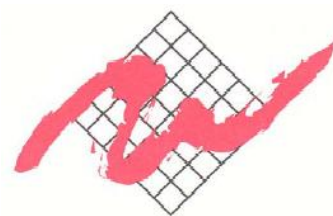


The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project

Focus on Yemen | Educational Attainment and Career
Aspirations Topic Brief

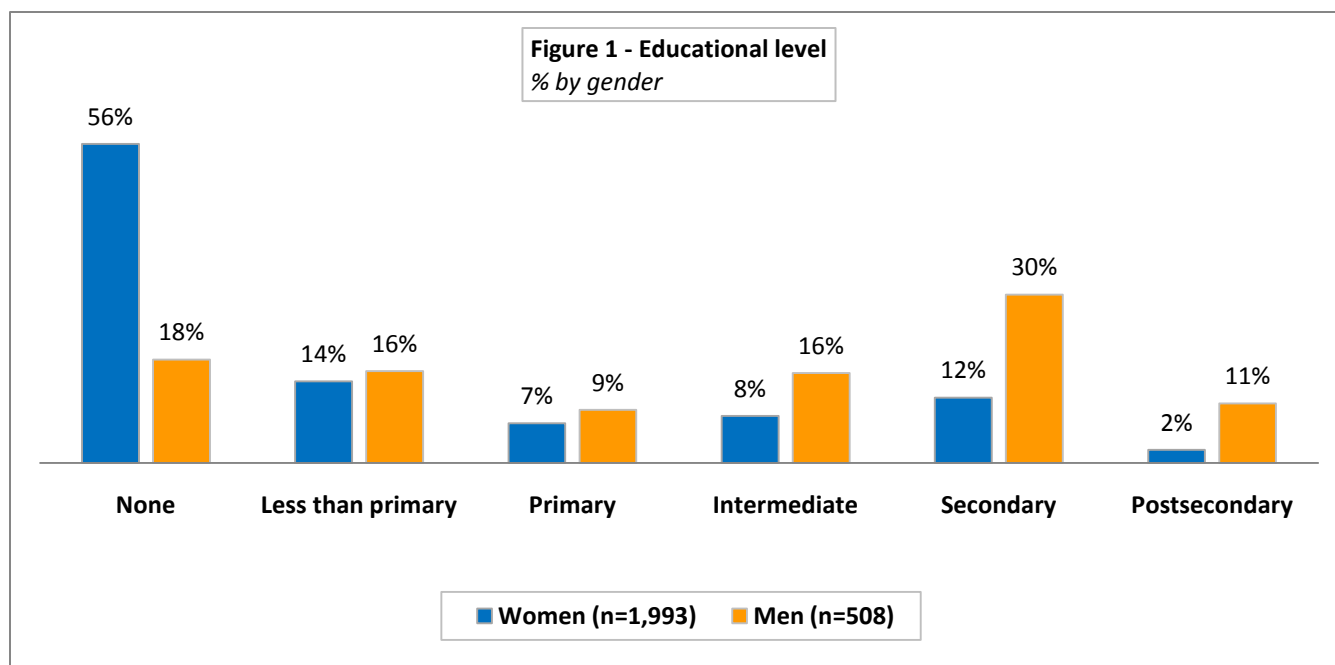
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EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND ASPIRATIONS

This topic brief presents the main findings on educational attainment from the SWMENA survey in Yemen.¹ The analysis centers on differences between Yemeni men and women, and among Yemeni women of various ages, regions, income levels, and marital statuses. It also reports on the educational and career aspirations of young adults under age 25 in Yemen.

Educational attainment among women in Yemen is currently very low: over half (56%) of women and nearly one in five (18%) men have no formal schooling (Figure 1). Eighty-six percent of women and 60% of men report that they have less than a secondary-level education. A very low rate of formal schooling among women limits their ability to pursue careers, contribute economically to families, or to be self-sufficient if they so desire. Women without a formal education may lack basic literacy and math skills, which leaves women vulnerable to economic insecurity and limits their power in the workplace and at home.



