



Immigration and  
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration  
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

# **Egypt: Treatment of women who do not conform to Muslim practices and traditions, including wearing a veil (head covering), in rural and urban areas; state protection available to victims of mistreatment (June 2013-November 2014)**

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Related Document [Égypte : information sur le traitement réservé aux femmes qui ne se conforment pas aux pratiques et aux traditions musulmanes, y compris le fait de porter un voile, que ce soit dans les régions rurales ou urbaines; la protection offerte par l'État aux femmes victimes de mauvais traitements pour ces raisons \(juin 2013-novembre 2014\)](#)

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## 1. Treatment of Women Who Do Not Wear a Veil

According to a 27 January 2014 article by Foreign Affairs, a "multiplatform media organization" published by the Council on Foreign Relations, a non-profit and nonpartisan organization (Foreign Affairs n.d.), Egyptian women have "faced increasing pressure, from the state, religious authorities, and people in the streets, to dress and act more conservatively in public." An article published by the Associated Press (AP) indicates that "Egypt's conservative Muslim society discriminates against women, accusing them of dressing immodestly and mixing with men in public and thus provoking harassment" (9 June 2014). An article published by the Gatestone Institute, a non-partisan, not-for-profit international policy council and think tank (n.d.), indicates that

In the minds of Egypt's theocrats, a woman's body should not be seen in public. In televised interviews and sermons, leaders of the Nour Party [the Salafists' "ultraconservative" party in Egypt] have stated that when a man sees a woman, his testosterone hormones are activated. Therefore women, according to his interpretation of Sharia law, need to be covered-up or locked-up. (Gatestone Institute 10 Dec. 2013)

According to the same source, these ideas "have a real impact on how girls and women are treated in Egyptian society" (ibid.). The Middle Eastern Values Study (MEVS) [1], a "systematic comparative study of the values and attitudes of the publics from Islamic countries" (MEVS n.d.), published a report titled *The Birthplace of the Arab Spring: Values and Perceptions of Tunisians and A Comparative Assessment of Egyptian, Iraqi, Lebanese, Pakistani, Saudi, Tunisian, and Turkish Publics*, which was released in December 2013. The report states that approximately 14 percent of Egyptians believe that women should be able to choose their own clothing and that 52 percent prefer that women wear an Islamic headscarf (Moaddel 15 Dec. 2013, 6, 54).

A 22 July 2014 article published by the New York Times reports that at the end of the 1970s, millions of Egyptians left Egypt to work in the Gulf states, and they returned having adopted a Wahhabi-influenced Islam, which obliges women to wear the hijab and keep their bodies covered. According to the same source, "the hijab is now so prevalent in Egypt that an unveiled woman is generally taken to be a Christian or a nonpracticing Muslim" and that "[s]ome Wahhabis, in fact, deem harassment a just punishment for a woman who exposes any part of her body" (The New York Times 22 July 2014). The article quotes a Salafist preacher on his religious television show as saying, "I challenge the notion that a single woman in a niqab [Islamic full-face veil] has been molested... the women who get harassed are those in slutty clothing" (ibid.). The article cites a study conducted by the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights that "showed that a woman's dress had no effect on whether she was molested; in fact, the majority of victims were veiled" (ibid.).

UN Women, the United Nations' (UN) Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, published a report in May 2013 which states that "approximately half of the male respondents (49.1%) stated that attractive unveiled girls or women are the ones most exposed to harassment" (UN 23 May 2013, 19). The report also indicates that 99.3 percent of female respondents said that they have been subjected to sexual harassment and that 82.6 percent did not feel safe in the street (ibid., 6, 17).

According to a poll conducted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation, in which 336 gender experts in 21 Arab League states as well as Syria were surveyed, Egypt is "the worst country in the Arab world to be a woman" (Thomson Reuters Foundation 12 Nov. 2013). The report states that sexual harassment contributed to this ranking (ibid.).

