

The WomanStats Project Database: Advancing an Empirical Research Agenda*

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This article describes the WomanStats Project Database – a multidisciplinary creation of a central repository for cross-national data and information on women available for use by academics, policy-makers, journalists, and all others. WomanStats is freely accessible online, thus facilitating worldwide scholarship on issues with gendered aspects. WomanStats contains over 260 variables for 174 countries and their attendant subnational divisions (where such information is available) and currently contains over 68,000 individual data points. WomanStats provides nuanced data on the situation and status of women internationally and in so doing facilitates the current trend to disaggregate analyses. This article introduces the dataset, which is now publicly available, describes its creation, discusses its utility, and uses measures of association and mapping to draw attention to theoretically interesting patterns

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Ruth Silver. The WomanStats Database and codebook, containing specific coding rules and variable information, are available at <http://www.womanstats.org> and <http://www.womanstats.org/Codebook7.30.07.htm>. Intercoder reliability checks average 80–85%. Replication data for the analysis in this article is posted at <http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets>. Correspondence: mcapriol@d.umn.edu.

concerning the various dimensions of women's inequality that are worthy of further exploration. Two of nine variables clusters are introduced – women's physical security and son preference/sex ratio. The authors confirm the multidimensionality of women's status and show that the impact of democracy and state wealth vary based on the type of violence against women. Overall, the authors find a high level of violence against women worldwide.

Introduction

This data report describes the WomanStats Project Database – a multidisciplinary creation of a central repository for cross-national data and information on women freely available. Researchers seeking to study gender inequality are often faced with a dearth of meaningful and useful data to capture the myriad aspects of women's experiences. Nuanced data on the situation and status of women internationally is available only by scavenger hunt. Several important obstacles bar the path:

- The data desired may exist, but may be scattered in disparate and/or obscure reports, most of which are in hard copy text format only.
- The data may not exist at all. This may be because the country is in shambles (e.g. Somalia); or it may be because national or other sources do not collect data on certain phenomena (e.g. marital rape, which is considered an oxymoronic concept in quite a few cultures). Furthermore, finding data on the subnational differences in the status of women is often a futile endeavor.
- Issues of comparability and standardization plague any attempt to gauge the status of women in a cross-national sense. For example, in country A, literacy may be defined as having the ability to write one's name; in country B, having three years of primary schooling; and in country C, having five years of schooling.
- Various political agendas may contaminate data on the status of women. For example, the CEDAW Report (Convention

on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Report) submitted by the government of North Korea, depicts a paradise for women. But NGO reports can be equally suspect, for their agenda may be embarrassment of the regime. As a result, one may find profoundly contradictory assessments of the status of women in particular states.

- Useful reports are found in many different languages.

For all these reasons, investigation into the status of women has usually relied on a very small set of indices and single indicators – less than a half dozen – that are viewed as being relatively comparable and uncontaminated.

Existing Indices of Women's Status

Two of the most extensively used indices are GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) and GDI (Gender Development Index). These oft-used indices, though pioneering, still leave much to be desired. GEM (UNDP, 2006) was created in an attempt to measure the relative power of women and men in political and economic life. It is a composite index of women's percentage share of administrative and managerial positions; women's percentage share of professional and technical jobs; and women's percentage share of parliamentary seats. GDI was created as a gender sensitive measure of the Human Development Index (HDI) by combining into an equally distributed index both male and female longevity (life expectancy at birth), knowledge (adult literacy rate, and combined primary, secondary, and

tertiary gross enrollment ratio), and a decent standard of living (GDP per capita in purchasing power parity US dollars) (UNDP, 2006). Thus, GEM attempts to capture women's political, economic, and social participation, whereas GDI measures the average achievement of a country in basic human capabilities for both men and women.

Charmes & Wieringa (2003) provide a thorough critique of both GEM and GDI. In particular, they address three problems related to issues of validity: (1) the indices' dependence on GDP, (2) the limited conceptualization of gender, and (3) issues of reliability concerning the individual measures that comprise the index. They argue that GDI is not exclusively a measure of gender inequality, but rather of general welfare, because GDI also includes the absolute level of well-being. As Moez (1997) points out, GDI decreases when achievement levels of both men and women decrease *and* when the difference in their level of achievement increases.

