Resources, Family Power, and Gender Preference in Minya, Egypt

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ABSTRACT

Researchers debate whether, in highly patriarchal settings, women's access to and control over resources in the family will alter their family power and gender preferences. We adapt a theory of gender stratification to explore the influence of a woman's customary and non-customary social and economic resources and marital household structure on her family power and gender preferences in Minya, Egypt. Residence with parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, and the husband decrease women's influence in decisions pertaining to children. On average, women in endogamous marriages still prefer sons over daughters and have greater influence in life course decisions than do women in non-endogamous marriages. More educated women report weaker son preference and greater influence in daily and life course decisions, but more educated women still tend to prefer sons. We discuss the institutional and demographic circumstances under which women's empowerment is likely to improve the relative well being of girls.

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In settings where parents rely on children for security in old age and where social, economic, and legal institutions are highly patriarchal, a preference for sons becomes part of the normative environment that shapes decisions about the allocation of care (Arnold 1992; Arnold, Choe & Roy 1998; Goodkind 1996; Kishor 1993; Mason 1986; Murthi, Guio & Dreze 1995). Given such settings, researchers debate whether women's access to and control over resources in the family can alter their gender preferences and influence in decisions that affect the well being of girls. Some argue that women with more education will better implement shared preferences for sons (Das Gupta 1987).[i] Others argue that women with more control over economic resources will allocate them more equitably between sons and daughters (Thomas 1990; Barbeau 1987 in Kurtz & Johnson-Welch 1997). Researchers who do not assume that gender norms are "fixed" have modeled the impact of community-level institutions and individual resources on women's family power and attitudes about gender (Balk 1997). At the crux of this debate are two questions: First, in highly –patriarchal settings, which resources and social constraints determine the power of women over decisions that affect the well being of children? And, do the resources at a woman's disposal also influence her gender preferences in such settings?

Here, we adapt Brinton's (1988) theory of the institutional and familial bases of gender stratification to address these questions in Minya, Egypt. We broaden Brinton's theory to include marital household structure and customary and non-customary social and economic resources within and beyond the marital home. We argue that the array of resources at a woman's disposal will determine her influence in decisions that pertain to children, but that marital household structure may constrain a woman's investment decisions. We also argue that in settings where security in old age depends on support from children, a woman's perceptions of the chances that boys and girls can fulfill such needs and the array of resources at her disposal will shape her

2

gender preferences. Using qualitative data from Minya, we illustrate the customary and non-customary social and economic resources that influence family power and instill beliefs about the value of sons and daughters. Using population-based data from Minya, we test the effects of women's access to and control over such resources on their gender preferences and influence in decisions that pertain to children.

Institutional and familial bases of gender stratification processes

Brinton (1988) argues that the educational system and labor market are critical to gender-stratification processes because these institutions affect the timing of human capital investment decisions across an individual's life course. In societies where the timing of such decisions is condensed, Brinton argues that there are fewer points in the life cycle at which human capital development decisions can occur. In Egypt, among women aged 25–49 years, the median age at marriage is 19.5 (El-Zanaty & Way 2001), and women rarely continue their education after marriage. Only 25 percent of ever-married women of reproductive age have ever worked for cash, with 8 percent working only before marriage and 17 percent working after marriage (El-Zanaty et al. 1996). In Egypt, therefore, investments in women's education occur largely before marriage, and paid employment remains secondary to women's familial responsibilities.[ii]

Also important for gender-stratification processes is the pattern of intergenerational exchanges and investments in the family. Brinton (1988, p. 307) argues that "[i]n cultural settings where parents (1) are motivated to invest in at least one child for future returns such as old-age support, (2) have resources for investment, and (3) perceive the labor market to be sex discriminatory, they will favor investments in sons over daughters." Brinton's model is useful as a framework for understanding how institutional opportunities and constraints shape parental preferences for and investments in children. The model assumes, however, that fathers and

3

mothers share similar gender preferences; thus, the types and distribution of resources in the family is not considered. We highlight the role played by women's access to and control over resources in gender-stratification processes by adding two sets of variables to Brinton's model: first, the customary and non-customary social and economic resources at a woman's disposal; and, second, whether or not a woman resides with marital relatives whose ascribed attributes give them authority over her investment decisions.

Resources and family power in social context

To justify inclusion of these variables, we elaborate on existing theories about the association of resources and family power in social context. Classical resource theory posits that the distribution of overt power in marriage depends on the balance of economic resources among husbands and wives (Blood & Wolf 1960).[iii] Rodman (1967, 1972) shows empirically, however, that the effect on marital power of a husband's economic resources depends on the institutional and normative context.[iv] In highly patriarchal settings, a husband's economic resources are irrelevant to patterns of decision-making in marriage because prescribed attributes dictate that the husband controls major decisions (Rodman 1972). At the same time, Rodman's comparative analysis shows a positive relationship between a woman's economic resources and her power in major economic decisions in marriage across varied normative and institutional contexts, as do studies in the United States, Taiwan, Mexico, and Turkey (Burr, Ahern, & Knowles 1977; Cooney et al. 1982; Fox 1973; Oropesa 1997; Xu & Lai 2002).

To model women's family power in settings in the Middle East requires a broader understanding of the concept of "resources" and potential actors in family decisions (See Astone et al. 1999). Kabeer (1999, p. 437) argues that the concept of "resources" should include "actual allocations" and "future claims" on material and financial goods as well as "human and social

4

resources [that]…enhance the ability to exercise choice..." In Palestine, for example, married women maintain ties with their natal kin and depend on male kin for economic security (Moors 1995). A married Palestinian woman who relinquishes her rightful inheritance to brothers invokes special obligations of support, whereas a woman who demands her share of inheritance may weaken her ability to invoke this support. Such decisions are important because support from natal kin affects a woman's position in her husband's house (Dyson & Moore 1983; Moors 1995).

Kabeer's definition and the above example suggest that access to and control over social and economic resources within and beyond the marital home may influence a woman's power vis-à-vis her marital family. Charrad (2001) offers three organizing principles for an ideal type model of kinship in the Middle East, which are useful to understand the influence of customary social resources on the power of married women in Upper Egypt. First, familial solidarity is based on bonds connecting male members of the same paternal lineage. The principle of patrilineality means that older married men are usually the designated heads of family, that brothers share authority in major family decisions, and that sons assume greater responsibility in family decisions as they enter adulthood and at the death of their fathers.

A second principle is a preference for marriage within the kinship group. Endogamous marriage strengthens relations among male relatives and protects the kin group from the division of property because spouses in an endogamous marriage "…carry the same patrilineal blood lines… [and] jointly owe their obligations to the same male members of the extended family..." (Rugh 1984, p.145). Although endogamous marriage upholds patriarchal systems of kinship, it also enhances a woman's prospects to use the material resources and "social leverage" of her male and female kin in negotiations with her marital family (Morsy 1993, p.113).

