

Men in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) at a crossroads, reveals ground-breaking multi-country study on the state of male-female relations in the MENA region

Tuesday 2 May 2017: Beirut, Lebanon – A multi-country study in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – covering Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, and Palestine – reveals the reality of men’s lives behind the headlines. While a majority of men surveyed in the four countries support a wide array of inequitable, traditional attitudes; a sizable minority of men in the four countries acknowledge and support women’s equality in many aspects of public and private life.

The International Men and Gender Equality Study in the Middle East and North Africa (IMAGES MENA) produced by Promundo and UN Women in collaboration with local research partners is the first study of its kind and size in the Middle East and North Africa to take a wide-angle, comparative lens to the lives of men – as sons and husbands and fathers, at home and at work, in public and private life – to better understand how they see their positions as men, and their attitudes toward gender equality. Equally important, IMAGES provides women’s perspectives on these same issues. The study includes quantitative and qualitative research with nearly 10,000 men and women aged 18 to 59 in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine, including both urban and rural areas. The study’s findings will be revealed at a regional launch event on May 2, as part of the “Masculinities in the Arab World” conference co-organized by ABAAD, UN Women, and Promundo in Beirut, Lebanon.

The study reveals that although traditional attitudes about gender equality dominate, at least one quarter of men hold more open and equitable views, supporting women’s economic, social, and political equality. Personal histories, family influence, and life circumstances are among the factors that impact men’s support for gender equality.

The findings show that while young women are showing more equitable views towards equality than the older generation, younger men do not necessarily hold more equitable views than older men.

The study also highlights the tremendous stress in men’s lives, namely the challenge of finding paid work and fulfilling the traditional masculine role of a provider in times of economic uncertainty, particularly in those countries affected by conflict. The effects of conflict and unemployment were frequently cited as reasons for, or aggravating factors in, men’s depressive symptoms. One-third to one-half of men in the four countries reported being ashamed to face their families because of lack of work or income.

The research, coordinated by UN Women and Promundo, also confirms international findings of the inter-generational cycle of violence: experiences of violence in childhood are associated with men’s use of violence in adult life. Violence breeds violence in all four countries. Men who witnessed their fathers using violence against their mothers, and men who experienced some form of violence at home as children, were significantly more likely to report perpetrating intimate partner violence in their adult relationships.

On the positive side, there is also evidence for inter-generational cycles of care: although many traditional norms are reinforced at home, fathers can have a powerful role in breaking these norms. Fathers who encouraged daughters to take on non-traditional professions or to work outside the home, or who allowed daughters to choose their husbands, seemed to contribute to the emergence of more empowered women.

“There is a long way to go for men to fully accept and support equality for women in the Arab region, as in many parts of the world,” says Gary Barker, President and CEO of Promundo and co-author of the study. “Across all four countries, we see that one of the biggest disrupters of gender inequality is when men take on more of the activities in the home typically defined as women’s roles.”

Indeed, the research points to some key pathways for equality, which are particularly notable around involved fatherhood: In all four countries, men whose fathers had participated in traditionally feminine household work and caregiving, as well as men who were taught to do this work as children, were far more likely to report contributing in this way within their own marriages.

Another factor associated with men's more equitable behaviours is women's work outside the home. In two of the countries, men whose wives worked outside the home were more likely to do more of the unpaid care work. In a region where only about a quarter of women work outside the home, this points to the potential dual impact of policies to increase women's paid work.

"For our work as UN Women, this report is incredibly important as a tool in our programming, in our lobbying and in our efforts to work with member states, civil society and communities. The results, though they may seem bleak when looking purely at numbers, do affirm that there are also true stories of champions, of men and women who believe strongly in gender equality. Indeed, this study is a seed, and its stories will grow into a tree of hope and humanity," says Mohammad Naciri, Regional Director for Arab States, UN Women.

As seen in this study and many others, men frequently dominate or control household decision-making, political and leadership spaces, and the daily lives of women and girls. This research offers a unique perspective on the state of male-female relations in the MENA region, it helps to better understand these dynamics, and to subsequently design and improve programmes and policies to address them.

