1994

Early Marriage and Reproduction in Two Egyptian Villages

Laila El Hamamsy

Follow this and additional works at: https://knowledgecommons.popcouncil.org/departments_sbsr-pgy

Part of the Demography, Population, and Ecology Commons, and the Family, Life Course, and Society Commons

How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!

Recommended Citation


This Monograph is brought to you for free and open access by the Population Council.
EARLY MARRIAGE
& REPRODUCTION IN TWO EGYPTIAN VILLAGES

Dr. Laila El Hamamsy
Occasional Monograph
The Population Council / UNFPA
EARLY MARRIAGE AND REPRODUCTION IN TWO EGYPTIAN VILLAGES

LAILA SHUKRY EL-HAMAMSY

Professor Emeritus, The American University in Cairo

Occasional Paper
The Population Council / UNFPA
Cairo, 1994
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study was undertaken for the National Population Council (NPC) of the Egyptian Ministry of Population and Family Welfare and conducted by the Social Research Center of the American University in Cairo. Research funds were generously provided by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities, Egypt. The author expresses thanks to the able members of the field research team, including Aziza Rashad-Lotayef, Zeinab Gamal and Esmat Kheir. Technical and computing assistance were provided by Nader Ferghany and Khaled Mohamed Abdulla. Special thanks are due to the Governors of Sharkiya and Aswan governorates and the directors of the NPC regional offices for their advice and assistance. The Population Council, Office for West Asia and North Africa, wishes to thank Sjaak Bavelaar, UNFPA Representative in Egypt, for providing support for the publication and distribution of this study. Views expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the author, and not of the Population Council or its sponsors.

Copyright © 1994 by The Population Council, Inc.

The Population Council seeks to improve the wellbeing and reproductive health of current and future generations around the world and to help achieve a humane, equitable, and sustainable balance between people and resources. The Council, a nonprofit, non-governmental research organization established in 1952, has a multinational Board of Trustees; its New York headquarters supports a global network of regional and country offices.
CONTENTS

Preface

Introduction

Description of study villages

Age at marriage

Satisfaction with own marriage age

Problems with early marriage

Husband's age at marriage

Education, occupation and age at marriage
  - Women's education and age at marriage
  - School-leaving among girls
  - Attitudes towards female education

Women's employment and age at marriage

Marriage decisions and married life
  - Choice of husband
  - Residence patterns
  - Satisfaction with marriage
  - Dissatisfaction with marriage

Reproduction
  - Attitude toward first pregnancy
  - First pregnancy
  - Number of living children

Contraception

Conclusions and Recommendations
  - Follow-up research activities
  - Educational programs
  - Action programs
Marriage forms a central element of social life for Egyptians. Unlike in some parts of the world, marriage in Egypt is nearly universal, and parents sacrifice and invest heavily to establish their children in married life. Once married, couples are faced with social pressures to begin childbearing immediately, a reflection of the high value placed on parenthood and children.

But not all marriages begin with the same prospects for stability and satisfaction. The study presented here by Dr. Laila El-Hamamsy draws attention to the particular problems faced by women who marry at very early ages in parts of rural Egypt. Despite a legal minimum age of sixteen years, significant numbers of young girls marry below that age, and as a consequence many experience social, emotional and health-related difficulties. The value of this study lies in the powerful way in which it tells the story of these young women, both through statistical analysis and rich reporting in their own words about why they married early and how that decision affected their later life. While the study is exploratory, it nonetheless points to areas where the aspirations of these girls have been clearly thwarted -- to go to school, to delay marriage, and to postpone childbearing until they feel physically and psychologically ready.

A related picture emerges of the social and economic forces which propel rural girls into marriage at very young ages: family resistance to girls' education, schools that are not oriented to rural needs, lack of employment opportunities for village girls, and the hardships of poverty that help to define unmarried daughters as an economic burden. Each of these problems suggest areas for concerted policy attention.

As the UN International Conference on Population and Development convenes in Cairo, The Population Council is pleased to make the findings of this important study available to a wide audience. We do so in the hope that it will contribute to a broader understanding of the issues surrounding adolescence, and will stimulate thinking about ways to improve the lives of young women in Egypt and beyond.

Barbara Lethem Ibrahim
The Population Council, Cairo
August, 1994
INTRODUCTION

This study explores the socio-cultural factors that influence the age at marriage and encourage teenage marriages among girls in rural Egypt. Early marriage deserves special attention for two equally important reasons: its demographic implications and its repercussions on women’s role, development and health.

The author’s interest in early marriage was sparked by a Ministry of Health field study in Upper (southern) Egypt which showed that 44% of rural women married in the previous five years had been under the legal age of 16 at the time of marriage. The figures are significant, yet few studies exist about the prevailing socioeconomic factors and cultural orientations that foster early marriage in Egypt, particularly in rural communities.

Estimates of changes in rates of early marriage are largely based on sample surveys which provide little contextual information. Trend data on age at marriage over this century, which is available in national censuses, suggest a rise in average marriage age for girls. Unfortunately, in the 1986 census, ages less than 16 were combined with age 16 so that the phenomenon of "pre-legal" marriage is not easily discernable. Smaller demographic studies have included data on marriage age. One example is the study of fertility, "Is There Hope?", which showed a median age at marriage of 16 in Menufia governorate villages. While other studies suggest that overall marriage ages are rising, regional "pockets" of under age marriage remain and need to be better understood.

The fieldwork for this study was initiated in February 1991 and the final report completed in December 1993. Research was carried out within two moderate-sized villages, one in

---

Sharkiya and the other in Aswan governorates. These governorates were chosen purposely because of high rates of teenage marriage reported in the 1986 census - 29 and 40% respectively. The study was undertaken in two stages. In the initial stage, a total household survey was implemented to find out the composition and characteristics of the village population and to identify the target group - all women of reproductive age. In the second phase, an in-depth survey of the identified women was undertaken.

In addition to the collection of basic quantitative data, numerous open-ended questions were used to allow women to express, in their own words, their perceptions and experiences relating to marriage and reproduction. These questions yielded rich qualitative data that provided insights into the cultural and social pressures and the socio-economic conditions that encourage early marriage. Numerous examples of women’s responses have been included in the text, not only because of the extra flavor and concreteness they give the quantitative analysis, but also because they can be used to enrich the content of educational and media messages addressing this issue.

As the study focuses on only two out of the 5000 or so Egyptian villages, it is, in a sense, exploratory. The results cannot be generalized to the rest of the population or even to the two governorates. However, we believe that they are suggestive of what might be found in other villages within the same general cultural setting. Comparisons between the two villages are occasionally made without any intention of generalizing the differences more broadly to their respective governorates. There is no question that the location of the Sharkiya village, close to a city and major roads, exposes it to more external and urban influences than that of the Aswan village. The comparison between the two villages is valuable insofar as it shows the variations as well as the similarities that can exist between different rural areas of Egypt.

DESCRIPTION OF STUDY VILLAGES:
The two villages are referred to as Sharkiya-V and Aswan-V. Sharkiya-V is at a distance of 10 kilometers from Zagazig, the governorate capital, and can be reached by paved
highway, train and public bus. The ethnic composition of the village is similar to that found in other parts of Sharkiya; it has an indigenous rural population as well as groups of bedouin origin. It is made up of one main village inhabited by the original rural population and two satellite hamlets or ezbas. The larger ezba is occupied by two bedouin groups.

Aswan-V is situated 46 kilometers from Aswan city and 3 kilometers from the town of Kom Ombo, and is composed of three settlements. Its people are not indigenous to Aswan; they originally came from the contiguous governorate of Qena in the 1920’s to work on newly reclaimed land. Sugar cane is one of the main crops in the Kom Ombo area, which explains the existence of a nearby sugar factory.

At the time of the household survey, Sharkiya-V had a population of 5,919 inhabitants - 3,008 males and 2,911 females - and 945 households with an average size of 6.3 individuals. Aswan-V had 5,307 inhabitants - 2,710 males and 2,597 females - and 773 households with an average size of 6.9. Both villages contain high proportions of young people. About 42% of Sharkiya-V population and 46% of Aswan-V are less than 15 years old. The dependency rate is substantially higher in Aswan-V - 108 in comparison to 93 in Sharkiya-V.

In the two villages, most women began married life early - 44% before reaching the legal marriage age of 16, 68% before the age of 18, and 81% before the age of 20. There are important differences, however, between the two villages. Fully 60% of the Aswan-V females were married before the age of 16 and 89% before the age of 20 as compared to 30% and 74% respectively in Sharkiya-V.

Using employment and educational attainment as indicators, we find that Aswan-V is less developed than Sharkiya-V. Sixty-four percent of its household heads are farmers or agricultural laborers in comparison to 48% of those in Sharkiya-V. The proportion of household heads who have never been to school, are illiterate or can barely read and
write, is 84% in Aswan-V, as compared to 52% in Sharkiya-V. Only 20% of the household heads in Aswan-V and 27% in Sharkiya-V have gone beyond primary school; and only 9 household heads are university graduates as compared to 43 in Sharkiya-V. As the Figure 1 below shows, there is a higher overall rate of illiteracy in Aswan-V than in Sharkiya-V and consistently much higher rates among females than males. The highest illiteracy rate is among the females of Aswan-V (87%) and the lowest among the males of Sharkiya-V (28%).

**FIGURE 1: ILLITERACY RATES (POPULATION 10 YEARS OF AGE AND ABOVE)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Aswan-V</th>
<th>Shark-V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>69.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study sample: The focus of this research is primarily women of reproductive age who married within the past 10 years. For comparative purposes, however, in order to note changes over time, women of reproductive age married over 10 years ago were also included for parts of the interview schedule.

The total number of women interviewed was 1,495. Of these, 327 were married within the last 5 years and 282 between 6 and 10 years, making a total of 599 women married within the last ten years (342 in Sharkiya-V and 257 in Aswan-V). Eight hundred ninety six women were married over ten years ago (455 in Sharkiya-V and 441 in Aswan-V). (See Table 1.) These three groups will be referred to throughout the study as the youngest, middle and oldest marriage cohorts.
The sample of women selected from the household survey was somewhat larger than those finally interviewed. Some women were found to be beyond the reproductive age; some had died, were divorced, widowed, or had left the village for one reason or another; and some were visited more than once but could not be found. In all, 44 women in Sharkiya and 95 in Aswan-V could not be interviewed.