5

A third principle of kinship is known as the "patriarchal bargain" (Kandiyoti 1988), whereby women adhere to codes of behavior and a trajectory of feminine roles in exchange for protection from blood relatives and authority over certain decisions in the marital home (e.g., Charrad 2001; Kabeer 1999; Yount 1999). Access to the protection of kin can be important for women in Upper Egypt, who have fewer rights in marriage than men. For example, marriage does not require a woman's explicit consent, wives "owe obedience" to their husbands, and a husband can forbid his wife to work if it interferes with her familial duties (Yount 1999). Although polygamy is rare in practice, husbands can marry more than one wife if they notify existing and intended wives. In the mid-1990s, a husband could verbally repudiate his wife, whereas a wife could seek divorce only through judicial process and in cases of harm or fault of the husband.[v] Promises of protection and domestic authority in a context of weaker marital rights motivate many women to respect prescribed feminine roles and codes of behavior.

Economic resources that distribute power in the kinship group include human capital and wealth. The Qur'an prescribes that "[m]en are the support of women as God gives some more means than others, and because they spend of their wealth (to provide for them)" (Ali 1984, p. 74). As the main financial providers, men also more often receive investments in education. For example, although the percentage of adult women (15 years and older) who were literate increased more than that for adult men between 1980 and 1995 in Egypt, the percentage remained markedly higher for men (64 percent versus 39 percent in 1995) (World Bank Group 2002). During the same period, women also comprised less than one-third of the documented labor force (27 percent in 1980, 29 percent in 1995). Islamic laws pertaining to the distribution of inheritance in Egypt also favor men, husbands, and sons over women, wives, and daughters:

As for the children, God decrees that the share of the male is equivalent to that of

two females…Your share in the property the wives leave behind is half if they die without an issue, but in case they have left children, then your share is one-fourth after the payment of legacies and debts; and your wife shall inherit one-fourth of what you leave at death if you die childless, if not, she will get one-eighth of what you leave behind after payment of legacies and debts. (Ali 1984, pp. 74–75)

This quote and the example from Palestine, however, illustrate that Muslim women have formal rights to inheritance and may use these rights to leverage other valued resources. Women also have rights to customary sources of wealth, including the gifts of gold (*shabka*), the trousseau (*kiswa*), and the smaller household appliances and furnishings (*gihaz*) that they acquire as they prepare for engagement and marriage.

Women in Egypt therefore have at their disposal some combination of customary and non-customary social and economic resources, all of which affect their influence in family decisions. The structure of a woman's marital household can constrain her investment decisions, however, as the ascribed attributes of marital kin give them authority over major family decisions. In addition, women who acquire customary social and economic resources may have stronger preferences for sons, whereas women who acquire non-customary social and economic resources may have more balanced gender preferences. The strength of the latter association may depend on the normative and institutional environment.

Figure 1 depicts the complete conceptual framework. Part (1) refers to the social, legal, and economic institutions that affect norms for investments in children and the distribution of resources in families. Part (2) – social resources– represents one determinant of a woman's family power and gender preferences and includes endogamous marriage and maternal age. Part (3) – economic resources – represents a second determinant of a woman's family power and gender preferences and includes human capital (e.g., educational attainment) and customary and non-customary kinds of wealth. Part (4) – social constraints – refers to the social restrictions on a

woman's ability to use the resources at her disposal and includes marital household structure and the difference in age between husband and wife. Part (5) refers to other demographic variables that affect family power and gender preferences, as cited in the literature. Part (6) — overt family power — refers to the ability of a woman to influence family decisions that affect the well being of children, and Part (7) – gender preferences – refers to a woman's underlying perceptions of the value of sons and daughters.

(Figure 1)

This discussion motivates two hypotheses regarding effects of the structure and economic resources of the marital household on a woman's overt family power. Because, in highly patriarchal settings, ascribed characteristics are more important than economic resources as sources of power for husbands and marital kin, we hypothesize that

H_1 Residence with a parent-in-law, brother-in-law, and husband will decrease a woman's influence over decisions pertaining to her children, and

H_2 the economic resources of a husband (education) and of the marital household (household standard of living) will be irrelevant to a woman's influence over such decisions.

The discussion also motivates two hypotheses regarding the effects of a woman's customary and non-customary social and economic resources on her family power and gender preferences:

H_3 Increases in a woman's access to and control over customary social and economic resources (endogamous marriage, ownership of gold) will increase her preference for sons and her influence over decisions pertaining to her children.

H_4 Increases in a woman's access to and control over non-customary economic resources (education) will decrease her preference for sons and increase her influence over decisions pertaining to her children.

The study population and data

Upper or Southern Egypt is more ideologically conservative and economically disadvantaged than Lower Egypt. Marriage is nearly universal among women of reproductive age, and 48

percent of marriages were endogamous in 2000 (El-Zanaty & Way 2001). In the same year, ever-marred women aged 40–49 years had 6.0 children, on average, 52 percent of ever-married women of reproductive age had no formal education, and 15 percent were currently working for cash (El-Zanaty & Way 2001).

Minya is a relatively poor, agrarian governorate in Upper Egypt that begins about 200 kilometers south of Cairo and extends about 80 kilometers along the Nile. The cultivated and habitable land is about 30 kilometers wide at the widest point and lies mostly on the west bank of the river. The capitol city is Minya City (population about 1 million), and the governorate houses several large district towns and rural villages. About 20 percent of residents in Minya are Coptic Christians, and the remaining residents are Muslim. In 1995, 51 percent of currently married women aged 15–54 years were married to a relative (Langsten & Hill 1996). In the same year, 55 percent of adult women (aged 20–24 years) and 16 percent of adult men had no formal education, and 11 percent of ever-married women aged 15–54 years were working for cash (Langsten & Hill 1996). The risk of mortality among children aged less than five years continues to be higher for girls than boys in Minya, and girls less often visit private providers for curative care, receive less investment in curative care per illness episode, and receive poorer curative care at public facilities (Langsten & Hill 1996; Yount 1999, 2001, 2003, in press). Therefore, Upper Egypt in general and Minya governorate in particular are settings where the educational system and labor market continue to be highly gender-stratified and where a majority of women rely for their security on customary social and economic resources in the family.

Data for this analysis include textual data from a sample of informants and survey data from a representative sample of households in Minya governorate. In the qualitative study, four villages or *shiakhas* (neighborhoods) were selected randomly from the 38 sample villages/

9

shiakhas included in the Two Governorate Linkages Survey (TGLS) in Minya Governorate (See below for a discussion of this survey.). Recruitment of five informants from each village/*shiakha* proceeded first by formal introduction of the project to a leader in the community, who identified eligible women that were willing to participate in a series of semi-structured interviews.[vi] Selected informants varied in age, education, marital status, and work experience, but all were currently or had been the caretaker of a child aged less than five years. One of the original 20 women withdrew from the study during the first months of interviewing. Data from these interviews were retained, and another informant joined the sample. The final set of data includes field notes from 21 informants who were interviewed between March, 1996 and April, 1997. The first semi-structured interview with each informant followed an ethnographic field guide, and this and subsequent interviews covered topics including perceptions of gender roles and perceptions and behaviors regarding illnesses of children. Interviewers took detailed notes during each interview, which they expanded immediately after the interview. A field supervisor checked these notes, and local typists entered them into a computer using Microsoft Word 6.0 for Arabic. Research assistants in Cairo translated these notes into English, and a system for coding the English text was developed during the fieldwork.

