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Gatekeepers and Enablers: Fathers, Brothers, and Girls' Leadership in Jordan and Egypt

She
LEADS



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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In both Jordan and Egypt, fathers and brothers play a pivotal role in fostering girls' and young women's leadership in the Arab world. According to the survey, 99% of respondents - including fathers, brothers, and girls from Jordan and Egypt - recognized the father's role as important in supporting girls and young women to assume leadership positions within their families and communities, with 91% describing it as *very important*. Similarly, 83% of participants identified the role of brothers as either *very important* (56%) or *important* (28%), while a small proportion remained neutral (13%) or considered it *not important* (2%). Fathers, in particular, are seen as key guiding figures in their daughters' professional development, providing both financial support and mentorship, especially in education and career advancement. In the in-depth individual interviews, all fathers (5/5) emphasized that they encourage their daughters to take on leadership roles within the family, with the goal of becoming self-reliant and financially independent. A main sphere of support provided by male family members is the investment in girls' educational journeys. As confirmed by all girls during individual interviews (18), their fathers cover university fees and actively support additional educational opportunities, such as trainings and workshops, contributing to build girls' independence and self-confidence.

Nonetheless, while male figures provide considerable support, challenges remain for their engagement in women's leadership. Social and cultural norms continue to shape men's perceptions of women's roles and capacities. For instance, only a minority of fathers expressed support for their daughters' freedom to travel for study or work reasons, citing among the concerns potential social judgment from community members. Moreover, interviews with brothers reflected social stereotypes as they reiterated the belief that, to assume leadership positions, women should "set aside their emotions," or work in socially accepted fields, such as education.

As societal norms gradually evolve, fathers and brothers often find themselves mediating between traditional expectations and emerging realities. By involving their daughters in decision-making processes and supporting their economic independence, fathers and brothers can play a pivotal role as intermediaries, bridging traditional social norms with more equitable divisions of roles within the family and society. According to the research, in contexts where social and cultural norms continue to restrict women's opportunities, particularly in rural areas, fathers often serve as key allies, supporting young women in pursuing educational and leadership opportunities.

Key Findings

1. **Male family support as a critical enabler:** Fathers are recognized as the primary guides, while brothers often act as "second fathers," offering advice, mentorship, and financial assistance. According to the survey, 99% of girls identified their fathers' role and 83% their brothers' role as important or essential in supporting their leadership journey. Moreover, 85% of respondents reported having received direct support from their fathers or brothers when making major life decisions.
2. **Support concentrated on education:** Male family members primarily invest in girls' educational journeys. All 18 girls interviewed in-depth confirmed that fathers cover university fees and actively support additional learning opportunities such as trainings and workshops.

3. **Conditional autonomy:** Support for leadership is generally provided within the boundaries of local traditions and cultural norms. Most fathers expressed reluctance to allow their daughters to study abroad or in other governorates, reflecting ongoing limitations to girls' autonomy.
4. **Emerging practices of “new fatherhood”:** Some fathers are actively challenging traditional roles by promoting their daughters' financial independence, advocating for a fairer distribution of gender roles, and mediating between conservative community and tribal views and evolving societal expectations.

Recommendations

- **Rethinking the concept of leadership:** Involve multiple generations of men and women, as well as community and tribal leaders, in discussions on leadership.
- **Engage more male figures in activities** in girls' leadership by equipping fathers and brothers with gender-transformative parenting skills, fostering intergenerational dialogue within families and communities, and amplifying positive role models through local and social media. This integrated approach—delivered in culturally sensitive ways—helps shift norms, strengthen social acceptance, and expand opportunities for young women's leadership.
- **Strengthen girls' leadership** by integrating safety measures with skills-building and mentorship, ensuring secure environments while empowering them to actively participate in family and community decision-making.
- **Promote alternative male role models through media:** Utilize social media and local media outlets to disseminate stories of male figures who actively support their daughters' leadership paths, normalizing practices such as having a woman as a boss.

Introduction

The present research is part of the “She Leads” Program, a joint project of Plan International Netherlands, Defense for Children - ECPAT the Netherlands (DCI-ECPAT), African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), and Terre des Hommes the Netherlands (TdH), targeting social norms in formal and informal institutions in East Africa, West Africa, and the Middle East. As an implementing partner with Terre Des Hommes regional office in Jordan, the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) works towards increasing the sustained influence of girls and young women (GYW) within the decision-making processes in the MENA region. Accordingly, the present research will draw upon and be informed by the activities of the “She Leads” program, enabling the effective identification of key lines of investigation and, in turn, informing the project's development and implementation.

Research Objectives

Overall Objective

In continuity with the main findings, lessons learnt, and relevant themes that emerged through the 2023/2024 research, the overall objective of this second research report for the year 2024/2025 is to further explore the role of male family members’ engagement in supporting young women’s leadership development and identify transformative gender practices, with a specific focus on fatherhood models.

The report aims to answer the main research question: How does the engagement of male family members, specifically through fatherhood models, influence the leadership development of young women in the case study countries?

Sub-Questions:

1. What are the prevailing attitudes and perceptions of male family members - fathers, elder brothers, and heads of extended families/tribes - toward young women’s leadership roles, and how do these vary across different countries, communities, tribes, and families?
2. What specific fatherhood practices (role modelling, support for education, domestic and emotional care, decision-making dynamics, religious influence) shape the leadership aspirations and trajectories of young girls in Egypt and Jordan and how do these practices differ across sociocultural contexts?
3. What challenges and opportunities exist in fostering male engagement for gender-transformative leadership?

Methodology

This research employed a **mixed-methods approach**, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to generate a comprehensive understanding of the role of fathers, brothers, and broader social structures in shaping young women's leadership trajectories in Egypt and Jordan.

The **quantitative component** was implemented through a structured survey administered via **KoboToolbox**, which allowed for systematic data collection across both countries. The survey captured socio-economic variables, perceptions of leadership, and patterns of decision-making within families and communities.

Nationality	Type	Count
Egyptian	Daughter	65
	Brother	7
	Father	NA
Egyptian Total		72
Jordanian	Daughter	29
	Brother	8
	Father	3
Jordanian Total		40
Total		112

To complement and deepen these findings, the **qualitative component** consisted of a series of **focus group discussions (FGDs)** and **individual interviews** with three target groups: young women and girls (GYW), fathers, and brothers. These methods provided rich narratives that illuminate the nuances of family dynamics, cultural expectations, and social norms influencing young women's access to leadership opportunities.

Nationality	Type	Individual Interviews	FGDs	FGDs Participants
Egyptian	Brothers	4	1	7
	Fathers	2	1	7
	Girls	7	2	17
Total		13		31
Jordanian	Brothers	7	1	12
	Fathers	3	1	13
	Girls	11	2	18
Total		21		43
Grand Total		34		74

Limitations and Challenges

The present research encountered several methodological and logistical limitations. Within the quantitative survey, a considerable portion of responses was excluded due to logical inconsistencies or incomplete information, resulting in a final sample of 112 valid respondents. A major challenge throughout the process was engaging male family members, particularly fathers. Two primary constraints were identified in this regard.

First, many fathers were unavailable due to professional obligations, and despite efforts to schedule interviews and focus group discussions at more convenient times—such as after 6:00 p.m.—attendance remained limited. Second, and more critically, several fathers and brothers did not perceive their participation as relevant to the discussion on women's leadership and empowerment. This reflects a broader lack of awareness regarding the importance of male engagement in advancing gender equality. Without a clear framing of how male involvement contributes to the overall impact or a clear return/benefit for them, men might not have seen their participation as necessary. As a consequence, many fathers and brothers of participants in the *She Leads* program declined to take part in the research or to provide consent for interviews.

These challenges highlight the need to design **targeted male engagement strategies to support gender related interventions** that consider both the logistical constraints (such as time availability) and the motivational aspects influencing participation. Clear communication on the value and impact of male involvement in women's empowerment initiatives is essential to foster greater commitment and ownership. Finally, it is important to note that data collection coincided with the holy month of Ramadan, which further affected participants' availability and energy levels.

Consequently, the number of fathers and brothers reached through the qualitative survey was substantially lower than the number of participating girls and young women. Despite the limited sample, the study builds on previous action research and provides a valuable insight into exploring the role of fatherhood and male family members in shaping young women's leadership trajectories and highlights the need for greater engagement of male family members in initiatives such as *She Leads*.

Girls and Young Women's Leadership in Egypt and Jordan: Why a Focus on Fathers and Brothers?

In West Asia and North Africa, as in other regions, social and gender roles are evolving under the influence of educational, socio-cultural, economic, and technological transformations. In recent years, growing attention has been given to the challenges and opportunities women and girls face in accessing leadership positions, particularly within civil and political spheres. However, little attention has been given to the engagement of men and their attitudes toward the evolution of gender roles. A notable gap in the literature persists regarding fatherhood practices, as male figures are frequently excluded from initiatives and research related to gender equality.

