

The 1995 EDHS was the first national-level survey to include questions on the practice of female circumcision. The survey found the practice to be widespread in Egypt. Information was collected in the 2000 EDHS to further investigate attitudes toward female circumcision among Egyptian women and to assess whether there was evidence of changes in attitudes or behavior during the period between the 1995 and 2000 surveys.

14.1 PREVALENCE OF FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

CIRCUMCISION OF EDHS RESPONDENTS

Results from the 2000 EDHS confirm the 1995 EDHS finding that the practice of female circumcision is virtually universal among women of reproductive age in Egypt. Table 14.1 shows that 97 percent of the ever-married women interviewed in the 2000 EDHS reported that they had been circumcised. Only in the Frontier Governorates does the prevalence of circumcision fall below 90 percent.

CIRCUMCISION STATUS OF DAUGHTERS

Ever-married women who had living daughters were asked questions about the circumcision experience of their daughters. Overall, 11,540 EDHS respondents had at least one living daughter. Table 14.1 shows that about eight in ten of these women reported that at least one of their daughters had already been circumcised (50 percent) or that they intended to have a daughter circumcised in the future (31 percent).

Younger women are somewhat less likely to have a daughter already circumcised or to intend to circumcise a daughter than older women. Place of residence is even more strongly associated with the likelihood a daughter will be circumcised. The percentage of women who have at least one daughter who had been circumcised or who intended to have their daughter circumcised in the future varies from a low of 63 percent among women in the Urban Governorates and the Frontier Governorates to a high of 91 percent among women in rural Upper Egypt.

Women with no education are the most likely to have at least one circumcised daughter or to plan to have their daughter(s) circumcised while women with a secondary or higher education are the least likely to have or to consider having their daughter(s) circumcised. Even among highly educated women, however, more than half report that they have at least one daughter who has been circumcised (18 percent) or that they plan for their daughter(s) to be circumcised in the future (35 percent). Women who work for cash were less likely than other women to have a circumcised or to be considering having a daughter circumcised.

14.2 CIRCUMCISION EXPERIENCE OF DAUGHTERS

EDHS respondents who reported that they had at least one circumcised daughter were asked about the age at which the daughter had been circumcised, the person who performed the circumcision, and the place where the procedure took place. For women with more than one circumcised daughter, these questions were asked for the daughter who had been circumcised most recently.

Table 14.1 Prevalence of female circumcision

Percentage of ever-married women who have been circumcised and, among ever-married women with daughters, percentage who report that they have at least one daughter circumcised or who say that they intend to have their daughters circumcised, by selected background characteristics, Egypt 2000

Background characteristic	Ever-married women		Ever-married women with daughters		
	Percentage circumcised	Number of women	Percentage with at least one daughter circumcised	Percentage who intend to have daughters circumcised	Number of women
Women's age					
15-19	99.1	615	0.0	80.5	150
20-24	97.4	2,244	1.5	73.3	1,117
25-29	97.2	2,850	11.1	64.9	1,929
30-34	96.7	2,701	33.8	40.6	2,173
35-39	97.4	2,674	64.2	18.2	2,273
40-44	96.9	2,182	79.9	5.5	1,899
45-49	97.9	2,307	88.4	1.6	1,999
Urban-rural residence					
Urban	95.3	6,871	44.4	24.5	4,999
Rural	98.9	8,702	53.4	36.6	6,542
Place of residence					
Urban Governorates	93.1	2,992	40.5	22.1	2,149
Lower Egypt	98.9	6,826	49.0	35.8	5,090
Urban	98.0	1,946	43.9	28.7	1,424
Rural	99.2	4,880	51.0	38.6	3,665
Upper Egypt	98.4	5,546	55.0	31.1	4,152
Urban	96.9	1,808	51.2	24.0	1,333
Rural	99.2	3,738	56.8	34.4	2,819
Frontier Governorates	76.3	209	39.6	23.5	149
Women's education					
No education	98.8	6,734	64.7	29.1	5,393
Primary incomplete	99.0	2,060	63.0	26.8	1,627
Primary complete/ some secondary	98.4	2,026	44.7	37.6	1,400
Secondary complete/higher	94.0	4,753	18.3	35.0	3,120
Work status					
Working for cash	94.0	2,266	38.6	23.4	1,688
Not working for cash	97.9	13,307	51.3	32.8	9,852
Total	97.3	15,573	49.5	31.4	11,540

