

Egypt: Success at a Double Cost

Women journalists carry an extra burden to prove their competence.

Investigative journalist Nadia Mabrouk's long history of work on women's rights is driven by harsh personal experience. Her mother was shot dead after defying her family to marry the man of her choice, leaving behind two daughters.

"My mother's killing showed me very clearly the condition of women in Egypt, deprived of rights that should be self-evident," said Mabrouk.

Now a journalist for more than 20 years, her diverse career – beginning at Al-Ghad newspaper and moving on to half-a-dozen other Egyptian outlets before going freelance – has served to reveal the reality faced by female journalists.

"As women, we are not seen. The work we do is not appreciated," she said. "Unfortunately, women's chances of reaching leadership positions are weak because the dominant mindset still sees a woman's place as the kitchen."

According to a January 2025 [research paper](#) by the Regional Center for Rights and Liberties, access to high-level positions remains a major challenge for female journalists. Leadership remains largely male, with representation of women in senior roles most often confined to sections such as fashion, family or social issues, reflecting gendered stereotyping.

Mabrouk described her own experience having to over-compensate in the face of widespread prejudice.

"When I assumed the role of department head at one of the private newspapers, I faced a tough challenge," Mabrouk recalled. "I had to constantly prove I was a competent journalist capable of running the department."

"As women, we are not seen. The work we do is not appreciated."

This was particularly hard as her daughter was just three years old at the time.

"Because of the pressures I faced, I exerted double the effort to prove my competence," Mabrouk continued. "I would take late shifts and take on responsibility during major news coverage that forced me to stay at the paper until one in the morning, just to assure everyone that I was a competent journalist, equal to a man, even though the men would leave early."

According to a 2025 [report](#) by the Egyptian Observatory for Journalism and Media, female journalists routinely face exclusion from appointment or promotion solely for being

married or having children.

Mabrouk credited the support of her husband, journalist Walid Salah - who shared household responsibilities and swapped shifts when she traveled – with enabling her to pursue her career.

Many women who do reach the ranks of managing editor and editor-in-chief at national press institutions, she continued, had little real authority.

"It's just an administrative grade for the sake of pay," Mabrouk continued, adding that this amounted to no more than mere "cosmetic dressing of the media face" of some institutions.

A 2024 [study](#) on the empowerment of women in Egyptian journalism noted widespread wage discrimination and unequal opportunities for promotion and appointment, as well as the prevailing societal culture that media work was unsuitable for women.

However, Mabrouk emphasised that women brought a fresh perspective on newsrooms coverage, often finding angles men would overlook.

One example was the issue of so-called verbal divorce, an Islamic practice in which a man can end the marriage solely using spoken words, without official documentation. It is therefore hard to prove that it occurred, meaning the divorced woman cannot remarry or obtain her financial rights. An often mooted solution is the use of [khul'](#), a religious ruling by which a woman can request the end of the marriage before the court in exchange for returning her dowry, while waiving all her financial rights related to the divorce, such as alimony or compensation.

While male journalists often reported this as a simple outcome, Mabrouk said, "As women, we see the issue clearly. Khul' means a woman gives up her religious and financial rights, so why must a woman give up her rights because a man decided to end the marriage verbally, and because there is an institution that adopts a single jurisprudential opinion?"

And Mabrouk emphasised that female representation in media was crucial to dismantling a culture of violence and overwhelming prejudice. She highlighted the work of one Egyptian cartoonist known for his drawings depicting professional women as sex workers and workplaces as brothels.

She concluded, "This shows how we as women suffer - even when we are working hard."