According to the interviews and FGDs conducted by ARDD, fathers in Egypt and Jordan are balancing between conventional patriarchal norms and different emerging models of fatherhood that emphasize a more equitable distribution of decision-making power within the family. The current research indicates that fathers are progressively involving their daughters in household decision-making, supporting their financial independence, and encouraging their participation in educational activities. However, while some autonomy is granted, many spheres of decision-making remain subject to family negotiation. In particular, most fathers expressed resistance toward allowing their daughters to travel or study abroad, thereby limiting the scope of opportunities for women's leadership development (Figure 1).

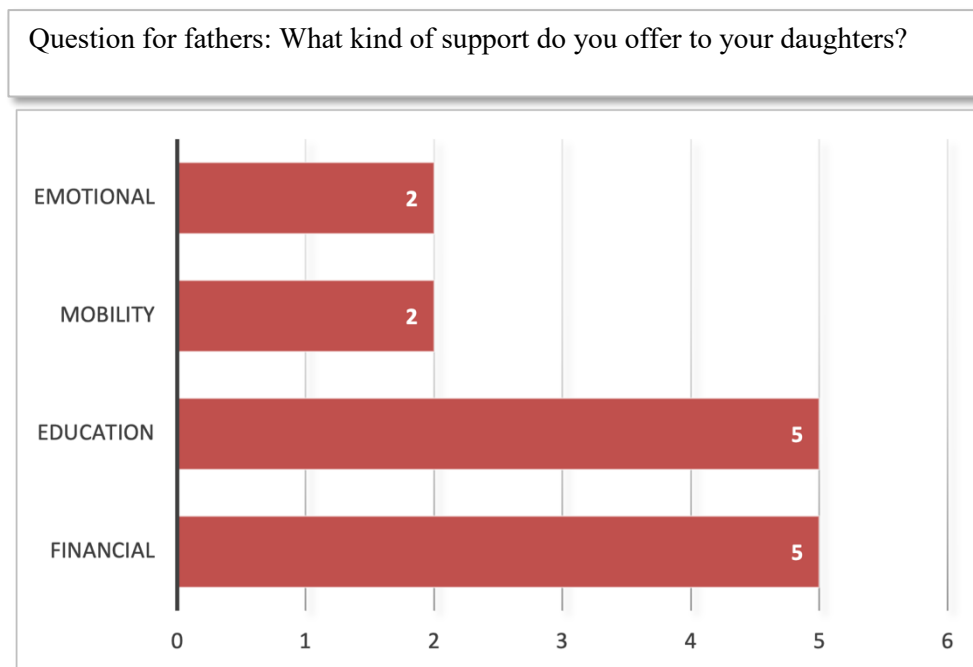


Figure N.1

These findings align with broader regional evidence. A recent multi-country study on men's realities, practices, and attitudes (The International Men and Gender Equality Survey - IMAGES) in the Middle

East and North Africa (MENA) suggests that men in Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and Morocco are slowly changing their attitudes related to gender roles within the family.¹ Around 20% of fathers across the assessed countries are beginning to question “traditional” fatherhood practices that usually define the leadership of the father as head of household, protector, and financial guarantor, moving from authoritative figures toward more active mentors and supporters. Similarly, a study conducted by Equimondo on masculinities in Jordan highlights that, while fathers continue to play a central role in household decision-making, certain domains - such as education-related choices - are increasingly entrusted to women.²

Men’s attitudes toward gender roles and women’s in the Arab region are gradually shaped by a combination of structural and cultural factors. Extended family arrangements are more and more giving the way to nuclear family structures. Displacement, conflict, economic strain, level of education and political uncertainty, all contribute to influence how men perceive women’s roles in both private and public spheres. During ARDD’s individual interviews and FGDs with fathers and brothers, participants consistently highlighted differences between more educated, urban environments, where fathers and brothers were more willing to support women’s autonomy, and rural or more traditional settings, where restrictive norms persisted. These findings align with the IMAGES multi-country study, which indicates that fathers with higher levels of education, particularly those living in urban areas, are more inclined to challenge established gender divisions and move toward a more equitable distribution of responsibilities³. Furthermore, economic stability can also be strictly related to gender equality, as men with more secure economic conditions tend to show greater openness toward their daughters’ ambitions. In a region where women’s economic participation remains among the lowest globally, competition over limited job opportunities fuels perceptions that men’s employment should take priority⁴. Indeed, as highlighted by the IMAGES report, men’s sense of identity and self-worth is often tied to their capacity to provide financially.

Looking at brothers’ perspectives on women’s leadership also provides a valuable insight to grasp prevailing attitudes and perceptions of male family members. Brothers often assume the role of “second fathers”, providing economic support and guidance to their sisters while, at times, exhibiting stricter attitudes than those of their fathers. Indeed, existing literature indicates that younger men and brothers are not necessarily more inclined than their fathers to challenge traditional social and family roles. As highlighted also in ARDD’s interviews, brothers acknowledge women’s potential and ability to succeed professionally, but their support often remains conditional. When asked if they support their sisters and female family members in assuming leadership positions, most of brothers conditioned their support to the fact that women must

¹ El Feki, S., Heilman, B. and Barker, G., Eds. (2017) Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) – Middle East and North Africa. Cairo and Washington, D.C.: UN Women and Promundo-US.

² Equimondo. (2022). The International Men and Gender Equality Survey: A status report on men, women, and gender equality in 15 headlines. Washington, DC: Equimondo.

³ UN Women and Promundo-US, 2017

⁴ UN Women and Promundo-US, 2017

conform to traditional norms, maintain a balance between household duties and employment, or restrict their work to “socially appropriate” sectors such as education (Figure 2).

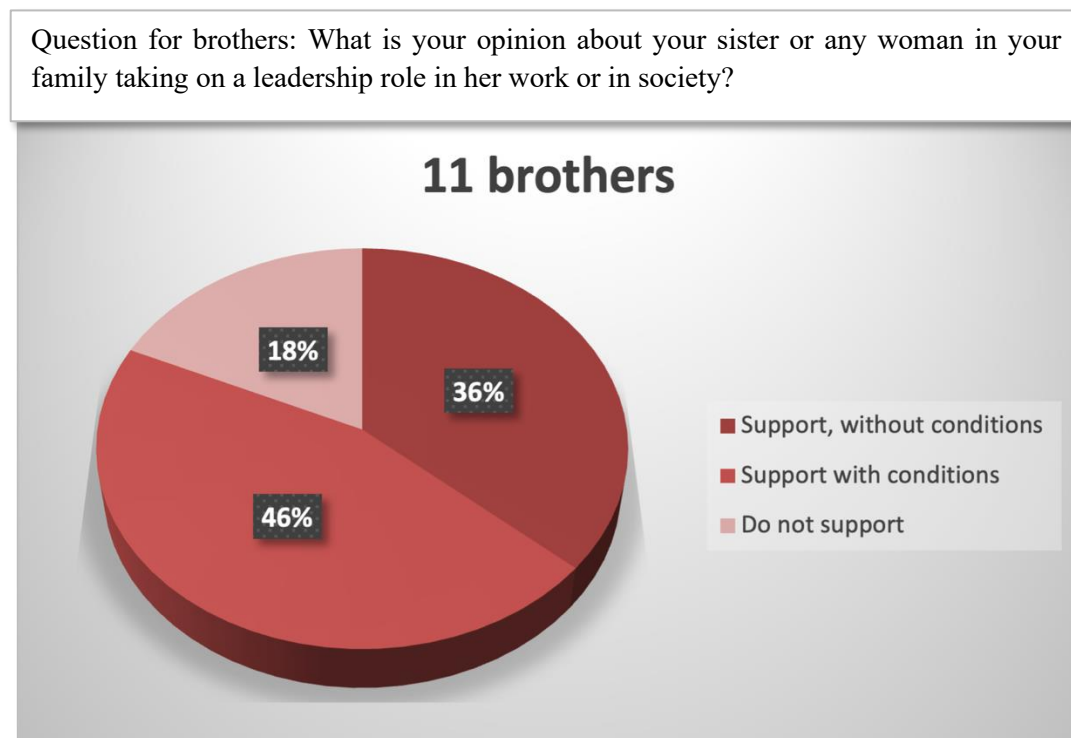


Figure N. 2

High unemployment rates, particularly among young men aged 15 to 25, might translate into stronger resistance to women’s full participation in the labor market and leadership spaces.⁵ This correlation may help explain why the brothers interviewed in this research demonstrated greater reluctance to support women’s unrestricted participation compared to fathers. Although being exposed to alternative models of masculinity through family, community, and digital platforms, brothers' support for gender equality often remains limited.