According to a report on sexual harassment in Greater Cairo, released in August 2014 by HarassMap, a volunteer-based social initiative founded to end "the social acceptability of sexual harassment in Egypt" (HarassMap 19 Aug. 2014, 11) [2], "61% of respondents agreed that a woman who wears tight clothing and is non-veiled is the most vulnerable to harassment" and 97.4 percent of male respondents believe "that tight clothes increase exposure to harassment" (19 Aug. 2014, 29).

Information on the treatment of women who do not conform to other Muslim practices and traditions and state protection for these women could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this response.

## 2. State Protection for Women

Several sources reported that the Egyptian government introduced new laws in June 2014 that criminalize sexual harassment and make it punishable for up to five years in jail (Al Jazeera 6 June 2014; BBC News 5 June 2014; AP 9 June 2014). HarassMap provided a full text of the new law:

### Article 306 (a)

To be punished by prison a duration not less than 6 months and a fine not less than 3000 Egyptian pounds and not to exceed 5000 Egyptian pounds, or one of these two punishments all those who confront others in a public space a private one or where one is present with permission by making forward actions, insinuations or hints that are sexual or pornographic whether by signals, words or action and by any means including wired and wireless communication methods.

And punishment is by prison not less than a year and a fine not less than 5000 Egyptian pounds and not to exceed 10000 Egyptian pounds and by one of these punishments if the crime is repeated by the perpetrator via following or stalking the harassed.

And in case the crime is repeated again, both punishments of imprisonment and fine payment are doubled in both their minimum and maximum forms.

### Article 306 (b)

It is considered sexual harassment if the crime referred to in Article 306 (a) of this law is committed with the intention of the perpetrator receiving from the harassed benefit of a sexual nature, and the perpetrator is punished by prison not less than a year and a fine not less than 10000 Egyptian pounds, and not to exceed 20000 Egyptian pounds or one of both punishments.

And if the perpetrator is one of those referred to in the second paragraph of Article 267 of this law, or has occupational authority, familial, educational/mentoring, or practiced any kind of pressure on the harassed that would allow the context of committing the crime, or the crime is committed by 2 perpetrators or more, or if at least one of them had a weapon, punishment is not less than 2 years in prison and does not exceed 5 years, and punishment is not less than 20000 Egyptian pounds and does not exceed 50000 Egyptian pounds. (Egypt 2014)

Foreign Affairs states that a woman who wants to report a harassment incident to police "is required by law to catch her attacker and bring him and two other witnesses to the police" (Foreign Affairs

27 Jan. 2014). The same source quotes a representative from HarassMap as saying that women "regularly 'have to fight with the police to actually make the report, in the street, and at the police station'" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### Notes

[1] MEVS started as a collaboration in 1999 between Mansoor Moaddel, professor of Sociology at the Department of Sociology and research professor at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland, and Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan. The collaboration was a "convergence of two different research programs the two investigators were conducting" (Moaddel n.d.).

[2] HarassMap aims to end the social acceptability of sexual harassment in Egypt using an online interactive map, social media, and mobile phones to allow individuals to report incidents of sexual harassment (19 Aug. 2014, 11).

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

Oral Sources: Attempts to contact the following were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Assistant Professor of Islamic and gender studies at the University of British Columbia; Associate Lecturer at the University of Australia; Associate Professor of sociology at the American University in Cairo; Journalist at Thomson Reuters Foundation; Lecturer in the department of political science at the University of Toronto; Professor of sociology at the American University in Cairo; Professor of sociology at the University of Maryland; Representative at the Cairo Institute For Human Rights Studies; Representative at the Legal Aid Society for Human Rights; Representative at the New Woman Foundation.

Internet sites, including: Africa Confidential; Africa Research Bulletin; Al-Ahram Weekly; AllAfrica; Amnesty International; Association for Women's Rights in Development; ecoi.net; Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights; Egypt Independent; Egypt - Ministry of Interior Affairs, National Council for Women; Freedom House; HeinOnline; International Crisis Group; Nazra for Feminist Studies; Reuters; United Nations - Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld, ReliefWeb; US - Department of State; X Index (Voice of free Expression).

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