat. First, it shows how running out of

options and lack of support can often force women into using violence and risking the possibility of him fighting her back. Second, it shows the extent of power relations. When asked if her decision to beat him would make her lose the job, she said the level of job security she enjoys as a government employee is vital in this case, and that she would only be subject to administrative penalties. When asked about how he was promoted despite his reputation, she said that his appointment followed the aftermath of January 25 revolution as he enjoyed strong relationship with the political leadership at the time. It shows that appointments of leaders in state-run organizations are usually determined by the leader's ability to appease the political leadership rather than competence or reputation, which dramatically impacts women's safety at the workplace.

The intersectionality of gender and other factors also plays an important role in shaping the experience of female journalists with sexist practices. A young journalist with only three years of experience who works in a state-run news website speaks about the comments she hears once she steps into the gate of the influential institution she works for.

*"I don't wear the hijab. I would say al-salam alykum and no one responds, I heard some of the colleagues working in other publications in the institution calling me a Kafra (Arabic for infidel or atheist). The website I work for is a news website in English. Because of my appearance and attitude, they identify me immediately as working in the English section. They would give me a certain look, I'm being looked at as the creme de la creme in the place."* (Journalist working in state-run news website, November 2018).

In this experience, the journalist feels alienated because of her appearance, attitude and the foreign language she speaks. The experience shows the intersections of various themes, including class, age, religion and gender. Because of not wearing the hijab, wearing ripped jeans and dying her hair in red, some of her male workers jumped to the conclusion that she is not Muslim, and hence decided not to respond to her use of the Islamic greeting "Al-Alam Alykum". Because she speaks a foreign language and received her education in a private university, she is

seen as an outsider who comes from a higher class. While being perceived as someone coming from a higher social class should have granted her more respect, she explained that her young age and gender made her perceived social class a factor against her.

The building where she works includes several publications owned by the bigger institution. She noted she only heard sexist comments whenever she meets one of those working in other publications. But inside the small newsroom she works in, she says she always felt welcomed.

*“I believe that this is directly because I work in an English section. The managing editor of the website is exceptionally a woman, and the people working here have better education, younger, and come from a different culture.”* (Journalist working in a state-run English news website, November 2018)

The young journalist here refers to a supportive woman leader, younger colleagues with which the power distance is much less and the level of education of co-workers as factors that helped her to feel more welcomed in her smaller work environment. Contrary to this experience, another woman journalist working in a state-run TV station said that being a woman and the youngest in the work environment has deepened the power distance and marginalized her even further.

*“I’m 31 but I’m the youngest in the organization and the last one to join. I’m always seen as the new comer despite spending several years here. When I came, I didn’t know which program I should work for because the older reporters had established their programs and their careers. When I work with an older reporter, he would never help me because he does not want to me access his sources. It took me a long time to circumvent this. Being the youngest means I don’t have a voice, I’m inclined to withdraw in order not to face criticism. If you are nice and cute, it will be easier for you to mingle more. The woman who puts limits on her relationships at work is the one who faces more difficulties.”* (Producer working in a state-run TV channel, November 2018).

The intersectionality of gender and age is very clear in this quote. Young women find it difficult to voice their concerns or develop their careers. They are usually faced with challenges

with older males. Being “cute and nice” in her opinion can make the process of women inclusion in the workplace much easier. When she was asked to explain what it means to be cute and nice, she hesitantly referred to women being easy going and removing controls when dealing with men colleagues.

Women working in privately-owned news organizations have reportedly had more direct threats of sexual harassment that reflect on a deeply sexist workplace culture. In all of these experiences, women had no powers to report these incidents and rather adopted very negative coping strategies. Those who said they confronted sexual harassment were often alienated and labelled as aggressive or extremist feminists. As Berdahl (2007) explained, powerful women or those regarded as “uppity” usually face sexual harassment as a form of punishment.

