Women's Job Search Activity in a Transforming Labor Market: Determinants of Women's Job Search Propensity in Egypt

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Abstract. The present study examines determinants of job search propensity of unemployed women in Egypt, and evaluates changes in their search propensity (1998-2006), to examine the effect of transition towards a market-oriented economy away from the public sector employment guarantee, on which they depended for decades, on their propensity to search. The results reveal that women have less job search propensity than men. The gender gap is wider excluding registration at government employment offices. Females are still mainly dependent on the government to find a job. Analyzing determinants of women's job search propensity reveals significant effect of personal, household characteristics and labor market conditions. There is an inverted U-shaped relation between age and female's job search propensity. Education and previous work experience positively affect women' job search. Women living in households with high dependency ratio and those living in areas with high unemployment rates have higher job search propensity.

Keywords: Labor Economics, Job Search, Women, Egypt.

1. Introduction

The transition to a market-oriented economy has significantly affected the Egyptian labor market. Women are affected more negatively than men by this transition as they used to depend mainly on the public sector employment guarantee. The unemployment rate for women is 2.5 times higher than the unemployment rate of men (CAPMAS, 2008). This leads to a decline in the labor force participation rate among educated females (Assad, 2007). It is therefore important to raise search propensity of women if unemployment in Egypt is not to become more concentrated among them.

However, there is insufficient empirical information on job search behavior in Egypt. Different studies of job search have emerged in the last two decades. The majority of these studies analyzed job search behavior in developed countries (Holzer, 1988; Gregg and Wadsworth, 1996; Weber and Mahringer, 2002; Lindeboom et al., 1994). Fewer studies analyzed job search in developing countries and in economies in transition (Masague, 2008; Smirnova, 2003).

Nevertheless, there is little work in the Egyptian literature that explicitly analyzes job search behavior. Wahba and Zenou (2005) study the impact of the size and the quality of social networks on the probability to find a job in Egypt. This study responds to the gap in the empirical literature with respect to the in-depth study of women's job search in Egypt, by analyzing changes in women's search propensity during an important era of transition and examining determinants of women's job search propensity in Egypt.

The study has three main objectives. The first is to evaluate the gender gap in search propensity in Egypt. The second is to evaluate changes in women's search propensity. Finally, the study examines determinants of women's search propensity; so as to identify main factors affecting women's search propensity in Egypt.

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The paper is organized as follows: Section 1 is the introduction. Section 2 provides literature review. Section 3 describes data. Section 4 traces change in women's search propensity between 1998 and 2006. In section 5, determinants of women's search propensity are examined. Section 6 concludes.

2. Literature Review

Labor economics place great emphasis on job search as a vital activity. The main purpose of this activity is to obtain employment while information about employment opportunities is imperfect and costly to acquire (Smith, 2003; Márquez and Ruiz-Tagle, 2004). The first job search decision is whether or not to search at all; that is the job search propensity (Smirnova, 2003).

Apart from a number of rather descriptive analyses of job seekers' use of different channels of search, relatively few empirical studies attempt to explain differences in individuals' search effort. Some notable exceptions are Holzer (1988), Lindeboom et al. (1994), Eriksson et al. (2002). Few studies were conducted to analyze main determinants of job search behavior in developing countries, none in Egypt.

The main determinants of job search behavior may be classified in three main groups; personal characteristics, household characteristics and labor market conditions.

2.1. Personal Characteristics

The main personal characteristics that were found to have significant impact on job search propensity include age, education, unemployment duration, and previous work experience.

The young are usually more active in search. The study of Eriksson et al. (2002) shows that there is evidence that the elderly workers are less likely to search. Theoretical and empirical literature emphasizes the positive significant effect of education on job search (Smirnova, 2003; Smith, 2003).

