

# Younger employees most affected by pandemic-caused income declines, job losses

One in four Egyptians have altered food habits due to ongoing crisis, says CAPMAS

By Bassant Mohamed

Few people have been left unaffected by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, with a range of emotional, financial, and health-related impacts among the most widely reported side effects.

For some families, the pandemic has meant making significant changes in everyday routines due to financial hardships. In other families, the uncertainty and inability to interact with anyone outside the immediate family has meant increased anxiety, whether among adults or children, tensions in parental relationships, or general fear.

The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) has released the results of a series of surveys that have gathered localised information on the wide-ranging and far-reaching effects of the global pandemic.

The results of the surveys were gathered via phone interviews, and aim to highlight the obstacles Egyptian families face due to the pandemic.

CAPMAS found that the pandemic has led to drastic reductions in work hours, and even to job losses, with this in turn affecting income and general family well-being. It found that a total of 61.9% of employees aged between 15 and 64 were affected by workplace changes off the back of the coronavirus pandemic, with about 26% losing their jobs.

Moreover, the age-range that suffered the most from the job security point of view was the 25-34 age range, with about 67.5% of the surveyed citizens reporting that their jobs were affected.

The most disadvantaged workers were those who had not completed



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high-school, with their unemployment peak at 66.4% during the economic crisis.

About 73.5% decline in income has been reported since the crisis hit, while almost 25% of respondents said that their income was not affected. Only 1% of surveyed people reported an increase in their income since the start of the crisis.

CAPMAS notes that the older the employee's age, the lower the economic impact of the pandemic. The agency noted that 87.9% of people aged between 15 and 24 years old saw a decrease in their salaries, while a total of 56.5% of those aged between 55 and 64 reported a salary decrease.

Meanwhile, about 55.7% of citizens noted that their work hours fell precipitously, while about 26% of these citizens had completely lost their jobs.

The crisis has also led to a change in family incomes, on the back of the effects of the precautionary measures on economic activities.

A majority 60.3% reported that the

preventive measures adopted to curb the virus' spread led to their incomes decreasing. A total of 35.5% of respondents reported income declines due to job loss, with 31.5% reporting income declines due to low demand on the product or service they provide.

CAPMAS also conducted a survey to gather information on how people identify the signs and symptoms of the coronavirus. This looked into awareness of the virus, as well as general knowledge, attitudes, and related behaviours among citizens.

The agency found that 99.9% of respondents were aware of the existence of the novel virus, with 95% of participants identifying fever as the main symptom of infection. Over half of participants followed new developments related to the virus using state-run news channels.

The majority of participants, or about 96.3%, could correctly identify symptoms and ways to prevent infection with the coronavirus. A total of 65% of families reported that they would visit the nearest



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hospital in case they have suspect a case, while 16% of the families believed that they should use the Ministry of Health's hotline to report any suspected cases.

About two-thirds, or 67.6%, of families were aware of the Ministry of Health's hotline. Over half, or 52.8%, of respondents were extremely confident that a curfew is the most effective measure to curb the virus' spread. A total of 42.3% of families believed that closing public areas where large gatherings are most likely to take place is the most effective measure against spread.

CAPMAS also reported that the coronavirus' rapid spread has altered consumer habits in the short term, although it added that this could potentially have a long-term impact.

In a third survey, the agency assessed the impact of the coronavirus on the consumption habits of Egyptian families. It found that one in every four consumers, or 25%, said the pandemic changed his food consumption habits, driving

him to cook, eat, shop, and think about food differently.

The consumption of meat, fish, and chicken has significantly fallen, by as much as 17-25%, while the consumption of non-food products such as clothing, school, and transportation has seen a 27-33% drop. A drop in the numbers of people who reported consuming sugar, rice, oil, and legumes was also reported.

The CAPMAS survey also indicated that 70% of the decrease in food consumption was a result of income declines among families, either due to salary cuts or job losses. At the same time, there was a reported 90% decrease in consumption of other products, as the result of the state-imposed precautionary measures.