Table 14.2 presents the distribution of the most recently circumcised daughter according to the daughter's age at circumcision. Two-thirds of daughters were reported by their mothers to have been between seven and ten years of age at the time of circumcision, and virtually all daughters were circumcised before age 13. The median age at the time of the circumcision for daughters is 10 years.

Table 14.2 Aspects of daughter's circumcision

Percent distribution of most recently circumcised daughters by the age of the daughter at the time she was circumcised, the person performing the circumcision, and the site where the procedure was performed, Egypt 2000

Aspects	Percent
Age of daughter when she was circumcised	
< 5	6.2
5-6	9.3
7-8	15.2
9-10	44.9
11-12	19.8
13+	3.3
Don't know/missing	1.3
Median age	10.0
Mean age	9.0
Person who performed the circumcision	
Male doctor	41.9
Female doctor	10.3
Trained nurse/midwife	9.2
Daya	32.1
Barber	3.5
Ghagaria	2.7
Don't know/missing	0.3
Place circumcision performed	
At home	64.8
Private hospital/clinic	27.6
Government hospital/clinic	4.8
Relative/neighbor's house	1.9
Barber's kiosk	0.2
Don't know/missing	0.2
Total	100.0
Number	5,709

Regarding the person performing the circumcision, Table 14.2 shows that trained medical personnel performed slightly more than 60 percent of the circumcisions. Dayas (traditional birth attendants) performed the majority of the remaining circumcisions.

Regarding the site of the circumcision, 65 percent took place in the home. Among those taking place at a health facility, most were performed in private facilities. Overall, only 5 percent of circumcisions were reported to have been performed in governmental facilities.

Table 14.3 presents differentials in two key aspects of the circumcision experience of daughters: the median age at circumcision and the proportion for which the circumcision was conducted by trained medical personnel. Little variation is observed in the age at circumcision among the various population subgroups. However, subgroups differ considerably in the type of person who performed the circumcision. Medical personnel are much more likely to have performed the circumcision in urban than in rural areas. By place of residence, the proportion of circumcisions performed by trained medical personnel varied from 49 percent in rural Upper Egypt to 76 percent in urban Upper Egypt.

The likelihood that the daughter was circumcised by trained medical personnel increases directly with the mother's educational status, from

slightly more than half the circumcisions among daughters of women with no education to nearly 90 percent of the circumcisions among daughters of women with at least a secondary education. Trained medical personnel were also more likely to have been involved in the circumcisions of daughters of women who work for cash than in the circumcisions of daughters of other women.

Table 14.3 Daughter's age at circumcision and person performing circumcision

Among most recently circumcised daughters, the median age at circumcision and the percentage whose circumcision was performed by trained medical personnel, by selected background characteristics, Egypt 2000

Background characteristic	Median age at circumcision	Circumcision performed by trained medical personnel	Number of daughters
Mother's age			
15-19	-	-	-
20-24	*	*	17
25-29	7.9	68.0	214
30-34	9.6	66.5	734
35-39	10.0	62.7	1,460
40-44	10.2	62.6	1,517
45-49	10.1	56.5	1,767
Urban-rural residence			
Urban	10.1	72.1	2,217
Rural	9.9	54.6	3,492
Place of residence			
Urban Governorates	10.2	69.9	871
Lower Egypt	10.2	62.8	2,496
Urban	10.4	71.0	625
Rural	10.2	60.0	1,871
Upper Egypt	9.5	56.7	2,282
Urban	9.7	75.7	682
Rural	9.4	48.7	1,600
Frontier Governorates	9.1	57.9	59
Mother's education			
No education	9.9	52.0	3,487
Primary incomplete	10.2	67.8	1,025
Primary complete/ some secondary	10.1	78.1	626
Secondary complete/higher	10.0	89.4	571
Work status			
Working for cash	10.2	72.4	652
Not working for cash	10.0	60.0	5,056
Total	10.0	61.4	5,709

Note: An asterisk indicates that figures are based on fewer than 25 cases and have been suppressed.