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For more information about the research findings:

www.imagesmena.org
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Notes to editors:

About IMAGES

The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), created by Promundo and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), is one of the most comprehensive studies ever on men's practices and attitudes as they relate to gender norms, attitudes toward gender equality policies, household dynamics including caregiving and men's involvement as fathers, intimate partner violence, health, and economic stress. To date, it has been implemented in or is in progress in over 30 countries globally, and is part of a multi-year, multi-country effort to build the evidence base on gender equality; raise awareness among policymakers and program planners of the need to involve men in health, development, and gender equality issues; and integrate gender equality within public institutions and policies. Find out more about IMAGES globally: <http://promundoglobal.org/programs/international-men-and-gender-equality-survey-images/>

About UN Women

UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide. UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality. For more information, visit: <http://www.unwomen.org/en>

About Promundo

Promundo is a global leader in promoting gender justice and preventing violence by engaging men and boys in partnership with women and girls. Promundo believes that working with men and boys to transform harmful gender norms and unequal power dynamics is a critical part of the solution to achieve gender equality. Promundo's formative research and rigorous evaluation, evidence-based programs, and targeted advocacy efforts strive to create change at multiple levels, and reveal that promoting healthy masculinity (or positive notions of "what it means to be a man") and femininity (or "what it means to be a woman") leads to improvements in men's own lives, and in the lives of women and girls. Promundo has partners in over 40 countries, and is funded by national and local governments, foundations, bilateral and multilateral aid organizations, major nongovernmental agencies, and individual donations. For more information, visit: www.promundoglobal.org

About the research partners

The IMAGES MENA multi-country study and its dissemination were coordinated by Promundo and UN Women, in collaboration with local research partners in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Palestine. These partners include: (1) Egypt: El-Zanaty and Associates; Social Research Center, American University in Cairo (AUC); (2) Lebanon: Connecting Research to Development (CRD); ABAAD; (3) Morocco: Association Migration Internationale (AMI); Rajaa Nadifi (independent researcher); Gaëlle Gillot (independent researcher); (4) Palestine: Institute of Women's Studies, at Birzeit University. For more information about the research partners, visit: www.imagesmena.org

ANNEX

The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa:
[Highlighted messages and related findings by theme](#)

GENDER NORMS AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

A majority of men interviewed in the four countries support mostly inequitable views when it comes to women's roles.

- Two-thirds to three-quarters of men support the notion that a woman's most important role is to care for the household.
- About half or more of women across the four countries support the same idea.
- Strong majorities of men believe it is their role to monitor and control the movements of the women and girls in their households, a practice most men recalled starting in childhood.
- In some countries, majorities of women not only affirm but also appear to accept male guardianship.
- In others, they challenge the idea, in theory if not in practice.

The MENA region has some of the lowest rates of women's economic participation in the world.

- Three-quarters or more of men in the four countries, and women at nearly the same rates, support the priority of men's access to jobs over women's.
- Women are still widely defined – by men and women alike – as wives and mothers first, rather than by professional or workplace achievements.

Yet, there are cracks in the armour.

- About half of men – or fewer – believed a married woman should have the same right to work as a man. Yet...
- A majority of men in all four countries would accept a woman as a boss, and were willing to work in gender-integrated workplaces.
- Much of this acceptance is theoretical, however; many men in the region support women working outside the home – as long, it seems, as he is still the main breadwinner and she is still the main caregiver and organizer of domestic life.

In nearly every other country where IMAGES has been carried out (in other regions of the world), younger men have consistently shown more equitable attitudes and some key practices than their older counterparts; in three of the four countries included in IMAGES MENA, this was not the case.

- In Morocco, Palestine, and Egypt, younger men's views on gender equality do not differ substantially from those of older men. Why? Young men's inequitable views may be a result of:
 - Challenging economic circumstances: Many young men in these three countries report difficulties finding a job, and as such, they struggle to achieve the socially recognised hallmark of a man as financial provider. This struggle may be producing a backlash; or
 - A general climate of religious conservatism under which the younger generation has come of age. While other research in the region has noted similar trends and posited similar drivers, further study is necessary to explore this phenomenon.

If young men's views are not leading the way to gender-equitable views in the majority of the countries studied, what factors are?

- Education emerges as key for both men and women.
- As with men, women with more education, with more educated mothers, and whose fathers carried out more traditionally feminine tasks in their childhood homes were generally more likely to have equitable views than their older counterparts.
- Unlike men, however, younger women in every country held more equitable views than their older counterparts.

- Younger women in the region are yearning for more equality, but their male peers fail to share or support such aspirations. This tension between the sexes plays out in public and private spaces across the countries of study, with important country-by-country variations.

CYCLES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Experiences of gender-based violence, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual harassment in the streets, are common for women across the region.