Digital platforms create new arenas that simultaneously challenge and reinforce traditional gender roles. On one hand, social media exposes young people to alternative gender discourses; on the other, such narratives are often perceived as externally imposed and misaligned with Arab cultural and religious values, complicating how younger generations conceptualize gender roles. When misused, technology can also exacerbate gender-based violence, particularly through the spread of hate speech across the region. Moreover, online discourse frequently presents oversimplified views that neglect the nuanced socio-cultural and religious contexts of Arab societies. According to Ipsos (2023)⁶ Openly identifying with feminism remains largely taboo for men in the region. These dynamics underscore the importance of analyzing gender and social roles within their diverse

⁵ UN Women and Promundo-US, *ibid*.

⁶ Ipsos. (2023, March 31). Data dive: How men feel about the fight for women’s rights.

cultural and religious contexts and from a decolonized perspective, while also emphasizing the need to engage men as key actors in advancing gender equality.

Contextual and Structural Barriers to Women's Leadership in Jordan and Egypt

Both Egypt and Jordan have implemented significant legislative reforms aimed at advancing women's rights, including measures to address early and child marriage, female genital mutilation, and sexual harassment. However, gaps remain in labor-related policies, particularly regarding wage equality and parental leave, limiting women's leadership and participation in the workforce. According to the Arab Barometer⁷ The lack of childcare constitutes the primary barrier for women in both countries. In Jordan, the top three barriers are insufficient childcare (34%), low wages (24%), and social norms deeming women's employment unacceptable (13%). In Egypt, the main constraints are the lack of childcare (38%), prioritization of men in employment (18%), and low wages (13%). Parental leave policies have a direct impact on gender equality at home and in the workplace, promoting a more equal responsibility-sharing. In Jordan, men are entitled to three days of paid paternity leave under the 2019 amendment to the Labor Law, while in Egypt, men are entitled to one day of paid leave up to three times, contingent on at least one year of employment with the current employer (New Labour Law No. 14, 2025).

Attitude and perceptions of male family members toward young women's leadership roles

Building on the ARDD Report (2024) ⁸ about the role of the family in supporting their daughters' leaderships, this study confirms that families are key promoters of girls' and young women's aspirations, skills, and leadership. Fathers and brothers recognize women's abilities to lead and support their prominence in public leadership role.⁹ Family and especially fathers, also act as buffers against societal pressures, strengthening young women's confidence and public engagement. Fathers, as primary decision-makers, play a decisive role in challenging restrictions and enabling women's leadership. The following section examines fathers' and brothers' perceptions of female leadership, shedding light on how these relate to wider societal and tribal expectations.

Fathers as guides toward girls' ambitions

According to the individual interviews and focus group discussions, fathers of the girls engaged in the "She Leads" program across Egypt and Jordan, recognize and support the potential of their daughters to assume leadership roles within the family and, to a certain extent, in society. All fathers

⁷ <https://www.arabbarometer.org/2023/02/mena-women-in-the-workforce/>

⁸ Raising Tomorrow's Leaders The Role of Family and Social Norms In Shaping Young Women Leadership in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, ARDD, 2024

⁹ International Men & Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES). (July 2022). A global report in 15 headlines.

in the individual interviews (5/5) emphasized that they **encourage their daughters to take a leadership role within the family, so one day they can be self-reliant and be financially independent** (5/5). In other words, all fathers agree that their daughters must have very high ambitions to succeed in society today.

According to Egyptian and Jordanian fathers, girls develop strength and ambition by learning to make informed decisions independently, guided by moral principles and paternal counsel. Fathers consistently articulated their role as one of guidance, positioning themselves as the primary responsible for shaping their daughters' values, self-confidence, and decision-making capacities. A father from Cairo stated: *"Our role is **supervisory and guiding**. I give her self-confidence gradually until she takes her decisions by herself."*

Fathers consistently emphasized the importance of **early confidence-building** and **moral direction** as decisive factors in enabling their daughter's leadership potential. Fathers describing their role as **preparing daughters to navigate the risks and obstacles that society presents**.

Father's role as guide is confirmed by the Individual interviews carried out with girls and young women: **the majority of girls (14/18) turn to their father to discuss decisions related to academic and professional life**, underlining their experience and wisdom in specific topics of life. Indeed, the majority of girls involved in the survey (85%) reported having previously received support from their father or brothers in making important decisions. Girls turn to their fathers also for important life choices. 11 out of 18 girls said they regularly consult their fathers for professional or academic advice. In cases where the father was deceased or otherwise absent (4/18), this guiding role was assumed by brothers or, in few cases when the young woman was married by the husbands. Fathers are most often engaged on issues related to education and professional development, while personal and emotional matters are perceived as taboo. In individual interviews, 16 out of 18 young women indicated a preference for discussing emotional issues with their mothers or sisters rather than their fathers. In previous research conducted by ARDD (2024)¹⁰, about the role of family and social norm in shaping young women's leadership, mothers are identified as a key role model, described as heros ready to endure and sacrifice everything for the good, wealth, and education of their children.

According to the data, fathers in both Egypt and Jordan emphasized the importance of raising daughters with high ambitions and self-confidence from an early age. 3 out of 5 fathers explicitly stated that **leadership skills are best developed when girls actively engage with the outside world**, through education, work, or social activities, as such experiences are essential for building decision-making capacity.

¹⁰ Raising Tomorrow's Leaders The Role of Family and Social Norms In Shaping Young Women Leadership in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, ARDD, 2024

Brothers as “Second Fathers”

Similar to fathers, brothers often framed their role in terms of guidance, frequently describing themselves as **“second fathers”**. In the individual interviews, 10 out of 11 brothers reported providing emotional support to their sisters. Overall, brothers recognize that their role to support sisters’ leadership ambitions can be decisive. From the individual surveys, all 11 brothers interviewed agreed or strongly agreed that ***“when a brother supports his sister, it helps her face challenges and overcome obstacles.”*** This view was largely shared by young women themselves: 91% of surveyed girls agreed with the statement, highlighting the value placed on fraternal support in fostering their confidence and leadership potential (only 6% of young women expressed a neutral position, and 2% disagreed).

Interviews with girls and brothers revealed two main patterns in how brothers influence their sisters’ opportunities and leadership potential. First, given their closer age proximity, brothers often act as strong allies, fostering a unique level of trust distinct from that of fathers. As confirmed by girls’ interviews, brothers of the same age are perceived as companions and confidants. One girl from Amman stated, when asked whether she could freely express her opinions and beliefs within the family: *“Yes, I share that with my close brother and feel comfortable talking to him. I sometimes tell my mother, but I prefer talking to my brother because he is closer to me in age, and I often find that he understands me more than anyone else.”* Second, many brothers adopt an authoritative stance, reinforcing traditional social and gender restrictions and, at times, overruling their sisters’ choices. For instance, one young woman in Amman stated: *“Recently I presented to my parents a business idea via social media. My mother was hesitant, but my husband and brothers refused completely, and therefore my decisions were affected, and I cancelled the the project.”*

Especially in families without fathers, brothers tend to act as “second fathers,” reinforcing conditions that preserve male authority and uphold traditional gender hierarchies, often being stricter than their fathers.

Fathers’ and Brothers’ Perceptions of Women in Public Leadership Roles

According to the Survey, 94 % of fathers and brothers agree (50% strongly agree, 44% agree) with women or girls from their family working in leadership positions such as "director, deputy-municipal council member" and others. Only 6% of brothers disagreed with the quote.

However, a minority of males surveyed expressed discomfort when women are perceived to surpass men professionally or challenge their authority. In both Jordan and Egypt, skepticism about women’s advancement to high-level leadership roles persists. Focus group discussions captured this sentiment, with fathers explicitly stating:

“I don’t want my wife to be better than me” (Jordan)

“Men have a problem if a woman surpasses them at work” (Egypt).

These views were voiced by fathers from both urban (Cairo/Amman) and rural settings, suggesting that concerns about being surpassed by women are not confined to rural areas.

Perceptions of women in leadership roles continue to be shaped by broader structural and social factors. In urban areas, where access to education, professional networks, and employment opportunities is more widespread, leadership is often linked to individual capability. In contrast, in many rural settings, women's professional advancement is hindered by limited resources, fewer opportunities, and stronger adherence to traditional roles and structures, which restrict support for women in leadership. Girls themselves recognize this cultural resistance, with one noting in discussion: *"Men do not like women to be better than them or in a higher position."* This seemingly contradictory attitude among fathers - expressing strong support for their daughters' leadership aspirations while demonstrating reluctance toward women occupying positions of authority over men - may be understood in light of the social and economic functions daughters' success serves. In many cases, the achievements of daughters reinforce the father's social standing and, at times, contribute to the family's economic security, thereby aligning female advancement with paternal ambition rather than challenging it.