This woman working in a private newspaper said that confronting sexual harassment have impacted her career, and made her feel alienated in her workplace.

*“I have encountered many situations where my colleagues would give me looks that make me uncomfortable. I started treating them badly, when they asked why I’m aggressive with them, I looked to them in the eye and said because they are sexual harassers. They won’t consider their looks as sexual harassment, but I always make my point clear. Of course this attitude alienated me, but I don’t mind if this is the only way to protect myself.”* (Journalist working for a private newspaper, November 2018)

This experience shows that women sometimes have to acquire certain qualities, like being firm, direct, and sometimes aggressive, in order to avoid sexual harassment. These male-like qualities are sometimes needed to fend off potential threats. Many of the respondents have repeatedly said that they use this coping strategy in many cases in order to expose a certain image about them. One of the respondents said that working in a male-dominated job like journalism meant “forgetting my femininity”.

Giving up on feminine traits is a common strategy for women journalists. In the following quote, one young woman journalist spoke of her decision to cover up and change the way she walks to avoid sexual harassment.

*“I used to work for a private newspaper where the chief editor used to comment on my dress code. Once he directly came to me and said: The way you walk is very sexy, you make me aroused. I walked away in disbelief and I didn’t continue in the job for quite a long time. In my current job, I faced several incidents of sexual harassment. A colleague of mine never looks to a woman in the eye, he always looks at our breasts. I called him Mr. Boobs. Me and my friends always wear shawls in the office to cover up. I’m so frustrated because I can’t speak out against this. One time a young trainee was sexually harassed by one of the managers, but the bosses covered up on the whole thing and the poor girl had to leave. I spoke to one of the managers but he blamed the victim. I felt helpless.”* (Journalist working for a private news website, November 2018).

In this experience, the journalist speaks of a poisonous work environment where sexism and sexual harassment are deeply rooted in the organizational culture of the workplace. Managers are not shy to say clear sexist comments to women workers, who are often helpless. Due to the lack of policies against sexual harassment at the workplace, sexual harassment is often tolerated and male managers systemically block women’s attempts to report them. Coping mechanisms here are usually limited to trying to control her dress code, walk in a certain way or act conservatively.

Sexual harassment in these cases have pushed the respondents to withdraw, limit their professional exposure to sources and colleagues, or even turn down job offers because they cannot offer sexual concessions.

*“I was very young and a fresh graduate. I went to apply for a job and met a famous journalist. He did not even look at my resume, he did not ask a single question about the job offer. He chatted a little and asked me for a dinner. I knew from the way he asked that it wasn’t an innocent dinner.”* (Journalist working at a private newspaper, December 2017).

Not only did the journalist turn down the job offer, but she also decided not to apply in a certain job unless she knows people that she personally knows in the organization. She explained



that she had to stick to a very limited circle of trustworthy connections through which she can access new offers and opportunities. While such a coping strategy have impacted her professional development, she said that it has been an effective mechanism to protect herself. Another journalist said that gendered practices in the workplace have pushed her to work in a small newsroom with an office-based job.

Despite the very harsh experiences that the respondents referred to, two journalists working in independent news websites have referred to a dramatically different experience. Both journalists have said that their organizations have discussed the need for introducing policies for sexual harassment and bullying, in light of the current #MeToo campaign and the need for creating safe spaces for women in Egypt. While one respondent said the policy is yet to be drafted, another said that the policy have been approved with the participation of female and male workers.

One journalist spoke of the first application of the policy and explained how an independently financed news organization with a progressive line and supportive leadership have helped women journalists channel their concerns about discrimination in the workplace.

*“Women in the organization felt for a very long time that the atmosphere in the newsroom is poisonous and unwelcoming for women. Women are being increasingly bullied. If a woman speaks loudly, male colleagues would shush her very violently. So much bullying was taking place. I spoke to the chief editor (a woman) and the HR specialist (a woman) and both decided to organize a forum for the women working in the organization to voice their concerns. The meeting took place at the home of the chief editor and she cooked for us. As a sign of protest, we did not attend the morning news shift this day. We agreed to write a statement detailing the outcomes of the meeting and there will be official steps taken to address the problem. Also, we agreed that the women will jointly create informal tactics of solidarity in order to collectively confront bullying.”* (Journalist working in an independent online news website, November 2018).

