

# EGYPT COUNTRY SPOTLIGHT

In this Spotlight, the main focus is on adolescent girls in urban areas.

## Safe cities for adolescent girls: Harassment is not ok

### 1. Introduction

Adolescent girls in urban settings are amongst the most deprived groups in Egypt. They experience high levels of discrimination and significant inequalities of opportunity in education, visibility and mobility, economic opportunities and ability to influence decision-making. They also experience harassment in different spheres. This campaign aims to see adolescent girls from urban slum areas able to make safe choices without fear of harassment. It will mobilise support to revise and activate existing legal protections and promote implementation through the policy agenda, enable access to services, while also tackling public and institutional attitudes which condone and enable harassment of girls.

#### **Egypt: snapshot**

- 26.3% of Egyptians live below the poverty line; and 49% below the upper poverty line
- 40% are less than 18 years old
- 45% of Egypt's population live in slum conditions
- Egypt ranks 130 out of 187 countries on the GII
- Egypt is a major source, destination and transit country for migration

### 2. Overview

**Adolescent girls in urban settings:** Almost half of Egypt's 87 million people now live in urban areas, with 45% of the country living in slum conditions. Children and youth form a large and growing part of the population – 40% are less than 18 years old.<sup>1</sup> More than 50% of children living in slums experience multidimensional poverty, living in areas which are characterised by cramped conditions with limited infrastructure, limited access to services and adequate housing, unsafe structures, open drains, and uncollected garbage.<sup>2</sup> Threats resulting from high levels of crime are also prevalent. Economic poverty is high, along with high rates of unemployment.<sup>3</sup> Recent studies indicate that average trends for urban Egypt show stagnation and deterioration in some dimensions of well-being, a sign of wide and growing disparities and deprivations within informal slum areas.<sup>4</sup> These challenges are compounded by high levels of stigma associated with slum dwellers in Egypt, contributing to marginalisation and limiting opportunities.

Adolescent girls in urban slums are one of the most excluded groups, and their situation is particularly acute. There are few schools in slum areas, and as incomes reduce, parents are less willing to pay for girls' education, preferring to focus resources on their sons. Girls from

<sup>1</sup> Population Reference Bureau 2014, <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Reports/2014/egypt-rapid-population-growth.aspx>; OCHA/IRIN. 2007. *The Housing Crisis Cairo: Sheltering the Urban Poor*. Available from: [www.irinnews.org/pdf/in-depth/tomorrowscrisestoday-prelims.pdf](http://www.irinnews.org/pdf/in-depth/tomorrowscrisestoday-prelims.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Labor, 2013. *Egypt: Moderate Advancement*. [www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/2013TDA/egypt.pdf](http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/2013TDA/egypt.pdf).

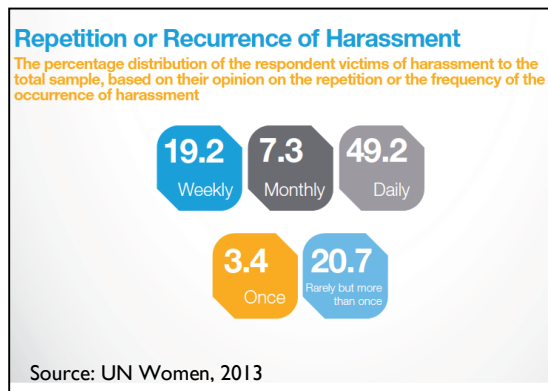
<sup>3</sup> Save the Children 2013, *Analytical study on situation of selected urban slum dwellers in Cairo Governorate: Manshiet Nasser and Ezbett El-Haggana*