The evidence on the effect of unemployment duration on job search is mixed (Masagué, 2008; Márquez and Ruiz-Tagle, 2004; Eriksson et al., 2002). It may have a negative effect, leading unemployed job seekers to decrease their search effort because of discouragement. In contrast, longer unemployment duration of job seekers may result in more search effort if unemployed workers rely on receiving unemployment benefits for which their eligibility ends after a certain period of time.

2.2. Household Characteristics

The lower household income implies more pressures on the unemployed to be more active in search. In contrast, individuals from high income households have less motivation to search for work (Sestito and Viviano, 2008). Bigger households and a large number of children imply a high dependency ratio and thus put more pressure to search for work. However, the effect of the presence of children has been found to differ significantly between men and women (Masagué, 2008).

Literature suggests that urban residents are more likely to search more than rural residents. On one hand, job search is more likely to pay off in urban areas. On the other hand, costs of search are lower in urban labor markets due to the high density of employers and lower transportation costs (Smirnova, 2003; Tasci, 2008).

2.3. Labor Market Conditions

Search propensity has been found to be inversely related to unemployment rate. It is lower in labor markets with few job opportunities available which discourage the unemployed. In contrast, it increases in labor markets where job competition declines and the probability of receiving a job offer rises as job search tends in this case to pay off (Salas-Velasco, 2007; Márquez and Ruiz-Tagle, 2004). However, one empirical study in Turkey suggests that increases in unemployment rate increase job search effort (Tasci, 2008).

3. Data

The empirical analysis is based on two data sets; the Egypt Labor Market Survey of 1998 (ELMS 98) and the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey of 2006 (ELMPS 06). The two surveys collected information on individual characteristics, employment characteristics, unemployment and mobility. Regarding job search, the job search questions applied to all unemployed individuals whether they have worked before or not.

4. Women's Job Search Propensity in Egypt

Following job search literature (Eriksson et al., 2002; Boheim and Taylor, 2002; Weber and Mahringer, 2002), search propensity (P) is measured as the percentage of the unemployed who did a job search; $P = SU / U$ …. (1). SU and U denote the unemployed who did a search and all unemployed workers.

4.1. Job Search Propensity (1998-2006)

Table (1) reports job search propensity for both males and females. Data illustrates job search propensity, taking into consideration registering at government office. If the unemployed worker registers only at a government employment office, he/she is still considered searching for a job.

Table (1): Job Search Propensity (P1) - 1998-2006

	1998	2006	2006/1998
Males	0.8186	0.8858	1.08
Females	0.8341	0.8341	0
Male/female relative gap	0.98	1.06	(+) reversed
Total	0.8269	0.8549	1.03

* Differences between males and females, and also between 1998 and 2006 are statistically significant p<0.01, except for the difference between female job search propensity in 1998 and 2006 (p=0.986).

Data illustrates that unemployed males are more active than females in job search. Males' job search propensity is significantly higher than females' job search propensity in 2006 in spite of the fact that females' job search propensity was higher than males' in 1998. While males' job search propensity has tended to increase, females' search propensity remained the same.

Table (2) reports job search propensity for both males and females, excluding those who depend only in their job search on registering at government employment offices from job searchers.

Table (2): Job Search Propensity (P2) - 1998-2006

	1998	2006	2006/1998
Males	0.7970	0.8543	1.07
Females	0.7443	0.7579	1.02
Male/female relative gap	1.07	1.13	(+)
Total 15+	0.7690	0.7965	1.04

* Differences between males and females, and also between 1998 and 2006 are statistically significant p<0.01.

Data in table (2) reveals that females are far less active in job search if registering at government office is excluded from search methods used. Between 1998 and 2006, job search propensity excluding registering at government office tended to increase. Comparing with the gender gap in search propensity considering registering at government office (table 1), the gender gap in search propensity is wider.