14.3 SUPPORT FOR FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

The 2000 EDHS obtained information about women's attitudes about whether the practice of circumcision should be continued and about their perception of men's attitude toward the practice. Women were also asked about whether their attitude about circumcision had changed in the year before the survey.

Table 14.4 shows continuing widespread support for the practice of circumcision among women in Egypt. Overall, three-quarters of ever-married women 15-49 feel that the practice of circumcision should continue. Slightly more than 60 percent of women believe that men support continuation of the practice of circumcision.

Marked differences in attitudes toward the continuation of the practice are evident according to the woman's background characteristics. Urban residents are less likely than rural residents to believe circumcision should be continued or to feel men support continuation of the practice. There is also a marked negative relationship between a woman's educational level and the likelihood that she supports the continuation of the practice of circumcision or believes that men want the practice to be continued.

Table 14.4 also shows that attitudes toward the practice of circumcision have been changing. About one in nine women indicate that their attitude toward the practice had changed during the past year. Urban women, highly educated women and women working for cash are most likely to report a change in attitude.

Table 14.4 Attitudes toward circumcision and perception of men's attitudes

Percentage of ever-married women who think the practice of female circumcision should continue and percentage who believe that men want the practice to continue, by selected background characteristics, Egypt 2000

Background characteristic	Believe practice should continue	Believe men want the practice to continue	Opinion changed during past year	Number of women
Age				
15-19	80.5	62.0	7.4	615
20-24	75.4	62.5	9.7	2,244
25-29	75.7	59.9	10.7	2,847
30-34	72.8	59.4	12.0	2,695
35-39	74.8	61.7	11.9	2,673
40-44	75.5	59.4	10.9	2,180
45-49	76.8	61.0	10.8	2,304
Urban-rural residence				
Urban	62.6	47.4	16.4	6,860
Rural	85.3	71.1	6.6	8,699
Place of residence				
Urban Governorates	56.2	34.5	17.6	2,983
Lower Egypt	80.7	68.5	9.9	6,825
Urban	68.3	58.2	16.5	1,945
Rural	85.6	72.7	7.2	4,880
Upper Egypt	79.6	65.4	8.7	5,544
Urban	67.1	56.7	14.5	1,807
Rural	85.7	69.6	5.9	3,737
Frontier Governorates	59.9	50.3	10.1	207
Mother's education				
No education	88.9	71.9	4.9	6,730
Primary incomplete	81.6	65.3	8.4	2,058
Primary complete/ some secondary	76.0	57.9	11.2	2,024
Secondary complete/higher	53.1	43.8	20.4	4,747
Work status				
Working for cash	57.0	45.5	18.6	2,264
Not working for cash	78.4	63.2	9.6	13,295
Total	75.3	60.7	10.9	15,559

14.4 TRENDS IN CIRCUMCISION INDICATORS

Figure 14.1 and Table 14.5 present trends between the 1995 and 2000 EDHS surveys in two key circumcision indicators: (1) the percentage of all ever-married women age 15-49 who believe the practice should continue and (2) the percentage of women with at least one daughter who reported that a daughter has been circumcised or who expressed the intention to have their daughter circumcised in the future. As Figure 14.1 shows, there was somewhat less support for circumcision at the time of the 2000 EDHS than in 1995; three-quarters of all ever-married women at the time of the 2000 EDHS expressed the opinion that the practice should continue, compared with 82 percent of the ever-married women at the time of the 1995 EDHS. Table 14.5 shows that the proportion of women who either report that at least one of their daughters has been circumcised or who say they intend to have their daughter circumcised in the future decreased from 87 percent in 1995 to 81 percent in 2000.