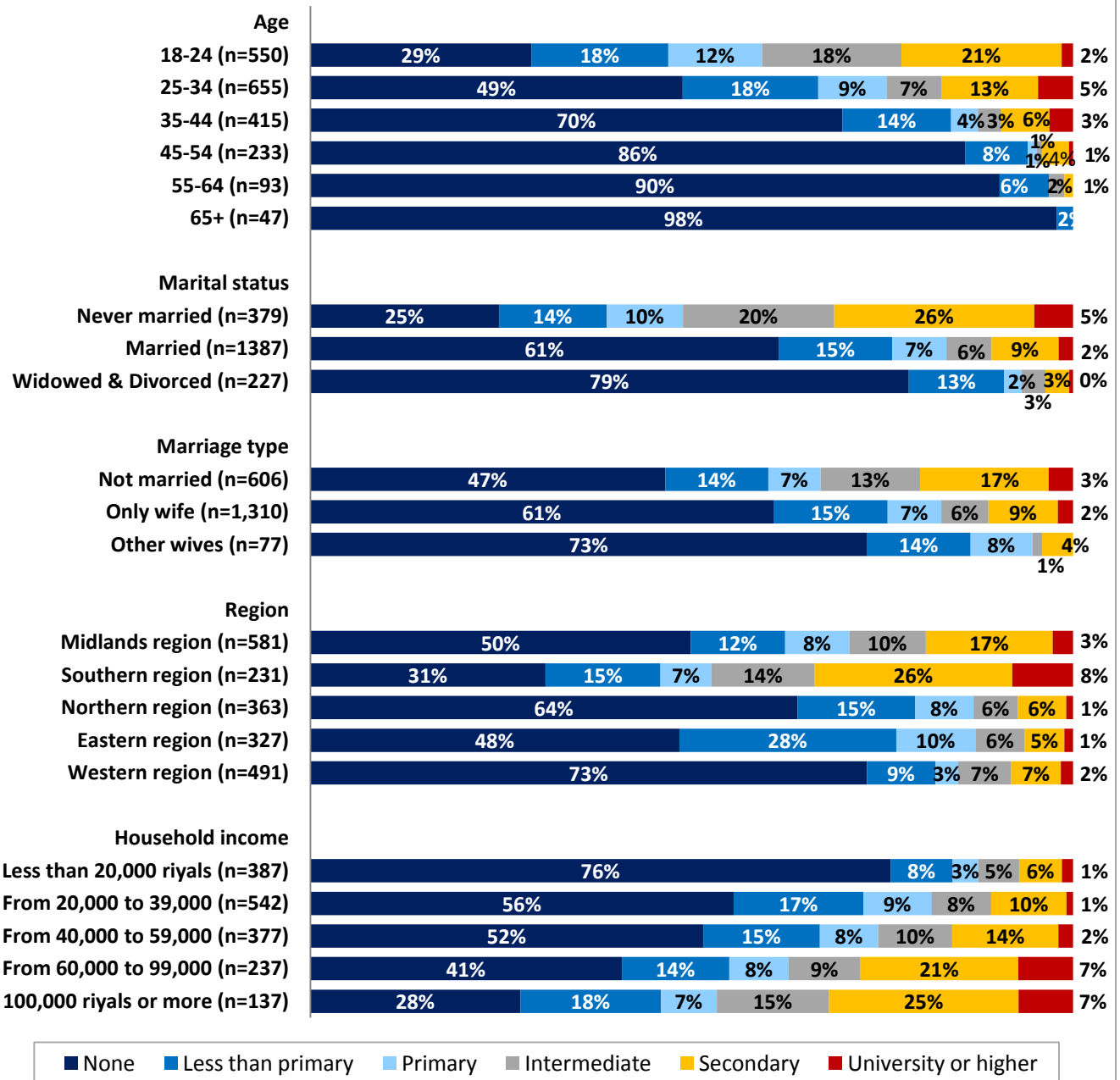
Education rates in Yemen do appear to be increasing among the younger generation of women (Figure 2). Only 29% of women 18 to 24 have no formal education, compared to 98% of women 65 or older (Figure 2). In addition, among women in the younger age group, 21% have at least a secondary degree, while none of the 47 women 65 and older interviewed has that much schooling.