**TABLE 1 - THE STUDY SAMPLE BY VILLAGE AND TIME OF MARRIAGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Marriage</th>
<th>Sharkiya-V</th>
<th>Aswan-V</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within last 5 years</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years ago</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>797</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>698</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AGE AT MARRIAGE:**

**Current age:** The ages of women married within the last 10 years range from 14 to 33 years. Only 3 (0.5%) are currently in the 14-15 years category, i.e. below the legal age of marriage, while 81 or 13% are teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19. With the widespread awareness of the government’s commitment to reduce illegal early marriages, some married adolescents may have inflated their own ages.

**Marriage age:** In order to increase accuracy, age at marriage was calculated indirectly by obtaining the woman’s age at engagement and adding to it the time that elapsed between engagement and consummation of marriage. Taking all three groups of marriage cohorts together, 41% were married at less than 16 years, 30% at ages 16 or 17, 15% at 18 or 19 and only 13% at ages 20 or above.
Teenage marriage is still the norm, for we find that among the youngest cohorts, 50% were married at age 17 or less and a total of 80% as teenagers. There is, however, a clear trend toward fewer pre-legal age marriages and a growing tendency for postponement of marriage to the age of 20 or beyond. Marriage at less than 16 declined from 51% among the oldest, to 32% among the middle, and 23% among the youngest cohorts. Conversely, 8% of the oldest were married in their twenties, 14% of the middle, and 25% of the most recent cohort. (See Table 2)

### TABLE 2 - AGE AT MARRIAGE OF THREE FEMALE MARRIAGE COHORTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at Marriage:</th>
<th>Married</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 yrs &amp; less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 16-</td>
<td>68 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 17</td>
<td>88 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 19</td>
<td>75 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 +</td>
<td>77 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>309 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A further breakdown of the data by village reveals wide differences between the two study sites. Aswan-V has higher rates of adolescent and early marriage and lower rates of marriage at age 20 or above, among all three marriage cohorts. In Aswan, 57% of the women reported they were married under the age of 16 as compared to 28% in
Sharkiya-V, while among the oldest cohorts, 64% married at less than 16 as compared to 39% in Sharkiya-V. Both villages have registered improvements with the passage of time; but the improvements in Sharkiya are more striking. In Aswan-V, 39% of those married during the last 5 years were below 16, as compared to only 8% in Sharkiya-V. It is important to keep in mind that the sample excludes unmarried women, who would raise the percents marrying late to even higher levels.

For women marrying below the legal age of 16, how is the law circumvented? Birth registration in Egypt is generally very good; families want to vaccinate and educate their children, and they cannot do so without registering the child and obtaining a birth certificate. We find, however, that 30% of women married within the last 10 years and 56% of those married for over 10 years had obtained their marriage licenses on the basis of a physician’s age estimation rather than a birth certificate. It has been a common practice for a bride-to-be who is under age (or her family) to declare that she has no birth certificate and present, instead, an age estimation by an accommodating physician. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that in Aswan-V, where the age at marriage is lower, a higher percentage than in Sharkiya-V were licensed to marry on the basis of a physician’s age estimation - 50% of those married within the last 10 years and 66% of those married over 10 years ago, compared to 16% and 46% respectively in Sharkiya-V.

The government has tried in recent years to change the system. In some governorates, the use of age estimation in licensing marriage has been discontinued. There is evidence, however, that some people are getting around this new obstacle by contracting what is called an "Islamic marriage". The latter requires no more than the presence of two witnesses and that the betrothal must become public knowledge. In this type of marriage, the marriage contract is not officially registered until the girl has reached the legal age. During informal interviews in Aswan-V, some of the women reported cases in which the consummation of marriage, and even the birth of a child, preceded the date of signing the legal marriage contract. Only one woman within the sample admitted that the consummation of her marriage and the birth of her child had taken place before the signing of the contract. Some village women referred to the complications that can occur
in such marriages, citing a case in which the husband denied the marriage and refused to admit being the father of the children, thus leaving the woman with a serious social and financial crisis.

SATISFACTION WITH OWN MARRIAGE AGE:
If they had the freedom of choice, 63% of the women married within the last 10 years would choose to marry at the same age they did and 37% at a different age. About 55% of women overall who married under the age of 17 liked the age at which they got married. The percentage of satisfied women rises perceptibly the higher the marriage age. About 66% of those married between the ages of 18 and 19, and 82% of those married in their twenties expressed satisfaction with their age at marriage. (See Table 3)

**TABLE 3 - NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN SATISFIED WITH OWN MARRIAGE AGE BY MARRIAGE AGE AND VILLAGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marriage Age</th>
<th>Sharkiya (number)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Aswan (number)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total Satisfied (number)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 16</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>(70)</td>
<td>61.4</td>
<td>(90)</td>
<td>55.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16--17</td>
<td>(55)</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>(45)</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18--19</td>
<td>(52)</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>(88)</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 +</td>
<td>(76)</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>(96)</td>
<td>82.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are differences between Aswan-V and Sharkiya-V, as noted in Table 3. In both villages there is a much lower rate of satisfaction among those married at less than 16 and at 16 and 17 than among those married at higher ages. Aswan-V women are, generally, more favorable to younger marriage ages than those of Sharkiya-V, perhaps because of
its higher incidence there.

Some of the reasons women gave for satisfaction reflect general attitudes about the best age at marriage for a girl; others are more personal and have to do with specific circumstances and experiences that made marriage propitious and desirable at the time it happened. One set of reasons for satisfaction with own marriage age, given by 31% of the satisfied women, reveals the strong influence of traditional peasant culture and pressures put on a girl to marry early: they were afraid people would label them as spinsters. Some said that marriage shields and protects the girl from wrongdoing. "A girl should marry as soon as the right suitor shows up." "It was the right marriage age according to village customs". Others said their parents had made the decision and they could not contest it.

Another equally important set of reasons for satisfaction with a specific marriage age, given by 31%, was its suitability and the readiness of a girl for marriage - mentally, emotionally and/or physically. At that age, the respondents said, the girl is "mature enough", "old/young enough", physically "strong enough" to bear the responsibilities of marriage, husband, pregnancy, childbirth, child rearing, homemaking etc.

Other reasons for choosing to marry at the age she did, given by 14% of the women, have to do with education. Some said because the woman was educated it was logical that she get married after completing her education; or if she had received no education, she had to get married early - "what was I to wait for?" The idea that an uneducated girl has no reason to wait is echoed in answer to several other related questions.

The last group of reasons are not related to age but rather to the woman's desire at that time to get married and have children or to marry a man with whom she was in love. The latter was an unexpected response from women living in a traditional peasant society. Twenty one out of the 24 women who mentioned being in love were from the Sharkiya village.
The most frequently mentioned single reason for satisfaction with their own marriage age, given by 20% of the women, was that at that age the girl can take good care of her home and family because she is "mature/wise enough", "knows what's right and what's wrong", is able to carry the responsibilities of marriage, husband, children and home.

The second most important reason for satisfaction with their age at marriage, given by 12% of the satisfied women, is that beyond that age, a girl would become "fallow", a spinster. The concept of spinsterhood is influential as a negative label for many rural women. Some of the typical responses:

I would marry at the same age; it is a suitable age. I was the oldest girl to marry in our street. I was 18 and no one gets married at 18.

Do you want me to wait till I get old until I am "fallow" and become a spinster? And 19 is a good age, anyway.

Here in this village if a girl waits till the age of 18, she would be considered too old. I am the first one among my sisters to marry at that age; they used to get married much younger.

If a girl reaches the age of 20, people would say, "Oh, calamity, she has become a spinster" and they go around disgracing her in the village.

Two-thirds of those who thought that spinsterhood loomed beyond the age at which they had gotten married are from Aswan-V. Checking on the age at marriage beyond which these women think they would risk spinsterhood, all but 3 had married in their teens. It is interesting to note that social pressure to marry to avoid spinsterhood was even felt by 17% of those who got married below the legal age of 16. Equally interesting is the fact that only 3 out of the 117 who married at 20 years of age or above seem to have worried about becoming unmarriageable because of an "over ripe" age.

Among the 14% of women who referred to education or its lack as a determining factor in their age at marriage, those who said they had to complete their education first were all married at 20 years of age or over. All those who said they had no education and had
no reason to wait were married as teenagers. Education obviously plays an important role in determining age at marriage, and is discussed further below.

When it is a question of the physical fitness of the woman to withstand the demands of marriage, pregnancy and childbirth, those who married late spoke loudest. Forty-three women or 11% said that their marriage ages were right because at that age a woman is "in control of her health", is "strong enough" and "is physically able to bear pregnancy and childbirth". The same health arguments are used by the champions of both early and late marriage and are noted in the following typical responses:

This was a good age for marriage in every way; she will be old enough to face life generally and the demands of daily living. If a girl marries young, she will suffer physically and will get worn out.

It is dangerous for the girl to get married before the age of 20 there is risk to her health, to her pregnancy, childbirth and children.

A girl at 16 is already knowledgeable about the world, has control over her health and is able to bear marriage and pregnancy.

I was young when I got married and a young girl can support the physical demands of marriage, childbearing and rearing and can bear the miseries of husband, children and home.

Thirty-six women, 9%, have the notion that a girl who marries young remains young and beautiful, while those who marry late grow rapidly old and ugly. What is considered "young" is a relative matter, as the marriage ages these women were referring to range between under 16 to twenty and above, but nearly all those who gave this answer had married as teenagers.