A higher percentage of people said that their use of detergents and disinfectants had significantly increased since the start of the pandemic, in part due to the greater focus on hygiene and sanitation.

The survey also looked into the measures taken by Egyptian families in cases

where the coronavirus forced them into financial hardship. A total of 40% of respondents said that they borrowed money from their relatives to overcome financial problems.

More than half of the families anticipated that they would see a decrease in incomes in the coming three months, while 46.4% of respondents believed that their incomes will remain the same.

Meanwhile, 45.3% of responding families said their income declines were as a result of the precautionary measures taken to curb the virus spread. One in every three families said they do not have an adequate income to meet their needs, while 66.8% of families said they can meet their needs.

Asked about the measures they have taken to overcome the financial problems, 92.5% of respondents said they bought cheaper food products. About 89.8% of families have also reduced their consumption of meat and chicken, while 19.8% of families have reduced the size of every meal.

Both global and country-specific interventions of varying degrees and impacts have been taken to mitigate the pandemic's impacts across the food system.

Locally, Egypt has taken several measures to support local industries meant to preserve and re-adjust product supply chains, with solutions harnessing locally-available resources and goods.

Beyond the immediate interventions addressing the current emergency situations, countries may take this opportunity to pursue permanent solutions and promote transformation towards more sustainable food systems.

## Smokers not more susceptible to COVID-19 infection: Researchers

Giving smokers alternative nicotine delivery means they might prefer these products over cigarettes, and produce better outcomes, says Polosa

By Shaimaa Al-Aees

It's not news that smoking is bad for human health and the leading risk factor for many heart problems and cancers. It also reduces immunity, and makes people more likely to respiratory infections.

But researchers have found recently that smokers might not be more susceptible to infection or illness caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). However, according to Riccardo Polosa, Professor of Internal Medicine at Italy's University of Catania and a world-renowned researcher into tobacco harm reduction, there is still an area of active research and the jury remains out on the claims.

Polosa sat down with Daily News Egypt to talk further on this critical issue.

### Do you think that smokers are most vulnerable to COVID-19?

As with any viral infection, the symptoms and severity of symptoms generally depend on two key factors: the viral load and the immuno-competence of the host. For SARS-CoV-2, about 80% of the infected population seems to deal adequately with the viral infection developing only asymptomatic forms or slight symptomatic disease.

However, there are 20% of individuals that will go on to develop a severely symptomatic form of the disease, either because they have been exposed to a highly elevated viral load, as in hospital staff, or due to depressed immunologic defences, as in elderly people with comorbidities.

Smokers do not seem to be more susceptible to infection or disease caused by the coronavirus, and, quite surprisingly, the scientific evidence suggests the opposite, that smoking may be protective against COVID-19. This is still an area of active research and the jury is still out.

### Are smokers likely to have more severe symptoms? Are those using vaping products or e-cigarette less



Riccardo Polosa

### likely to be affected?

Smokers are less likely to get infected with SARS-CoV-2, or to end up in hospital with the coronavirus. No data is available for e-cigarette users, but, given that e-cigarettes are much less toxic than tobacco cigarettes, a consequential educated guess is that vaping is highly unlikely to be a risk factor for infection and/or disease.

### Do smokers pass infection faster than non-smokers?

Besides the notion that smokers are less susceptible to SARS-CoV-2 infection, currently there is no data to argue about the propagation speed of the virus.

### In your opinion, what are the alternatives to smoking cigarettes?

The first alternative to smoking is to not smoke! But stopping smoking is not easy, and many smokers like cigarettes. For smokers who cannot or do not want to quit, there is an alternative, which is switching to much less harmful, combustion-free products such as e-cigarettes or heated tobacco products. Toxicological data of combustion-free nicotine delivery products are on average 90%

to 95% less harmful than combustion cigarettes. Moreover, rapid innovation in vaping product design is likely to further reduce their residual toxicological risk. Promoting wider access to much less harmful combustion-free nicotine delivery products, such as tobacco cigarette substitutes, may contribute to accelerating the decline of the prevalence of smoking.