Women who have never married are more likely to have some schooling (75%) than are women who are currently (39%) or formerly married (widowed and divorced, 22%). Among the married women, 39% of respondents who were

¹ During June and July 2010, the SWMENA survey collected data from 1,993 women and 508 men in Yemen. The survey is designed to assess how women in Yemen view themselves as members of society, the economy and the polity. Data was weighted appropriately for computing percentages, although labels in figures and tables show the unweighted number of cases in the sample.

the only wife had some schooling compared to 27% of women married to men with one or more other wives sharing the household (Figure 2).

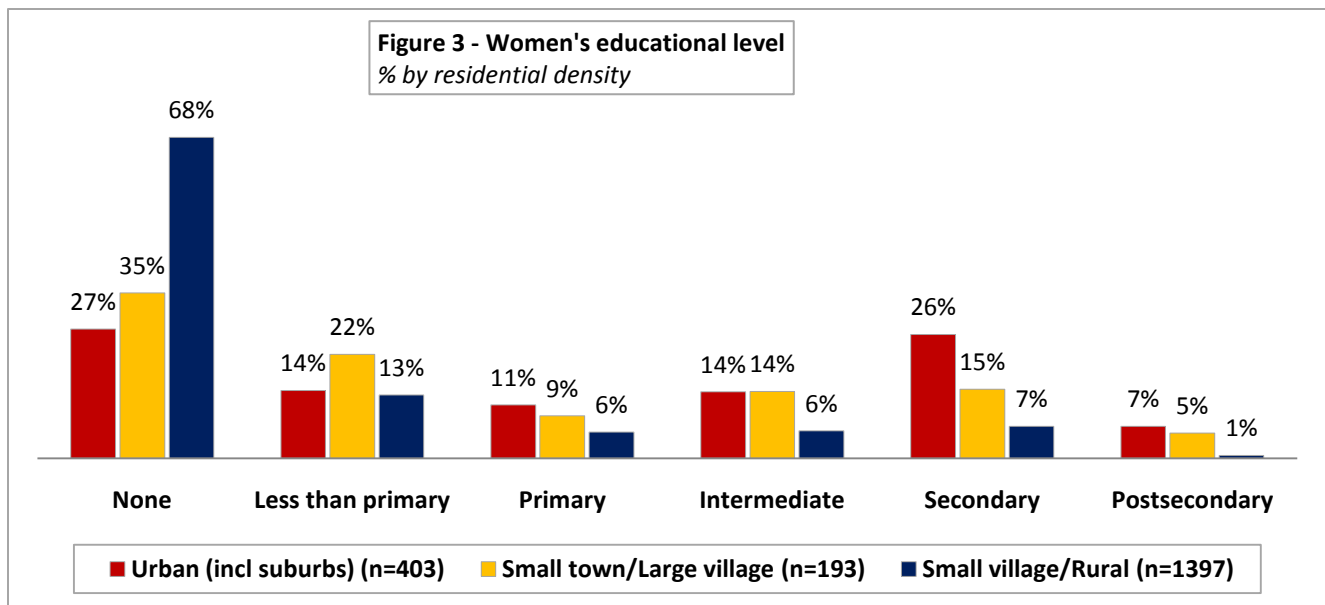
Figure 2 - Women's educational level
% by age, marital status, marriage type, region, and household income



Women’s education varies a great deal among the different regions of Yemen. Education among women is highest in the Southern region (Aden, Al-Dhale, Abyan, Lahj), Midlands region (Sana'a city, Ibb, Taiz), and Eastern region (Mareb, Shabwah, Albaida, Hadramout, Almaharah) where at least half of women have some schooling. In the Southern region, over a third of all women (34%) have completed secondary school or more and 8% have a university or graduate degree. However, in the Western region (Al-Hodeidah, Hajjah, Al-Mahweet, and Raimah), nearly three-quarters of women have no formal education (Figure 2).