When asked about women's overall capabilities and potential to succeed in leadership positions, 7 out of 11 brothers affirmed that women could perform as well as men, with 2 even suggesting that women could surpass them. However, 3 respondents qualified their support, and 1 rejected the idea entirely. Yet, when the discussion shifted to their own sisters' and mothers' prospects of assuming leadership roles in the workplace or community, the same brothers expressed greater hesitation: 5 out of 11 conditioned their support, 2 disagreed outright, and only 4 offered unqualified support.

Commonly cited conditions for their success included the expectation that women work in socially "appropriate" fields - such as education, considered more suitable than politics - and that professional ambitions should not compromise family responsibilities. Another frequently mentioned rationale was the belief that women should "set aside emotions," as they are perceived to be "too delicate and emotional" for leadership. These views, while minor in this limited sample, reflect a masculinized conception of leadership, privileging traits associated with strength over so-called "soft skills," and highlight the persistence of gender stereotypes that continue to constrain support for women's leadership (e.g. "women are too emotional").

Furthermore, a small minority of girls expressed similar views. Survey data indicate that **2 % of girls and young women respondents strongly disagreed with women in political leadership roles and 4 % remained neutral.** In individual interviews, 3/18 girls agree with the idea that men should bear more responsibility than women because of their role in society (as financial protector and decision-makers). A girl from Amman stated *"in major and fateful matters, the intervention of the man and the imposition of his leadership role are needed."*

This pattern underscores the need for interventions aiming to strengthen women and girls self-confidence and develop leadership skills aligned with a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of leadership, in order to avoid replicating stereotypical perceptions of roles within the family and workplace. As both men and young women continue to frame leadership predominantly as a male prerogative, these findings highlight the necessity of reconceptualizing leadership.

Acknowledging Inequalities: Family, Tribe and Society

Survey findings and interviews conducted in Jordan and Egypt confirm that fathers are aware of the unequal opportunities and spaces afforded to sons and daughters within society. Across both contexts, social norms tend to prioritize the success of boys, often justified by the expectation that men will assume responsibility for supporting households in the future. By contrast, daughters are still widely perceived as ultimately dependent on a husband for financial security. These disparities are particularly pronounced in rural settings, such as Upper Egypt, where social attitudes toward women's progress seems to remain more restrictive and where female leadership is often openly criticized.

Family

In continuity with the results of ARDD 2024 Report¹¹, **families emerged from the interviews as the primary and most influential arena to support girls' ambitions and leadership paths**. Compared to tribes and broader society, families were described by all participants (fathers, brothers, and girls) as the more **open and safe space for change**. Fathers, in particular, often presented their own households as spaces where social hierarchies and gendered restrictions were perceived as less rigid than in the wider community. One Egyptian father stated: *"Personally, I have no problem with women's success in any field. I see that success is due to their capabilities, but a small part of Egyptian society criticizes women's emancipation. And in rural areas, support is even less."*

Tribe

Fathers and daughters from Jordan participating in focus groups stated that tribal structures **remain more strongly linked to conventional divisions of women's and men's roles in public life**, where acceptance of women's leadership is less common but **change is also emerging**. In the survey, 52% of participants in Jordan indicated that tribes' leaders and heads of extended families can sometimes play a positive role in encouraging the local community to support girls and young women in assuming leadership positions. By contrast, the role of fathers was perceived far more positively, with 90% of respondents affirming their supportive influence.

As a girl from Amman shared: *"My small family is supportive, my father encourages me for volunteer work inside the university, and this requires being late at university. The extended family doesn't accept me completely, so I might have to apologize for missing family occasions due to university*

¹¹ ARDD, 2024

commitments, especially when there's mixing between young men and girls. But my family supports me and provides justifications for my absence."

Tribal structures continue to have influence in decision-making processes and play a role in shaping the reputation and perceived esteem and renown of families within the community. However, their influence in everyday family decisions appears to be diminishing. In individual interviews, 3 out of 5 fathers reported consulting the tribe, but only in matters of significant importance to the entire family. In most cases, tribal authority is increasingly viewed as formal or symbolic rather than decisional. As a Jordanian father noted, *"As for the clan or extended family, their role is formal. They are invited to big occasions like the Jaha, but they have no role in decision-making."*

Society

According to participants, **societal norms are gradually evolving**. As emphasized during discussions with girls, fathers, and brothers, recent legislative reforms, including gender quotas, have advanced women's empowerment and representation in society. However, the path toward women fully assuming leadership roles remains long and challenging. For women to advance in political and professional spheres, it is essential to complement legal measures with societal support that recognizes and validates their leadership potential.

Fathers reported facing some **criticism from relatives or community members** for encouraging their daughters to pursue leadership roles or travel independently. It is important to note that many fathers emphasized that external disapproval and judgment carried little weight in comparison with decisions made inside the household. As one father explained: *"There are criticisms, and sometimes even within the family we may agree or disagree. But if the disagreement or criticism comes from outside the family, I do not care."*

All three spaces - family, tribe, and society - are gradually shifting in their promotion of women's potential leadership roles, while simultaneously mediating this recognition through cultural norms and expectations. **Families appear as the more flexible spaces, with fathers playing a pivotal role in sustaining the girls' trajectories toward leadership**. The following chapter examines how fatherhood practices are articulated at the intersection of restrictive societal norms and new models.

Fatherhood Practices and Their Impact on Girls' Leadership Aspirations and Trajectories

Social and economic factors play a crucial role in shaping fathers' conceptions of manhood. Fathers with higher levels of education, particularly those residing in urban areas, are more inclined to challenge entrenched gender divisions and move toward a more equitable distribution of responsibilities. For instance, fathers in urban Egypt tend to be more willing to support gender equality than their rural counterparts¹². Similarly, younger men raised in more open and diverse

¹² UN Women and Promundo-US, 2017

environments appear more committed to questioning roles that hinder women's empowerment. A key finding from the International Men & Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), highlights that expanding women's access to education and enhancing their economic independence contributes to more equitable household decision-making over time, particularly in the Arab world.

Decision-making Dynamics in Jordan and Egypt

Family and social structures vary between Egypt and Jordan. Jordan's social structure is significantly shaped by a strong tribal system that influences various social processes. In Egypt, families are generally larger and less tribe centered, with roles shaped by urban–rural divides and extended family networks. Despite these differences, results from the Survey show that in both countries the majority of families can be classified as **nuclear families, where fathers emerge as the primary decision-makers.**

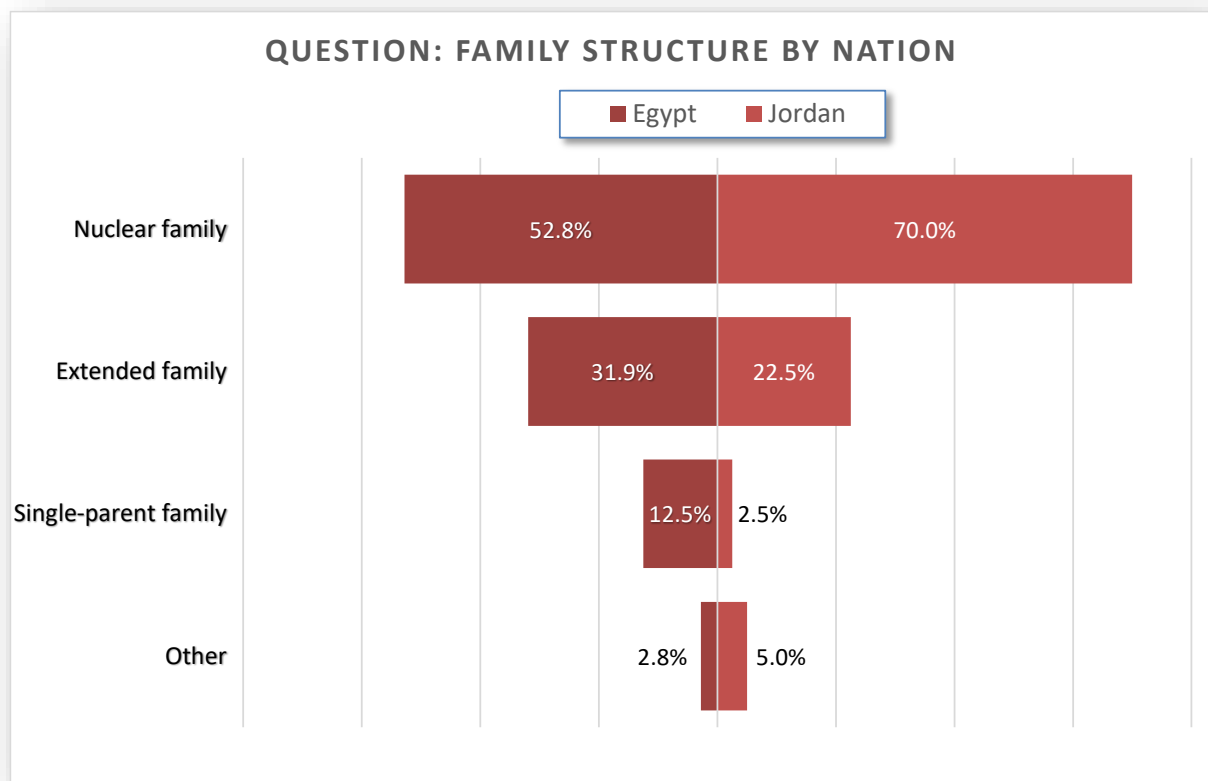


Figure N. 3 (On a sample of 72 Egyptians and 40 Jordaninas)

Overall, 68% of respondents in the Survey - 63 % in Egypt and 73 % in Jordan - identify the father as the family leader, compared to 16% for the mother, 5% for the brother, and 4% for the grandfather, with joint parental authority remaining marginal. In Jordan, grandfathers and grandmothers seems to hold more important role compared to Egypt. Survey data indicate that Jordanians (70%) are more likely than Egyptians (63%) to be influenced by extended family members in decision-making.