Questionnaires for this study were implemented with the Two Governorate Linkages Survey, a five-round longitudinal study of child morbidity and women's reproductive experience that was undertaken in Qaliubia and Minya governorates during 1995–1997 (Langsten & Hill 1996). Eligible participants from a representative sample of households in each governorate (n=3,171 in Qaliubia; n=3,125 in Minya) were interviewed at three-monthly intervals.[vii] A household listing permitted recording of age, gender, relationship to household head, education, and main occupation for each member of the household as well as births, in-migrants, and the

survival status, marital status, and work status of each household member for the round of first residence and subsequent rounds. A household characteristics questionnaire included questions about the dwelling; access to electricity, water, and sanitary facilities; ownership of consumer goods and durables; and average expenditures of families like the family being interviewed. A woman's questionnaire included questions on age, age at marriage, marital status, education, work, pregnancies and fertility, health knowledge and practices, and use of contraception and was administered to all ever-married women aged 15–54 years or any primary caretaker of a child aged less than five years. The child's questionnaire focused on the health and nutritional status of resident children aged less than 5 years. A Women's Status Module was administered during Round 5 of the TGLS in Minya and included questions on gender preferences, perceptions of child illness, marital history, mobility and decision-making, work, and other domestic matters. The quantitative analysis is based on married women who have ever had a live birth and have complete information on variables of interest (n=2,226).[viii]

Dependent variables

Measures for overt family power are derived from questions about the person or people in the family who "have the final say" (0=someone else, 1=joint, 2=respondent) about visits to friends or family members, household budget, children's education, marriage plans of children, and health provider for a sick child. Maximum likelihood factor analysis is used to estimate standardized scores (mean zero, standard deviation one) for two related factors, one measuring degree of influence in "daily domestic" decisions and another measuring degree of influence in "life course" decisions. Gender preference is measured using the Coomb's gender preference scale (Coombs, Coombs & McClelland 1975), which is based on responses to a sequence of three questions, each of which asks the respondent to choose one of two combinations of boys

11

and girls that she would like to have if she could begin child bearing over and achieve a completed family size of three. A score from 1 (extreme daughter preference) to 7 (extreme son preference) is assigned to each respondent based on her responses. For ease of interpretation and model checking, a 3-point derivative of this scale (girl preference (score 1-3), equal preference (score 4), and boy preference (score 5-7)) is used in the multivariate analysis.

Independent variables

Variables measuring marital household structure and potential constraints on a woman's investment decisions include residence with parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, and the husband and difference in age between the respondent and her husband. Presence of parents-in-law captures generational differences in gender preference and authority due to age and marital position, and presence of brothers-in-law captures the authority of male collateral kin in this setting. Presence of the husband largely distinguishes between respondents whose husbands have and have not migrated for work, and the variable for difference in age between spouses controls for differences between husbands and wives in this aspect of social status. Variables measuring customary social resources include whether the husband is a blood relative and age group of the respondent. Endogamous marriage measures a woman's access to social (and economic) resources from her natal family, and age is a common measure of social status in Middle Eastern and Asian settings (Abu-Lughod 1986; Balk 1994, 1997; Lane 1992; Morsy 1993).

Measures of economic resources include indicators of human capital and wealth. Measures of human capital include respondent's level of education, whether the respondent ever worked, and whether the husband completed secondary education. The latter variable is selected because graduation from secondary school in Egypt guarantees membership in the civil service, which ideally ensures a minimum monthly income and other forms of social insurance.[ix] Marital

household wealth is denoted by a standard-of-living score derived from estimated loadings for the first principal component of a principal components analysis that included measures for source of water, type of toilet, rooms in the dwelling, access to electricity, and assets owned.[x] Respondent's customary wealth is denoted by whether she owns gold. Demographic control variables include religion,[xi] urban versus rural residence, number of surviving sons and daughters, and number of dead sons and daughters (See variable descriptions in Table 1.).

(Insert Table 1)

Analytic methods

We examine univariate frequency distributions of outcomes and covariates. We estimate pairwise Pearson product-moment correlations between ordinal items for decision-making (not shown) and a series of factor analytic models for women's influence in family decisions. Because the probably that the chi-square (χ^2) test for residual differences between observed and expected covariance matrices increases with the size of the observed sample (Marsh, Balla & McDonald 1988), we estimate a one- and a two-factor model, compute the Tucker-Lewis reliability coefficient ρ, and use theory and ρ to select the most parsimonious factor structure (Bohrnstedt 1983), which in this case is two factors. We use the PROMAX oblique rotation procedure to improve the interpretability of factor loadings and compute standardized scores for each factor. We compare mean and median scores for gender preference, influence in daily domestic decisions, and influence in life course decisions by levels of covariates. Estimates are adjusted for the multistage, cluster sample design (Rogers 1993; Williams 2000).

We then use ordinal logistic regression to predict the cumulative probability of reporting son preference, as measured by the 3-point derivative of the Coomb's scale. This model is known as the proportional odds model because the ratio of the odds of the event is assumed to be

13

independent of the choice of response categories (McCullagh & Nelder 1989). To assess the appropriateness of this assumption, we use the same outcome and covariates and fit a generalized ordinal logit model, which estimates an intercept and coefficients for each of the m–1 points at which the dependent variable can be dichotomized (Fu 1999). If a Wald test of any difference in coefficients across equations is insignificant, the assumption of proportional odds is met. In this case, the proportional odds model is given by:

$$\log\{(P_{im}/(1-P_{im})\} = \theta_m - (\mathbf{C}_i^T\boldsymbol{\beta} + \mathbf{S}_i^T\boldsymbol{\beta} + \mathbf{E}_i^T\boldsymbol{\beta} + \mathbf{D}_i^T\boldsymbol{\beta}) \tag{1}$$

where "i" indexes the respondent, "m" indicates the category of gender preference, P_{im} denotes the cumulative probability of reporting a particular gender preference up to and including category m, $\mathbf{C}_i$ denotes measures of social constraints, $\mathbf{S}_i$ denotes measures of social resources, $\mathbf{E}_i$ denotes measures of economic resources, and $\mathbf{D}_i$ denotes demographic control variables. Because estimated scores for influence in life course decisions are not continuous, we use logistic regression and the same covariates to predict the probability that the respondent's score for degree of influence in life course (I_{ij}, where j=1) and daily domestic (I_{ij}, where j=2) decisions is greater than zero:

$$\text{logit}(I_{ij}) = \beta_0 + \mathbf{C}_i^T\boldsymbol{\beta} + \mathbf{S}_i^T\boldsymbol{\beta} + \mathbf{E}_i^T\boldsymbol{\beta} + \mathbf{D}_i^T\boldsymbol{\beta} \tag{2}$$

The direction and significance of estimated beta coefficients in equations (1) and (2) provide tests for hypotheses (1)–(4). In all multivariate analyses, we estimate robust standard errors for model coefficients to account for within-cluster correlation of responses arising from the multi-stage, cluster sample design (Rogers 1993; Williams 2000).