In this case, women journalists managed to utilize exceptionally powerful tools to confront gendered practices at the workplace. Protesting, declining to participate in news shifts,

meeting to discuss possible ways to confront sexism with an institutional support have all been a major driving force for women. In this quote, the journalist works in an independent and progressive news website that is led by a veteran woman journalist. The organization has been working on securing alternative and independent funding sources, which impacted greatly the gender balance in the newsroom. The journalist explained that they managed to protest sexist practices in the workplace without fearing to lose their jobs, mostly because they power distance between them and the leadership is almost non-existent. The approval of a policy against sexual harassment and bullying in the organization was another major helping factor. This case was by far the only one where a written policy against sexual harassment and bullying was approved as part of the organization's policy structure. The approach of using political economy of the news media to explain gender disparities is very important here (Beale and Annette van den Bosch 1998; Byerly 2001; Nagrath 2001 as mentioned in Byerly and Ross 2006). Powerful and rich males owning the media has historically led to greater gender disparity (ibid.) and only news organizations that managed to secure alternative and independent sources of financing to media, like the one above, have been successful in addressing these disparities (Nagrath, 2001).

Discussions with this study's participants have shown that Shamy's case is not an isolated incident. With the exception of only one respondent, all respondents agreed that there are no policies against sexual harassment in their workplaces, and that their organizations' work environments usually encourage deeply gendered practices that in many cases amount to direct sexual harassment. Women's attitudes towards these practices have been mostly negative, saying that they are unable to fight sexual harassment. Those who took firm stances against such practices are usually labelled as aggressive, extremist feminists or unnecessarily reacting to innocent comments. Others choose to remain silent either to avoid stigmatization or for fear of

losing their jobs. Whether resisting or choosing to be silent, women say they feel marginalized or withdrawn in their workplaces, which impacted their professional development. It is worth noticing that the younger the respondents are, the more likely to be subject to sexual harassment and more likely to remain silent.

Experiences with gendered workplace relations and sexual harassment also varied according to the type of the ownership of the organization. Women working in state-run institutions say their experiences with sexism and sexual harassment were mostly subtle and less direct than those working in private institutions. Barsoum (2014) have noted that the power relations in the public sector are usually more “relaxed” than those in the private sector, which could possibly serve as an empowering tool for women journalists. Women working in independent news organizations said they felt more empowered to fight back against sexist practices.

#### **D. Work assignments: Men come first**

Giving priority to men while allocating important work assignments or covering certain news beats has been one major source of frustration for most of the female journalists interviewed in this study. Just like women’s decision to work is always not taken seriously, so does their professionalism. Women struggle to cover news in subjects that are deemed highly political or serious, and usually specialize in covering topics that are viewed as an extension of their domestic roles like motherhood and childhood, light or “fluffy” news, entertainment, fashion, etc. Covering political news, investigations, defense, security, terrorism, or important breaking news and events like conferences organized by the presidency are generally reserved for men. Journalists working in broadcast media, especially TV, are generally assigned to work

assignments where their appearance serves as an image to the TV station. Women in these work environments would cover news related to embassies and foreign organizations “to give a good image of the organization”, one journalist said.

The decisions to cover violent events, protests, clashes, bombings and similar events that spanned the country since the eruption of January 25 protests in 2011 were also marred by sexist practices. Many of the interviewed women journalists said their supervisors automatically decided that women will not cover these events in order to protect their wellbeing, or out of suspicion that women are not qualified enough to cover these events. When women journalists decided to challenge these decisions, male bosses have decided to overly assign women to cover violent events as a form of punishment. In both cases, women’s individual decisions and personal readiness to cover these events have been always marginalized, and they have not been provided with much-needed training and protection that are usually given to reporters working in hostile environments.