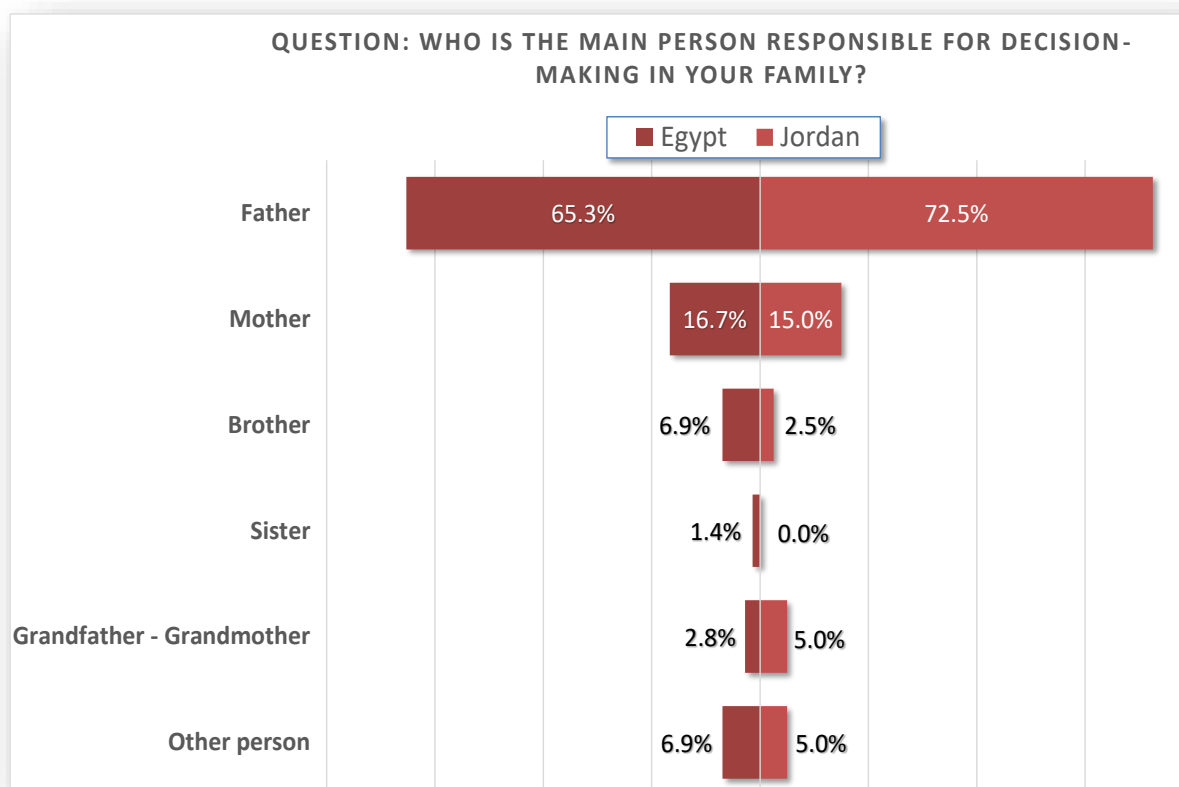


Figure N. 4

Even though daughters do not appear as the main decision-makers within either nuclear or extended families, **interviews with fathers and daughters indicate that they do participate in family decision-making processes**. When asked about their perceived decision-making power, girls in both Jordan and Egypt reported similar patterns: they hold greater influence within the household, largely supported by male family members who value their opinions.

As illustrated in the graph below, girls' perceived decision-making power declines progressively as the scope of influence widens: from "house", to "place of study", "local community", and "national community". While the overall trends are similar across both contexts, **Egyptian girls report feeling more represented at the local and national levels compared to their Jordanian counterparts**. This difference may be linked to Egypt's recent reforms aimed at promoting women's political participation, positioning the country as the one with the biggest number of women in politics in the Arab world in 2025.¹³ On the contrary, Egyptian girls report feeling less represented within the

¹³ **In Egypt**, reserved seats and electoral quotas, alongside the 2020 Law No. 141 (Issuing the Senate Law), have substantially increased women's political representation. By 2025, women in the Egyptian Parliament reached 27.7%, surpassing both the global average (27.2%) and the MENA regional average (18%). This represents a remarkable increase from just 2% in 2012, highlighting the impact of targeted reforms and political will over the last decade. **Jordan** as well has introduced gender quotas, the 2022 amendments to the Election Law (Article 8, Law No. 4) introduced 18 reserved parliamentary seats for women - one per

family unit. This divergence could be associated with the relatively higher levels of education and household income observed in Jordanian families, which may provide girls with greater opportunities for influence in domestic decision-making.

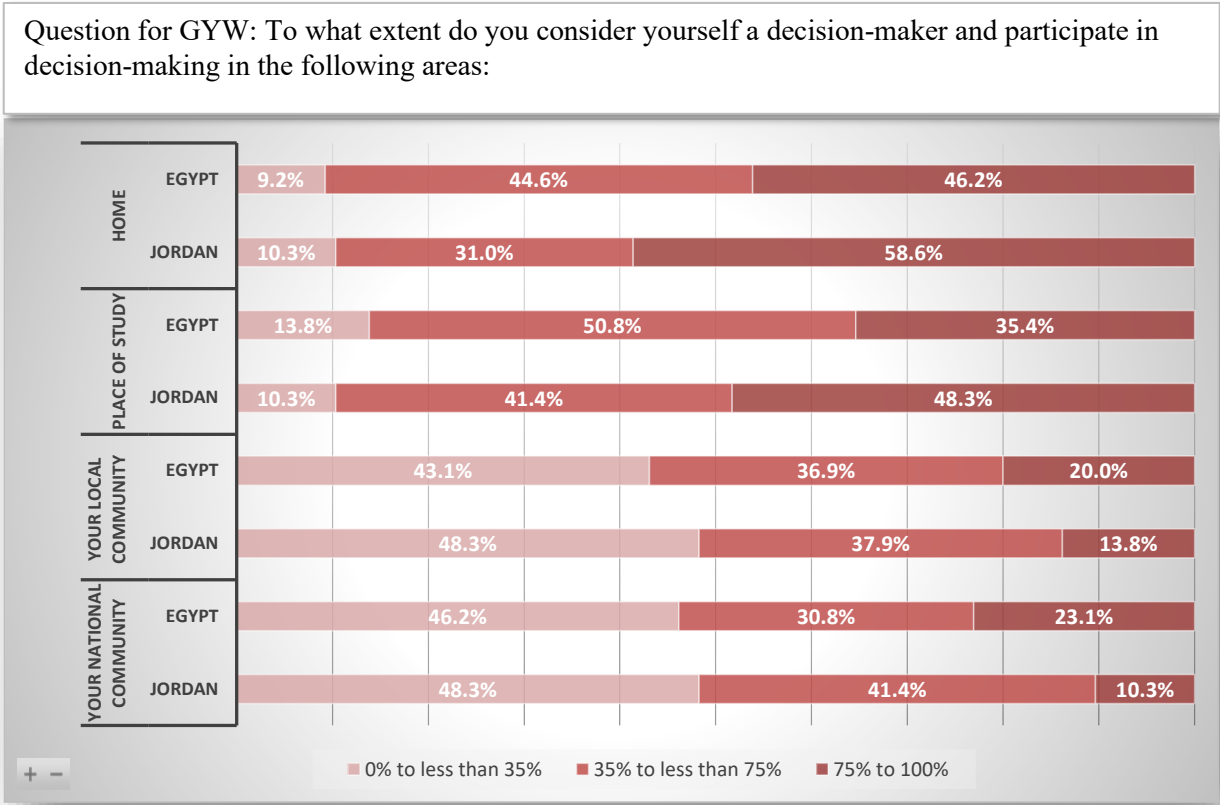


Figure N.5

Decision-making power is strongly influenced by both economic resources and educational opportunities. According to the existing literature, girls with access to education and who are economically independent are more likely to participate actively in family and societal decision-making processes.¹⁴ Similarly, fathers with higher levels of education and more stable economic conditions are more inclined to support their daughters.