In addition, women in households with higher total income have more schooling than women in lower income households. Over three-quarters of women in households with monthly incomes below 20,000 riyals have no formal schooling compared to 28% of women in households with monthly incomes of 100,000 riyals or more. Almost one-third of women in households with monthly income of 100,000 riyals or more (32%) have a secondary degree or higher; this is nearly five times the percentage for women in households with monthly income below 20,000 riyals (7%) (Figure 2).

Women living in rural areas are much less likely to receive formal schooling than women living in either urban areas or in small towns and large villages. Seventy-two percent of women in urban areas receive some formal schooling, compared to 65% of women in small towns or large villages and only 33% of women in rural areas. Seven percent of women in urban areas and 5 percent of women in small towns or large villages have a postsecondary degree, compared to less than 1% of women in rural areas (Figure 3).



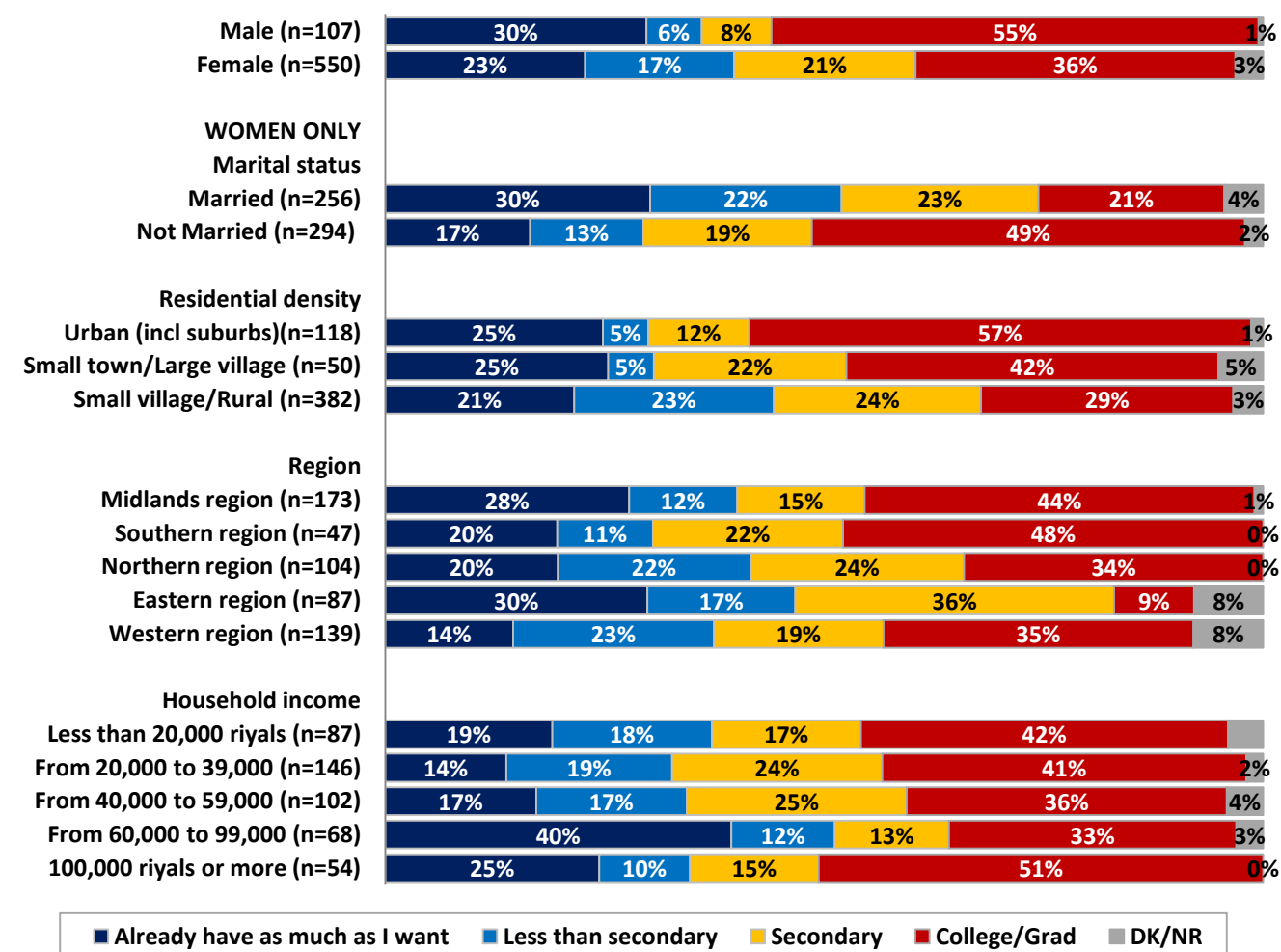
In Yemen, both where a woman resides within the nation and her household income appear to be important to whether she has any formal education at all, and particularly whether she will have education above the primary school level (Figure 4). For survey data analysis of how women’s household income in Yemen varies across regions, please see the topic brief, “Paid Work and Control of Earnings & Assets.”