It is possible that available measures of family power and gender preference contain systematic error. Available items about decision-making, for example, may not accurately measure overt family power. To address the question of construct validity, we estimate the

association of available items and women's attitudes about wife beating and observe that higher percentages of women who report that they make these decisions jointly or alone believe that a husband is never justified in beating his wife. In the case of gender preference, some women may be suspicious of stating a preferred number of boys and girls, or women's reproductive experiences may influence stated preferences. To account for biased reporting, multivariate analyses include measures for the gender composition of surviving and dead children.

A qualitative view of resources, family power, and gender preference in Minya

In Minya, age provides a basis for social differentiation and stratification in public and private life. Although generational relationships are based on affective ties, older adults acquire authority from accumulated experience and religious prescription. One informant stated that elders are a good source of advice about a child's illness because of their greater experience:

> Q: If you were to look for advice on treatment,… where would you look…?
> A: …I would ask the elder people, like the grandmother, because those people have a great deal of experience … and they know more about these things. [41-year-old, housewife, uneducated, 4 boys and 4 girls]

Another informant acknowledged the spiritual rewards that would befall an obedient son:

> As long as the son is obedient to his parents, God will make good things for him…that is a duty, that he is obedient, and that he spends on them, because they are in the end his parents. [19 year-old, illiterate, housewife, in Dimsheer]

In settings where economic opportunities are limited, older adults also provide a financial safety net for children before and after marriage, and older adults may still be named titular family heads after they relinquish their formal productive roles (Rugh 1984).

A major social resource for women in Minya is their natal family. Consanguinity, or marriage to a first paternal cousin in particular, is a common indicator of the strength of familial ties, and one informant explained the benefits of being married to the son of her father's brother:

15

> It is nice to feel that I married one from my family and not from outside. So if …
> we have any clash, …every one whether in my family or his family will try to
> reconcile both of us as they all care about our marriage… Both families do not
> like to confront each other… So the woman will always feel that she is protected
> from her uncle, her father and even her husband … [30-year-old married woman,
> technical diploma, 1 son and 2 daughters]

Endogamous marriage therefore provides protection and social leverage for women when they experience conflict with members of their natal or marital families.

Other women in Minya adhere to prescribed roles and codes of behavior in exchange for influence in certain family decisions, financial security from their husbands and marital families, and protection from natal kin. Important markers of adherence include engagement and marriage to a preferable man (*ibn halel*), evidence of purity on the wedding night (*dukhla*), birth of the first child, birth of a son, honorable marriage of children, and becoming a mother-in-law (of daughters-in-law). One informant explained that, in some families, the public display of a stained cloth proves a bride's virginity and preserves the honor of her family:

> After the wedding day, they hang the cloth…on the windows of the bedroom, so
> that whoever walks in will congratulate her, …her mother has to see it and so do
> her relatives, and her mother-in-law, and her father has to see it … we call it the
> reconciliation, he goes to…bless the marriage, and see the cloth, and give the girl
> money… [41-year-old, uneducated, housewife, 4 boys and 4 girls]

A wife who becomes a mother then gains influence over certain family decisions. An informant explained why she did not consult her husband before treating a sick child at home:

> …these things are up to the woman in the house, and my husband has nothing to
> do with this…Things outside of the house have to do with him, and things inside
> of the house have to do with me. [Age 36, uneducated, 3 sons, 1 daughter]

Ultimately, a mother who becomes a mother-in-law "enjoys cultural legitimization of her authoritative role over her sons, their wives, and their children" because of her seniority in age and experience (Morsy 1993, p. 54). An informant explained why she took the advice of her

16

mother-in-law to delay care for a child with diarrhea: "She's older and has experience and she thought that the child will be alright and I shall obey her because not only is she my mother-in-law, but also my paternal uncle's wife" [35-year-old, uneducated, housewife, from Dimsheer]. Another informant described the specific duties that she fulfills for her mother-in-law:

> … I go down to her [my mother-in-law's] apartment, and I spend some time with her…and I always say 'hadir' and 'nam' and try to satisfy her ... And I should see the needs of my house and hers and be committed to all that … [23-year-old housewife with post-secondary education living in Maghagha]

Thus, women at the pinnacle of this trajectory have power over others at an earlier life stage.

In addition to customary social resources that distribute family power, important economic resources include human capital and wealth. An informant expressed the following expectations regarding the gendered division of family labor:

> The family head (*rab el usra*) of course, the man, he is the one who pays all the money… The mother. She is the one who handles this money….My husband generally gets paid his salary, and he gives it to me in order to deal with the house things … he must have some money in his pocket for any circumstances. But, the rest…remains with me to buy the house needs the whole month. [23-year-old, educated, housewife, 3 daughters]

According to this informant, men are expected to be the financial providers and may retain a certain portion of their income for personal use, whereas women are expected to manage the monthly budget with money they receive from their husbands. Although various financial arrangements are practiced (Hoodfar 1988), this ideal is widely expressed.

Because men are expected to be the main financial providers, they are the main beneficiaries of inheritance and investments in education. Consistent with religious norms, some mothers in Minya expressed the expectation that sons will inherit major property items:

> It is my husband who owns the house. He is the man of the house. And after a long time, my boys will live in that house…It will belong … to my elder son (*li ibni el kabir*) because after my husband, my elder son will be the man of the

house. [32-year-old, married, 4 girls and 3 boys]

Other informants expected sons and daughters to follow the gendered division of family labor:

> A: [I would like that boys] work on the farm…and I think that work is not
> shameful, and the son gets older and works, and spends on himself, and helps his
> father and…holds the axe in his hands and plants…and this is good…He could
> work in Cairo … also maybe in any other occupation besides planting, such as
> driving, anything. I want him to work in something that will get him good
> money... [40 years old, uneducated, unmarried, 4 girls, 3 boys]

Boys should be financially independent and should assist their fathers financially. To do so, they

enjoy greater mobility and opportunities to work outside of the home or village. The same is not

typically expected of girls, who often are called to assist in domestic activities:

> …my daughter…is 20 years old. The first thing she does in the morning is to heat
> some water…for everyone to wash his face, and afterward, she prepares the
> breakfast and makes tea…Then she looks after the house business. She
> sweeps…cleans the dishes…feeds the cattle, and cleans up after them. She cuts
> their dung in order to make fuel…And if we have to bake, she…brings wood for
> the oven… Afterward, she…prepares the lunch for her brothers and father,
> …cleans the dishes, she takes her younger brothers and sisters to bathe them.
> Then, she prepares the supper…takes her supper and sleeps early in order to wake
> up early the next day. [41-year-old, uneducated, housewife, 4 boys and 4 girls]

Role differentiation of boys and girls in Minya is associated with parental expectations of

their future contributions to the immediate family. The following informant expected a son to

support her family before and after marriage.