- Across the four countries, around 10 per cent to 45 per cent of ever-married men reported ever having used physical violence against a female partner, with approximately equal numbers of women affirming they had experienced this violence.
- Between 20 per cent and 80 per cent of men, across all four countries, reported ever having perpetrated some form of emotional violence against their wives.
- In all four countries, men who witnessed their father using violence against their mothers, and men who experienced some form of violence at home as children, were significantly more likely to report perpetrating intimate partner violence in their adult relationships.

The roots of gender-based violence, as in other parts of the world, are found in women's limited power, in violence-supportive attitudes, and in highly violent childhoods.

- In all four countries, half to three-quarters of the men reported having experienced physical violence in their homes growing up, and two-thirds or more reported having experienced physical violence by teachers or peers in school.
- In all four countries, women had also experienced these forms of physical violence, but at lower rates than had men.

The violence men and women experienced as children turns into violence against their own children.

- Across all four countries, 29 per cent to 50 per cent of men and 40 per cent to 80 per cent of women reported using some form of physical punishment or other forms of violence against their own children.
- Women's higher rates of physical punishment against children are clearly a function of the fact that women carry out the majority of the caregiving.
- Violence against children is also gendered: in most countries, fathers tend to use more physical punishment against sons.

Street-based sexual harassment - mainly sexual comments, stalking/following, or staring/ogling - is one of the most prevalent forms of gender-based violence in the region.

- Between 31 per cent and 64 per cent of men said they had ever carried out such acts.
- While 40 per cent to 60 per cent of women said they had ever experienced it.
- When asked why they carried out such violence, the vast majority of men – up to 90 per cent in some countries – said they did it for fun, with two-thirds to three-quarters blaming women for dressing “provocatively”.

Younger men, men with more education, and men who experienced violence as children are more likely to engage in street sexual harassment.

- More educated women and those in urban areas were more likely to report that they had experienced such violence.
- More educated men are more likely to have sexually harassed (with the highest rate found among men with secondary education, in three of the four countries)

HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING

Consistently, women and men in all four countries reported that men make most of the major household decisions, although, on the whole, men reported greater say in such matters than women acknowledge.

- Compared with men, women consistently reported less control over their decision to marry the person they wanted, when they wanted, with fathers having the final say in most cases.

- While men may have more autonomy when it comes to choosing a mate, they also reported feeling considerable pressure to cover the escalating costs of marriage and to provide for their families, in an era of rising unemployment.

Men expect to control their wives' personal freedoms, from what they wear and where they go to when the couple has sex.

- Two-thirds to 90 per cent of men reported exercising these various forms of control, with women affirming that their husbands sought to control them in these ways.

FATHERHOOD, DOMESTIC CHORES AND CAREGIVING

The vast majority of the daily care of children and other household tasks are carried out by women, in all four countries.

- One-tenth to one-third of men reported ever having recently carried out a more conventionally female task in their home, such as preparing food, cleaning, or bathing children.
- In all four countries, men whose fathers had participated in traditionally feminine household work, as well as men who were taught to do this work as children, were far more likely to report contributing in this way within their own marriages.

In two countries – Egypt and Lebanon – women working outside the home may be a driver of men's greater participation in daily chores and caregiving.

- Among the small percentage of men in Egypt (10 per cent) whose spouses are working full time, 45 per cent reported participating in domestic work, far higher than men whose wives do not work.
- Similarly, in Lebanon, men with wives working full time reported doing more of the housework.

Still, there are encouraging trends when it comes to fatherhood.

- More than 70 per cent of men in all the countries reported going for at least some prenatal visits with a pregnant wife (although that male participation may reflect a degree of male control and male guardianship, as well as concern and caregiving).
- In all of the countries surveyed, half or more of the men said that their work takes time away from being with their children.
- In addition, two-fifths or more of men in all four countries reported talking with their children about important personal matters in their lives; this points to an emotional intimacy not always associated with masculine behaviour.

Even in decisions such as daughters' circumcision (in the case of Egypt), fathers are highly involved in their children's lives.

- Fatherhood may offer a pathway for engaging men in the region in their children's lives in more positive, equitable, and non-violent ways, and, ultimately, in gender equality.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Health issues and the difference between men's and women's health vulnerabilities.