### Is it correct that vaping is less harmful than cigarettes?

There is nothing to be suspicious about! Vaping products are less harmful than tobacco cigarettes. Public Health England recognises the reduced harm caused by e-cigarettes as an alternative to combustible cigarettes, with e-cigarettes being up to 95% less harmful. E-cigarette in England can be sold inside hospitals, and family doctors can advise their patients to quit smoking by switching to e-cigarettes.

### Do you think that smoking rates will decline due to harder circumstances worldwide?

A recent survey of 1,825 participants by the Center of Excellence for



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the Acceleration of Harm Reduction (CoEHAR) in Catania, showed a slight decrease in cigarette consumption during the COVID-19 lockdown. But, on the other hand, the same respondents stated that they stockpiled cigarettes and e-liquids, a behaviour similar to that of citizens who stocked up foodstuffs during the lockdown. In spite of the media campaign promoting smoking abstinence, there has been no sign of a decline in smoking rates during COVID-19.

### Do you think that that e-cigarette helps smokers to quit?

Yes. Population surveys, randomised controlled trials and observational studies have shown that e-cigarettes can be used to help smokers quit. Efficacy is variable depending on the specific product-user interaction.

### What bad habits smokers should quit?

Smokers must stop smoking. If they cannot, they should at least try switching to combustion-free nicotine delivery products. By quitting or switching, they will massively reduce the chances of exposing themselves and bystanders to toxic substances in tobacco smoke.

### Rampant rumours suggest a link between COVID-19 and smoking. Do you think smoking companies have to create less harmful products?

Tobacco cigarettes can kill, so there is no doubt that most efforts should be spent in developing innovative cigarette substitutes that provide the best smoking-like experience but without the harm of the toxic substances of tobacco smoke. These products may not be risk free, but their impact on human health is likely to be substantially less damaging than conventional cigarettes, regardless of any potential effect of smoking on COVID-19.

### Based on your studies and expertise, are vaping and e-cigarette less harmful than cigarettes, do they have the same long-term effects?

This is an important question. No data is available for the long term health effects of e-cigarettes, but, given that e-cigarettes are much less toxic than tobacco cigarettes, a consequential educated guess is that vaping is highly unlikely to be a risk factor for significant health effects compared to continuing smoking. New studies are being performed on exclusive vapers who have never smoked in their life. Data will not be available for many years. Therefore, the jury is still out on long-term health effects of e-cigarettes.

### There have been demonstrations against e-cigarettes which have caused deaths. Can you estimate the

### percentage of deaths by e-cigarette compared to cigarette smoking?

Let's be clear, e-cigarettes do not kill people. Sadly, the media misrepresented the outbreak of acute severe cases of lung injury and deaths in the US in the fall of 2019. For several months, commercial vaping products were blamed for the illnesses and deaths in numerous newspapers, TV, and radio stories.

Although the data was available on the US CDC website, the media failed to report that 82% of cases (of which 66% male) were among users of illegal THC cartridges, not including underage patients who may not have admitted to their illegal activities. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) shut down 44 illegal THR online vape sites with Operation Vapor Lock and subsequently the number of new cases plummeted.

With new cases down to near zero and having identified Vitamin E acetate, a thickening agent in illegal/black market THC liquids consumed with vapourisers, as the culprit of the outbreak, the CDC stopped reporting on this respiratory condition on 25 February 2020.

The media gave little attention to these important developments and to the fact that the outbreak was confined to the US black market supply chain, with no cases of lung illness being reported among users in the European Union or elsewhere in the world. Moreover, no appreciable effort was spent by the media in rectifying the misinformation.

### What do you recommend for smokers?

My advice to tobacco smokers is to try to quit, it is never too late to quit smoking! If you cannot or do not wish to give up your cigarettes, please consider trying substitute combustion-free products. Giving smokers an alternative with efficient nicotine delivery means that they might prefer one of these products over cigarettes and in the end this will produce better outcomes.