> Q:What is the boy's…role before he gets married?
> That he respects his parents, and listens to them, and if he works that he helps…in
> the house expenses, as I told you with regard to…my brother.
> Q:What is the boy supposed to do for his family after his marriage?
> The same that he used to do for his family before he got married, the respect
> between him and his parents should stay there, that he continuously asks about
> them…participates in solving their problems…by opinion or by money…When
> my father used to travel…my brother…used to take his place. [Age unknown, 1
> daughter, from Minya town]

By contrast, informants recognized that the primary duties of a daughter will shift to her husband

and marital family and that a daughter cannot fulfill certain social obligations for her parents.

> [The father] would tell you that the boy would carry his name, and when I die he [the boy] would be offered the condolences …the girl can not carry the burden of the house of her father forever, because eventually she will end up in the house of her husband, and the girl doesn't provide any continuity… and all the customs since long ago say that the boy is better in fulfilling the duties of his family…
> [Age unknown, 1 daughter, from Minya town]

Thus, unequal investments in boys and girls arise from parental needs for financial security and the fulfillment of social obligations. A common belief is that boys can better fulfill these needs.

The acceptance among some women of prescribed gender roles and the prevailing distribution of family resources stems from anticipated rewards for conforming to these ideals.

One informant explained the benefits of being a "good bride":

> I always say 'hadir' and 'nam' [yes] and try to satisfy [my mother-in-law] …this way, I get into a new life and a new house...the most important characteristic for a new bride is that … she has to treat the people…in a good way...In this sense, she will be loved by her husband and mother-in-law…[23-year-old educated housewife with 3 daughters]

Another informant described the anticipated costs of failing to be a dutiful wife:

> ...When a woman is staying in her husband's house, the eye is always on her … So, she has to appear in front of her husband's family as obedient, clever, and clean…[Otherwise,]…Her husband can divorce her and fight with her, so she is asking for trouble. And if she is living with her husband's family, they will be upset with her and will make her move out... And even if [her husband] doesn't divorce her …He can…send her to her father's house until…she learns how to fulfill her duties and becomes a good housewife…[28-year old illiterate peasant with 2 boys and 2 girls]

Other informants, however, stated that the gains associated with conforming are limited and do not guarantee economic security. Some such women recommended other strategies to achieve these goals, including wage work and the secret accumulation of wealth.

> After I left work I regretted it...The woman can not say or ask for all that she wants when she is not working…if she is working before marriage, she should continue working after marriage…and she should try with her husband even if he

refuses it. [Married woman from Dimsheer]

I am the one who manages...the monthly allowance for the house...My husband gives me his monthly salary...and I spend for the whole month...I can put part of it aside without my husband knowing... I can also put it into an association without my husband knowing…I actually...bought a gold ring [this way]... [Educated, housewife, 1 daughter, living in Minya]

Predictors of family power and gender preference

Table 1 provides univariate statistics of women's scores for gender preference, influence in decisions that pertain to children, social constraints, social and economic resources, and other demographic characteristics. On average, married women in Minya prefer sons (mean score = 5.03), and 68 percent of women report some degree of son preference. Women do not often report having the final say about decisions pertaining to children. Relative to other decisions, women report least often having the final say about decisions regarding children's education and choice of spouse (< 3 percent for both decisions). A higher percentage of women reports having the final say in decisions about choice of health provider for a sick child (18 percent). For all decisions, most women report that someone else in the household or family has the final say.

Regarding the social restrictions on women and their customary social resources, 30 percent live with at least one parent-in-law, 18 percent live with at least one brother-in-law, and 92 percent live with their husband. Almost three-quarters of women report that their husbands are at least four years older, and 51 percent of women are married to a blood relative.

Levels of formal education continue to be low for women, with 65 percent reporting that they have no education. Among women who attended school, almost half have at least some secondary education. Women's employment in Minya is similar to the national average, with 16 percent having ever worked for cash or kind. Despite the high value placed on owning gold in this setting, only 24 percent of women report that they do. Although slightly under half of the

husbands of respondents have no schooling, one quarter of these men completed high school.

Regarding other demographic characteristics of women, 19 percent reside in urban areas, and 23 percent are Coptic Christians. Over 50 percent of respondents report having at least two surviving sons and at least two surviving daughters, although the mean number of living sons is higher than that of daughters (2.0 versus 1.8, respectively). Over 25 percent of respondents report that at least one son and at least one daughter died.

Table 2 shows the results of the factor analysis of women's reported level of influence in decisions that pertain to children. Column (1) shows unrotated factor loadings, percent of total variance explained by each factor, percent of common variance explained by each factor, and eigenvalues. Column (2) shows factor loadings after oblique rotation, and bolded figures indicate high factor loadings. Column (3) shows estimated scoring coefficients after oblique rotation.

(Table 2)

Regarding overall fit of the two-factor model, sensitivity analyses conducted on a random subsample of observations suggest that the chi-square test statistic is sensitive to sample size (not shown). Tucker-Lewis reliability coefficients, however, are close to 1 for the two-factor model, suggesting a reasonable fit to the data (Appendix 1). As indicated, 54 percent of the total variation in decision-making items is explained by the two factors, and the first factor accounts for about 79 percent of the common variance. The factor structure after oblique rotation has a clear conceptual interpretation: decisions about visits to family and friends, household budget, and provider for a sick child are more highly associated with the second factor, and those about children's education and marriage are more highly associated with the first factor. This factor structure clearly distinguishes "daily domestic" and "life course" decisions, and the association of these factors is estimated to be 0.68. This factor structure is consistent with informants'

21

descriptions of the gendered division of decision-making in Minya.

Table 3 shows mean and median scores for respondents' reported gender preference and degree of influence in daily domestic and life course decisions by variables measuring social constraints, social and economic resources, and other demographic characteristics. Scores for influence in both spheres of decision-making are higher when parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, and husbands are not coresident. Mean gender preference scores are marginally higher among women whose husbands are absent (e.g., 5.0 versus 4.8), and a greater difference in age between spouses is associated with women's stronger reported preferences for sons (5.1 versus 4.8) and marginally higher influence in daily domestic and life course decisions. Endogamous marriage is associated with marginally higher mean gender preference scores (5.1 versus 5.0) but marginally lower median scores for influence in life course decisions.