4.2. Differences in Women's Job Search Propensity

Personal characteristics that affect job search incentive include age, education, unemployment duration and previous work experience (table 3). There is an inverted U-shaped relation between age and female's job search propensity (figure 1). Up till the beginning of the forties, old aged female unemployed job searchers are more active. After that, females become less active as they get older. More educated females have higher search propensity. They have higher incentive to search for work; job search is expected to pay them off more than less educated workers. It is estimated that earnings of females (15+) with post secondary education and above are 3.5, 28.2, 68.4 times higher than earnings of females with secondary education, basic education and no school certificate respectively[1]. The unemployed were classified in five quintiles according to unemployment duration. The unemployed in the first quintile have been unemployed for ten

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[1] Calculated using the Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey 2006.

months or less, while those in the fifth quintile have been unemployed for more than 96 months. Women who are unemployed for longer periods have higher search propensity.

Table (3): Personal Characteristics and Women's Job Search Propensity (P)

A- Age, Education and Unemployment Duration

Age Brackets	P	Educational Level	P	Unemployment Duration	P
12-14	0.00	No School Certificate	0.34	1	0.68
15-19	0.69	Basic Education	0.61	2	0.70
20-29	0.85	Secondary Education	0.85	3	0.85
30-39	0.88	Post Secondary Education and Above	0.84	4	0.95
40-49	0.76			5	0.89
50-59	0.00				

B- Previous Work Experience

Working Before	P	Length of Work Experience	P	Formal/Informal Work	P
Worked before	0.8514	1	0.871	With Contract	0.75
		2	0.753		
		3	0.735		
Did not work before	0.8357	4	0.445	Without Contract	0.85
		5	0.000		

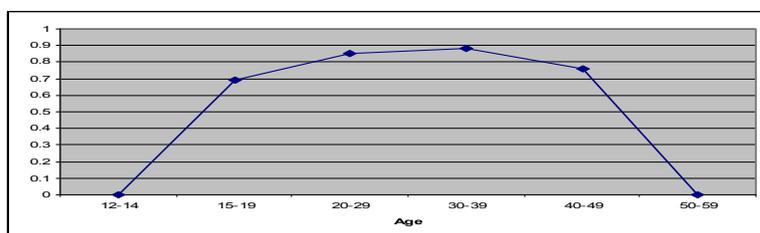* Differences are statistically significant p<0.01.

Fig. 1: Age and women's job search propensity

Females with previous working experience have higher search propensity. An index is developed to measure length of working experience = 2006-year of entering the labor market. Females were grouped in 5 quintiles. The length of experience is less than 7 years for first quintile; it ranges from 8-13 years for second quintile; 14-22 years for third quintile; 23-36 years for fourth quintile and 37+ years for fifth quintile. The higher the length of work experience, the lower is the search propensity. Those with longer work experience are usually older, and as previously mentioned, older females have lower search propensity. Those who previously were working informally are more active in search than those who were previously working formally. The first group is usually poorer and they are not supported by the social security system.

Household characteristics that affect search propensity include household economic conditions; dependency ratio; marital status; and presence of children (table 4). The wealth index is a composite index constructed of several indicators using factor analysis. It measures the economic level of the household. Those surveyed were grouped into five quintiles according to the wealth index. It is found that contrary to expectations, the higher the household economic level, the higher is the search propensity. Females from middle class and from relatively wealthy households have higher career aspirations and are usually more educated while females from poor households are more likely to be less educated and hence have less incentive to search for jobs and are less informed about search methods.

Table (4): Household Characteristics and Women's Job Search Propensity (P)

Wealth Quintiles	P	Dependency Ratio	P	Presence of Children	P	Marital Status and Children	P
1	0.72	High Dependency ratio	0.86	Do not have children (in HH)	0.88	Not married, no children	0.82
2	0.77						
3	0.85					Married, no children	0.89
4	0.88	Low Dependency Ratio	0.79	Having Children (in HH)	0.85	Not married, with children	0.95
5	0.86					Married with children	0.84

* Differences are statistically significant p<0.01.