As expected, most of those who said that their marriage age was right because they had no schooling and, hence, no reason to wait, were married as teenagers; and most of those who said that their marriage age allowed them to finish their education were married at age 20 or above.
Women's choice of best marriage age: When women were asked the more objective question of what they consider the best marriage age, a somewhat different picture is presented, as personal circumstances are less relevant. Although only 7% were married in their twenties, yet the most frequently chosen ideal marriage age for a girl was 20, chosen by 51% of those married within the last 10 years and 44% of those married earlier. About 24% of both groups of cohorts chose ages between 16 and 19, but there are still some who thought that 15 could be a good marriage age - 8% of the younger and 14% of the older cohorts. (See Table 4)

**TABLE 4 - PREFERRED MARRIAGE AGE AMONG THREE MARRIAGE COHORTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preferred age:</th>
<th>5 yrs &amp; less</th>
<th>Married 6-10 yrs</th>
<th>Over 10 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 16-N</td>
<td>18 (6)</td>
<td>32 (11)</td>
<td>130 (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 - 17</td>
<td>37 (12)</td>
<td>38 (13)</td>
<td>190 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 - 19</td>
<td>37 (12)</td>
<td>33 (11)</td>
<td>110 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 +</td>
<td>216 (70)</td>
<td>187 (65)</td>
<td>466 (52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>896</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A further breakdown of the figures by village shows that Aswan-V tends to endorse younger marriage ages than Sharkiya-V. The largest proportion of champions of pre-legal age marriage are found among those married over 10 years ago in Aswan-V (18%), followed by those married for less than 10 years in Aswan-V (14%) then the oldest
cohorts in Sharkiya-V (11%) and finally by the more recent cohorts in Sharkiya-V, among whom only 4% think the age of 15 is the most suitable marriage age. Conversely, the largest proportion of those who believe in marriage in the twenties is found among the more recent cohorts in Sharkiya, 74%, followed by the earlier cohorts in Sharkiya-V, 59%, the more recent cohorts in Aswan-V, 56%, and finally the earliest cohorts in Aswan-V, 48%.

Several women chose young ages (16 or 17) for the uneducated and much higher ages for the educated: "sixteen is a good age, but for the educated girl 23"; "sixteen if she is a peasant; but if she is educated, she can wait until she gets a diploma"; "twenty two is a good age for an educated girl, but for the one who is not educated, then 17 will do"; "If she is in school, she should finish her education, but if she is not, then it is better for her to get married at 18."

The most frequently mentioned reason for choice of an ideal marriage age is that a girl at that age is mature enough, more enlightened about the world and able to cope with the demands of marriage. This explanation was given by 53% of the women married within the last ten years and 50% of those married earlier. Typical statements:

By that age she would be moulded and would know everything about homemaking. She would be fully equipped to deal with her new home and to cope with all the responsibilities. Should she face difficult circumstances, she would be able to deal with them and bear the burdens of children and family.

This is a good age because when a girl gets married, she becomes worn out and she has to carry the burdens of children and family.

By that age a girl would have become a bit more sturdy and would have had time to learn in her father's house, to cook and bake bread. She would then be able to cope with all the responsibilities of home and children.

So that when she goes into her husband's family she can cope with their work demands and can serve her husband and his family.

She should marry not too young nor too old. A young girl gets worn out and does know her responsibilities; but at that age she is able to handle all her affairs and manage all household problems.
She would be mature, respect her husband and her husband would respect her. She would have a say about her marriage and not just be drawn like an animal with no one ever asking for her opinion.

She would be wiser to the world than a young girl and she can carry the responsibilities of home and children and would be old and strong enough. You see, I got married very young and knew nothing. An older girl would be happier with her husband and can cope better with any problem that may arise between them.

So that she may be able to manage husband and children. She would be of her husband’s age and would understand him; but a young girl would be foolish and immature.

What that "mature" age is ranges between under 16 to 20 plus, but 78% of those who mention maturity from among the recent marriage cohorts and 65% of the earlier cohorts were referring to ages 20 and above. There are, in addition, the expected Sharkiya-V Aswan-V differences; out of a total of 53 women who thought that a 15 year old girl was ready to carry the responsibilities of marriage, 43 were from the older group, and all but 5 were from Aswan.

The second most important reason for favoring a particular marriage age is because the girl would be physically able or "old enough" or "young enough" to endure pregnancy and childbirth - chosen by 39% of the younger and by 51% of the older cohorts. The higher percentage among older women is perhaps due to their longer experience with pregnancy and childbirth and their greater awareness of the physical toll these can take on a woman’s health. The ages at which the respondents thought the girl would be physically prepared for motherhood span the range from less than 16 to 20 plus, but 82% of those who mentioned childbearing from among those married within the last 10 years, and 63% from among the older marriage cohorts were referring to ages 20 and above. Only a small number (4% of the former and 6% of the latter), think that an adolescent at the age of 15 is physically best fit for marriage and its responsibilities. Some typical responses:

At this age, a girl is able to endure pregnancy, staying up late with the children and carrying household responsibilities.

She would be old enough to endure pregnancy and childbirth and the man’s abuses and would be strong enough and in control of her health. Frankly, marriage just grinds the girl. I would have so liked to marry at a later stage.
A young girl goes into marriage and has to face all the miseries and get crushed by them. I have "seen death" with my son, Mohamed. A girl should not have a child when young; her bones should, first of all, become strong.

If a girl gets married before that age, she would be too young. She would get overburdened with children, maybe fall ill; and that would be an injustice against her.

A girl who marries young has to cope with pregnancy, children and other heavy responsibilities; and, because young, she will hate the man.

Because a girl gets married and becomes pregnant right away and her health suffers. That's why she should postpone marriage until she reaches the age of twenty.

This is the best age for pregnancy, childbirth and breast feeding.

Another significant reason for early marriage was given by 180 women: "A girl who marries young stays young". While most of these respondents were referring to ages 17 and under, about 40% of the younger cohorts who gave this answer and 23% of the older ones were referring to higher ages, including 20 and above. Typical responses:

The girl who gets married young stays young and she brings men into the world while she is still young.

Because a girl has "limits" beyond which she will not look pretty. A girl has brightness when young; and when she gets married and bears children she stays young forever. But if she marries old, after going through one pregnancy, old age will show on her face.

At that age a girl is at the prime of her beauty and youth and is in greatest demand.

If she gets older than that and gets married, she will not look nice; and she will not be able to take care of her child or anything. But when she marries young, she gets children while young; and her children can eventually serve her while she is still young. Thus, she would not get worn out quickly.

Other reasons for choosing certain marriage ages, by order of frequency: (1) The girl would still be young and thus avoid gossip and spinsterhood, given by about 7% of both older and younger cohorts and referring mostly to ages 17 and less. (2) She would have the time to complete her education, given by 6% and mainly referring to ages 20 and above. (3) It is the "right age for marriage" and it is the legal marriage age, given mostly
by women from Aswan. Four women, interestingly all from Aswan, expressed the liberal view that late marriage gives a girl a chance to live a little, to achieve some of her goals, and enjoy her freedom.

Spinsterhood: Fear of spinsterhood is one of the conscious or unconscious reasons why most women are reluctant to postpone marriage too long, but what is considered "too long" is a relative matter. What age society sets for spinsterhood undoubtedly influences marriage age, for the internal and external pressures on the girl to marry are likely to mount as she gets closer to the dreaded age. In answer to the question asking what age a girl becomes a spinster, the overwhelming majority (87%) gave ages 20 or above. Age 20 is important since its choice implies that there are social pressures to marry girls while still teenagers. This answer was given by 29% of those who married within the last ten years. Among those married for over 10 years, a total of 47% think spinsterhood starts at 20 or less, with an equal percentage in both Sharkiya-V and Aswan-V.

PROBLEMS WITH EARLY MARRIAGE:
Because of the difficulties, physical and psychological, expected to be encountered by girls married at the young age of 17 or less, these respondents were asked if, because they were young, they had met any special difficulties when first married. One hundred and seventy-one or 16% of this group, said they had. These figures should be viewed with caution, since the answer to this question depends on women’s recollection of a situation that, for many, is rather remote in time. Women’s responses do give an idea, however, of some of the difficulties girls married at young ages can suffer.

Twenty-four percent of those who had difficulties said they had problems in relation to pregnancies and childbirth because they were young and frail. Others (19%) suffered health and gynecological problems (ovarian, vaginal or cervical inflammations or hemorrhage, with some of these difficulties leading to miscarriage), or had not yet reached the age of menarche. Add to these the 4 women who said that they had problems with their mothers-in-law because of delayed pregnancy, for a total of 22% who had difficulties relating to reproduction. Seventeen percent reported problems with marital relations and
sex resulting in psychological problems and loneliness; 16% suffered fatigue and debility from overwork and the excessive demands of in-laws, and 6% feared or disliked the husband. Typical statements:

I suffered a lot during my pregnancy and when I had my first baby.

After the delivery, I was exhausted physically and psychologically. I was weak as I had become pregnant immediately after marriage.

I became pregnant immediately; I was very unhappy. I missed the house of my mother and father and I often sat down and cried.

I carried very heavy responsibilities and was burdened beyond my capacity at such an early age. I did not know much and could not do anything. My in-laws kept making fun of me. I really suffered.

I did not understand what marriage is. I was too young and was not strong enough to do all the work they demanded of me. I also could not bear any physical relation with my husband, and I would vomit every time.

I was scared of my husband. He is very tough, and beats me if I make any mistake. He never allowed me to go and visit my family; and if ever he came home and did not find me, he would beat me.

I didn’t know anything; I was just 11 and still a child. I did not understand the value of a man, and I did not want to stay with him. I was afraid of him and used to run away from him.

I had problems because I did not menstruate until a year and a half after the consummation of the marriage.

HUSBANDS’ AGE AT MARRIAGE:
Some 7% of the women (114) did not know or did not want to divulge the age at marriage of their husbands, 62% of whom were themselves married at less than 16. The data show that 7% of the husbands for whom information was available were married at less than the legal age of 18, indicating that underage marriage among men represents a far smaller group than among women. Fifty-two percent of the husbands married between 18 and 24 years of age; 26% between 25 and 29; 12% between 30 and 39; and about 3% at 40 or beyond.
Given traditional marriage patterns, it is expected that men will be naturally older than their brides. We find, however, that about 59% of the women who married at 17 years of age or less married men less than 25 years old; about 20% married men between 25 and 29 years of age; 9% between 30-39, and 2% married men 40 years old or older. In other words, many of the very young brides married men close to their own ages and 79% married men less than 30 years old (90% in Sharkiya-V and 73% in Aswan-V). Only 2% of adolescent brides reported that they married middle aged or old men. The stereotype of very large age differences among rural spouses is not borne out by this study.