(Table 3)

More educated women report lower mean scores for gender preference (e.g., 4.5 among secondary-educated versus 5.2 among uneducated), and have higher levels of influence in daily domestic (0.34 versus –0.08) and life course (0.53 versus –0.13) decisions. Although the mean gender preference score of secondary-educated mothers approaches equal preference for sons and daughters, the median score suggests that at least 50 percent of these women continue to prefer sons. A similar scenario is apparent for women who have ever worked: having ever worked is associated with greater influence in daily domestic and life course decisions and lower reported preference for sons, but women who have ever worked still prefer sons, on average. Similar associations are apparent for women who own gold, whose husbands have 1–12 or more years of education, and whose score for household standard of living is greater than zero.

Regarding other demographic variables, being Christian is associated with greater

22

influence in daily domestic and life course decisions but is not associated with reported gender preference. Number of living sons is associated with significantly stronger reported son preference, and number of living daughters is associated with marginally weaker reported son preference. The prior death of two or more sons or daughters is associated with stronger reported son preference but lower reported influence in daily domestic and life course decisions. Compared to rural residents, urban residents report significantly weaker son preference (mean 4.6 versus 5.1) and greater influence in daily domestic and life course decisions.

Table 4 shows adjusted effects of social constraints, social and economic resources, and demographic control variables on reported gender preference (1=girl, 2=equal, 3=son) and dichotomous indicators for influence in daily domestic and life course decisions. First, the X^2 test for the assumption of proportional odds in the ordinal model for gender preference suggests that this assumption is reasonable. The Pearson X^2 goodness of fit tests also suggest that logistic regression models for the association of decision-making and social resources, economic resources, and demographic control variables provide reasonable fits to the data.

Regarding substantive findings, residence with parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, and husbands are associated with significantly lower adjusted odds that women report higher levels of influence in daily domestic and life course decisions. Residence with marital kin is not associated with reported gender preferences, however. Women whose husbands are 1–3 years older have marginally higher adjusted odds of reporting greater influence in daily domestic decisions and 1.3 times higher adjusted odds of reporting son preference versus equal or daughter preference. Endogamous marriage is associated with marginally higher adjusted odds of having more influence in life course decisions but is not associated with women's reported gender preferences, and women's age is significantly associated only with having greater

23

influence in daily domestic decisions, holding other things constant.

(Table 4)

Regarding the adjusted effects of economic resources, women who attended or completed preparatory education versus those with no education have 0.7 times lower odds of reporting son preference versus equal or daughter preference, and women who attended secondary or higher education versus those with no education have 2.1 times higher odds of reporting greater influence in daily domestic and life course decisions. Ever having worked is associated with 1.4 and 1.6 times higher odds of reporting greater influence in daily domestic and life course decisions, respectively, but women's work is not associated with reported gender preference. Neither a woman's ownership of gold nor the marital household's standard of living are associated with a woman's influence in family decisions or reported gender preference. Contrary to expectation, secondary education of the husband is associated with 1.3 times higher odds that a woman reports greater influence in life course decisions.

Regarding the adjusted effects of demographic control variables, number of living sons is associated with 1.4 times higher odds of reporting son preference versus equal or daughter preference, and number of living daughters is associated with 0.9 times lower odds of reporting son preference versus equal or daughter preference. Most notable is the effect of a woman's residence: compared to living in a rural area, living in an urban area is associated with 0.6 times lower odds of reporting son preference versus equal or daughter preference and 1.9 and 1.6 times higher odds of having more say in daily domestic and life course decisions, respectively.

Figure 2 shows predicted probabilities of reporting daughter preference, equal preference for sons and daughters, and son preference, as well as predicted probabilities of having greater influence in life course decisions that pertain to children, by education of the respondent. Despite

24

declines in the predicted probability of reporting son preference with increasing levels of maternal education, mothers with preparatory or more education still have greater than 0.5 predicted probability of preferring sons, on average, and more educated mothers have a higher predicted probability of having more influence in the life course decisions of children.

<div align="center">(Figure 2)</div>

Discussion

Findings here address two questions that are relevant to theories of inequality and demographic change in highly patriarchal settings: Which resources and social constraints determine the power of women over decisions that pertain to the well being children? And, are the resources at a woman's disposal also associated with her gender preferences in such settings? Consistent with hypothesis (1), findings suggest that residence with parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, and the husband decrease a woman's influence over daily domestic and life course decisions that pertain to her children. Findings with regards to parents-in-law are consistent with those from other studies (e.g., Balk 1994, 1997). In addition, indicating whether at least one brother of the husband resides with the respondent acknowledges the importance of bonds between male relatives in this setting and improves the fit of models predicting women's influence in family decisions.

Contrary to hypothesis (2), women whose husbands completed secondary education have a greater say in decisions about the education and marriage of children. These findings contradict Rodman's assertion that the economic resources of husbands are irrelevant to the distribution of power in major life course decisions in highly patriarchal settings. One explanation for this finding is that the children of highly educated men may work in paid employment more often than in family production, and other research has shown that children who work for wages have

<div align="center">25</div>

a greater say in the selection of their spouse (Thornton & Fricke 1987). If these children also communicate more often with their mothers about potential spouses, the wives of educated men may indirectly have more influence in these decisions.

Consistent with hypothesis (3), bivariate findings suggest that endogamous marriage is associated with marginally stronger son preference and marginally greater influence in life course decisions; however, after adjusting for other variables, the effect of endogamous marriage on gender preferences disappears. These results imply that women in endogamous and non-endogamous marriages share similar preferences for sons but that endogamously married women have greater influence in life course decisions pertaining to their children. Therefore, endogamously married women may better implement their preferences for sons. Inconsistent with hypothesis (3), ownership of gold is associated with *weaker* son preference and greater influence in daily domestic and life course decisions in the bivariate analysis and is associated with neither gender preferences nor influence in these decisions after adjusting for other factors. These results could indicate a real absence of an effect of women's economic resources in a highly patriarchal setting, or they could be due to inadequate measurement of women's control over customary sources of wealth, including the amount of gold, size of the trousseau, and quantity of furnishings and appliances that women accumulate in preparation for marriage.

Consistent with hypothesis (4), women who have more formal education report weaker preferences for sons and greater influence in daily domestic and life course decisions that pertain to children. More educated women nevertheless have a higher probability of preferring sons than daughters. Such findings suggest that, in highly patriarchal settings, women's access to non-customary resources like formal education may enable them to implement persistent preferences for sons (Das Gupta 1987). National surveys in Egypt show that fewer than half of ever-married

26

women of reproductive age agree that education should prepare women for work as well as family (El-Zanaty et al. 1996), and other researchers underscore the increasingly conservative character of public education (Shukrallah 1994). Private Christian and Islamic schools also are common in Minya, so the nature of education received should be considered in future studies of its effects on women's family power and gender preferences.