Households surveyed were divided into two main groups according to dependency ratio. The first group has a dependency ratio greater than the average dependency ratio; the second has a dependency ratio lower than average. Females living in households where the dependency ratio is higher have higher search propensity as high dependency ratio puts more pressure to search for work.

Women with children are generally less active in search. Classifying women according to both marital status and presence of children; it is found that women who are not married and have children have the highest search propensity, followed by married women with no children. The first group needs to work to support their children while the second has no children to take care of and has enough time to search for work. The other two groups are less active in search. Married women with children have other responsibilities which are time consuming and they traditionally expect their husbands to work to support their households; the other group is those unmarried with no children; usually supported by their families.

Women living in areas where unemployment rate is higher than the national average have higher search propensity. Unemployment pressures make the unemployed more active in search. Regions with highest unemployment rates and female unemployment rates; Alex and Suez Canal, Urban Lower Egypt in urban areas, Rural Lower Egypt in rural areas2, have the highest search propensity.

Table (5): Labor Market Conditions and Women's Job Search Propensity (P)

Region	Greater Cairo	Alex and Suez Canal	Urban Lower Egypt	Urban Upper Egypt	Rural Lower Egypt	Rural Upper Egypt
P	0.75	0.99	0.88	0.75	0.88	0.73

* Differences are statistically significant p<0.01.

5. Determinants of Women's Job Search Propensity

5.1. Economic Model to Estimate Determinants of Women's Job Search Propensity

Relatively few empirical studies attempted to analyze main determinants of job search. Few studies were conducted to analyze these determinants in developing countries, none in Egypt. The main determinants of job search are classified in three main groups; personal characteristics, household characteristics, and labor market conditions. The model used here to estimate determinants of women's job search propensity in Egypt follows the methodology of Eriksson et al. (2002), Böheim and Taylor (2002), and Sminrova (2003).

The job search propensity is concerned with the decision whether to search or not. This decision may be described as follows:

$$P_{it} = P (R_{it}, H_{it}, L_{it}) \ (2)$$

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2 Unemployment rates are: 10.2%, 13.1% and 9.3%, female unemployment rates are: 19.1%, 31.1%, and 25.6% respectively (Assaad, 2009).

Where Pit is the job search propensity of the ith individual, Rit is a set of personal characteristics, Hit is a set of characteristics of individual's household, Lit is specific labor market characteristics.

In this study, two more equations are estimated:

$$P_{1it} = \alpha_o + \alpha_1 R_{it} + \alpha_2 H_{it} + \alpha_3 L_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \qquad (3)$$

$$P_{2it} = \alpha_o + \alpha_1 R_{it} + \alpha_2 H_{it} + \alpha_3 L_{it} + \varepsilon_{it} \qquad (4)$$

Where: Pit = 1 if individual i is searching for a job and Pit = 0 if she is not searching. P2it indicates search propensity excluding those who depend only on registering at a government office from job searchers. The dependent variable (Pit) is a dichotomous indicator. Thus, the binary logistic model is used for estimation.

Rit is a vector of personal characteristics that includes age, education, unemployment duration, and previous work experience; Hit is a vector of individual's household characteristics that includes economic conditions, household size, dependency ratio, marital status, and being a head of the household. Lit is a vector of labor market characteristics.