As confirmed by the Survey, all fathers indicated that the family’s economic and cultural background can significantly influence the level of support provided by male siblings and fathers to girls and young women within the household. It is noteworthy that all fathers interviewed, both in the Survey and in the Individual Interviews, were highly educated (holding a diploma or a university-level

electoral district, resulting in women occupying 20% of the House of Representatives and Chamber and 15% of the Senate.

¹⁴ IMAGES (2022)

degree), and the ones in the Survey had financial security. Accordingly, all fathers surveyed reported being willing to support their daughters' choices.

Between Egypt and Jordan, the Survey reported very different economic and educational opportunities. Jordanians (fathers, brothers, and girls) appear to have greater access to higher education and more favorable economic conditions compared to their Egyptian counterparts.

	EGYPT	JORDAN	TOTAL
EDUCATION			
Primary education	1.4%	2.5%	1.79%
Secondary education	25.0%	5.0%	17.9%
University education	65.3%	75.0%	68.8%
Graduate studies	8.3%	17.5%	11.6%
PROFESSION			
Student	27.8%	25.0%	26.8%
Employee	13.9%	35.0%	21.4%
Currently not working	29.2%	27.5%	28.6%
Freelance work	29.2%	12.5%	23.2%
MONTHLY FAMILY INCOME (USD)			
Less than 200	81.0%	NA	52.1%
From 200 to 500	15.0%	22.5%	17.7%
From 500 to 1,000	3.0%	30.0%	12.6%
From 1,000 to 1,500	1.0%	22.5%	8.7%
More than 1,500	NA	25.0%	8.9%

Table N.1

With respect to educational and economic differences between the two countries, a marked disparity emerges between urban and rural areas, where limited economic and educational opportunities can be linked to less support for women's leadership. Interviews with both girls and fathers confirmed that men in urban areas displayed greater willingness to support daughters' leadership compared to their rural counterparts. This urban–rural divide underscores the correlation between socio-economic conditions and attitudes toward gender equality, reflecting findings from recent studies on the subject.¹⁵

¹⁵ IMAGES, 2022; El Feki, S., Heilman, B. and Barker, G., Eds, 2017.

Individual interviews with GYW further confirm this trend. Girls from Assiut reported facing greater constraints in exercising independent decision-making compared to those in urban settings, frequently describing the city as a “more open environment”. One participant explained: *‘There is a difference between Assiut city and Assiut villages; for example, education for females is less and early marriage is greater in villages, while in cities education is greater.*

Old and New Fatherhood Practices

Traditional fatherhood practices can be defined as those behaviors and responsibilities that **reinforce socially constructed expectations within the family**, particularly regarding the division of roles between men and women.¹⁶ Traditionally, men are positioned as the primary financial providers, with limited engagement in childcare, child discipline, or household tasks. However, recent studies indicate that **fatherhood practices are gradually evolving** toward a more inclusive model, with men increasingly participating in childcare, domestic responsibilities, and sharing financial obligations with women.¹⁷ As reported also by the 2024 ARDD Report about the role of families, women's financial independence is being increasingly valued by fathers and families.¹⁸

According to the interviews, fathers reported a generational shift in gender roles, noting a decline in restrictions toward girls’ mobility and opportunities. They observed that young women today increasingly prioritize education and professional development over early marriage, and enhanced skills and financial contributions. One father from Amman, on the difference between generations: *“In the 1970s, there was no technology like today, and everything was shameful for a girl: shame to go to the store, shame to wash outside. When she went to school and returned, the process had to be very quick.”*

Girls today increasingly perceive their fathers as strong allies. As illustrated in the data, fathers in both Egypt and Jordan are predominantly regarded as supportive figures, even more than brothers.

Question: In your opinion, how do you describe the role played by fathers/male siblings in the family in supporting girls and young women in taking on leadership role?

¹⁶ UNICEF, 2021

¹⁷ UN Women and Promundo-US, 2017

¹⁸ ARDD, 2024

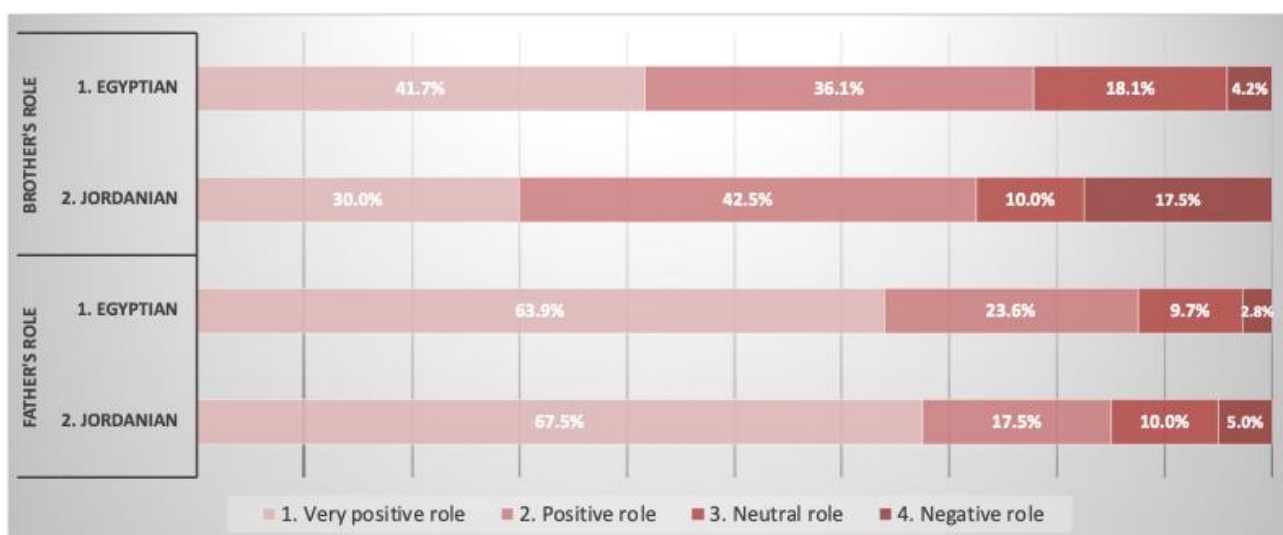


Figure N.6

Investing in their daughters' education has become a priority for men. All girls from the interviews (18) noted that fathers cover university fees and actively invest in educational activities (trainings, workshops), considering them essential for girls' future independence and self-confidence.

Especially in Jordan, families tend to place a strong emphasis on education. In the Jordanian focus group, participants agreed that girls' participation is generally supported when activities are education-related. In Egypt, although education is also valued, a sharper divide emerges between urban and rural areas. Several Egyptian girls highlighted that rural families often attach less importance to girls' education and are more inclined to encourage early marriage. As one participant from Upper Egypt (Sohag) explained, *"My mother's family, for example, does not support women's education and encourages early marriage."*

Reflecting evolving fatherhood practices, many fathers described a growing recognition of young women's autonomy in educational decision-making. Discussions with both fathers and daughters revealed that, beyond providing financial support, **fathers increasingly allow their daughters to choose universities and fields of study.** In both Jordan and Egypt, however, this freedom appears more readily granted when choices are seen as carrying limited consequences for the family. As one father from Amman explained: *"She has the freedom to make decisions when the outcome affects her personally, for example, choosing her specialization. When decisions might have repercussions on the family—for instance, working outside Jordan—I intervene in that decision."* These accounts suggest the emergence of **new forms of fatherhood, marked by greater delegation of responsibility and decision-making to young women, while maintaining paternal oversight in matters with broader family implications.**

Question: what type of decision do you feel you can make on your own? What type of decisions would you prefer to involve your family members (father, brother, other)?

