

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

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??*Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*

??*Studies on the Status, Rights and Well-Being of Women in the Developing World*

Two stages for women and modernization: I. Workforce entrance, fertility reduction, and literacy rise. II. "Post-industrial" attitude change.

In *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*, **Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris** show that for women the modernization process occurs in two stages.

The first shift—from *agrarian* to *industrialized* societies—generates reduced fertility, increased female literacy and school enrollment, more women in the paid labor force, and more women in management and administrative positions.

The second transition—from *industrial* to *post-industrial* societies—generates new attitudes, mores, and laws that produce another burst of equality in the public sphere and workplace.

Inglehart and Norris use survey data from the World Values Survey and the European Values Survey from 74 societies, ranging from the less prosperous, such as India, China, Brazil, Pakistan, Nigeria and Egypt, to the most affluent, such as Sweden, the United States and Japan.

To earlier findings that economic development is associated with equality for women in almost every society, they add that cultural change is critical. The pace of cultural change is

mediated by religious legacies, historical traditions, and institutional structures.

Even controlling for modernization, people in Catholic countries are more likely, and in Islamic countries less likely, to support gender equality.

Their Gender Equality Scale is composed of five items: 1) "On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do," 2) "When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women," 3) "A university education is more important for a boy than a girl," 4) "Do you think that a woman has to have children in order to be fulfilled or is this not necessary?" 5) "If a woman wants to have a child as a single parent but she doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man, do you approve or disapprove?" Of the potential 100 points on this scale, Finnish respondents, at the top, score an average of 85, Jordanians, at the bottom, an average of 48. The association between the Scale and logged per capita GDP is fairly high ($r^2 = .61$).

Independent of GDP, religious traditions are related both to these gender attitudes and to objective measures of women's empowerment, such as the percent of women professionals and

administrators in the society, the percent of women in the lower house of the elected assembly, or

the ratio of female to male literacy. Even within agrarian states, on most of these measures as well as on the Gender Equality Scale, predominantly Catholic countries rank first; predominantly Muslim countries rank last. Attitudes toward gender equality vary by religion even controlling for societal modernization and social background.

Norris and Inglehart's data also may overthrow conventional wisdom regarding the conservatism of women in traditional societies. Although individuals may interpret the question differently, women in agrarian societies are more likely than men to place themselves to the left on a question worded, "In political matters people talk of 'the left' and 'the right.' How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?" Women in the younger cohorts in industrial and post-industrial societies are also more likely than men to place themselves further to the left.

Parents' preference for sons harms daughters' outcomes even if parents treat children equally.

The key is “differential stopping behavior” writes Robert Jensen. In his recent paper, *Studies on the Status, Rights and Well-Being of Women in the Developing World*, 2003, Robert Jensen presents a new theory concerning channels through which gender inequalities may arise.

Although boys are more likely to die than girls worldwide, the opposite is true in many countries in Asia, North Africa and the Near East.

Many *underlying determinants* contribute to these higher rates of female infant mortality or “Excess Female Mortality” (EFM). Reasons for the “missing women” range from the low status placed on daughters and the lack of women’s property and legal rights to the costs to the family of having girls who require a dowry at the time of their marriage and who, unlike sons, leave the household at marriage, thus providing no economic support to parents in their old age.

These factors result in *proximate determinants*—direct channels—leading to EFM, including differential provision of resources, food, medical care and attention, physical mistreatment, and infanticide.

However, EFM and other differences in children’s outcomes, such as education, may arise *without* differential treatment within the household, i.e., even if

all parents treated their children equally.

Another potential effect is that couples with many children but

For couples who want male children, gender inequality and higher rates of female mortality will arise even if they treat all their children equally.

The way this occurs is through differential stopping behavior (DSB). If parents have a preference for sons, they may continue having children until they have a desired number of sons. As a result, girls will always have more siblings than boys on average. The simplest demonstration is to suppose that all parents prefer one child but also prefer a boy. If they have a boy, they stop; if they have a girl, they continue and have just one more child and then stop. In this scenario, all girls will have one sibling, whereas some boys will have no siblings. Where parents have to divide up scarce household resources, having more siblings means poorer health and less education for each child. So, even if all parents treated their sons and daughters equally, girls would still be worse off on average because, on average, they are sharing resources with more siblings.

These effects can be large, since in India, the average girl has about .3 to .5 more siblings than the average boy. Girls in India are thus effectively sharing resources with almost an extra half a sibling because of the strong preference to have sons.

few boys will not wait long after the birth of a girl before having another child. This “differential spacing behavior” may result in shorter breastfeeding for girls (especially for those with few brothers), since many women use breastfeeding as a means of contraception. Where there are few adequate surrogates for breast-milk (which is sterile, nutritionally complete, and endowed with immunological properties), shorter breastfeeding increases the likelihood of mortality.

Combining his own surveys with the Demographic Health Surveys and the Survey of Aging in Rural India, Jensen concludes that, overall, about 30% of the gender gap in education and 40% of EFM can be explained by family size differentials. Understanding the mechanisms through which gender disparities arise is critical to the design of interventions to address these problems. Interventions that affect son preferences may also affect gender inequalities (e.g., old age insurance, and marriage/property/inheritance laws). Those that do not address differential stopping and spacing behavior may not be completely effective.