*“Our former chief editor always thought that women are good at covering issues like health and education. He would never assign women to cover the military or any subject that would involve physical activities.”* (Journalist working in a state-run newspaper, November 2018).

Again, the quote indicates how male leaders think of the type of fields that women can cover. They believe that health, education, or any other subjects that link to women’s traditional gender roles at home are what women are good at, hence reproducing and reaffirming the same sexist discourses existing outside the workplace. Covering subjects that require physical activities is always reserved to men, which is in turn an extension of their gender roles in society.

Many of the interviewed respondents have repeatedly pointed out to the allocation of beats like defense and the military to men. This female journalist who works in a state-run TV

channel says these beats have been traditionally reserved to men or women with long years of experience and established careers.

*“I took a course on war reporting, and I applied to cover news related to the military. My application was turned down because there are the big guys who usually cover this beat, and it would upset them if a newcomer takes over their specialization. There are people who cover the police as well as other news. An outsider cannot take over their beats.”* (Correspondent working in a state-owned TV channel, November 2018).

Young and aspiring women are usually looked at as “newcomers” or “outsiders”, and their attempts to venture into covering certain beats that are traditionally male-dominated usually upsets those in charge. According to the journalist, it takes women a long time to overcome these barriers, usually by getting closer to those in power.

One woman working in a state-run magazine tells her experience with working in the magazine’s layout and design department. She was the first one to be appointed in the department after decades of being completely male-dominated. Her appointment, a surprise for her male colleagues, was due to the exceptional encouragement of a former chief editor.

*“My male colleagues thought that working in layout and design is only for men, simply because they have never seen a woman working in this department in any state-run or private publication. They marginalized me, especially that they developed work routines that only suit men. They would work from 7pm till after midnight. When I came and asked that they work in the normal workday hours, they mocked me and said that’s why this job is not suitable for women. But I resisted and insisted to change the work routines. Whenever I made a mistake, they would punish me. But they gave up in the end.”* (Journalist working in a state-run magazine, November 2018).

The journalist here speaks about her experience with a supportive chief editor who gave her the opportunity to work in a male-dominated field, but she notes that this was a personal decision taken by the editor, and not part of a larger institutional policy that encourages women empowerment and diversity in the newsroom. It is noticeable that women’s ability to cover important news or beats has been largely driven by the encouragement and support of individual

managers who believed in the professionalism of women journalists and their abilities to cover important news just like men. The following experience is a similar example.

*“During the war on Gaza in 2012, my female boss told me that she can send me in a reporting assignment with a caravan of political activists moving to the besieged enclave to support the residents during war. In the beginning, the chief editor refused and he only agreed when I signed a paper saying that I’m traveling on my own responsibility and that I’m not in a reporting assignment. I went and it was one of the most important reporting experiences I had. I would have never had this opportunity without the support of my direct boss.”* (Journalist working in a private newspaper, November 2018).

Here, the journalist pledged that she is not in a reporting assignment, but she reported and sent several reports from Gaza. The experience shows the lack of protection of women journalists when they insist to break the barriers and work in hostile environments, they are often allowed to, but they are left to bear the responsibility of the consequences alone.

Covering violent events and clashes in Tahrir square in the past few years has been an issue of major concern for the women journalists interviewed in this study. Many of the journalists said that their organizations have collectively decided not to send women to report on such assignments, while others said that women were deliberately left to cover these events as a form of punishment.

*“Covering politics is always exhausting and not bound to certain times. That’s why it has been always labelled as a beat for males only. Covering this beat for over ten years, I have faced a lot of resistance from male colleagues and superiors. In most of the time I succeeded, but sometimes it came on the expense of my personal safety. One time I was asked to cover protests in Tahrir square at a time when waves of mob sexual harassment against women were on the rise. I asked to have a male colleague with me and boss refused and said: Aren’t you a strong woman? Go and do your job.”* (Journalist working in a private newspaper, December 2017).