EDUCATION, OCCUPATION AND AGE AT MARRIAGE:
As pointed out earlier, the differences relating to marriage patterns and women’s role consistently found between Sharkiya-V and Aswan-V can be largely explained by differences in development levels, as indicated by the occupation and the educational attainment of the population. About 52% of the husbands in Aswan-V are in rural occupations (mainly small farmers and agricultural daily wage workers) as compared to only 36% in Sharkiya-V. There are also relatively fewer individuals within the higher occupational groups, i.e. university-educated government or private sector employees and professionals (7% in Sharkiya-V and only 3% in Aswan-V).

The educational level of both men and women in the Sharkiya village is much higher than in Aswan. The percentage of illiterates among all the husbands is 50% (39% in Sharkiya-V and 62% in Aswan-V). Not only did relatively more of the men go to school in Sharkiya-V (61%) than in Aswan-V (37%), but they also reached higher levels.

The difference between the villages of Sharkiya and Aswan in the educational status of women is even more striking, though both have a high rate of illiteracy. The majority of women in the total sample (67%) are illiterate, but the rate is higher in Aswan (77%) than in Sharkiya (58%). It is consistently higher among all three marriage cohorts, by as much as 23 percentage points among those married over 10 years ago and 15 points among those married within the last 5 years.
Among women who have been to school (31% of the women in Aswan and 41% in Sharkiya), we find an almost equal dropout rate from primary school in the early stages - 47% in Sharkiya and 44% in Aswan. The most important differences occur in the later stages; 59% of Sharkiya women had left school before completing the compulsory intermediate level as compared to 74% of Aswan women. Out of the 51 women who completed high school, 47 are from Sharkiya and only 4 are from Aswan. About 4% in both groups went to university - 6 women in Sharkiya and 4 in Aswan.

Although women's educational status is still disadvantaged, there has been some improvement over time. The illiteracy rate of those married during the last five years is 57% as compared to 67% of those married within the last 6 to 10 years, and 71% of those married for over 10 years. The dropout rate prior to completion of the preparatory level is 53% among the youngest marriage cohorts, compared to 80% for the middle group and 96% for the oldest.

**Women's education and age at marriage:** Studies elsewhere suggest that early marriage is less likely with increased education, a finding strongly supported by our data. All but two of the women who married at less than 16 are illiterate or school dropouts with primary education only. Marriage age rises with higher educational attainment, and thus over 70% of the women with secondary and university education were married at age 20 or above. That is true of the more recent as well as the older marriage cohorts in both Sharkiya and Aswan. (See Table 5)
TABLE 5 - EDUCATIONAL STATUS BY AGE AT MARRIAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>&gt; 16</th>
<th>16-17</th>
<th>18-19</th>
<th>20+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate + Read &amp; Write N</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>1,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(47)</td>
<td>(30)</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Primary</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(37)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(37)</td>
<td>(35)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(52)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(28)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(21)</td>
<td>(69)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
<td>(100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>1,495</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relationship between the husband’s education and his wife’s age at marriage is also strong. The percentage of men who married adolescents less than 16 years old decreases with each level of husband’s education. Forty-nine percent of the illiterate husbands married adolescents; 41% of those with a few years or who completed primary education; 34% of those with preparatory; 21% of those with secondary and intermediate diplomas, and only 1 out of the 54 husbands with university degrees.

As education is such a significant factor in discouraging early marriage, it is important to understand the reasons why so many women among those married within the last 10
years had not been sent to school. As it turned out, personal choice had little to do with it. Only 3% of the uneducated women said that they had not been to school because they had no inclination for studies, or because they had come to dislike or fear the school. Traditional conceptions of the female role seem to have been the most important obstacles in the way of girls' education. Some 49% of the women reported that they did not attend school because parents, and particularly the father, did not believe in girls' education and thought it useless or socially shameful. From these women:

My father educates the boys only but not the girls.

It was a matter of ignorance and carelessness in the earlier days; they did not like to educate the girls. You see my parents are peasants.

My father would not allow any of us to go to school because, they say, it is shameful for a girl to go to school. So he kept me at home to help my mother take care of my siblings, to learn all about housework, washing and cooking so that I may become a "lady of the house".

My father would not send me to school because boys accost and tease girls in the street and because it is improper for a girl to go out.

My father worked as an attendant at the college of agriculture. He saw the girls there, and he developed a complex about them. He did not want me to get an education because I am pretty and have green eyes, and boys would look at me.

My older brother was in school, and he saw how the girls are teased and run after by the boys. So he said, "My sisters are not to go to school!"

We were living on the land (outside the village); and my father was afraid to have us walk alone to school.

The influence of the traditional female role can also be noted in relation to the 20% who were not sent to school in order to serve other members of the family - younger siblings, an ailing mother or a step-mother. Following are some typical statements:

I was the oldest of my siblings and my mother refused to send me to school. She told my father, "Let her help you in the fields."

My father kept me at home to help my mother take care of and bring up my younger siblings.
I was the oldest; and my mother and father did not want me to go to school. Every time I went, my father would come and beat me and say, "You stay home and serve your mother and your siblings."

My father refused to send me to school for his own interest. He wanted me to help at home and serve my mother and also to clean the animal shed and everything. He did not educate any of us girls. He used to say, "The girl is for the house and the boy for education."

Poverty is the second most important reason given for why women were denied an education. If the family's economic circumstances are difficult so that only some children can be educated, girls are likely to be the first victims. Some 25% referred to their family's difficult financial situation, often due to a large number of children, as the reason for not going to school. Following are sample statements:

My parents refused to send me to school; they had limited means and did not have any money to educate me.

My father refused; we were 11 children and our expenses were too much for him.

My father was married to three wives, had 18 children, and did not have enough money to provide for all of us.

My father died and my siblings were young and needed financial support. We had no one to provide for us and we were many.

My father did not have the means to send me to school. We were 9 girls, which one could he afford to send?

Only 7% did not go to school either because there was no school in the village or because of difficulties with enrollment procedures: their birth certificates were lost; they waited to be called by the school and they were never called; they were asked to come a year later because they were too young, and the following year were told that they were too old; or their parents, for one reason or another, had failed to register them on time.

School-leaving among girls: Some of the same personal, social and economic reasons that kept women out of school initially were responsible for the dropping out of large numbers
before completing their education through high school. Table 6 below shows the reasons girls quit school – as given by the 165 women who did so and who represent 73% of all those who attended school.

TABLE 6 - REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL GIVEN BY CURRENTLY MARRIED WOMEN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not like studying or the school</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help at home or work with family</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental/traditional attitudes</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic necessity</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get married</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School not available or distant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn sewing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left the village</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL 165 100.0

More conservative tendencies in the Aswan village showed in the traditional attitudes that were most frequently mentioned as reasons for girls to drop out of school. Parents withdrew their daughters because they were more interested in educating boys. Many considered female education useless or shameful, either because a girl’s place is the home and marriage her best option, or because going to school meant exposure to the world of the street, to people’s tongues and to possible male harassment. Following are some of the ways in which women expressed these attitudes:

Because we are peasants and according to our customs it is better for the girls to get married. What is important is the education of the men.
My parents took me out of school because they did not give much importance to girls' education, for girls are to serve in the home - that’s all!

Because I had matured and my father wanted to marry me off. He also preferred to educate the boys. In the past, girls did not go to school. And, if they did, they were kept in school for a year or two, just to learn to read and write, and then were taken out. Parents were afraid to let them walk in the street all by themselves.

My parents would not let me continue because they thought it inappropriate for a girl to receive an education; people would talk about her."

Asked whether they would have liked to go to school, the overwhelming majority of all women said yes. Only 17% said they would not, and over half these said they had never been fond of studying and preferred playing with the other children or staying at home. A few seem to accept the parental decisions and cultural, mores that kept them out of school. Some think that education is costly and useless since graduates cannot find employment. Examples of answers:

Because my siblings are all peasants and I am just like them. I work on the land and that’s it; why should I get any education?

No one went to school in those days, and I used to like to stay home and help my mother and I didn't like the school. All the girls I knew were staying at home; and the girl who stays at home learns about homemaking and farming, which is better than just school.

Because we grew up and found ourselves like that and found no one in our village interested in educating the girls; so we know nothing about the value of education.

Do you think that those who go to school succeed in anything? All they do is spend money, study hard and then at the end find no work.

Attitudes towards female education: When the women were asked the general question of whether it was better for a girl to go to school or stay home and learn to be a housewife, an overwhelming majority (81%) said she should go to school. There is some difference between those married within the last ten years, among whom 86% opted for girls' education, and the older ones, 78% of whom did. The most significant regional difference is among those married for over 10 years, as we find 65% in Aswan compared to 90% in Sharkiya are supporters of female education. Among the minority opposed to
A girl should stay home to help her mother and to learn how to cook, bake bread, wipe the floors, clean and arrange the house, learn to be a lady of the house. School does not teach them anything. They only take degrees then stay home.

To learn how to be a housewife and how to serve her husband and children and carry her responsibilities. You see, schools ruin girls' minds.

What does a girl get out of education? She should learn about housework so that when she gets to be responsible for a man, she would know how to serve him and meet his demands. Education is for the boy only.

Here it is a dishonor for the girl to go to school. It exposes their minds to bad ideas; and if she stays in school until she finishes she would be too old and would have missed the train.

If a girl is educated, she refuses to work on the land. She does not know how to collect dung from behind the farm animals or do anything. And if she knows, she feels proud and above farm work.

School teaches them to fall in love and to go around with the man for a year or two before marriage; and so she loses her reputation.