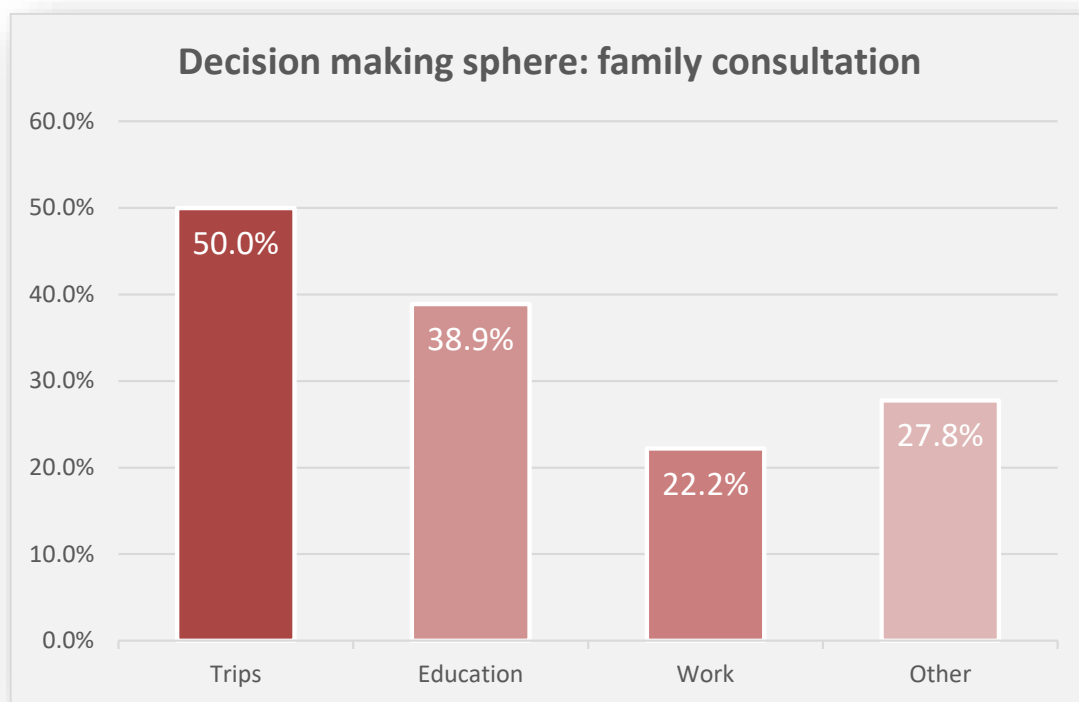
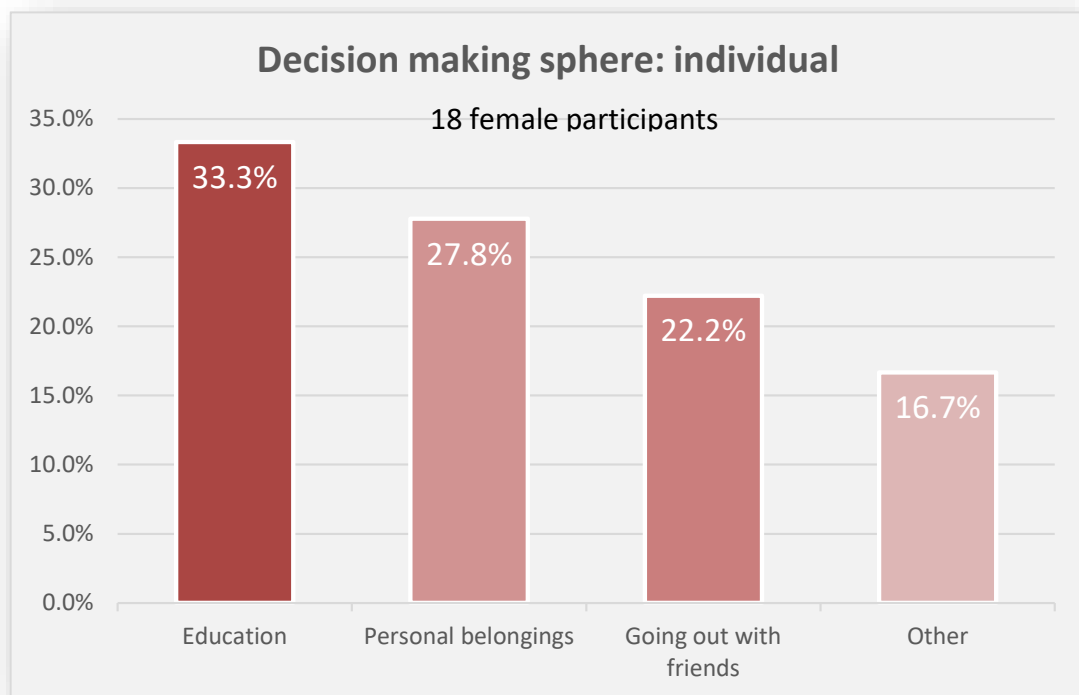


Figure N.7 and N.8

Yet, when asked whether girls in their communities could make professional or academic choices without family approval, most young women reported significant constraints. Out of 18 female respondents, 16 stated that **independent decision-making was not easy and often required parental consent or negotiation**. Resistance was particularly strong around activities that diverge from family traditions, such as overnight trips, mixed-gender gatherings, or night shifts. In response, many girls reported relying **on dialogue and persuasion**, often reaching compromises rather than open conflict: 6 out of 18 actively negotiated with their fathers, 4 adapted to existing rules, and 2 did not perceive restrictions as limiting. Overall, 11 respondents acknowledged that family views directly shaped their decisions, underscoring both the persistence of constraints and the agency exercised by girls in navigating them.

Fathers commonly justified restrictions by pointing to safety concerns and fear of social judgment. As one father from Amman explained: *“As for traveling, I refuse to allow it because I fear for her in a different society.”* Safety emerged as the dominant theme across the interviews: 12 out of 18 young women identified it as the primary reason behind parental hesitation. Additional factors included fear of reputational harm or rumors (3/18), perceptions of girls’ inability to protect themselves alone (3/18), religious concerns related to gender mixing (2/18), generalized fears of harm (3/18), and, less frequently, financial constraints (1/18).

Notably, daughters’ own perspectives were divided: half considered these fears partially irrational, while the other half viewed them as fully justified. This indicates that concerns about safety and social norms are not only imposed by fathers but also, to some extent, internalized by daughters. Many distinguished between fears rooted in societal customs—such as prohibitions on women traveling alone, which they often considered less valid—and concerns tied to tangible risks. As one girl from Amman noted: *“Their fear is justified because of the presence of young men harassing girls; I have also witnessed many such situations firsthand.”*

Question: Do you think parents' concerns about allowing their daughters to participate in university activities or travel are justified?

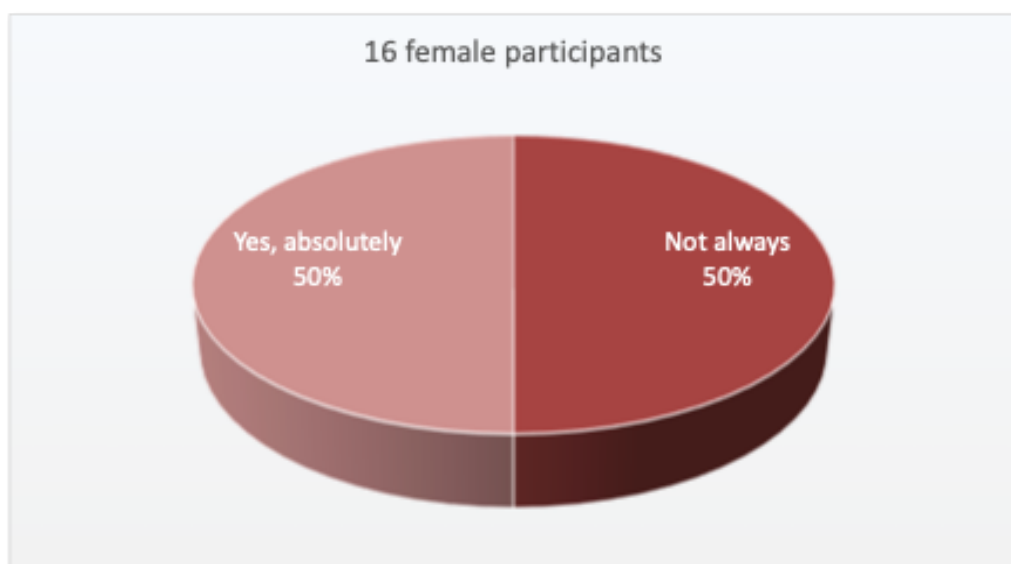


Figure N.9

Finally, **emerging models of masculinity increasingly support girls'** financial independence and grant them greater autonomy in choosing their educational trajectories, but restrictions linked to women's freedom of movement continue to persist. Through dialogue and mutual understanding, daughters and fathers often find ways to navigate these challenges, **negotiating new forms of compromise that gradually reshape women's roles and spaces.**

Opportunities and Challenges to Males' Engagement

Opportunities

- **Reconciling Ambitions and Social Norms**

Fathers and brothers play a central role in mediating between young women's ambitions and the social norms that constrain their leadership. Survey findings highlight that fathers, as key figures within both the family and wider social structures, can leverage their authority to negotiate space for their daughters' aspirations. Girls and young women emphasize that they value their parents' perspectives not only because of societal expectations but also as part of their family bonds, illustrating how family dynamics can at times counterbalance external pressures.