Educational Aspirations

In addition to asking respondents about the highest level of education they have completed, the survey asked those under age 25 about the level of schooling they *would like* to complete. Although educational attainment in Yemen is low, most young adults would like to have additional schooling (Figure 4). Only three in ten young men and under a quarter of young women (23%) have all the education they would like. Over one-third of women (36%) and half of men (55%) would like to complete a college or graduate degree.

Married women report less interest in future education than their unmarried counterparts. Almost twice as many married women report that they have all the education they want (30%) as unmarried women (17%). Nearly half (49%) of unmarried young women aspire to complete postsecondary education. However, just over one in five married women (21%) aspires to a postsecondary degree (Figure 4).

Figure 4 - Educational aspirations of respondents under age 25
% by gender, marital status, residential density, region and household income



Similar proportions of women living in rural (21%), small towns (25%), and urban areas (25%) are satisfied with their current level of education. However, while 57% of urban-dwelling women would like to attend college or graduate school, only 29% of rural-dwelling women would like to do so (Figure 4).

Educational aspirations are highest in the South where 70% of young women would like to have at least a secondary degree. Over forty percent of young women in the Midlands (44%) and Southern (48%) regions would like to earn a postsecondary degree (Figure 4).

Overall, there is not a clear relationship between educational aspirations and level of household income. Over half (51%) of young women in households with monthly incomes of 100,000 riyals or more, however would like to complete a university degree or more (Figure 4).

Table 1 - Most commonly cited obstacles to higher education
Women under age 25

Unmarried women (n=139)	Married women (n=53)
Cannot afford it (36%)	Focus on marriage (51%)
Too far away from home (17%)	Parents won't allow it (11%)
Focus on marriage (10%)	Too far away from home (11%)

Of the young women who said they wanted to attend college or university, 20% were confident that they would face no obstacles to those ambitions. Young women, however (both married and unmarried) perceive different barriers to pursuing postsecondary education (Table 1).

Among unmarried women, 36% cited financial obstacles to pursuing higher education, and 17% said the postsecondary institutions were too far from home. Ten percent wanted to focus on marriage, compared to over half of married women. Equal proportions of married women said their parents would not allow them to attend university or that the postsecondary institutions were too far from home (11%).

Table 2 - Top three fields of interest for women who hope to attain postsecondary education (n=192)
Women under age 25

Medicine (21%)
Religious/Islamic studies (19%)
Computer science (9%)