This notion of punishment has been consistently reported by many of the interviewed journalists. They said that organizations usually decide to make assumptions on behalf of women that they cannot cover these events. When women object, male superiors will overly assign them

to report on dangerous events. Generally, news organizations tend to marginalize the reporters by not including them in the decision-making process, which result in either ignoring women's professional abilities or exposing them to dangerous situations. One journalist said women are usually categorized into two stereotypes: marginalized women who cover women-related news and leave work early, or the woman who is adopting masculine traits and is sent to dangerous work assignments.

In some cases, insisting on sending men on certain assignments had impacted the quality of the news reports submitted. In this experience, a woman journalist was assigned to work on a breaking news story, but insisting to send a male reporter who lacked the necessary experience has costed her an important story.

*“There was a measles outbreak in Siwa oasis, and I was assigned to go with another woman colleague because our editor thought that it will be easier for women to enter the houses of the bedouins and interview the mothers of the infected babies. The chief editor, however, insisted that two women cannot travel alone, so he decided to send me on the assignment with another male colleague from the news department who had no prior experience in covering these stories. When we went, we couldn't interview most of our sources and we had to cancel the reporting assignment altogether.”* (Journalist working in a private news website, November 2018).

Assumptions made by leaders of news organizations, given the above example, do not only impact women, but they could also impact the quality of the news content. Organizations need to effectively engage with reporters to decide on their readiness and ability to cover certain assignments based on their abilities and needs, not their gender roles.

*“I generally tend not to cover certain events because of their psychological impacts on me. I refused to cover the Rabea protest camp dispersal and the bombings of the churches. I was penalized for that. I remember having a male colleague who similarly refused to cover violent events. Everyone was mocking him and labelling him as less of a man. I received many journalism trainings and realized that journalists have the right to refuse a certain assignment if they find it threatening to their physical or psychological well-being.”* (Journalist working in a private news website, November 2018).

This example continues to reflect the sexist nature of the editorial decisions taken at news organizations. Women who refuse to comply to the existing culture are penalized, and men who act against the existing division of gender roles inside the newsroom is isolated and bullied. Both measures are taken on an institutional level.

Giving more priorities for men is not only in coverage of certain beats, but also in playing bigger roles in the newsroom. The following experience of this woman journalist indicates how men are given priorities in bigger roles even when women are promoted. In state-run organizations, promotions are usually cosmetic for women.

*“I was recently promoted as the deputy of the department’s head, but this is just a title with no powers or real editorial responsibilities. There are at least five or six other people with same title, it only gives me an increase in the basic salary. I won’t be the deputy of the department head if he took some days off, other males with the same title will most probably replace him”* (Journalist working in a state-run newspaper, November 2018).

In this quote, the experience of this woman journalist indicates that promotions do not necessarily mean more power for women journalists. A promotion is usually considered “just a title” for women, while real powers and control over the editorial line are still in the hands of men.

## **E. Relationship with women leaders: Always contentious, rarely positive**

Women journalists interviewed in this study have continuously used their relationships with their women leaders as an indication of the extent of the deeply-rooted sexism at the workplace. The analysis of these experiences has revealed three different types of these relationships. These



included a non-supportive woman leader in a non-supportive workplace, a supportive woman leader in a non-supportive workplace and a supportive woman leader in a supportive workplace.

In the first type of relationship, the workplace is usually a hostile environment for women, and women who manage to play leading roles are usually exceptional cases. Women journalists often complained in this type of relationship that they face discrimination from these leaders just like male leaders, if not even worse.

*“She used to treat our male colleagues better than us. She would insult me if I committed a mistake. She would comment on our dress code and weight. She used to tell us to forget about marriage. I don’t think that having a woman leader could have any impact on women on the workplace.”* (Journalist working in a state-run newspaper, November 2018).