GEM can also be critiqued for its shortcomings as a measure of gender equality, in part because absolute levels of income, rather than gender sensitive levels, influence the income component of GEM. Charmes & Wieringa (2003) also note that GEM does not incorporate issues related to the body and sexuality; to religious, cultural, and legal issues; to ethics, women's rights, and care. In highlighting an additional bias within GEM, Pillarisetti & McGillivray (1998) point out that GEM does not address the issue of power over resources (particularly in states with small organized manufacturing sectors as found in many developing countries), or variations within the state.

The inadequacies of GEM and GDI lead Charmes & Wieringa (2003: 433) to conclude with the example of Barbados where 'Women's advances in education and work are seen by men as the reasons for the poor performance of boys in schools and other

problems men face, giving rise to a wave of misogyny.'

In addition to GEM and GDI, the CIRI Human Rights Dataset (Cingranelli & Richards, 2006) includes three indices of women's rights – four-point indices of women's political rights, women's economic rights, and women's social rights. Although CIRI is to be commended for including gender-sensitive indicators in its dataset, it is designed to capture the stance taken by the government, *not the actual situation of women in the country*. The measures are not sensitive to variations within the state – particularly those caused by social limitations, such as ignorance and social pressure to conform. To the extent that the women's political rights index relies on some of the single-indicator variables listed above in connection with GEM and GDI, particularly on percentage of women in the legislature and in other high-ranking government, the index suffers from the same limitations.

As with the CIRI women's political rights index, the women's economic rights index does not capture the social pressure and ignorance that can prevent women from attempting to apply for positions within the formal labor sector, thus remaining an invisible discrimination that never triggers a state response to laws should they exist. The coding scheme for the CIRI women's social rights index underscores its focus on state laws. Specifically, the rules instruct coders to 'Ignore any mention in the USSD reports of domestic violence, trafficking and prostitution, sexual harassment, honor killings, dowry deaths, and rape' (Cingranelli & Richards, 2004: 40). In other words, women might be routinely violated in any number of ways that could include murder, and yet this would not be factored into the CIRI index for women's social rights. In short, CIRI's focus is on state law, not women's equality. This explanation is not meant to fault the CIRI effort but rather to more fully explicate

that CIRI's focus is on state law, not women's reality. Researchers desiring indicators of the latter must search further.

The WomanStats Database

The members of the WomanStats Board of Directors have published widely on issues relating to gender inequality and its impact on international conflict and peace (Ballif-Spanvill, Clayton & Hendrix, 2007; Caprioli, 2005; Caprioli & Boyer, 2001; Caprioli et al., 2007; Caprioli & Douglass, 2008; Caprioli & Trumbore, 2007; McDermott & Cowden, 2002; McDermott et al., 2007; Hudson & Den Boer, 2004).

We have developed the WomanStats Database to advance our empirical research agenda linking the security of women to the security of states and to provide more, and more detailed data. And WomanStats goes a long way towards addressing all of the aforementioned obstacles and issues and includes data on a range of issues including social, legal, economic, physical security, and health, among others.

WomanStats includes over 260 variables collected for each of 174 countries (those countries with populations greater than 200,000) and their attendant subnational divisions (where such information is available), and it currently contains over 68,000 individual data points. WomanStats is organized around nine conceptual clusters related to the security of women:

- (1) Women's physical security
- (2) Women's economic security
- (3) Women's legal security
- (4) Women's security in the community
- (5) Women's security in the family
- (6) Security for maternity
- (7) Women's security through voice
- (8) Security through societal investment in women
- (9) Women's security in the state

Realizing the frequent discrepancy between rhetoric, law, and practice, we seek data on three aspects of each variable – practice/custom, law, and data. For example, when examining the phenomenon of rape, we collect data not only on the incidence of rape and laws concerning rape, but also custom and practice concerning rape. So, WomanStats provides answers to such questions as: Are rapes generally reported? Why or why not? Is a woman who had been raped typically subject to reprisal by her family or clan? Is she eligible for marriage? Is rape of the wife grounds for divorce by the husband? Is rape sometimes sanctioned, as in the practice of capture marriage, etc.? How does a woman prove rape in a court of law in her country? Are there other barriers to enforcement of the law, such as low conviction rates? In the WomanStats database, there are 11 variables on rape alone.