The decline in both indicators was most evident in the Urban Governorates. Women in the Frontier Governorates and women with at least a primary education showed among the least change in both indicators.

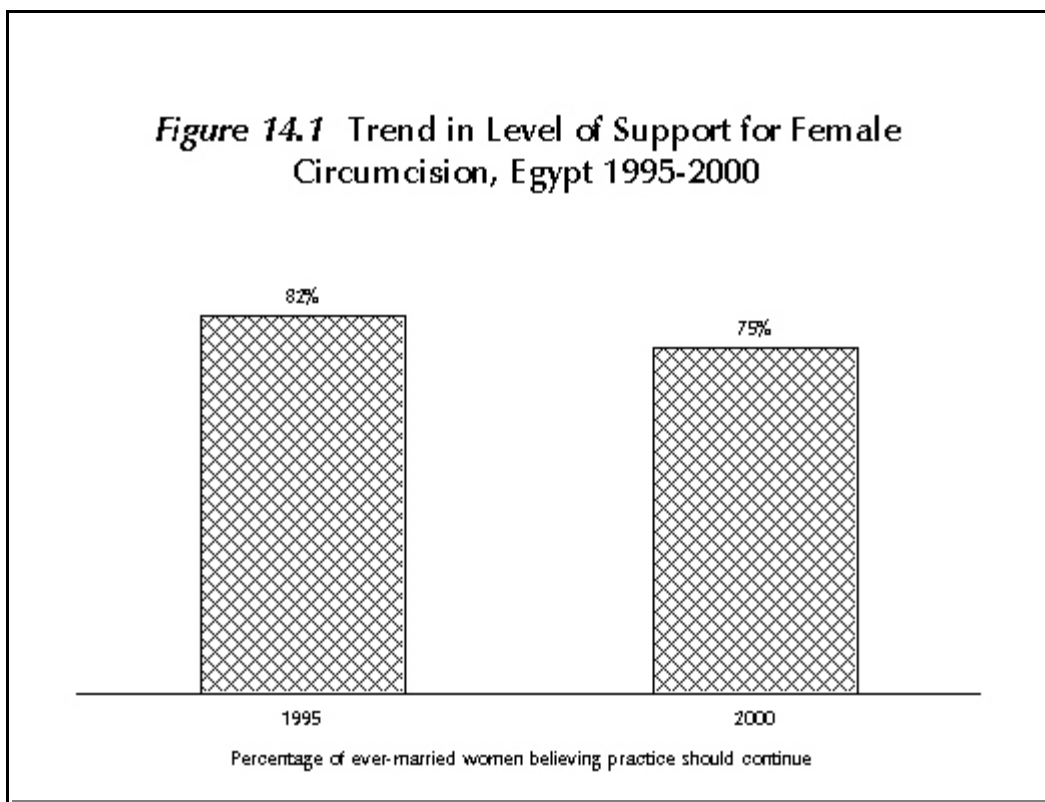


Table 14.5 Trends in circumcision indicators, Egypt 1995-2000

Trends in percentage of ever-married women who believe practice of circumcision should continue and the percentage of ever-married women with daughter(s) who report at least one daughter is circumcised or who intend to have their daughter(s) circumcised, by selected background characteristics, Egypt 1995-2000