In the following quote, this woman journalist described her relationship with her woman manager as one that is marred by jealousy and negativity. This notion has been reported by various women journalists, in reference to a toxic work environment where women journalists feel that discouraging other women colleagues is the only way to affirm their leadership roles.

*“Nafsana (Arabic for jealousy) has been always the case when I do any good work. I will never be appreciated, I’m always discouraged and humiliated. I believe she fears from my success.”* (Journalist working in a private newspaper, December 2017).

In the previous two examples, a work environment that is not friendly to women has turned into a place where notions like jealousy and comments on appearance of women are defining characteristics of women leadership. Women leaders in such organizational cultures tend to reproduce the same sexist practices prevalent in the workplace, and exhibit certain male-related characteristics. All the women who had negative experiences with their women bosses attributed such behavior to the need of these women leaders to keep their jobs.

In the second type, supportive women leaders work in hostile work environments and they try to improve the work conditions of women journalists. These women, however, are

usually met with resistance from male leaders and eventually end up with leaving the organization altogether.

*“I had a very supportive woman boss. I only became aware of the gender disparity when she left. The team was entirely made of women. When my boss left, there was a decision not to appoint another woman leader because they don’t want the same example to continue. They decided to include our department in the politics department. They could not stand seeing one more woman in control.”* (Journalist working in a private newspaper, November 2018).

In this quote, the appointment of a supportive woman leader was not the norm. She served as a catalyst of change and major supporter to other women journalists in the department. Her support to women was viewed as threatening to the existing structure in the male-dominated newsroom, which led to losing her job. Having a supportive woman leader altered the organization as to not to repeat the same experience again, and hence male leaders decided not to hire women leaders. The situation sends a clear message that adhering to sexist practices in the newsroom is the only way for women to advance in their careers and hold leading positions. The following quote explains how reaching leadership positions would not protect women journalists from experiencing sexist practices at the workplace.

*“During the weekly meetings, the chief editor never addresses my woman boss when he talks about anything related to our department. He would address any other male in the team. Eventually they changed the management structure and appointed a supervisor to oversee the work of my boss. Technically, she is no longer the boss.”* (Journalist working in a private news website, November 2018).

The quote refers to the same fate of any supportive and successful woman leader, either losing her job, or limiting her powers. The journalist in this quote expressed her frustration at the administration’s position towards her woman boss, and said that she usually avoids any chance to apply for any leadership positions in her organization in fear of facing a similar situation. In the following quote, the administration’s insistence on getting rid of a woman leader led to a

situation where the interviewed journalist herself lost a chance to head the department she worked in for 14 years.

*“My boss is the head of the investigations department. It is a very important department in any newspaper. She disagreed with the chief editor and everyone was fighting her. They wanted to replace her as a result. I was nominated to head the department, but they did not want one more woman to lead. They decided to appoint a male colleague from another department.”* (Journalist working in a private newspaper, November 2018).

In the previous three examples, the positive example of women leaders was exceptional, and they were often met with resistance. The interviewed journalists described their women bosses as empowering and supportive, but they are often fighting a losing battle against the male-led administration. The journalists said that the organizations have deliberately resisted the recreation of such positive experiences. Successful women leaders are usually punished for supporting other women and are forced out of the job.

The third type of relationship is when women journalists work in supportive work environment, where women are empowered and are given equal chances with men to grow and develop. Such work environments were explained by two women journalists working in independent news websites.

*“When I spoke with one of the male managers about the bullying women journalists face in the newsroom, he did not take the problem seriously and said that there is a balanced men-to-women ratio in the organization. But when I addressed the woman chief editor and the woman head of the HR department, they understood. The chief editor hosted us in her house and cooked for us. I blame her for letting the bullying issues to grow, but I appreciate her awareness and her insistence to formulate the policy against sexual harassment and bullying.”* (Journalist working in an independent news website, November 2018).