Still other practical concerns include the often stark discrepancy between what is legal and what is widely practiced in society, the most prominent example being noteworthy rates of female infanticide and selective female fetus abortion in nations such as China and India, where both practices are technically illegal. The WomanStats database, with its array of law, practice, and data variables, is uniquely capable of detecting such theoretically important discrepancies. Where available, WomanStats attempts to capture important subnational variations – variations which conflict scholars recognize as they begin to disaggregate their analyses, for example linking geographic factors such as terrain and natural resources to civil war at sub-national levels (Buhaug & Lujala, 2005). WomanStats can improve such analyses. The state of Kerala in India, for instance, has significantly higher female life expectancy figures than other Indian states such as the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. And rates of female circumcision differ greatly according to region in states such as Tanzania.

One of the strengths of our effort is that we are consulting sources, including country experts that are not already included in the major datasets such as Wistat, CEDAW, and the State Department's Human Rights Reports. We also extract information from non-official sources as well, such as the important Shadow CEDAWs produced by various nongovernmental organizations. WomanStats details the source of data for each data point. Data sources already coded include the four just mentioned, as well as the GEM, GDI, World Value Survey, OECD data, the CIA Factbook, UNICEF, WHO, Save the Children, UNESCO, and other UN reports (such as those on Economic and Social Rights, Civil and Political Rights, etc.), DHS, RHS – to date, over 500 sources have already been extracted. In all these ways, this dataset is already unlike any other existing dataset on the status of women in the world today.

WomanStats includes both statistical and qualitative data, to give voice to the experiences of real women in the context of their culture. Tickner (2005) and others have argued for the necessity of recording information about women in a non-quantitative fashion. The WomanStats Database includes interview and survey responses, expert interpretations, first-hand accounts, journalistic reports, and other qualitative information that adds nuance and depth to any analysis of the situation of women within a society. The qualitative data beyond its usefulness in qualitative analyses is a crucial supplement to quantitative studies as well. In an analysis of the effect of military intervention on women's status, Caprioli & Douglass (2008) use the WomanStats qualitative data to illustrate the violence and inequality women experience within the states examined as a supplement to the statistical analysis.

WomanStats has the potential to track change over time, though the data are not currently longitudinal. Though most of the data

are currently from the time period 2000–06, we are coding 2007 sources at this time, and we have quite a few data points of historical interest from the 1990s. Several variables of longstanding interest have been back-coded to 1990, such as representation of women in parliament and fertility rates, and over time these will be coded as far back as data are available. Given that the pace of social change tends to be quite slow (Eckstein, 1988), WomanStats data can appropriately be used to examine longer time frames than 2000–06. It is our aim to continue not only with updating the database, but also to continue to back-code data as well, thus offering the potential for longitudinal analysis in the future.

Our philosophy of data compilation is worth a brief discussion. We are not interested in providing a database that consists solely of numbers. We are also not in a position to adjudicate all issues of data validity. Our philosophy is that the WomanStats Database will compile existing data from *credentialed* sources, and the user of the database will bear the responsibility of deciding the parameters of that use. We provide what we call 'semi-raw' data, which includes direct quotes from textual sources, statistics when provided, and even qualitative experiential data from the lives of women. We will extract information regardless of the level of measurement precision of that information. We also strive to triangulate data in every instance; that is, we search for multiple data sources for each cell of the database. In this way, we hope to address serious issues of validity that arise when discussing information on the status of women. True, we feel the data are most useful when processed – our research team has already constructed several ordinal indices from information provided in the database, and some of the results of those scaling exercises can be found both in the database and also in visual form under 'The Maps' link on the website. However, we feel it is incumbent upon users of the database to create and

scale their own indices, as well. The creation of this dataset enhances the infrastructure necessary for research, teaching, and learning on this important subject to advance more swiftly.