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF 2013, *Multidimensional child poverty in slums and unplanned areas in Cairo*

urban slums also face bleak economic prospects, social isolation, high levels of early marriage and entrenched discrimination and violence.<sup>5</sup> This is exacerbated by low levels of the voice of female youth in personal or household decision-making and community affairs at any level.<sup>6</sup> The situation is compounded for adolescent girls with disabilities or special needs, and amongst adolescent girls from Egypt's refugee community, who live side by side with marginalised Egyptians in urban slum settings. For example, Syrian girls in Egypt consistently highlight key concerns around lack of skills and opportunities to work; desire to engage in social and community activities and to have more freedom to move outside their homes.<sup>7</sup>

**66% of adolescent girls in Cairo report that they have been sexually harassed.**

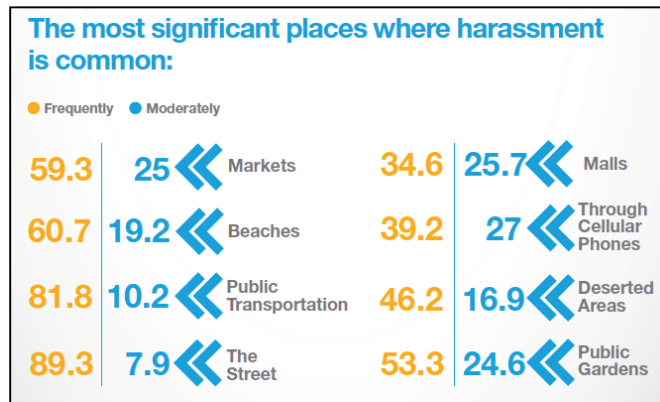
Source: NCCM and UNICEF 2015, Op cit



### Harassment in Egypt

Egypt ranks second in the world for harassment of girls and women.<sup>8</sup> Studies indicate that 95% to 99% of girls and women in Egypt have been subject to sexual harassment; and 49% report that this takes place on a daily basis.<sup>9</sup> Significantly, 67.1% of the female respondents to a recent study said that all girls are subjected to harassment, regardless of attire, looks, manner of speech or gait. Women report being frequently harassed on the street (89.3%), on public transport (81.8%); and

they are also unable to feel safe at the beach, markets, in public gardens, or in malls. Rates of workplace based harassment are unquantified, but expected to be high, with one study of women workers in Cairo reporting that 70% of respondents had been harassed at work.<sup>10</sup> Girls and women are also subject to harassment at home, with the vast majority experiencing or witnessing harassment and violence.<sup>11</sup>



An alarmingly high number of men admit to harassing girls and women – 77% report they have harassed women in some way,<sup>12</sup> and 30% report they ‘would not care if they witnessed harassment. For women in Egypt, by contrast, harassment is more likely to be seen as a

<sup>5</sup> NCCM and UNICEF 2015, *Violence against children in Egypt*; UNICEF 2013, op cit.; Save the Children 2013, op cit.,

<sup>6</sup> Plan International and Save the Children Egypt 2014, *Child Rights Situation Analysis: Egypt*

<sup>7</sup> WRC 2015, *I am Here: Internal assessment*; SCI Egypt 2014, *Rapid assessment of refugee needs: Alexandria, Damietta and Hewyn*

<sup>8</sup> UNFPA [http://egypt.unfpa.org/english/Staticpage/3/c94040b0-542a-4a2d-a549-da8756195c6e/Sexual\\_Harassment.aspx](http://egypt.unfpa.org/english/Staticpage/3/c94040b0-542a-4a2d-a549-da8756195c6e/Sexual_Harassment.aspx)

<sup>9</sup> UN Women 2013, *Study on ways and methods to eliminate sexual harassment in Egypt*; HarassMap 2014, *Towards a safer city: Sexual harassment in Greater Cairo: Effectiveness of crowd sourcing data.*

Source: UN Women 2013

<sup>10</sup> Egyptian Labour Union 2014, unpublished.

<sup>11</sup> NCCM and UNICEF 2015, Op cit.