Background characteristic	Percentage who believe the practice of circumcision should continue		Percentage who report at least one daughter is circumcised or who intend to have their daughter(s) circumcised	
	1995	2000	1995	2000
Age				
15-19	84.8	80.5	93.8	80.5
20-24	83.9	75.4	89.2	74.8
25-29	81.6	75.7	84.7	76.0
30-34	79.2	72.8	84.0	74.4
35-39	81.3	74.8	87.7	82.4
40-44	80.8	75.5	88.6	85.4
45-49	82.1	76.8	90.1	90.0
Urban-rural residence				
Urban	70.3	62.6	77.0	68.9
Rural	91.2	85.3	95.9	90.0
Place of residence				
Urban Governorates	66.4	56.2	73.0	62.6
Lower Egypt	86.9	80.7	91.5	84.8
Urban	75.1	68.3	81.2	72.6
Rural	91.8	85.6	95.7	89.6
Upper Egypt	85.5	79.6	91.7	86.1
Urban	73.1	67.1	80.7	75.2
Rural	91.0	85.7	96.7	91.2
Frontier Governorates	60.7	59.9	66.9	63.1
Education				
No education	93.1	88.9	97.5	93.8
Primary incomplete	89.2	81.6	95.4	89.8
Primary complete/ some secondary	76.7	76.0	85.0	82.3
Secondary complete/higher	56.5	53.1	56.9	53.3
Work status				
Working for cash	65.3	68.4	70.1	62.0
Not working for cash	84.6	78.7	90.5	84.1
Total	81.6	75.3	87.3	80.9

Source: El-Zanaty et al., 1996, Tables 13.1 and 13.3

14.5 REASONS FOR SUPPORT OF FEMALE CIRCUMCISION

To gain some greater understanding of Egyptian women's reasons for supporting the practice of circumcision, the EDHS included several questions to gain insights into the reasons for women's attitudes. First, EDHS respondents were asked both about the benefits of being circumcised and not being circumcised for a girl. Second, the 2000 EDHS included a number of statements about specific beliefs about circumcision with which women were asked to agree or disagree.

BENEFITS/DRAWBACKS OF CIRCUMCISION

Table 14.6 presents the responses of ever-married women 15-49 to the questions about the benefits of being circumcised and not being circumcised for a girl. Almost all women see circumcision as benefitting a girl. Only one in nine report that there are no benefits from circumcision.

The responses to the question about the benefits of circumcision make it clear that for many Egyptian women, circumcision is an important traditional practice. About three in five women mentioned that a girl who is circumcised benefits from conforming with tradition. Other related but less frequently cited benefits included the religious approval (12 percent) and social acceptance (4 percent) a girl receives from being circumcised.

A number of Egyptian women see as one of the benefits of circumcision the fact that it serves to limit a woman's sexual desire. Thirty-two percent of women cited a reduction in sexual desire as a benefit of circumcision, and 9 percent mentioned the preservation of the girl's virginity. Somewhat surprisingly, relatively few mentioned the practice as contributing directly to a girl's marriage prospects (4 percent). This may be because the majority of girls are circumcised, and it is only if a girl is not circumcised that there would be concerns about her marriage prospects.

Another frequently mentioned benefit of circumcision is its contribution to a woman's personal cleanliness or hygiene; 29 percent of women cited this as a benefit of the practice.

Finally, Table 14.6 shows that most women (75 percent) felt that there a girl would experience no benefits if she failed to conform to the traditional practice. Among the minority of women who do see some benefit to a girl from not being circumcised, avoiding pain and having fewer medical problems were the most frequently cited benefits (10 percent and 7 percent, respectively).

BELIEFS ABOUT CIRCUMCISION

Table 14.7 shows the pattern of agreement or disagreement with the various beliefs about circumcision. The results provide further insight into the factors that contribute to the widespread support for the practice.

Table 14.6 Benefits from undergoing and from not undergoing circumcision

Percentage of ever-married women 15-49 who report various benefits for girls if they are circumcised and various benefits from not undergoing the procedure, Egypt 2000

Benefits	Percent
Benefits from undergoing circumcision	
Uphold tradition	57.7
Gain religious approval	12.1
Social acceptance	4.2
Reduce sexual desire	31.8
Preservation of virginity	9.3
Cleanliness/hygiene	28.6
Better marriage prospect	3.8
Greater pleasure of husband	1.4
Other benefits	3.8
No benefits from circumcision	11.0
Benefits from not undergoing circumcision	
Follow religion	2.2
Avoid pain	10.0
Fewer medical problems	7.2
Greater sexual pleasure	
for self	5.5
for husband	4.7
Other reasons	5.9
No benefits from not being circumcised	74.7
Number of women	15,559

Among ever-married women 15-49, 73 percent believe that circumcision is an important part of religious tradition. Two-thirds of the women feel that the husband prefers the wife to be circumcised. Furthermore, many women see circumcision as ensuring that a woman will remain faithful to her husband; half of the women agree that circumcision prevents adultery.