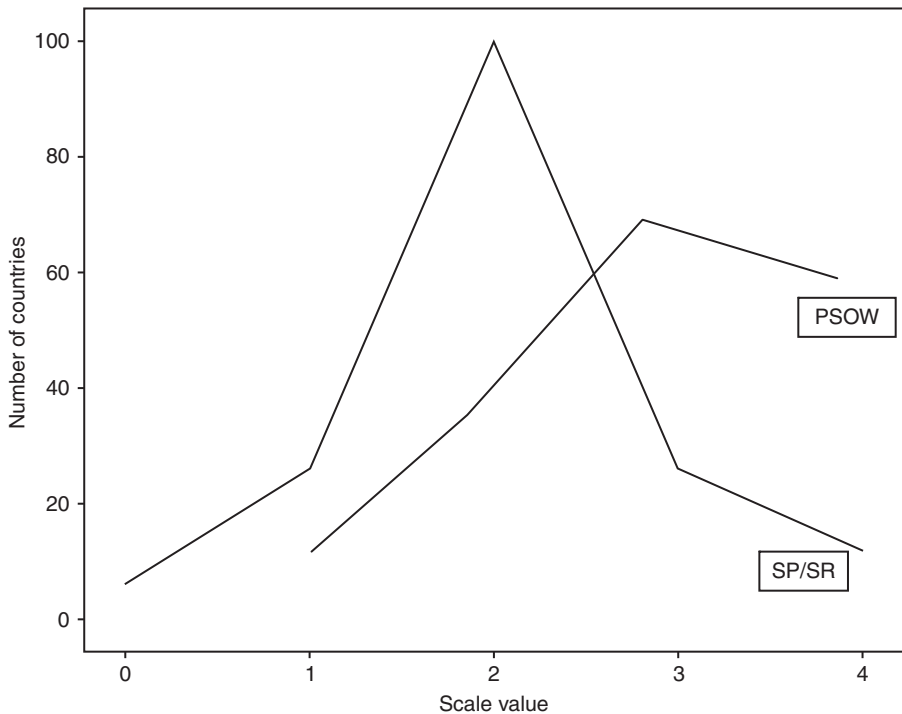
WomanStats: Some Preliminary Data, Views, and Analysis

To show, for example, how a research agenda investigating the relationship between women’s security and state security cross-nationally can be pursued by means of WomanStats, we will use two of our newly created five-point ordinal scales – Women’s Physical Security and Son Preference/Sex Ratio, both scaled for 2006 (see Figure 1 for their distribution).

Women’s Physical Security Cluster

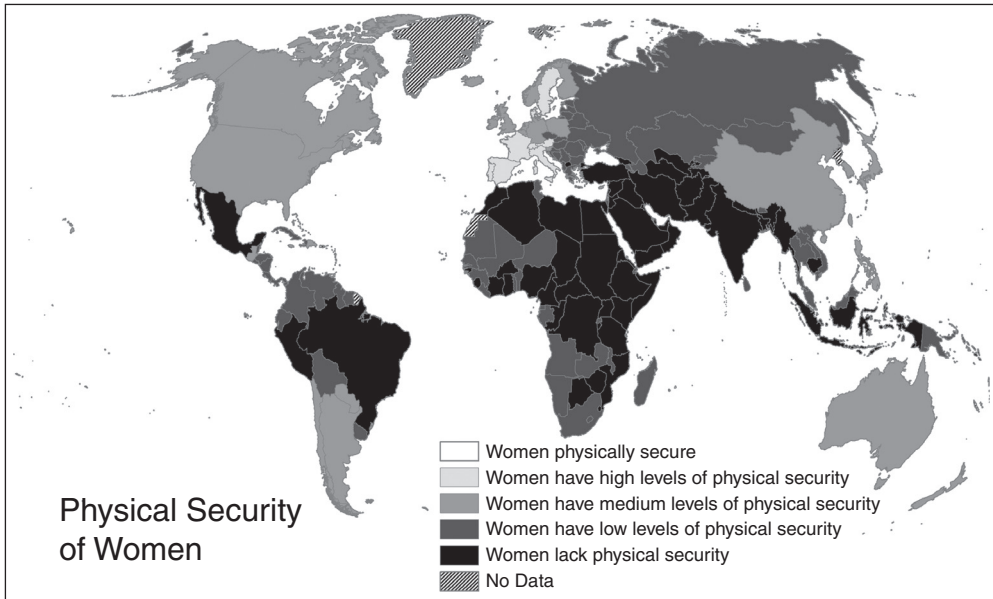
As theory linking women’s equality and state behavior is often based on violence against women, a new variable capturing violence against women in cross-national perspective seems particularly apropos. ‘The cook knows salt, the composer strings, and the gardener soil; the war scholar should know gender’ (Goldstein, 2001: 408). The WomanStats physical security cluster includes the following variables with measures for law, practice, and prevalence: domestic violence, rape, marital rape, and murder. Foremost, we chose these measures for theoretical reasons, the prominence of these measures in scholarly work, the level of data precision, and data coverage. These indicators of violence against women are combined into a