An unexpected finding is that women living in urban areas have weaker son preference and greater influence in daily domestic and life course decisions than do women living in rural areas. Possible explanations for this finding are that customary patriarchal kinship networks are weaker in urban than rural areas and that women have more opportunities for paid employment outside of natal and marital kinship groups. Data for Upper Egypt do show that mean household size is smaller (5.1 versus 6.4) and that the percentage of ever-married women of reproductive age working for cash is higher (18.2 versus 5.8) in urban than rural areas (El-Zanaty et al. 1996).

It is worth noting that direct questions about power in this study focused on women's overt power, or degree of influence in family decisions, rather than covert power or other aspects of autonomy, such as freedom of movement (e.g., Dyson & Moore 1983; Niraula & Morgan 1996) (According to Komter (1989), covert power refers to the failure of a subordinate to attempt change out of fear of conflict). It is possible that marital household structure could influence a woman's investment choices not only by limiting her ability to influence overt decisions but also by circumscribing her mobility and by causing her to fail to act out of fear of conflict. Qualitative findings also suggest that some women find ways to act independently of the influence of coresident family members (e.g., acquire wealth without the husband's knowledge), whereas other women express fear about the consequences of disobeying their husbands or senior marital relatives. Therefore, efforts to measure directly women's mobility, covert powerlessness, and the

influence of marital household structure on these variables may be important in future studies of this kind (Kabeer 1999; Komter 1989). Also important will be efforts to measure the family power and gender preferences of women in more and less patriarchal settings to compare the effects of women's access to and control over customary and non-customary social and economic resources in different normative and institutional environments.

Findings from this analysis still provide clues about the circumstances under which women's empowerment translates into more equitable gender preferences and improved life chances for girls. Because legal, social, and institutional arrangements reinforce women's perceptions of the benefits of patriarchal kinship in settings like Minya, a widespread shift in women's preferences for sons may require changes at the macro level that create non-kin-based sources of support for women, define the boundaries of women's legitimate social identity beyond the kinship group, and weaken the pillars of patriarchal kinship (patrilineality, kin endogamy, and the exchange of women's modesty for men's protection). Relevant legal reforms would enforce gender equity in parental and marital rights and inheritance (Charrad 2001). Relevant institutional changes may include reforms to the educational system and labor market so that women's productive contributions to the family and society are seen as compatible and women have greater flexibility in the timing of education, marriage, and work. To the extent that local ideals about modernity and national identity embody customary notions of kinship and women's roles, however, broad-based legal and institutional reforms may be slow (Charrad 2001). Instead, Fargues (2003) argues that further declines in fertility in the Arab world will reduce the availability of brothers, who are fundamental to customary patterns of marriage and inheritance. Thus, it may be further demographic change that weakens patriarchal systems of kinship and empowers women to improve the life chances of girls in Egypt and similar settings.

28

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FIGURE 1. Effects of Gender Stratification and Family Resources on Gender Preferences and Family Power
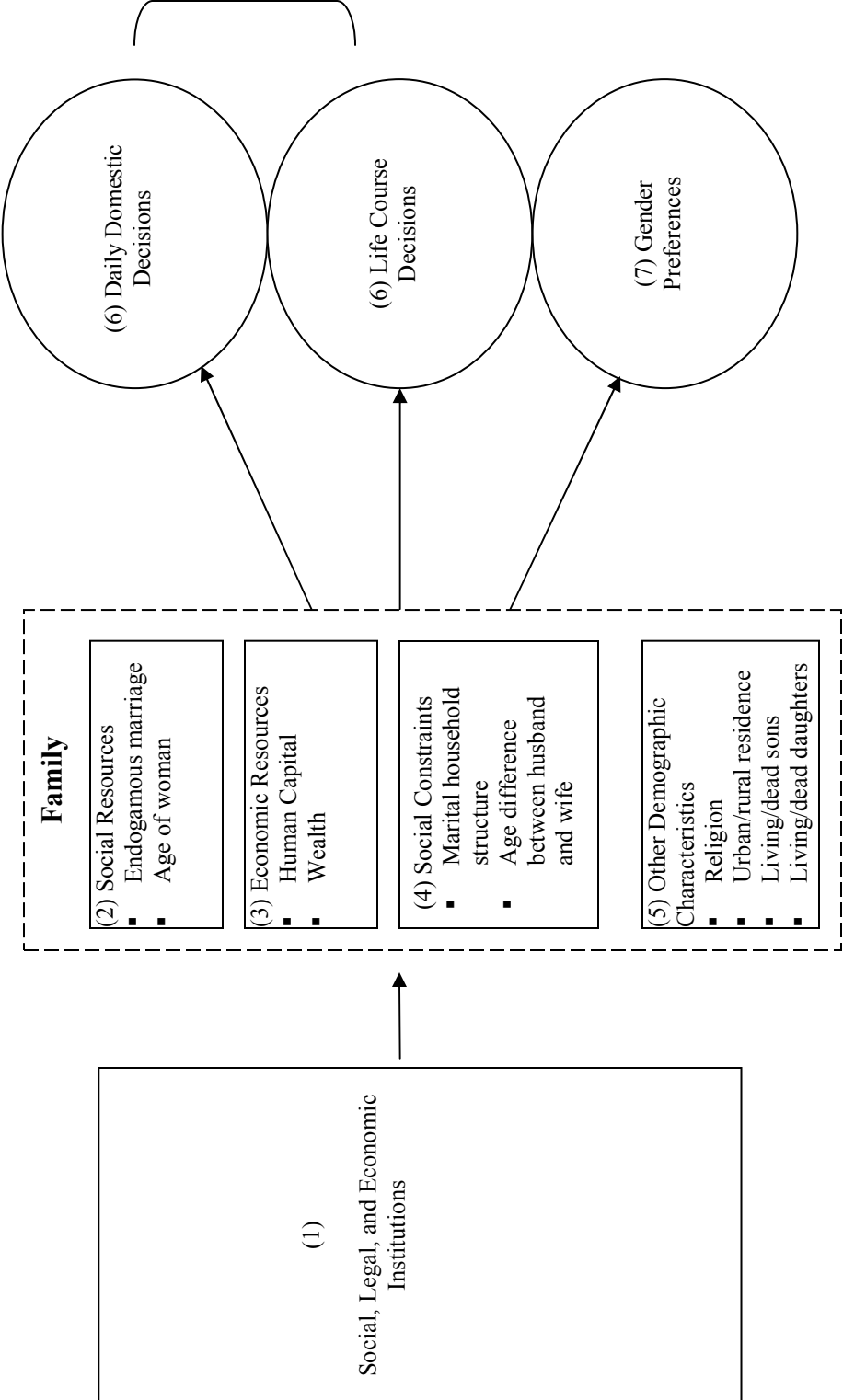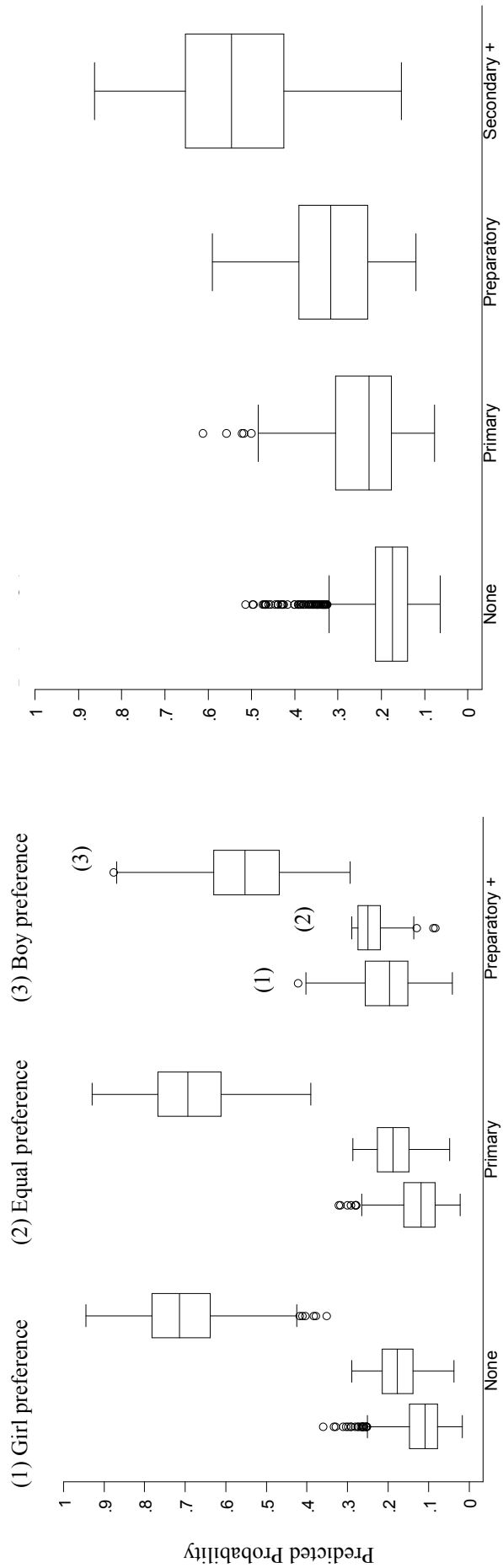
FIGURE 2. Predicted Probabilities of Reporting Girl Preference, Equal Preference, and Boy Preference and of Ranking Greater than Zero on Influence in Life Course Decisions, by Education of Married Women Aged 15–54 Years with Living Children in Minya, Egypt