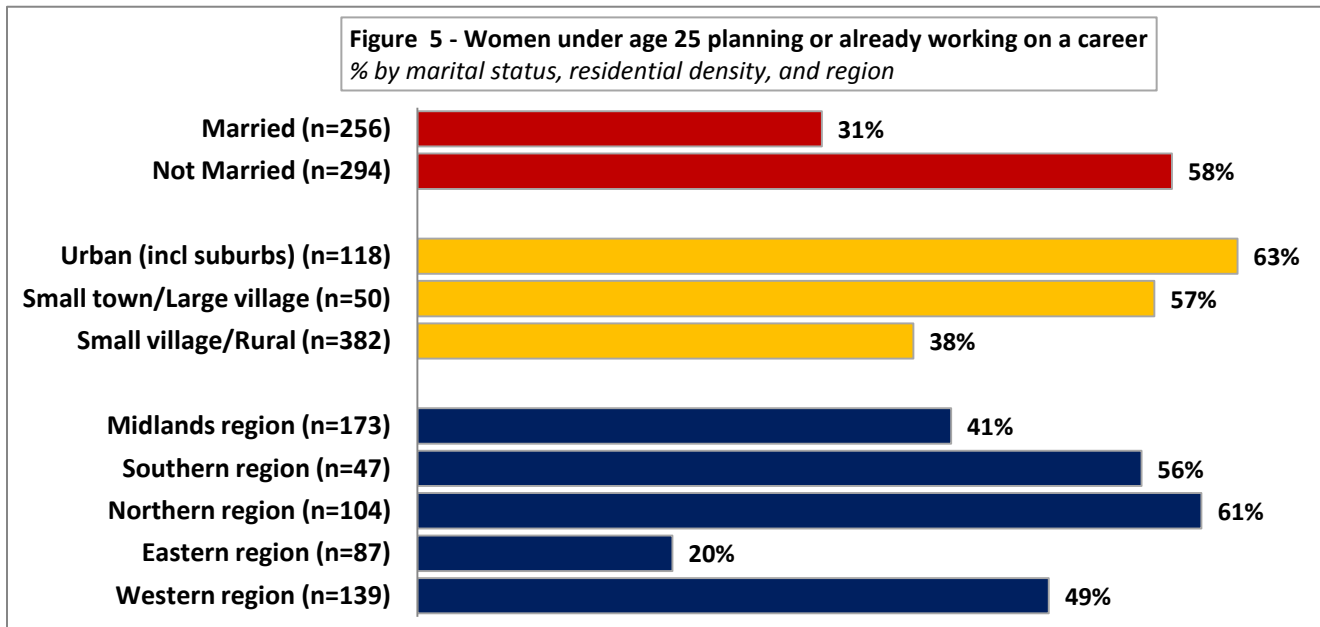
Young Yemeni women are interested in a wide variety of fields, but Medicine, Religion/Islamic Studies, and Computer Science are the most popular fields of study among women reporting that they would like to attend college or graduate school, and who have a field in mind (Table 2). Nearly half (49%) would like to pursue one of these three fields.

Career Aspirations

Despite very low rates of formal employment reported (see “Paid Work and Control of Earnings & Assets” Topic Brief), many women (45%) and men (69%) under age 25 say they plan to pursue a career. In addition, 20% of men and 1% of women in this age group reported that they were already working toward a career. As with educational aspirations, there are marked differences among women in Yemen when it comes to career aspirations (Figure 5).