However, in the ELMPS06, the questions related to job search are asked only to unemployed individuals. Thus, there is a sample selection problem. Since the estimations based only on unemployment criterion, i.e. ignoring the selection bias, may lead to biased and inconsistent results, there is a need to tackle this problem. The most common approach used in the literature to solve this issue is Heckman's (1979) two-step procedure, in which, we jointly model selection into the sample, i.e. unemployment, and the final outcome, i.e. search propensity. Hence, the effects of individual and labor market properties on search propensity are estimated by employing "selectivity corrected" logistic model. There are two stages in this approach. In the first stage of the model, we estimate the unemployment choice of the survey respondents, where the independent variable is "unemployed"; it is a dummy variable taking the value of 1 if the respondent is unemployed, and zero otherwise. In the second stage, determinants of search propensity are estimated. This approach follows the methodology of other search literature (Eriksson et al., 2002; Tasci, 2008). The Heckman model requires that the selection equation; unemployment choice equation here, contains at least one variable that is not related to the dependent variable in the substantial equation (Smits, 2003); the job search propensity equation here. This variable affects unemployment but does not directly affect the outcome studied; which is search propensity, except through its effect on unemployment. Macroeconomic conditions as shown in different literature significantly affect unemployment (Tasci, 2008; Tansel, 2002; Berument et al., 2006). Economic development measured by GDP per capita in the province/state level have been used as a determinant of the probability of being unemployed as shown in different economic literature (Tasci, 2008; Tansel, 2002; Berument et al., 2006). Focusing on women, a higher per capita GDP is generally accompanied by higher female participation and employment rates (Perugini and Signorelli, 2006).

5.2. Determinants of Women's Job Search Propensity

Table 6 shows the results of binary logistic regression of the job search propensity two equations. The likelihood ratio chi-square shows that the overall model fit is good, a p-value of 0.0001. All coefficient estimates are significant at the 1% level.

Concerning personal characteristics, the results show that parameter estimates for females younger than 40 is positive, except for those younger than 15, suggesting that search propensity increases for females (15-39). The relationship between age and search propensity is inverted U-shaped. Unemployed people, in their prime work age, are expected to be most active in search (Smirnova, 2003). However, it is worth mentioning that the odds of doing a job search for females (30-39) are ceteris paribus 3.6 times as likely as for females (40+), while the odds of doing a job search for female unemployed youth (15-29) are ceteris paribus 2.1 times as likely as for females (40+). Young females are less active than females (30-39). Consistent with both literature and empirical evidence, females' education positively affects their search activity. The odds of doing a search for females below secondary education are ceteris paribus 0.76 times as likely as for females with secondary education and above. Previous work experience significantly affects job search, the odds of doing a job search for females with a previous work experience is ceteris paribus 0.988 times as likely as for females with no previous work experience. The difference seems relatively small, indicating higher job

search propensity for new entrants. However, excluding registering at a government employment office, it is found that those females with previous work experience have a higher search propensity than new entrants; the odds that females with a previous work experience search for a job is ceteris paribus 1.43 times as likely as for females with no previous work experience.

Table (6): Determinants of Job Search Propensity

Explanatory Variable	P_1			P_2		
	Estimate (B)	S.E.	Odds Ratio	Estimate (B)	S.E.	Odds Ratio
Intercept	8.6	0.23		1.39	0.022	
Age (reference category: 40+)						
Age (1) <15	-6.3	1.3	0.002	-3.98	0.290	0.019
Age (2) 15-29	0.75	0.02	2.118	0.64	0.016	1.89
Age (3) 30-39	1.28	0.02	3.608	0.65	0.017	1.92
Education (reference category: secondary and above)						
Educational Level: below secondary	-0.27	0.018	0.760	-0.233	0.016	0.793
Ever Worked Before (reference category: never worked before)	-0.12	0.010	0.988	0.357	0.009	1.43
Wealth	0.30	0.003	1.344	0.174	0.003	1.19
Household Size	-0.064	0.001	0.938	-0.004	0.001	0.996
1/dependency ratio	-1.46	0.017	0.233	-1.522	0.015	0.218
Head (reference category: head)						
Not head	-6.05	0.230	0.002	0.278	0.011	1.320
Region: Reference Category (Rural Upper Egypt)						
Region (1)-Greater Cairo	-0.51	0.009	0.600	-0.34	0.008	0.71
Region (2) – Alex and Suez Canal	3.15	0.031	23.254	2.31	0.019	10.104
Region (3) – Urban Lower Egypt	0.21	0.009	1.24	0.34	0.008	1.408
Region (4) –Urban Upper Egypt	-0.36	0.010	0.70	-0.59	0.008	0.557
Region (5) – Rural Lower Egypt	0.50	0.008	1.641	0.06	0.008	1.059
Marriage (reference category: married)						
Not married	-0.238	0.006	0.788	-0.02	0.005	0.978
Selection term	-0.762	0.009	0.467	-0.580	0.007	0.560
N	725			725		
Likelihood Ratio Chi-square	1428489.2			103251.6		
DF	16			16		
Pr>Chi-square	<0.0001			<0.0001		