Figure 1. WomanStats Physical Security Cluster (PSOW) and Son Preference/Sex Ratio Distribution (SPSR), 2006



PSOW	Secure	High security	Medium security	Low security	No security
SP/SR	No preference	Limited preference	Common preference	Universal preference	Intense preference
	Normal ratio	Normal ratio	Normal ratio	Abnormal ratio	Extremely abnormal

Figure 2. Physical Security of Women Cluster



single indicator, Women's Physical Security, coded¹ as follows:

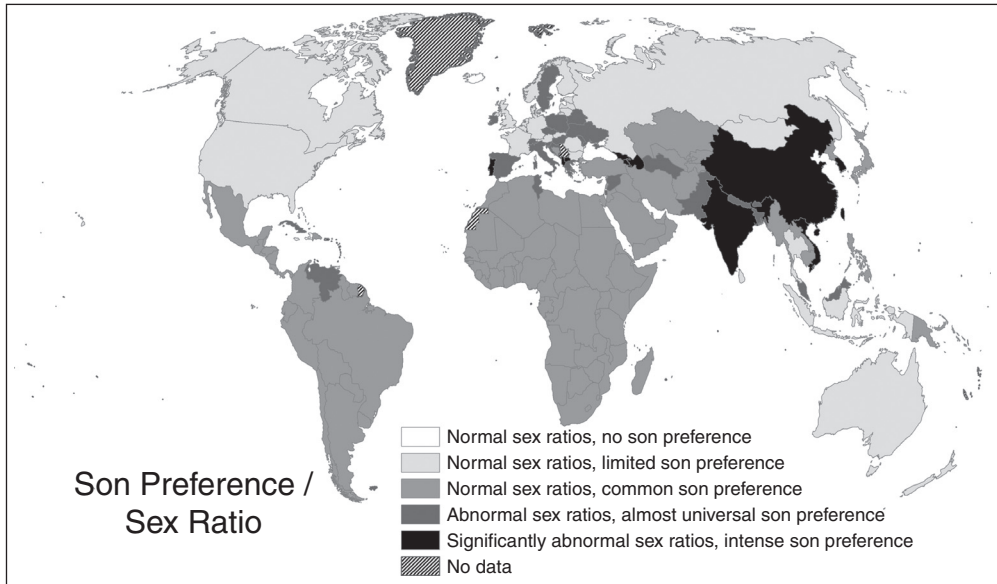
- 0 – Laws protecting women's physical security exist, are enforced, and crimes, which are rare, are reported.
- 1 – Laws protecting women's physical security exist and are generally enforced. Crimes against women are less likely to be reported.
- 2 – Laws protecting women's physical security exist and are sporadically enforced. Crimes against women are common and rarely reported.
- 3 – Laws protecting women's physical security, but not necessarily marital rape, exist but are rarely enforced. Crimes against women affect a majority of women though honor killings are rare.
- 4 – Laws protecting women's physical security are nonexistent or weak, and these laws are not generally enforced. Honor killings may occur and are either ignored or generally accepted.

¹ See WomanStats codebook for detailed coding rules.

No country achieved the highest ranking of 'women physically secure'. In the second highest category (women have high levels of physical security) 10 of the 11 countries are Western European, with Mauritius being the single outlier. The two lowest categories, in which women have limited or no physical security, are clustered primarily across the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, the former Communist bloc, and most of Latin America. Tunisia is a step above other Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa, and Guatemala – at the same ranking as the United States – is a rank above its Central America neighbors to the south and two ranks above Mexico to the north. Regional patterns obviously exist, but there are regional exceptions, as well, where some countries appear able to rise above the perceived confines of their cultural milieu.