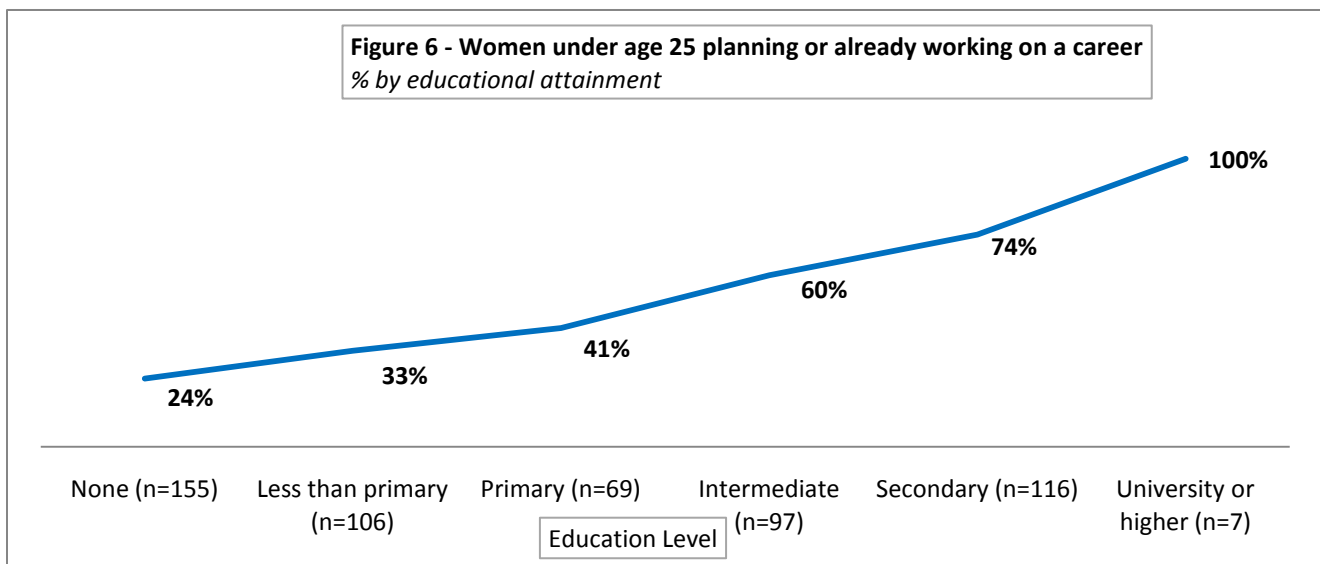
Although 58% of unmarried women under age 25 either intend to pursue a career or already work in their chosen field, fewer than a third of married women (29%) say they would like to pursue a career. Since this question was only asked of respondents in the youngest age group, 18 to 24, differences in attitudes and behaviors between married and unmarried women cannot be attributed to different age profiles among the groups (Figure 5).

Young urban-dwelling women are much more likely than rural women in the same age group to say they intend to pursue a career or are already doing so. Whereas 38% of women living in rural areas say they intend to pursue a career, 63% of urban women either already work in a career or plan to in the future (Figure 5).



Career aspirations for young women in the Northern (61%) and Southern (56%) regions exceed fifty percent. In the Eastern part of the country, barely one in five young women plans to have a career (20%) (Figure 5).

As shown in Figure 6, women’s career aspirations are related to the level of education they have achieved. Only 24% of women under age 25 without any formal schooling intend to pursue a career, but among women who have completed primary school, 41% have career aspirations. Nearly three out of four (74%) of those who have finished secondary school would like to pursue a career. While there are only seven women under age 25 who have completed a postsecondary degree, all of them plan to pursue a career.



Among women who indicated they were interested in pursuing a career and had a particular career in mind, the most popular prospective occupation was Teacher (37%), followed by Dressmaker/Embroiderer (11%) and Doctor (11%), as Table 3 shows. Nearly the same number of respondents simply replied “Any job” or “Doctor” when asked about their career choice. Seven percent of women would like to pursue a career in nursing. The fact that the non-professional occupation of clothing alteration is among the most popular career paths suggests that it is not only the highly-educated elite that aspires toward having a career, but also those considering work in the trades or handicrafts.

Table 3 - Top five fields for women who plan to have a career (n=249)
Women under age 25

Teacher (37%)
Dressmaker/Embroiderer (11%)
Any job (10%)
Doctor (10%)
Nursing (7%)

Table 4 - Top three reasons that women say they do not plan to pursue a career (n=285)

Women under age 25

Husband or family will not allow it (31%)
Prefer to be a homemaker or spend time raising children (29%)
No jobs are available or jobs are scarce (12%)

Among Yemeni women who stated that they did not intend to pursue a career, 31% specified that they would not pursue a career because their parents or husband would not allow them to work. Twenty-nine percent of the women surveyed responded that they would prefer to be homemakers or spend time raising their children. Twelve percent said that they did not plan to have a career because jobs are scarce or not available (Table 4). For more information on actual labor force participation in Yemen, please see the “Paid Work and Control of Earnings and Assets” Topic Brief.