With respect to household characteristics, unemployed females from wealthier households are more active in doing a job search; for every one unit increase in the wealth index, the odds of doing a job search

increases by a factor of 1.34. Those females usually have higher aspirations. Household size negatively affects women' search propensity. Women living in larger households tend to have more domestic responsibilities than those living in smaller households. These domestic responsibilities usually are time consuming. Higher dependency ratio results in more pressures on females to do a job search. Married females are more active in job search than unmarried females. This is mainly due to the economic circumstances in Egypt; high inflation rates and high poverty rates make it necessary for married women to help their husbands to support their families. Being the head of the household raises the need to look for additional income, this in turn results in a higher search propensity for females who are head of their households. The odds of doing a job search for a female who is not a head of the household is ceteris paribus 0.002 times as likely as for a female who is a head of the household. However, excluding registering at a government employment office, females who are not head of their families have higher search propensity.

Concerning labor market conditions; females in labor markets where unemployment is higher are more likely to do a job search. The odds of doing a job search for unemployed females in Alexandria and Suez Canal are 23.3 times as likely as for females in rural Upper Egypt. In Upper Egypt, less job opportunities are available for women, in addition considering payment levels and job quality; these limited job opportunities do not provide incentives for doing a job search considering search benefits and costs contrary to Alexandria and Suez Canal governorates where women's job search is more likely to pay off.

6. Conclusion

The transition to a market-oriented economy has affected the Egyptian labor market. Women are affected more negatively than men by this transition as they used to depend mainly on the public sector employment guarantee. This leads to a decline in educated females' labor force participation rate. It is therefore important to raise search propensity of women if unemployment in Egypt is not to become more concentrated among women.

The results show that between 1998 and 2006, search propensity increased. However, women's search propensity is lower than men's search propensity. Moreover, this gender gap is wider excluding registration at government employment offices from search methods used. Females are still mainly dependent on the government to find work. The gender gap in search propensity is negatively affecting women's position in the Egyptian labor market. However, it is expected to continue widening due to lack of work opportunities in the government and the public sector, where females especially educated females used to find work of what they consider of a relatively good quality. Raising job quality in the private sector, ensuring enforcement of the law, forcing contracts and strong supervision is needed to make females, especially new entrants, more optimistic about jobs in the labor market and hence increase their search propensity.

It is also necessary to provide institutional support to women within their job search. This raises questions about labor market institutions in Egypt, especially labor market intermediaries which still have a very limited role in the Egyptian labor market. Providing such support especially for educated females through schools and universities may be very helpful in increasing women's job search propensity.

Analyzing determinants of women's search propensity reveals a significant effect of personal characteristics, household characteristics and labor market conditions. There is an inverted U-shaped relation between age and female's job search. Females aged 15-39 are more active in job search than younger and older females. Among females aged 15-39, the youth (15-29) are less active than those aged 30-39. This raises concerns about the future position of women in the Egyptian labor market. Education and previous work experience positively affect women's job search. Raising women's educational levels in Egypt is necessary to close the gender gap in job search propensity in the long run. Females who are heads of their households and those living in households with high dependency ratio have higher search propensity. Not only economic pressures on the household but also unemployment pressures lead to an increase in women's search propensity. Higher unemployment rates in the labor market result in higher job search propensity.

7. Acknowledgements

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