In contrast, the most frequent reason why a majority of women endorse girl's education is because it is "light"; it "opens" the mind, and because the educated girl is more enlightened than the fellaha (peasant girl). These reasons were given by 58% of the total group, with no discernable difference between younger and older cohorts or between Sharkiya and Aswan. The next most frequently given reason for endorsing education, given by 41% of the women, is so that the girl may earn a degree with which to get a job and help her family. About 8% believe education gives a girl a better chance of marrying well, of making a good match, or marrying "an educated man, not a fellah". A few women mention that education leads to self-respect and greater autonomy. Typical responses:

Education is light; it broadens the mind. A degree is a weapon in a girl's hand with which she can work and make some money if she wishes.

Education is beautiful, and an educated girl has freedom and has a future. She has her
degree; and if there is any misfortune, she can spend on herself.

A woman with education is better in everything. She can make a good match and marry someone educated who would make a lady out of her. With her degree she can help her husband with the family’s livelihood and can teach her children.

An educated girl has personality and holds her head high. She is respected by everyone and by her husband. Her opinion is respected and no one can impose anything on her; and she knows how to walk around in the streets without getting lost.

An educated girl holds a piaster (coin) in her hand; she can do whatever she wants and her opinion is heard by her husband. You see, the man today respects in a woman her education and her degrees.

Education is important because if a girl has a disagreement with her husband and leaves him, she can take care of herself and develop herself and not have to wait for her husband to take her back. You see, no one is willing to look after a woman who quarrels with her husband and quits him. She has to take care of herself.

Because ignorance is ugly!

If a girl is already in school and a suitor comes along, is it better for her to complete her education or to get married and become a housewife? Again, a large majority, 86% of the younger and 78% of the older cohorts, said a girl should continue with her education. In Sharkiya, the vote for continuation is around 90% among both younger and older marriage cohorts; in Aswan, it is 81% among the younger but only 65% among the older group. The reasons given for the continuation of the girl’s education or for removing her from school if a suitor presents himself are similar to those given for and against girls’ education.

WOMEN’S EMPLOYMENT AND AGE AT MARRIAGE:
Only 56 women (9%) among those married within the last 10 years are employed outside the home - 41 in Sharkiya and 15 in Aswan. Among those married for over 10 years, 77 (9%) said they were currently working or involved in productive activities in the household. (See Table 7 below)

The more conservative nature of Aswan’s rural society reveals itself in relation to
women's work, not only in the percentage of working women but also in the type of work they undertake. More than two fifth of the Sharkiya working women are employed outside the home in what are considered menial jobs - agricultural wage work, picking cotton or harvesting crops, and street vending of vegetables and fruit. It is traditional in rural areas that only a family in serious financial need would allow its women to take up these jobs. In the Aswan village, no women report being engaged in such work. (This is not because the Aswan families are better off, but most likely because of the shame and dishonor they believe would befall the family that allows its women out of the house to work, mingle or be seen with strangers). That may explain why 12 out of the 15 working women among the younger marriage cohorts in Aswan are engaged in productive occupations that do not take them outside the home - dressmaking, poultry raising or the processing of cheese and other milk products. The three other working women in Aswan are educated; two are primary school teachers with high school diplomas and one is a nurse. In Sharkiya, we find that 20, or half the working women, have some education, eight of whom have university degrees.

| TABLE 7 - EMPLOYMENT IN STUDY VILLAGES AMONG WOMEN MARRIED WITHIN THE LAST 10 YEARS |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Employment                      | Sharkiya | Aswan | Total |
| Agricultural laborer            | 14   | 0    | 14   |
| Custodian                       | 1    | 0    | 1    |
| Fruit/vegetable vendor          | 3    | 0    | 3    |
| Makes and sells cheese/ghee     | 0    | 4    | 4    |
| Raises and sells poultry         | 0    | 4    | 4    |
| Runs own grocery store           | 1    | 0    | 1    |
| Dressmaker                      | 4    | 4    | 8    |
| Clerk/Secretary                 | 8    | 0    | 8    |
| Teacher                         | 7    | 2    | 9    |
| Social worker/nurse              | 2    | 1    | 3    |
| Pharmacist                      | 1    | 0    | 1    |
| TOTAL                           | 41   | 15   | 56   |
| Percent working                 | 12   | 5.8  | 9.3  |

28
We can note some change in social attitudes in the reasons given for why most of the women in the study villages did not work. Some 48% referred to family and peasant values as the reason for not working: because it would "dishonor the family" or the father would never allow any of his girls to go out to work, etc. Seventy-one of these women referred to the comfortable financial circumstances of their families. The implication seems to be that, in Sharkiya, the family will allow women to work if the extra income is needed. In Aswan, negative attitudes are so strong that even need does not induce most families to allow women to go out of the house to work.

It is interesting to note that a girl's education can alter some of the negative attitudes toward work. Ninety-four women, 21% of the non-working women, said they had never worked because they did not have any education or professional skills with which to take up a job. Another ninety-five women (21%) said that they were too busy taking care of their homes and their families to have time to work outside the home.

Among the younger cohorts are 71 women who had worked previously but were not working at the time of the survey. The main reason for stopping work, given by 25 respondents, is because the husband did not wish them to work. "Because," explained one of them, "I got married and every house has its own traditions. In my husband's house they would not let me work." "You see," said another, "I got married. I was a free girl and used to go out with the other girls; an unmarried girl has freedom to work, but after I got married they wouldn't let me." Nineteen women gave up work in order to take care of home and children or to help the husband farm his land. The rest gave a variety of miscellaneous reasons such as health, age, pregnancy, boredom, or poor pay. The majority, 68% of women who had ever worked, started working before marriage and only 32% after marriage, presumably with the approval of the husband.

Many women started working as children, some as early as 7 or 8 years of age. Among all women who ever worked, 23% began working before reaching the age of 12 and another 29% between 12 and 15. These are women who had little education and come from underprivileged families, where the labor of many family members is needed. The
rest are almost equally divided among those who started to work between the ages of 15 and 19 and those at the age of 20 or over (28%).

It is easy to understand, in view of the small number of women who are gainfully employed, why unmarried girls, unlike the boys who can earn their keep, are perceived in these communities as a burden or liability, and why this situation contributes to early marriage.

**MARRIAGE DECISIONS AND MARRIED LIFE:**

**Choice of husband:** Who decides about the girl’s marriage and chooses her future husband? In view of the traditionally patriarchal nature of the rural family, the fact that fathers are more influential than mothers in decisions relating to the girl’s marriage is not surprising. Fathers picked the husbands of 47% of the women married within the last ten years; in addition, 3% reported that the mother also shared in the decision. Only 5% said that their mothers alone had made the choice, but one suspects that the mother at times paves the way then leaves the final decision to the father. What truly surprised the researchers, however, was to find that 28% (168) of the women reported that they chose their own spouse. Even in Aswan, where 57% of the women married the men their fathers picked for them, 16% said that they themselves chose their future husbands. This is a smaller percentage than the 37% found in Sharkiya, a proportion almost equal to that of the women whose fathers alone made the choice (40%). Regardless of who proposes the girl’s suitor, however, it is generally agreed that the father is the final authority as to when and whom the girl marries.

Most of the women said they were asked their opinion about their suitors, but there were 102 women (24%) whose opinion no one had bothered to solicit, with a very small difference in that respect between Sharkiya and Aswan. Most of the women seemed to accept the decision of their parents and only 35 (6%) said they had not agreed to the marriage, two thirds of whom were from Sharkiya. Some typical statements from women initially opposed to their suitors:
I did not like my cousin, but my father and mother forced me, saying that he was my cousin and I had to marry him. So I said, "Do whatever you wish; I know nothing."

I did not like him and did not want him, but my father said, "I will bury you in the animal shed if you don't marry this fellow."

He was married before and had a daughter, and I did not want to marry him, but my parents said that he was a good man, so I agreed.

He was an old man and had been married three times before.

They did not take my opinion about this marriage; and I was too young for marriage and its responsibilities.

I wanted very much to make a better match.

I did not want that marriage because he works as a farmer on the land. I only agreed when they told me I was not going to work in the fields.

My paternal cousin had asked for my hand and I wanted to marry him, but my maternal uncle did not agree and told me that my husband was a good and meek fellow, so, I accepted to marry him because we [girls] have no say. Our word does not count.

Residence patterns: Once married, where does the couple reside? The residence pattern gives some indication as to who wields authority over a couple, particularly the young woman, in the early years of marriage. At the start of married life, the overwhelming majority (80%) of young couples in this sample resided with the bridegroom's parents. A slightly higher percentage resided with in-laws in Sharkiya (88%) than in Aswan (77%). Residence with the bride's family is rare in Sharkiya - less than 1% at the beginning of marriage, but it is found among 9% of the Aswan couples. Only 15% lived in an independent residence during the first year of marriage.

With the passage of years, the residence pattern of married couples changes and an independent residence gradually becomes the more dominant type. About 51% of the couples changed residence within the first three years; 71% did so by the end of 5 years of marriage, and 95% by the end of 10 years. The proportion of women living in independent households at the time of the survey increased from 42% among those married within the last 5 years to 89% among those married for over 10 years.
We find some interesting differences in current residence patterns between Sharkiya and Aswan among those married within the last ten years. Residence with in-laws is much more prevalent in the former than in the latter - 62% of those married within the last 5 years and 35% of those married between 6 and 10 years ago in Sharkiya, in comparison to 35 and 21 in Aswan. This means that the mother-in-law is particularly dominant in the life of a young married woman in Sharkiya. The mother, on the other hand, features more importantly in the life of most of young married women in Aswan. This is either because they are actually living with their mothers (6% as compared to none in Sharkiya) or are living in independent households (56% in comparison to 48% in Sharkiya) where the mothers have a chance of having some influence over their daughters. The joint family pattern, where married brothers live in one household, is also less common in Sharkiya than in Aswan, where 21 out of 28 such residences are found.