*“The gender balance in the organization is noticeable. Our chief editor is a woman and every major decision is taken in a democratic way. She consults with us, and when she takes decisions on her own sometimes, she explains why these decisions are taken. It is a friendly environment for women.”* (Journalist working in an independent news website, November 2018).

The link between the level of workplace discrimination and ownership of the news organizations is very clear here. In the previous two examples, women journalists work in independent news organizations, whose finances are free of the control of the government or the business owners. Both organizations are founded and led by women who do not face the same pressures faced by women in other traditional newsrooms. These organizations often depend on grants from major donor organizations interested in advancing press freedoms. They also push for an agenda to encourage women empowerment and progressive workplace practices. Women journalists in these institutions said they were encouraged to present a unique coverage of women issues and engaged in fruitful debates on how to make their content accessible and appealing to women readers.

## VI. Conclusion

As Nicolas (2010) and Sakr (2002) suggested, women increased representation in the newsroom does not mean they are empowered or influential. Egyptian women journalists, despite their increasing role in covering groundbreaking events in the past and especially following the January 25 protests seven years ago, continue to face discrimination at the workplace level.

The analysis of interviews with 20 early to mid-career Egyptian women journalists have shown that the lack of a supportive legal structure and empowering organizational policies continue to be the driving force for workplace discrimination in the news media. The results have shown that workplace discrimination is directly linked to the prevailing atmosphere of political and social constraints, conglomerated nature of media ownership and sexist organizational cultures prevalent in the news media in Egypt. Finding alternative funding for news media can contribute to producing more favorable work environments for women. Controls over the media have been concentrated in the hands of the state since the Free Officers Movement in the 1950s, up until mid-1990s with the introduction of satellite media and the associated private ownership of news organizations. While women's presence in the state-run media continued to grow, their impact has been marginal, if not cosmetic. With the private sector venturing into the media industry in mid 1990s and early 2000s, journalists working in state-run media became the new managers of the private organizations. The results have shown that these journalists reproduced the same sexist organizational culture that existed in the state-owned media.

Women journalists working in the private sector as a result face sexist practices in addition to the poor working conditions that characterize private sector. They face job insecurity, lack of social insurance, long working hours, poor application of labor laws as well as deeply gendered practices. With the introduction of digital journalism and the development driven by

the introduction of social media and citizen journalism in 2011, journalists in Egypt have escaped government scrutiny in the online world. Individual journalists founded independent news websites with editorial policies free of the control of the state and business owners. Among those were women journalists who founded and led progressive news organizations that managed to create work environments friendly for women.

The experiences of Egyptian women journalists with workplace discrimination included five main areas. The first is the lack of transparent hiring, promotion and wage policies. Women journalists often complained of a clear wage gap and difficulty being promoted to higher positions. This is often exacerbated by poor application of labor law and the lack of a supportive organizational structure that promotes gender equality.

The second area is the difficulty of maintaining work-life balance. With journalism being a very demanding job, women journalists said that keeping the balance between their commitment to household duties and job requirements is very difficult. While the Egyptian labor law gives certain rights to pregnant and nursing mothers, journalists said that the laws are poorly applied, especially if women journalists are at the beginning of their careers and are not hired on permanent contracts. Unmarried women journalists explained that they struggle to balance between their career aspirations and family pressures.

Sexual harassment and gendered workplace practices are another area in which female journalists identified the prevalence of a sexist organizational culture and power distance as main reasons of harassment. With the exception of one journalist, all the interviewed journalists said that their organizations have no policies to protect women from sexual harassment.

Journalists also referred to discrimination in the allocation of important reporting assignments which are generally reserved for men. They explained that women have been

systemically banned from covering major breaking news including important political events, defense, security, terrorism, etc. Women usually cover work assignments that are considered to be an extension of their traditional domestic roles. Women who object to these policies said that their superiors have deliberately chosen to send them to report in hostile environments as form of punishment.