Brothers, particularly those close in age to their sisters, also serve as mediators between daughters and family expectations. Their presence, especially during travel or participation in programs, often reassures fathers and enables girls' involvement in opportunities that might otherwise be restricted. According to individual interviews, 4 out of 18 girls reported that they were permitted to take part in certain activities, such as traveling, only if accompanied by another family member, most often a

brother. As one girl from Amman explained: *“My brother used to drive me to training and stay with me until I finished.”*

- **Education**

Compared to previous generations, access to education has become a central priority in contemporary Egypt and Jordan. Survey and interview findings suggest that fathers and brothers with higher levels of education are more likely to acknowledge the importance of female leadership. Since fathers increasingly emphasize educational attainment for both daughters and sons, this broader access carries significant transformative potential. It contributes to a gradual reconfiguration of men’s perspectives and attitudes within the family, creating new space for girls and young women to pursue leadership roles.

- **Social Media**

Interviews with girls, fathers, and brothers consistently highlighted social media as a space that simultaneously challenges and supports girls’ leadership pathways. On the one hand, online platforms can amplify hate speech and circulate Western feminist narratives that may clash with Arab cultural and religious contexts, at times fueling hostility toward women. On the other hand, social media creates valuable opportunities: it offers diverse role models, expands young women’s sense of what is possible, and provides tools to question restrictive traditions. For fathers and brothers, exposure to women leaders online can also shift perceptions, gradually normalizing girls’ participation in public life—for instance, by making the idea of working under a female supervisor more acceptable.

Challenges

- **Men’s Limited Awareness**

Survey results reveal a significant gap in men’s awareness of the cultural pressures that limit girls’ leadership opportunities. While individual interviews with girls underscored that social norms and gender stereotypes remain a major barrier, many male respondents failed to acknowledge this. Among female respondents, 62% recognized these pressures as a challenge, while 38% did not. Among male respondents, only 11 out of 18 acknowledged cultural and societal pressures as limiting, with just one father and two brothers explicitly recognizing their existence. This lack of awareness means that men rarely question the restrictive norms that shape girls’ opportunities, representing a critical obstacle to building genuine support for women’s leadership.

- **Gender Expectations and Stereotypes**

When asked about societal and family expectations, the majority of brothers reported feeling pressured to follow the “right” path, assume financial responsibility, and conform to traditional masculine roles. In contrast, expectations for girls continue to center on unpaid care work within the household, including domestic duties and childcare. These gendered expectations restrict men’s capacity to support women’s leadership and reinforce existing power hierarchies. Moreover, persistent stereotypes—such as the belief that women are “too emotional” for politics—continue

to hinder progress toward equality. Such views reflect an outdated conception of political leadership that equates strength and authority exclusively with masculinity.

- **Social Judgment**

Interviews with fathers revealed that they often face criticism from relatives and community members when supporting their daughters' leadership aspirations or independence in travel. This social judgment can discourage men from actively engaging in gender-transformative practices, further reinforcing restrictive norms.

- **Family Socio-Economic Contexts**

Survey findings show that 93% of respondents agreed that a family's cultural and financial situation shapes the degree of support fathers and brothers provide to girls and young women. While little difference was observed between Cairo and Amman, rural Egypt stood out for offering significantly fewer opportunities for women, a gap closely linked to lower educational and economic resources. Both fathers' and girls' interviews confirmed that men in urban areas were generally more open to challenging unequal norms than their rural counterparts, highlighting a clear urban–rural divide.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The present action research underscores the pivotal role of fathers and brothers in supporting the leadership potential of girls and young women (GYW) in Jordan and Egypt. Fathers, in particular, often act as intermediaries who balance their decision-making capacity with the aspirations of their daughters, navigating between tribal expectations, societal norms, and emerging opportunities. Their choices are shaped by socio-economic status, educational attainment, and geographic context, yet the evidence shows that traditional fatherhood practices are gradually evolving. Changing socio-economic dynamics across the Arab world are contributing to more supportive approaches, with fathers increasingly encouraging women's financial independence, educational advancement, and active participation in decision-making.

These findings point to a valuable opportunity: engaging male family members as partners in gender-transformative initiatives can accelerate progress toward more inclusive leadership models. Strengthening fathers' and brothers' awareness and capacity to champion girls' ambitions not only empowers young women but also fosters healthier family dynamics and more equitable communities. By situating male engagement at the heart of gender equality strategies, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of masculinity and highlights pathways for sustainable social change in the region.

Conclusion 1

- **Fathers and brothers' conditional support:** Fathers and brothers describe themselves to be very supportive of daughters and sisters' leadership ambitions, but support is often constrained by social norms, and old perceptions of leadership characteristics.
- **Emerging societal support:** Support is emerging to women's leadership in Egypt and Jordan but this support is generally conditional. Women are expected not to challenge male leadership or disrupt established social hierarchies and norms.
- **Family is often a safe heaven in comparison to societal structures like tribes :** Families, especially fathers and brothers, are the most influential actors in shaping girls' leadership trajectories. Compared to tribal or societal structures, families offer a comparatively more flexible space for nurturing girls' ambitions.

Recommendations: Civil society organizations (CSOs) can build on this potential by:

- **Actively engaging male family members** through tailored workshops for fathers and brothers that combine practical parenting skills with gender-transformative approaches. Emphasis should be placed on intergenerational communication and shared decision-making, delivered in flexible, culturally sensitive formats that increase men's participation.
- **Creating safe spaces for dialogue** that bring together families, tribal leaders, and community influencers to openly discuss women's leadership. Showcasing successful local examples of female leaders can help challenge stereotypes and strengthen social acceptance.
- **Promoting positive male role models** through social and local media by highlighting fathers and brothers who champion their daughters' leadership. Normalizing such practices helps reshape community perceptions and builds a culture of supportive male involvement.

Conclusion 2

- **Impact of socio-economic factors:** Financial security and cultural background play a significant role in shaping male family members' support for female leadership. Across the interviews, a marked disparity emerged in between urban and rural, where limited economic and educational opportunities translated into less support to women's leadership.
- **Fathers' support is mainly toward girl's education:** All girls interviewed confirm that fathers provide financial, emotional, and advisory support, with education being the priority.
- **New fatherhood practices:** Fatherhood practices are gradually evolving compared to previous generations. While more progressive approaches are emerging, acceptance varies by context with evidence showing differences in rural and urban areas of Assiut.
- **Impact of gender and social norms and unaddressed safety concerns:** Traditional norms continue to restrict girls' opportunities. Mobility and travel limitations reflect persistent gendered expectations, and many girls still require formal approval to participate in university or social activities, which can constrain their engagement in broader community life.

Recommendations: To build on these emerging shifts, CSOs can:

- **Integrate safety measures into programs and policies**, ensuring secure transportation, safe housing for study or work-related travel, and awareness initiatives to reassure families and encourage greater participation.
- **Equip girls with leadership and decision-making skills**, including confidence-building, negotiation, and communication. Universities and community spaces should provide training and mentorship programs that encourage girls to take an active role in family and community dialogues, gradually shifting norms from within.
- **Prioritize gender equality interventions in areas with lower socio-economic conditions**, particularly rural settings. Tailored programs that address local cultural norms and provide practical support where access to education and economic opportunities is limited can help create enabling environments for girls and encourage male family members to engage

Conclusion 3

- **Opportunities:** Fathers can act as key figure mediating traditions and ambitions. Fathers also serve as intermediaries with the tribe, handling formal or symbolic approvals while safeguarding their daughters' interests.
- **Challenges - Limited awareness:** Many men, and some women, do not fully recognize the challenges girls face in pursuing leadership roles, which can limit support for their ambitions.
- **Challenges - Social and economic barriers:** social and economic possibilities can influence male support for girls' leadership, particularly regarding mobility, access to education, public participation, and decision-making autonomy. Both fathers' and girls' interviews indicate that men in urban areas tend to be more receptive to challenging unequal gender norms compared to those in rural settings, underscoring the socio-economic context can have an influence on men's engagement with gender equality.

Recommendations: Civil society and government actors can amplify this potential by:

- **Expanding the concept of leadership** through training and dialogue programs that involve men, women, and tribal leaders across generations. By presenting more inclusive and diverse models of leadership, such initiatives can gradually shift entrenched perceptions and open new pathways for women.
- **Ensuring equitable access to education** through scholarships, tuition support, and financial assistance, particularly targeting girls from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Integrating gender-awareness into curricula**, equipping boys and girls with early understanding of gender equality, inclusive leadership, and the challenges women face. This helps cultivate supportive mindsets from a young age.
- **Enforcing gender-responsive policies and workplace protections**, including closing the wage gap, ensuring equal employment opportunities, and providing family-friendly measures such as affordable childcare facilities.

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