Satisfaction with marriage: How well did the marriage turn out in its initial stages? The question was asked only of women who married within the last 10 years. A large majority, 79% said they had been happy and met no difficulties. The most frequently mentioned cause of happiness at the beginning of marriage is the good treatment the bride received from her husband and parents-in-law, specifically the mother-in-law, 41% in Sharkiya and 29% in Aswan. In addition, 35% in Sharkiya and 26% in Aswan said that they had been happy because the husband turned out to be a good man, which means that a total of 75% in Sharkiya and 55% in Aswan mentioned the husband’s behavior as a cause of satisfaction. The good qualities and treatment of the husband are the most important cause of a young bride’s happiness, but in-laws also feature, particularly in Sharkiya, as a source of happiness or dissatisfaction. Typical statements:

I had no problems, no children nor the problems they bring with them. My husband was good to me. I am happy with him for there is a great deal of understanding between us.

My husband did everything to make me happy and comfortable. He tried not to upset or anger me, and provided me with all my needs.

His parents treat me well and do not insult me. They try to please me in every way possible; and my husband is kind to me.
It was a love match; so naturally I was happy. His parents, also, were also good to me.

My mother-in-law is a very good and kind woman. She treats me well and teaches me what’s right and what’s wrong. My husband, too, treats me well.

My parents-in-law were good to me because I was never insolent with them. I used my brains and responded with a "yes" to everything they said. You see "yes" is a soothing word. As a result, we were helpful to one another.

The next most frequently mentioned cause of marital happiness, though by a much smaller percentage, is the fact that the couple started married life in an independent residence. This answer was given by 7% of the Sharkiya women and 12% of Aswan women, among whom, as noted earlier, a higher percentage lived independently when first married.

I was comfortable in my own house, eating and drinking at my own ease. I was alone with my husband with no one intruding in our life together.

There is nothing better than one’s own feeling of comfort in one’s own house. This is different from living with the parents who only smother one. In my own house, I do whatever work I need to do.

I was living alone without a mother-in-law or anything. There’s a lot of understanding between my husband and me, as we had been in love before getting married.

It is perhaps because a higher percentage of young couples in Sharkiya live with the husband’s family, that their happiness is largely determined by the qualities and treatment of the husband and his family. Relatively more women in Aswan relate their satisfaction to the fact that they started married life in an independent residence and to the ability of the husband to provide for their material needs.

As is clear in the following analysis of women’s marriage difficulties, friction and quarreling between the young wife and her in-laws often occur in relation to the heavy work responsibilities they demand of her. It is possible that the in-laws in Sharkiya, especially among the poorer families, tend to demand much more work from their daughters-in-law both inside and outside the house than those of Aswan where the conventions are more stringent about women’s work away from home.
Dissatisfaction in marriage: The overwhelming majority, 95% of the 128 women (21%) who said they had difficulties when first married, gave the main cause as the poor relationship they had with their in-laws, particularly the mother-in-law. Seventeen of these women also mentioned bad treatment by the husband, and 11 women had primary difficulties with the husband only. Specific complaints had to do with the fact that parents-in-law, mothers-in-law or other in-laws constantly quarreled with them and/or humiliated them, demanded from them an excessive amount of work, including difficult farm work, or did not allow them freedom of movement. Eight of these women had to face the worry and nagging of parents-in-law because they had not become pregnant soon after the consummation of marriage. Nine of these marriages ended in divorce and the women remarried. A sampling of responses:

I was very unhappy. He used to beat me because he did not want me to leave the house and visit my family.

He was older than me and treated me very badly and I hated living with him.

My husband used to beat me at the beginning of our marriage and then he stopped after I had a child.

If I made any mistake, we quarreled together. If I spoke in a loud voice, he beat me; and when I laughed, he beat me.

He used to be suspicious of everything. He would not let me go out; even when I was not feeling well, he would not take me to the doctor.

I had problems with my mother-in-law and my father-in-law. They shout at me when I go to visit my family and if I stay with anyone in the street they quarrel and shout at me.

Quarreling is continuous in my husband’s house about everything. There were constant problems with my husband’s sister who used to take my things and ruin them.

Living with his family was the problem. A woman should have an independent home to feel that things belonged to her. Otherwise, she lives as a stranger in someone else’s home. I feel like a stranger in this house, and I don’t feel that it belongs to me.

My mother-in-law quarreled with me constantly. Whatever she wanted she imposed on me and on my husband, always stubbornly opposing everything. I came to hate the house and I used to close the door and weep. She also used to work up my husband against me, and he used to beat me for just any old reason.
I was comfortable in my father’s house, and when I left it, I became very fatigued from the additional work I had to do in the fields and in the house, and so much distress.

There were, in addition, 14 women who had financial difficulties at the beginning of married life, mostly because of the husband’s limited means. In 5 cases the husband had problems with his own parents; and 4 cases the women had pregnancy and childbirth complications. Examples of answers:

Our financial situation was very, very difficult. There were even days when I only ate pickles and my mother came to me. My husband does not want to acknowledge any of that, so life is very difficult.

We had children right away and we did not have any money at all. I was exhausted from the lack of money and the work I had to do.

I am tired of the conditions of life, and everything is so expensive. We have to buy grain. My husband had only a part-time job and he was in debt. That is why the first years of our marriage were very difficult.

The problem I faced and I still face is that Allah did not give me any children. This is a problem, particularly among the peasants.

When I first got married I had not started menstruating yet and I stayed three years before I did. My husband’s family was not happy. They wanted me to have a child right away; but how was I to do that? I had to bear all their quarreling for years until I finally had a baby.

**REPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOR:**

*Attitudes toward first pregnancy:* Married young or old, is there pressure on new brides to become pregnant immediately or is it possible for them to delay? While respondents confirmed that these pressures exist and influence actual behavior, the majority (70%) said a girl should wait. There are no great differences in this respect between Sharkiya and Aswan nor between the three marriage cohorts. The reasons these women give for preferring a waiting period at the beginning of marriage sound quite modern and reflect a different concept of self and of life expectations than one usually ascribes to rural women: to test the marriage; to get used to her new married life; to enjoy marriage unburdened by pregnancy and child care; to become strong and healthy enough, especially
when young, to endure pregnancy and childbirth; or until she and her husband have a
good enough income to afford children. The most frequently given answer concerns
enjoying the new life with a husband. Typical responses:

She should wait a year or so to feel happy and enjoy herself as a bride and to relax a bit
before facing the burdens of pregnancy and children.

For the spouses to enjoy each other and "feel happy in their youth", and until the girl is
strong enough to endure pregnancy and childbirth.

So that she and her husband would have time to enjoy each other and not have children
too soon on whom to spend money. Also children wear a woman out.

Concern about health is the second most frequently given reason for delaying pregnancy,
and these answers seem to refer to very young brides. A third reason for delaying
pregnancy is the need for the woman to settle down first and get used to her husband and
to marriage. Typical answers:

She should wait a bit but not too long, until she gets adjusted to her husband and her new
home.

Until she gets to feel relaxed and adjusted to the new home and its people [husband's
family].

Until she understands her man and his character and can deal with him. Also, she needs
to see what living with him will be like.

A small percentage of women (6%) said that if the girl gets married at a young age, she
should wait until she reaches the age at which she can have children without detriment to
her health.

If she is young and physically immature, she will be exhausted from working in the fields.
Therefore, she should wait a bit; otherwise, she will be worn out by childbirth and child
care.

She should wait a year or two, because if she is married young, she will not be able to
endure the burdens of pregnancy and children. She should wait until her age is right. We
hear of girls becoming pregnant before they are 20, and their health suffers.
If a girl is married young and waits a little, she will be able to bear pregnancy and avoid miscarriage. She will be more capable of bringing up her children and keeping them clean.

A few women (3%) mentioned the need for the woman to test her husband and her marriage to see if she will be happy, so that if she is not she can divorce before having any children.

She has to make sure that her husband is good to her; and, if he is, she can go ahead and have children. If he is not, she can divorce him before getting any children.

To feel secure with her husband and see that he will treat her well, otherwise, it is better for her to divorce before she gets tied down with children and then feel forced to live with her husband against her own desire.

Societal and family pressures, popular notions about age and health, and the joy of having children are the main reasons why 30% of the women think a newly-wed should become pregnant as soon as possible after the consummation of marriage. When we compare the responses of the three groups of marriage cohorts, we find an equal percentage among the youngest and the oldest cohorts favor immediate pregnancy (31%), and a smaller percentage (25%) among those married for 6 to 10 years. This difference may have to do with the fact that women in this middle cohort have already experienced one or more pregnancies and are more conscious of the burdens and costs of an early pregnancy. Older women may have less distinct and therefore more positive memories of early childbearing.

One unexpected result was the lower percentage among Aswan women as a whole who believe in pregnancy immediately after marriage, with the lowest percentage overall (21%) among the middle marriage cohort in Aswan and the highest percentage (35%) among those married within the last five years in Sharkiya. One should bear in mind, however, that the Sharkiya women generally marry at older ages than those of Aswan and may, therefore, see little reason for postponing pregnancy.
The most frequently given reason for endorsing immediate pregnancy is the importance of having a child when young and healthy. These women repeated what is obviously a popular concept, "A woman who is pregnant when young remains always young!" Relatively more women in Aswan (25%) than in Sharkiya (16%) gave this answer, and relatively more of the oldest cohort. Typical statements:

If a woman gets children when young, she will stay all her life young; and when her children grow up, she will still be young.

So that she may have her children while strong and beautiful "in her youth" instead of becoming old and having difficulties.

She should get her children while young, because, if she gets children while old, she could die, that's why.

The pressure of husband and in-laws, who might become so anxious about the wife's fertility as to drag her to the doctor, is another important reason for early pregnancy, given by 23% of those approving early pregnancy. About half of these women think that if pregnancy is delayed, a woman risks divorce or sharing her husband with a second wife. Thirty-nine out of the 48 women who gave this response are from the older cohorts. Another 19% think that a quick pregnancy would avoid the lashing of people's tongues and accusations of sterility. Even though the blame for non-pregnancy usually falls on the woman, three respondents said that it is the husband who might be accused of impotence or "lack of interest in women". In all, a total of 41% of those favoring early pregnancy were susceptible to external, societal or family pressures. It is important to note, however, that these women only constitute 12% of all the women interviewed. Typical statements:

In order to prove that she can become pregnant, that's all. Because of peasant traditions, people will say she cannot have children and her husband will take a second wife.