NOTES

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[i] Increases in maternal education are associated with increased differentials in survival, health status, and treatment in Bangladesh (Bhuiya & Streatfield 1991; Chen, Huq & D'Souza 1981; Henry et al., 1993), the Punjab (Das Gupta 1987, 1990; Das Gupta & Bhat 1995), Jordan (Tekce & Shorter 1984), and China (Ren 1995), decreased differentials in survival and treatment in India (Bourne & Walker 1991; Caldwell, Reddy & Caldwell 1983; Govindasamy & Ramesh 1996; Simmons et al. 1982;) and Egypt (Makinson 1986), and no change in the difference in India (Basu & Basu 1991; Rosenzweig & Schultz 1982), Bangladesh (Muhuri & Preston 1991), and Egypt (Hoodfar 1986 in Makinson 1986). The effects of education also depend on the birth order of female children in India (Amin 1990). The variable effect of maternal education is partly a function of differences in model construction and the multiple pathways by which this variable influences children's health.

[ii] Although the constitution of 1971 stated that "citizens are equal before the law…in public rights and duties, with no discrimination made on the basis of race, sex, language, ideology, or belief," it simultaneously guarantees a "balance…between a woman's duties towards her family…and … her…equality with man in the political, social, and cultural spheres…without violating the laws of the Islamic Shari'ah" (in Badran 1991, p. 222).

[iii] Komter (1989) distinguishes between three types of power in social relationships. Overt power refers to visible conflict, strategy, and attempts at change. Covert power refers to the subordination of one individual to another through fear or avoidance of conflict. Invisible power refers to a process that achieves approval among subordinates of dominant values, beliefs, and opinions.

[iv] Rodman (1972) classifies societies along a continuum of socioeconomic development and presupposes that increasing development will be associated with declines in patriarchal values and increases in egalitarian norms.

[v] "Harm" includes emotional and material harm caused by polygamous marriage, failure of maintenance over time, long absence or imprisonment of husband, and infliction of husband by serious disease. Harm can be variously interpreted, and some women have had difficulty obtaining a divorce on these grounds. In 2000, divorce laws in Egypt changed to permit husbands and wives greater equity in procedures to obtain a divorce (Singerman n.d.)

[vi] Relying on village leaders to identify potential informants can create problems of sample selectivity. This process, however, enabled interviewers to develop trust with community leaders before conducting in-depth interviews with local informants on sensitive topics. Moreover, we use data from informants to justify our conceptual framework, whereas we use data from the population-based survey to test hypotheses and to make inferences to residents in the seven districts in Minya that are represented.

[vii] The sample in Minya is representative of 7 of the 9 districts in Minya, as the 2 southern-most districts were excluded from the study for reasons of security.

[viii] The total available sample includes 3,194 ever-married women aged 15–54 years. 295 eligible respondents who did not complete the women's status module were dropped from the analysis (a 91% response rate). An additional 236 currently unmarried women, 45 currently married women who had never had a live birth, and 137 women who did not respond to the series of questions on gender preference also were dropped. Compared to women who did respond to questions about gender preference, women who did not respond are significantly older, have husbands with secondary or more education marginally less often, and have two or more living daughters significantly more often. Otherwise, major characteristics of responders and non-responders do not differ (proximity of natal family, age difference between respondent and husband, respondent's education, respondent's work status, household standard of living, religion, number of living sons, number of dead sons and daughters, urban/rural residence).

[ix] Also considered was a variable measuring the difference in educational attainment between a husband and wife. Although this variable is a common indicator of the relative economic resources of spouses in demographic research, it is limited insofar as a difference of zero years between uneducated spouses likely has a different meaning than a difference of zero years between highly educated spouses, and the measure does not reflect differences in attitudes that may be associated with higher levels of education. Therefore, controlling separately for education of the husband and wife was preferable.

[x] The following assets were included in the index: motorcycle, private car, agricultural land, other land, non-residential house or apartment, farm equipment, and shop or commercial building (all of which men generally own in Minya). Otherwise, the variables used in the principal components analysis of standard of living of the household are based on those recommended by Filmer and Pritchett (1999).

[xi] In Bangladesh, being Muslim is associated with lower influence in family decisions (Balk 1994, 1997).