<sup>12</sup> HarassMap 2014, Op cit.

serious threat which generates fear, erodes confidence, and can lead to depression, amongst other consequences.<sup>13</sup>

### **Risks for adolescent girls in urban settings**

Harassment clearly acts as a barrier to equitable opportunities and fuels disparities for this group. Linked to deeper gender dynamics, harassment of adolescent girls takes place in a social context where adults and boys believe that girls who are harassed have invited such behaviour, and “deserve what they get”. One study found that male respondents felt that men harassed to satisfy an urge (67.1%) and/or it was seen as an expression of masculinity (24.7%), and/or simply because it is seen as normal behaviour or a habit (25.8%).<sup>14</sup> In response, many adolescent girls have become largely hidden populations, isolated from education or economic opportunities, and unable to participate in their communities. Keeping their daughters at home is a strategy adopted by many families for their daughters’ safety. Often, they only feel it is safe to go out if they are accompanied. Since their fathers and other male members of their family are often not around, they rarely leave the house. Some families elect early marriage as a response, ostensibly offering protection from the greater dangers affecting unmarried women.<sup>15</sup>

Particularly excluded girls (on the street, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers) are especially vulnerable to multiple risks.<sup>16</sup> Refugee girls have reported that they fear physical and verbal harassment and are afraid of being kidnapped or robbed. Children report that they fear humiliation due to their race, and as a coping mechanism they stay at home where they feel secure. However, some reported being afraid even within their community and their homes.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, respondents in a national study identified girls with mental disabilities as particularly affected by the impacts of harassment.<sup>18</sup>

### **3. Policy and institutional analysis**

On June 4th 2014, a new law was passed amending the *Penal Code* which criminalises sexual harassment for the first time in Egypt. According to the law, verbal, physical, behavioural, phone and online sexual harassment attract a prison sentence of between six months and five years, and up to EGP 50,000 (USD 6,400) in fines. The heavier penalties apply to offenders in a position of power over a women (for example teachers, employers), multiple offenders and those who are armed. A number of weaknesses have been identified with the legal framework, particularly around the definition of key concepts including:

- Narrow definition of offences, as only when a man follows or stalks a woman and communicates sexual or pornographic content.

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<sup>13</sup> UN Women 2013, Op cit.

<sup>14</sup> UN Women 2013, Op cit

<sup>15</sup> Girls not Brides, 2015. *Fact sheet: Egypt national strategy for prevention of early marriage*. London: Girls not Brides

<sup>16</sup> NCCM and INICEF 2015, Op cit

<sup>17</sup> UNCHR Alexandria Field Office 2014, *Report of the participatory assessment*

<sup>18</sup> UN Women 2013, Op cit.

- The crime of harassment is defined as motivated by the sexual desires and fulfilment of the offender, ignoring other common motivations such as shaming, assertion of power, or even boredom.<sup>19</sup>

A fundamental weakness lies in lack of enforcement of the law, both in practice and through any accountability mechanism. Many people are unaware of the law, or fear stigma and further victimisation if they take action. Local and national institutions need stronger capacities and resources to be able to respond.

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<sup>19</sup> El-Rifae, Y 2014, *Egypt's sexual harassment law: an insufficient measure to end sexual violence*  
<http://www.mei.edu/content/at/egypts-sexual-harassment-law-insufficient-measure-end-sexual-violence>

#### **4. Policy recommendations**

To address these gaps, and to tackle related institutional and public attitudes and behaviours, Save the Children will work with relevant government authorities, UN agencies, CSOs and with adolescents to promote:

- A stronger evidence base and policy and institutional analyses around harassment of adolescent girls in urban settings.
  - A higher priority around harassment on the national agenda, and amongst stakeholders in urban slum areas.
  - Legal reform and the development of a national strategy/action plan, including clarity about responsibilities.
  - Strengthening capacities of relevant institutions to take action and improving access to protection and response services for adolescent girls.
  - Greater provision and access to schools and clinics in informal urban settlements.
  - Increased budget allocation and human resources to address harassment.
  - An influential voice of adolescent girls and boys in local and national dialogue and action on harassment.
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