The results in Table 14.7 also suggest that comparatively few women recognize potential adverse consequences of the practice for women. For example, only 29 percent of women agree with the statement that circumcision can cause severe complications that may lead to a girl's death. Moreover, only small proportions of women believe that circumcision can cause a woman to have problems becoming pregnant or that childbirth is more difficult for circumcised women than for other women (8 percent each). Women are somewhat more likely to recognize that circumcision may have an effect on sexual relations; 37 percent agree that circumcision lessens sexual satisfaction for a couple.

Table 14.7 Beliefs about female circumcision

Percentage of ever-married women who agree with various statements about female circumcision, by selected background characteristics, Egypt 2000

Background characteristic	Religious tradition	Husband prefers	Prevents adultery	Can lead to death	Causes infertility	Childbirth difficult	Lessens sexual satisfaction	Number of women
Age								
15-19	74.4	71.1	46.8	23.4	7.8	6.5	33.5	615
20-24	71.7	68.6	50.2	28.0	7.8	7.4	35.2	2,244
25-29	73.9	67.3	50.5	29.2	8.5	7.5	38.1	2,847
30-34	70.6	64.8	52.2	31.3	7.0	7.0	39.4	2,695
35-39	72.8	67.3	52.4	31.5	7.2	7.1	37.9	2,673
40-44	73.3	66.5	52.6	29.8	8.2	8.6	35.1	2,180
45-49	73.0	67.6	51.8	25.7	7.9	8.1	36.2	2,304
Urban-rural residence								
Urban	64.7	53.1	46.2	37.3	7.2	7.1	45.1	6,860
Rural	78.9	78.2	55.6	22.7	8.2	7.9	30.6	8,699
Place of residence								
Urban Governorates	59.1	38.9	41.8	36.4	5.4	4.3	44.8	2,983
Lower Egypt	76.3	73.3	57.3	24.0	6.6	5.7	30.6	6,825
Urban	69.0	64.2	55.7	34.8	7.4	6.2	39.5	1,945
Rural	79.3	76.9	58.0	19.7	6.2	5.5	27.0	4,880
Upper Egypt	76.0	75.1	49.9	31.3	10.7	11.7	40.9	5,544
Urban	69.6	64.2	43.8	41.0	10.1	12.6	51.9	1,807
Rural	79.0	80.4	52.9	26.6	10.9	11.2	35.5	3,737
Frontier Governorates	55.1	58.5	35.7	36.1	5.0	5.1	31.8	207
Education								
No education	80.6	78.3	55.5	20.5	7.7	7.6	27.7	6,730
Primary incomplete	78.0	72.1	56.7	24.2	7.0	7.5	36.6	2,058
Primary complete/ some secondary	74.4	67.1	51.0	29.2	7.7	8.0	38.1	2,024
Secondary complete/higher	58.2	49.1	43.5	43.5	8.3	7.3	49.8	4,747
Work status								
Working for cash	61.3	51.4	45.4	40.9	8.1	8.1	47.6	2,264
Not working for cash	74.6	69.8	52.4	27.1	7.7	7.4	35.2	13,295
Total	72.6	67.1	51.4	29.1	7.8	7.5	37.0	15,559

The differentials shown in Table 14.7 suggest that women living in urban areas, particularly in the Urban Governorates and the Frontier Governorates, highly educated women, and women who work for cash are considerably less likely than other women to believe that circumcision is an important aspect of religious tradition or that men prefer wives to be circumcised. For example, about four in ten women in the Urban Governorates agree with the statement that husbands prefer wives to be circumcised, compared with eight in ten women in rural Upper Egypt. There is somewhat less variability among women in the percentages believing that circumcision prevents adultery; however, urban women, highly educated women, and women working for cash are somewhat less likely than other women to hold this belief.