Here a girl bears children right away so that people do not shame her and talk around and say that there is something wrong with her; so she had better get a child and after that she can wait as much as she likes.

You'll find that the woman does not wish to become pregnant right away. But the man wants children immediately, and if her pregnancy is delayed in any way, she wouldn't hear the end of it.
To tie the man down and prevent him from looking at other women or skipping off and marrying a second wife.

If she does not become pregnant right away, what a calamity! They will drag her around to the doctors and to the sheikhs for all kinds of prescriptions. Also people will talk about her and tell her, "See how so and so has already borne a child and you have not". Furthermore, her husband may take a second wife.

Sixteen percent of the women favoring early pregnancy said that a new bride must try to become pregnant as quickly as possible to be reassured that she is fertile. One can assume that the external pressures are partly behind the need for such reassurance.

First of all, she should find out whether she can or cannot become pregnant. Once she is assured she can have children, she can wait as much as she likes.

So that if there is something wrong with her, she can hurry to the doctor and receive treatment without delay.

Although a large percentage of the women who opted for early pregnancy did so in deference to village norms and family wishes, there are those who think a woman would want to have children as soon as possible because of the joy and pleasant distraction they bring to her and/or the husband and in-laws (15%). A few women believe that brides cannot use contraceptives at the beginning of marriage, as they might become sterile. Some added that the woman should first get a child then use contraceptives later. This seems to be a relatively recent notion, since over half of those who gave this response are from the most recent marriage cohorts. Typical statements:

She should have one child at first, because it is possible that if she takes the pill, God would not favor her with a child. Once she has had a child, she can wait until the child grows up.

Because if she takes the pill, it will harm her and will cause sterility. Some of the women around here who were using the pill have become sterile and are now getting treatment.

A relatively small proportion of women (5%) place everything in the hands of God who determines all things. "It is all in Allah’s hands; if He wants her to become pregnant, she
will; if He does not, what can she do about it?" "There are those who become pregnant right away and some who wait a bit. Allah may have her become pregnant immediately. And, anyway, it is better for a woman to do so; for if she doesn’t, she may never be able to have any children at all."

First pregnancy: It is clear, then, that the majority of women believe that it is best to wait a while before becoming pregnant. The question remains: does behavior reflect this general preference, or do cultural values and sanctions, as well as life circumstances make it impossible for women to have control over the timing of their first pregnancy? As will be noted later when discussing contraception, only 7 women out of the sample reported using contraceptives before having the first child. In other words, while most women say that they wished to postpone pregnancy, almost all of them let nature run its course.

As a result, 56% of the women overall became pregnant during their first year of marriage. Among those married at less than 16 years of age, there is a somewhat longer delay reported. Among the youngest cohort, 57% of those married under age 16 were pregnant within the first year as compared to 70% of those married between ages 16 and 19, and at 20 and above. Among the older cohorts, the percentages are 49%, 58%, and 59% respectively, suggesting that immediate childbearing is actually increasing over time. The reason why those among the older marriage cohorts took more time to become pregnant may be due to the higher proportion of very young, hence infertile adolescent brides, and younger marriage ages generally in the past.

By the end of the second year, the proportion of women who had become pregnant among the older cohorts is 63% for those married under 16, 82% for those married between 16 and 19, and 88% for those married at age 20 or above. Among those married within the last 10 years, the rates are 71%, 85%, and 80% respectively. In other words, except for the very youngest, teenage brides started early and, therefore, had many years of procreation ahead of them.
Once a woman has had a child, would it be better for her to have one after the other or to space them? The sample of women were almost unanimous in endorsing spacing, 95%. The majority of these, 63%, gave 2 years as the ideal period; 27% said 3 years; and 4% gave 4 years as the ideal.

The desired number of children is in nearly all cases fewer than the actual number these women already have. Among those married for over 10 years, the percent who have two or three children is only 15%, yet these are the number of children considered ideal by 40% of the women. A total of 36% have four or fewer children, but 61% consider this the desirable number of children.

The average number of pregnancies and of live births are high in both villages, but they are consistently higher in Aswan. The averages for all women are 5.6 pregnancies (5.2 in Sharkiya and 6.0 in Aswan) and 4.7 live births (4.4 in Sharkiya and 5.1 in Aswan) (see Table 8).

**TABLE 8 - AVERAGE NUMBER OF PREGNANCIES BY DURATION OF MARRIAGE AND AGE AT MARRIAGE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>under 16</th>
<th>16-19</th>
<th>20+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 5 yrs</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5--9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10--14</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15--19</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20--24</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25--29</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>out of range</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The figures suggest a tendency for the average number of pregnancies to become progressively higher the lower the marriage age, whatever the marriage duration. Of course, factors other than age at marriage are affecting the fertility rates. Taking the middle group, those married for 15-19 years, we find an average number of pregnancies of 7.4 and of live births 6.3 among those married at less than 16 years of age, while the figures decrease to 6.8 and 5.8 among those married between 16 and 19, and to 6.3 and 5.5 among those married at age 20 or above. Among the cohorts married for 25-29 years, whose childbearing is completed, the average number of pregnancies for those married under the age of 16 is very high, 10.4 (11.8 in Aswan and 9.1 in Sharkiya) compared to 9.6 among those married at 16-19 and 7.4 among those married at age 20 or above.

### TABLE 9 - AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY DURATION OF MARRIAGE AND AGE AT MARRIAGE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>&lt; 5 yrs</th>
<th>5--9</th>
<th>10--14</th>
<th>15--19</th>
<th>20--24</th>
<th>25--29</th>
<th>30+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>under 16</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-19</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of living children:
The average number of surviving children for the whole sample of women is 3.9 but it rises to 4.5 among those married under 16, only 3.6 among those married between 16 and 19, and 2.8 among those married at 20 or above. (Questions relating to spontaneous or
induced abortion were not asked.) One may safely infer, however, that substantial rates of infant and child death were experienced by women in these two rural communities. Of course, some of the younger cohorts have not yet completed their total childbearing. (See Table 9).

CONTRACEPTIVE BEHAVIOR:
If women are going to plan the timing of their first pregnancy and the spacing and number of children, they need to find an effective way of controlling pregnancy. A majority of the women in this sample have at one time or another practiced modern contraception (877 or 59%), and 526 women or 35% are current users. In addition, 85 women mentioned using breast-feeding as a contraceptive method for child spacing.

The Sharkiya village is ahead of Aswan in relation to both ever and current contraceptive use. In the former, 68% are ever-users and 43% are current users compared to 47% and 26%, respectively. In Sharkiya, 44% of those married within the last ten years are current users compared to only 21% in Aswan. Among the middle group, those married from 6 to 10 years ago, 54% of those in Sharkiya are contraceptive users compared to 21% in Aswan. These patterns confirm national surveys showing large regional disparities in the use of contraception in rural Egypt.

The method choice for first-time users reported by 87% of ever users was the oral pill. Only 7% used the intrauterine device (IUD) as the first method, nearly all from Sharkiya. Ten women used condoms, 7 foam tablets and 2 sterilization, all of whom are from Sharkiya. Among current users, 86% use the oral pill (81% in Sharkiya and 96% in Aswan), and 9% use the IUD (13% in Sharkiya and only 2% in Aswan). The pill may be more popular among Aswan women because they have less easy access to the medical assistance necessary for IUD insertion - either because of greater conservatism that restricts mobility or because of limited medical services at their disposal. The pill is more readily available and can be easily purchased without prescription at a pharmacy by the user or by any other member of the family. Another possible explanation is that family planning providers may encourage different methods in the two communities.
The majority of women (585) initiated contraception after having 3 or less children - only 1% before having any children; 18% after having one child, 23% after 2 and 17% after 3 children. Twenty-four percent started contraceptive use after having had 4 or 5 children; 13% after 6 to 8 children and the rest between 9 and 13 children.

The majority of current users (65%) are in the 20 to 34 age bracket, while a small percentage (4%) are teenagers. This means that 69% (374 women) of the users are in their most fertile years, but they represent only 37% of all women in that age bracket. The rest of the users are 35 years or older.

A total of 43% of current users have 3 or fewer children. About 45% have 4 to 6 children and the rest, about 12%, have more than 6. Naturally, those who have fewer children have been married within the last 10 years and may not have completed their families.

Out of the 351 women who discontinued contraceptive use, 167 (48%) had planned to end childbearing permanently and the rest wanted to space their children. The reasons women gave for discontinuation show that 24 had reached menopause, while 14 stopped because the husband was away. Only 17% (63 women) stopped in order to have another child. Most of those did not want any more children, but reported that the husband wanted more and so they were told to discontinue use of the method.

A large majority (87%) discontinued use because of failure or problems with the contraceptive methods. About 14% (44 pill, 2 IUD, 1 condom and 1 safe period users) became pregnant while using the method; 56% had intolerable side effects (fatigue, headaches, dizziness, weakness, panting, decrease in breast milk, hemorrhage); 4% forgot to use, were afraid of or could not obtain the pills, or reported that the condom tore during use.

Clearly much needs to be done to increase the effectiveness of contraceptive use and reduce discontinuation rates. Side effects of the methods, particularly the oral contraceptive, remain an important reason for dropout rates. Given the large number of...
married teenagers, an important issue that needs to be addressed is the suitability of the available family planning services for these younger women, including the mix of contraceptive methods, and providing education and outreach programs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:
A number of important conclusions can be drawn from the results of both the quantitative and the qualitative aspects of the study. These have relevance for policy makers in several areas of the Egyptian government, for researchers, and for current reproductive health and family planning programs.