The interviewed journalists have also indicated that their contentious relationships with their women bosses have been a defining factor in their experience with workplace discrimination. Three types of these relationships included non-supportive women leaders in non-supportive environments, supportive women leaders in non-supportive environments, and supportive women leaders in non-supportive environments. Women leaders are sometimes pressured to practice the same gendered practices to keep their jobs. Women leaders who exhibited strong leadership abilities and helped women journalists were often forced out of the job. Only women leaders who work in independent news organizations managed to break free from these pressures and managed to successfully build relatively supportive work environments for women journalists.

The analysis offered a deeper understanding of how the intersection of age and gender has further exacerbated the intensity of discrimination at the workplace level. The study concludes that despite the deeply gendered work environment in which Egyptian women journalists work, there is a space for creating favorable working conditions for women with more support for independent media. Women working in independent media outlets explained that they were more empowered to address gender disparities at the workplace level, with the organizations providing more supportive work environments for women. In these organizations, women were able to take one day off every month during their periods, actively participated in

the formulation of policies against sexual harassment and bullying and protested against gendered practices at the workplace. This is primarily because these organizations managed to escape the control of the state and business owners by securing more independent funding resources. Women working in these institutions thus do not face the same pressures that other women journalists in state-run or private news organizations usually encounter.

Women working in mainstream media outlets with large newsrooms, namely in print and broadcast outlets, faced the most severe experiences of workplace discrimination. While women working in some of the online news websites experienced discrimination, all of those who had positive experiences worked in digital outlets. This is primarily because it is easier for independent media outlets to work in the digital sphere. Launching newspapers, magazine or TV stations is costly and need government approval, a process that is difficult for independent journalists to go through.

## **A. Limitations and delimitations**

The main challenge facing the researcher in this study is the lack of available literature on women in Egyptian media. Research conducted in Arabic is very difficult to find online, and the available offline resources are redundant, deeply theoretical, and often depend on the personal opinions of the researchers, and not the lived experiences of the subjects they study. In addition, the research is mostly outdated. Official statistics about women representation in the news media workforce are very difficult to find, and alternatively I had to use surveys conducted on the Middle East region as a reflection on Egypt.

The respondents shared sensitive information about their work colleagues and workplaces, and getting them to speak about private issues required an extra layer of care and



attention by the researcher. Due to speaking about challenges they face in their workplaces, it was difficult for the researcher to interview the subjects inside the newsrooms they work in.

The results of this study can be generalized to the general work environment in which Egyptian women operate. Experiences with workplace sexual harassment, difficulty to maintain work-life balance, discrimination in hiring, promotion, and wage policies can be similarly experienced by women working in other jobs. This study can also be reflective of the experiences of women journalists working in other parts of the Arab region.

## **B. Recommendations:**

The momentum that the #MeToo campaign gained worldwide has raised concerns over creating safe and supportive working spaces for women. In Egypt, women continue to face persistent gender disparities that are not properly addressed on a policy level. The data of this thesis shows that media institutions have failed to create policies that empower women at the workplaces. One major intervention could be made by expanding the role played by the journalists syndicate and other governing bodies to ensure better organizational policies at workplaces. The newly established regulatory bodies as well as the syndicate can lead the efforts to reform the institutional policies of the media organizations to ensure clear and fair hiring, promotions and wage policies, especially in private media organizations. Civil society organizations can also intervene to formulate policies to protect against workplace sexual harassment.

Another intervention would be to encourage women to self-organize to further pressure administrations of news organizations to address gender disparities. These informal networks can work on offering much-needed support for women journalists through trainings, awareness-raising and campaigning for safe workplaces. These networks can later evolve to prepare women

cadres that can compete in syndicate board elections and be represented in management boards of news organizations. These networks can also work on securing independent sources of funding that can help establish women-led news organizations or help independent women journalists to establish their own projects.

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