Beliefs that circumcision has adverse consequences for a woman's health and fertility or for a couple's sexual satisfaction are more evident among urban women, highly educated women, or women who work for cash than among other women in Egypt. However, even in these groups, the majority of women generally do not believe that circumcision has any of these adverse consequences. The proportion agreeing with any of the beliefs about the adverse consequences of circumcision reaches half or more of women in only two subgroups (women with at least a secondary education and women from urban Upper Egypt), and this is only in the case of the belief that circumcision lessens sexual satisfaction.

14.6 EXPOSURE TO DISCUSSION/INFORMATION ABOUT CIRCUMCISION

Table 14.8 summarizes the results of questions related to the level of interpersonal communication about circumcision and the channels through which women have recently received information about circumcision during the year before the survey. The table shows that interpersonal communication about circumcision was not widespread among women during the year prior to the survey. However, a third of the women had talked about circumcision with their family or friends and neighbors during the year before the survey.

Regarding sources of information about circumcision, television appeared to be the primary source. Among ever-married women, 73 percent reported that they received information about circumcision during the year before the 2000 EDHS on television, 37 percent had gotten information from the radio, and 20 percent had gotten information from a newspaper or magazine. Relatively few women cited either a community meeting or the mosque or church as a source of information about circumcision. Typically, urban women, highly educated women, and women working for cash were more likely than other women to have received information from any of the communication channels.

Table 14.8 Exposure to discussion or information about female circumcision

Percentage of ever-married women who report discussing female circumcision with relatives, friends, or neighbors during the past year and the percentage who reported hearing or seeing something about female circumcision through various communication channels during the year prior to the survey, by selected background characteristics, Egypt 2000

Background characteristic	Discussed with family/friends/neighbors	Information from TV	Information from radio	Information from newspaper/magazine	Information from community meeting	Information from mosque	Number of women
Age							
15-19	26.4	67.6	28.0	11.9	2.8	1.9	615
20-24	30.8	73.6	37.8	20.5	2.2	3.3	2,244
25-29	34.3	74.5	37.8	22.7	3.2	3.4	2,847
30-34	38.6	75.8	39.5	24.1	3.9	4.5	2,695
35-39	33.1	72.1	37.9	21.3	3.8	4.4	2,673
40-44	32.0	71.0	36.2	18.8	3.7	4.8	2,180
45-49	29.8	69.4	32.7	15.5	3.1	3.9	2,304
Urban-rural residence							
Urban	39.9	80.8	47.7	32.1	4.4	5.7	6,860
Rural	27.7	66.2	28.2	11.1	2.5	2.6	8,699
Place of residence							
Urban Governorates	45.5	76.1	44.9	32.4	5.2	6.7	2,983
Lower Egypt	26.3	74.1	36.1	18.6	3.5	2.9	6,825
Urban	34.0	86.4	50.9	31.9	4.5	4.4	1,945
Rural	23.2	69.2	30.2	13.3	3.1	2.3	4,880
Upper Egypt	34.4	69.1	33.6	16.1	2.1	3.8	5,544
Urban	36.5	82.0	49.9	32.5	3.2	5.7	1,807
Rural	33.5	62.8	25.7	8.2	1.6	3.0	3,737
Frontier Governorates	39.7	72.0	27.0	17.2	2.3	3.4	207
Education							
No education	26.0	62.2	23.6	3.7	1.3	2.1	6,730
Primary incomplete	33.0	71.1	31.4	8.4	2.1	3.0	2,058
Primary complete/ some secondary	35.4	76.9	40.1	20.4	3.1	4.1	2,024
Secondary complete/higher	42.1	86.4	56.3	49.1	6.7	6.9	4,747
Work status							
Working for cash	39.8	82.6	53.9	47.0	7.9	7.3	2,264
Not working for cash	31.9	71.0	33.8	15.8	2.5	3.4	13,295
Total	33.0	72.7	36.8	20.4	3.3	3.9	15,559