1. Patterns of teenage marriage, including pre-legal age marriage, and the circumstances and social pressures that foster it still persist in rural areas. Within that generalization, the differences found between the Aswan and Sharkiya villages suggest wide regional variations among rural communities with respect to early marriage and related behavior. Sharkiya has a lower rate of early marriage, hence, a higher median age at marriage, relatively more educated women, lower average numbers of pregnancies and children, and more contraceptive users. Changes in the age of marriage have occurred over the years in both study villages, however Sharkiya village shows consistently higher marriage ages among those married over ten years and a faster rise in overall marriage age than Aswan.

2. Variations in marriage and reproduction also exist within individual governorates, especially those inhabited by people of different ethnic backgrounds. In Aswan, for example, professionals working in health and family planning assert that early marriage is not as prevalent among Nubians and the Gaafra tribe as among the Saidis. The present study did not select a Nubian or Gaafra village and, therefore, has no data to corroborate these assertions. On the other hand, the research clearly reveals that the Saidi population (which is a numerical majority) in the sampled Aswan village has higher rates of teenage and pre-legal age marriage than other parts of the governorate where Nubians predominate.
3. The best way for early marriage to be discouraged is for people to be convinced that it has few benefits and to perceive that it conflicts with other desired values and life conditions. Judging from the answers to several questions relating to age at marriage and education, it is clear that schooling is one of the important factors discouraging early marriage. The benefits of education include the prospects of a better marriage, enhanced status and role of the woman, financial rewards, and a better standard of living for the family. This study underscores the importance of people's perception of these benefits in making decisions about schooling and marriage.

4. Girls are discouraged from receiving the amount of education they desire. From the strong endorsement it received, girls' education has obviously demonstrated its worth among rural women. An important question, however, remains: do other decision-makers in the family, such as fathers and brothers, have the same perceptions, and do the right conditions obtain for encouraging female education?

5. Even though the majority of women, especially the younger ones, both educated and illiterate, believe in girls' education, there are obstacles which have their origin in rural traditions and rural poverty. Because of the cost of education and/or a perception of its low intrinsic or economic value, poor and uneducated families tend to look upon a girl's schooling as a luxury. Once a girl is kept at home, then marriage to an acceptable suitor becomes the natural and sometimes the only option.

6. Education is usually viewed as a social equalizer, but it can also constitute a demarcation line accentuating the differences between the educated and the unschooled. As became clear from the answers to questions eliciting attitudes towards girls' education and work, age at marriage etc., education separates women into two distinct categories from whom different behavior patterns are expected. An educated girl, for example, can wait until the age of 20 or more without being labeled a spinster; an uneducated girl is pressured to marry as early as possible. Even in Aswan, work outside the home seems possible if the girl is educated, but only allowed among very poor families, if she is not.
7. There are clear patterns of change in behavior between the youngest and older marriage cohorts in both Sharkiya and Aswan, insofar as age at marriage and related behaviors are concerned. The changes in attitudes that have occurred, particularly among the youngest women and those of the Sharkiya village, are the most obvious. Women’s choice of ideal marriage ages (20 or above), their positive perception of the value of education, and their endorsement of delayed pregnancy, child spacing, and small family size can augur well for the future.

8. Changes in attitudes, however, do not automatically translate into actual behavior. First, there is the time lag that normally exists between attitudinal and behavioral changes. Attitudes often change as a result of experience, such as the realization of the economic, social, psychological or physical costs of early and repeated pregnancies; but this realization occurs when it is already too late to change the course of events.

9. A gap may exist between attitudes and behavior if individuals lack the power to implement their own wishes. This was the case among women in the sample who wished to limit the number of their children, but were forced by husbands or older relatives to discontinue the use of contraceptives. Another example is the large majority of girls who had wanted to attend school but were prevented by conservative fathers or other relatives out of a belief that a girl’s place is at home, where her honor can be safeguarded and where she can best help with the care of her family.

10. Contradictions between what a woman thinks or wishes and what she actually does can also arise as a result of the social pressures to which she is subjected - to marry young for fear of being labeled a spinster; or to become pregnant soon after marriage to avoid public gossip, the nagging of in-laws, or divorce. Finally, there are specific conditions and circumstances facing the woman herself (or the family members who make the crucial decisions in her life) that prevent wishes from becoming realities, such as the family’s inability to finance a girl’s education or to support a non-working, unmarried girl at home.
11. This is not to say that attitudinal changes are not important; they are usually indicative of future trends. Some of the younger women seem to have enough autonomy to impose their ideas and influence the significant events of their lives. If not, then they may be able, as mothers and mothers-in-law, to help the next generation of young women realize what they had wished but failed to achieve for themselves.

12. Attitudinal changes are necessary preconditions for behavioral changes but, as noted above, they are not sufficient. It is important that the socio-economic circumstances that encourage early marriage be removed. These arise primarily from economically depressed conditions in some rural communities, especially in Upper Egypt. If these conditions are not ameliorated, then early marriage and its socio-demographic consequences are likely to remain with us.

In conclusion, the importance of discouraging early marriage lies not only in its demographic and health consequences, but also in the more general implications for the status of rural women and the well-being of their families. Early marriage cuts short education and normal adolescence; it burdens the girl with pregnancy, children and excessive work responsibilities at an immature age; and it gives her little opportunity for self expression or fulfillment. These women are less able to raise healthy children and less likely to be able to achieve progress for their daughters, thus perpetuating a cycle of underdevelopment.

A number of specific policy recommendations emerge from this study:

Follow-up research activities:

1. As the present study was exploratory, it produced important insights but not generalizable findings. A more extensive survey should be undertaken using larger and more representative samples to obtain the overall prevalence and social and demographic correlates of early marriage in Egypt’s rural (and urban) communities. This study concentrated on the views and behavior of women. Fathers, however, are important actors in decisions relating to girls’ development, education and marriage, and husbands have
a say in reproductive behavior and family planning decisions. It is recommended, therefore, that men's behavior and attitudes also be investigated in any future research on early marriage patterns.

2. The aspect of health consequence was not sufficiently investigated in the present study. It is strongly recommended that a panel or longitudinal study be undertaken to gauge the problems of health, reproduction, and contraception that are associated with early marriage. Such a study should include bio-medical research on the suitability of available contraceptive methods for very young women and suggest appropriate counseling and contraceptive choices for young married women.

3. As female education plays such an important part in discouraging early marriage and early and repeated pregnancies, it is suggested that a focused study be undertaken of the national educational policy and curricula, to gauge the extent to which these meet the needs of rural girls. Such a study should investigate whether the educational system offers rural women usable skills; the reasons for female dropouts; possibilities for gainful employment open to educated females; the manner in which education affects women's family life; and women's own aspirations following education. Such information would be helpful in defining a realistic, long-term development strategy for women's education, by separating the home-based reasons for dropping out from those related to the nature and quality of schooling itself.

Educational programs:
1. MCH and family planning services should give attention to the special educational needs of married teenagers. Any educational programs sponsored by these services should involve mothers and mothers-in-law and, when appropriate, fathers and husbands, since all these family members are important decision-makers in the life of a young married woman. Special marriage education programs for adolescent girls should also be organized.
2. Educational programs and messages through the mass media, and particularly through the influential medium of television, should provide more information on the problems of early marriage. They should be designed in such a way, however, as to be responsive to the target groups - parents, parents-in-law, husbands and the women themselves. They should be based on scientific knowledge; they should be realistic about the economic constraints of poor families and they should not exaggerate the health or other consequences of early marriage.

3. Unrealistic portrayals of the reasons families marry their adolescent daughters should also be avoided. While it is true, for example, that some marriages are contracted between men much older than their young brides, such marriages are infrequent. Although these marriages make good topics for films, they are certainly not the primary reason why adolescent and teenage marriages occur.

The usual pattern is that both bride and bridegroom are young, with a difference in age that is acceptable in Egypt, and sometimes both are under the legal marriage age - she under 16 and he under 18. Therefore, presenting the problem of early marriage as one of old, wealthy men marrying adolescents (as was done in an early educational television film), is not a credible message for the majority of the population. It distracts the viewer and the policy community from appreciating the pressing problems of health and reproduction associated with early marriage, regardless of the age of the husband.

4. The language women themselves use and the opinions they express for and against education, delayed marriage, delayed pregnancy, child spacing and family planning should be more frequently utilized in media messages. Egypt now has a number of professional development communication centers that could produce appropriate messages based on qualitative findings from studies such as this one.

**Action programs:**

1. A more stringent application of the existing law concerning age at marriage can discourage very early teenage marriage. However, it is unlikely to resolve the problem
completely. Legal measures may achieve the postponement of most marriages to the age of 16, but would not necessarily eliminate the demographic and social consequences of adolescent marriage. Action programs must focus on the conditions that need to be changed in order to bring about a gradual rise in the age of marriage to the late teens or twenties for all Egyptian women.

2. Attitudinal changes are necessary but not sufficient preconditions for bringing about behavioral changes. Actions are needed to promote the conditions that would induce changes in patterns of behavior. The universal education of girls must be given top priority, as it is a prerequisite for many other developments - later marriage, smaller families, improved women's status, and the presence of educated female pace setters within rural villages. NGOs can become partners with the government to devise innovative education programs at local level.

Rural women's education would be seriously promoted if, in addition to general education, it offered training in skills that can be used to improve rural life. Families of limited means would be more supportive if education were to lead to some material benefit, be it gainful employment outside the home or engagement in activities that generate earnings or save the family some important expenses. The fact that educated women do not easily find suitable jobs, as mentioned by some women, currently discourages poorer families from investing in girls' education.

3. It is recommended that health and family planning services cater to the special needs of married adolescents. Family planning services should be provided within a broader framework of health services. If current methods, particularly the oral pill and the intra-uterine device, are not suitable for such young ages, an effort should be made to supply family planning clinics with appropriate contraceptive methods. Young brides need encouragement from physicians and other clinic staff to achieve their own desires to delay or space childbearing in the face of family pressures to quickly have a first birth.
4. Long-term development efforts aimed at relieving rural poverty are needed to create the basic conditions for encouraging rural girls' education and higher life aspirations, as well as delayed marriage and smaller families. More equitable investment across rural regions is needed to accomplish this goal.