

HERproject Egypt

Participating companies in HERproject: Levi Strauss & Co.

Key industries: Textile, Apparel manufacturing, Food processing

Female Factory Workers' Health Needs Assessment: Egypt

July 2010

Country Context

Women represent approximately 43 percent of all female workers in the industrial sector in Egypt, who predominantly work in the textile and food processing sectors. The majority of female workers are between the ages of 18–25 and are unmarried. In a 2009 HERproject survey of female workers we found women on average began their career at the age 19.5 years of age, and worked in the factory for an average of 3 years.

Key health issues for women workers in Egypt¹

The major issues affecting women workers health in Egypt include:

- » **Anemia:** Health Needs Assessments (HNA) in HERproject factories in Egypt found 67 percent of 390 female workers surveyed currently had or had previously had anemia and 20 percent currently had or had previously had intestinal worms during their lifetime.² At a national level, about 20-39.9 percent of non-pregnant women of reproductive age suffer from anemia³.
- » **Family planning and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):** Female workers in HERproject factories stated that they knew at least one family planning method. However between five and 13 percent of respondents had never seen or heard of condoms. Likewise, the majority of women mentioned AIDS as a sexually transmitted infection but only six to 11 percent knew about Hepatitis C.
- » **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):** FGM remains a very common practice in Egypt. FGM is often supported by mothers, who feel their daughters' marriage prospects will suffer if the procedure is not done. Many of the FGM procedures are conducted within ill-equipped facilities, causing infections after and scaring women's lives forever. FGM is officially illegal since 2007. Women surveyed in HERproject factories had differing views on FGM, with 32 percent in one and 67 percent in the other arguing that FGM was a necessary practice.
- » **Occupational health:** Neck and back aches, eye strains and headaches are commonly occurring problems for workers due to long working hours either sitting or standing at work stations.
- » **Painful menstruation:** Menstrual pain is often cited as a reason for absenteeism by women workers. HERproject surveys found that the majority

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Egypt

97% of the women aged 15-49 have gone through the FGM procedure in Egypt

Reference: [Female Genital Mutilation, A Statistical Exploration](#), UNICEF

¹ Note: This information is based on Health Needs Assessments conducted in participating HERproject factories in Egypt by BSR and Center for Development Services.

² Please note that the HNA results do not reflect the overall situation of Egyptian women. However, we believe a substantial number of female workers in the apparel industry suffer from anemia.

³ World Health Organization's Global database on Anemia (1993-2005)

Business impacts of investing in women workers' health in Egypt

HERproject is currently being implemented in 3 factories in Egypt reaching 3200 women. Initial results show the following business impacts in the participating factories:

- » Reduced health related absenteeism in one factory
- » Reduced demand for "permission to early leave" in all factories
- » Marked improvement in the personal hygiene of workers and restroom cleanliness in all the factories. This has increased the reputation of the factory among buyers and audit inspectors.

of women had difficulty meeting their production targets during their menstrual period.

- » **Personal hygiene:** HERproject surveys found female workers tended to have low personal hygiene, due to irregular bathing practices, unwashed hands, sharing bottles, cups, and cutlery during meals. However, menstrual hygiene was comparatively better than in other countries; 91 to 93 percent of women surveyed reported using sanitary napkins.
- » **Post-natal care:** Most young women in Egypt have very low awareness about the importance of breastfeeding. One serious consequence of this is malnutrition; most irreversible damage from malnutrition occurs during gestation and in the first 24 months of the baby's life.⁴

General Health care facilities in factories

Most factories in Egypt provide basic diagnostic facilities such as administering first aid, pain killers for muscular and back pains and provide referral health services. Factory clinics rarely provide counseling on women specific health issues, such as family planning methods or pre-natal and post-natal care for pregnant women.

External Health care facilities

Egypt has a national insurance system. Some factories choose to link their employees to the system and others choose not to. The vast majority of women workers prefer to go to private clinics to seek medical care.

BSR's partner organization for HERproject

BSR's local partner implementing HERproject in Egypt is the **Center for Development Services**. CDS is a private development entrepreneurial venture that uses innovative approaches to mobilize technical and financial support for development endeavors in Egypt and the Middle East. The range of applications continues to be broad and varied embracing work in fields of health, agriculture, education, environment, micro-finance, capacity building, institutional development, urban development, anti-trafficking, and information technology.

Other organizations in Egypt working on women's health issues

- » [Egyptian Family Planning Association \(EFPA\)](#)
- » [Ministry of Health](#)
- » [National Council for Women \(NCW\)](#)
- » [National council for Childhood and Motherhood \(NCCM\)](#)
- » [Population Council](#)
- » [The Suzan Mubarak Regional Center for Women's Health and Development](#)
- » [Women Health Outreach Program](#)

⁴ UNICEF 2009. Tracking Progress on Child and Maternal Nutrition