- Across all four countries, the majority of men (two-thirds to three-quarters) reported that their health is better than that of other men their own age.
- For women, this was between one-half and two-thirds.
- In all four countries, upwards of one-quarter of men smoke, making it one of the leading contributors to the burden of disease in the region, with implications for men themselves and for women who care for them. Up to two-thirds of men who smoke think they smoke too much, and up to one-half of those who smoke said they have ever had a smoking-related health problem.

Men and women were both likely to show signs of depression.

- From 40 per cent to 51 per cent of women exhibited depressive symptoms, as well as 20 per cent to 28 per cent of men.
- The effects of conflict and unemployment were frequently cited as reasons for, or aggravating factors in, depressive symptoms among men. All told, one-third to one-half of men in the four sites reported being ashamed to face their families because of lack of work or income.

PUBLIC (IN)SECURITY AND AFFECTS ON GENDER RELATIONS

In all four countries, roughly equal numbers of men and women (at least two-thirds) show high levels of fear for their family's well-being and safety, and for their own.

Occupation-related violence is pervasive.

- In Palestine, 65 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women reported one or more of 12 forms of occupation-related violence and other experiences within the past five years. Men were more likely than women to report having lost land; having been harassed, detained, or injured by soldiers or settlers; having difficulty accessing health services; and having lost work or educational opportunities due to the occupation.
- In Lebanon, Syrian refugee men were between two and three times more likely than Lebanese men to report that they had ever been arrested, imprisoned, or detained by police, or to have experienced some form of physical violence in public spaces (either in their home country or elsewhere). Qualitative research findings with both Syrian refugees and Lebanese-born men suggest that financial hardship, conflict-related displacement, and unemployment play a role in men's use of violence against their wives and children.

Men in the four countries are often on the move, within or outside their own country, by choice or compelled by difficult life circumstances.

- In total, between 7 and 26 per cent of men in all four countries reported ever having migrated, either in their own country or abroad, to work, study, or live for at least six months.
- Women in these circumstances, while their husbands are away, often take on new roles outside the home, and in the home a greater role in household decision-making.
- Among conflict-affected respondents in the qualitative interviews, men reported no longer being able to provide financially (whether partially or fully) during the conflict or conflict-related displacement, and that women had had to take on the role of provider. In some cases, because women, being less likely to be arrested or harassed by security forces, had greater freedom of movement, men had become dependent on them.

WHAT LEADS SOME MEN TO BE MORE EQUITABLE?

As part of the study, the research teams carried out qualitative interviews with "more empowered" women and "more equitable" men (identified via contacts from the community and from nongovernmental organizations, and defined as men who displayed more equitable views and practices than did most men in their social context, and women who were in leadership positions or professions that were traditionally male).

The results of these interviews suggest the importance of life histories and family influence, as well as circumstance:

- Some men had had to take on more caregiving because they had lost work due to displacement, conflict, or the job market.
- Some men had come to see their wives as strong and capable after they (the men) had spent time away from home, either migrating for work, or, in the case of Palestine, as political prisoners.
- Having fathers who encouraged daughters to take on non-traditional professions or to work outside the home, or who allowed daughters to choose their husbands, seems to contribute to the emergence of more empowered women.

- In some countries, among men, having more equitable and involved fathers or life circumstances that forced men to take on new household roles were the drivers of more equitable attitudes and practices.
- Other men talked about how they came to understand the problem of gender injustice from their work, or from messages they had seen in the media.
- The qualitative interviews yielded stories of tenderness, of deep caring and caregiving by men, and of men who supported daughters to make their own decisions about marriage.

Recommendations include: using sources of social influence through media, religious figures, literature and art, to start shifting social norms in support of more progressive attitudes; Use public discussions, campaigns and key political leaders and agendas to bring men along in supporting a comprehensive policy agenda for women's rights; Change the ways boys and girls are taught about what it means to be a man and a woman from early on through changing school curricula, and by training teachers, and parents to prevent violence and promote gender equality; Engage youth - young men and young women - to think critically about gender norms; Expand and scale up evidence-based interventions that break the cycle of violence by challenging violence-supportive norms; Promote men's caregiving and women's full involvement in the workplace through gender sensitive and family-friendly policies; Work with the health sector to engage men as allies in women's reproductive health needs and men's own reproductive health needs; Address the gender- and conflict- needs to those men and women affected by displacement and conflict, and; Conduct additional, applied research on men and masculinities in order to use the resulting data to inform and support policy changes that promote full equality for women and girls, and engage men as allies and partners in the process.