The average Physical Security Cluster score for all states in 2006 is 3.02 – a score that highlights the widespread and persistent violence perpetrated against women worldwide. The majority of women live in

Figure 3. Son Preference/Sex Ratio Cluster



countries where laws prohibiting violence against women are either nonexistent or unenforced, and where social norms do not define domestic violence, rape, and even murder as reportable crimes. Furthermore, many of these women live in ostensibly democratic states. Beyond governmental abuse that women and men share, women's rights are disproportionately either ignored by state laws, as for example by the lack of marital rape laws, or are the target of such laws, as was the case with the infamous *zina* laws in Pakistan (modified in 2006). It is difficult to fathom women's lack of physical security, the extent of violence that women experience daily – a violence that pollutes the personal, cultural, and state environments for the majority of women throughout the world. In short, there is no safe haven for women when violence and the threat of violence permeate the whole of women's existence.

Son Preference/Sex Ratio

As with the Physical Security Cluster, our indicator of son preference and sex ratio

indicates the relative valuation given male life and female life; in its aspect of sex ratio, it is also an indicator of violence against women. Son Preference/Sex Ratio is coded² as follows:

- 0 – There is no son preference and no abnormality in sex ratios.
- 1 – Although a minority expresses son preference, sex ratios remain normal.
- 2 – Though son preference is prevalent, there is no enactment of that preference, so sex ratios are normal.
- 3 – There is almost universal son preference resulting in abnormal childhood sex ratios.
- 4 – There is intense son preference with heavily skewed abnormalities in childhood sex ratios.

The low preference for and vulnerable status of girls (both before and after birth) in China, India, and surrounding states is well illustrated in the sex ratio rankings and map.

² See WomanStats codebook for detailed coding rules.

Curiously, Catholic Portugal and Muslim Azerbaijan are at the same low rank as several Confucian countries (including Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore) and Hindu India. The second to lowest rank includes several Western European countries—notably Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland, which were among the highest ranked in the previously discussed ranking. The middle ranking status, which may be linked to specific prohibition of female infanticide by the Prophet Mohammed, of the Middle East in terms of sex ratio is a significant divergence from the other scale. Iceland and five Caribbean countries rank at the top, with the most normal sex ratios and no noted preference for sons. In fact, a comparison of the Physical Security index map and the Son Preference/Sex Ratio index map is perplexing: why is there so little correlation between levels of violence against women as adults and levels of violence against women as neonates?

The average Son Preference/Sex Ratio for all states in 2006 is 2.07, indicating a general, globalized son preference. A skewed sex ratio also results from high maternal death rates and higher than average death rates of women and girls from lower relative caloric intake and gender restricted access to medical care. Globally, male offspring are valued more highly than female offspring. However, since the average is 2.07 on a scale of 0–4, this generalized son preference appears not to necessarily result in female infanticide or sex-selective abortion in most states. Nevertheless, the lack of value societies hold for women penetrates every aspect of their daily lives, thus both perpetuating the cycle of gendered violence (see Caprioli, 2005) and resulting in their own diminished sense of self.

Son Preference/Sex Ratio is not necessarily associated with violent practices against adult women. This highlights the crucial importance of using a multivariate approach to assess the status of women. Just as different cultures vary in the way they perpetuate

violence against women, this violence against women varies across the lifespan from the fetus to the widow. Practices such as female infanticide and passive neglect may strike at women in their earliest years, whereas practices such as dowry deaths may affect young adult women, and other practices such as inheriting of widows or the turning out of widows may occur later in life.

Bivariate Correlational Analysis

As the distributions and maps visually highlight, both WomanStats clusters represent various facets of women’s equality and capture different pieces of the puzzle. Table I provides a number of correlations to complement the maps. Specifically, we correlate both WomanStats clusters with

Table I. Correlation Between Two WomanStats Clusters with Other Variables

	<i>Physical security cluster</i>	<i>Son preference/sex ratio</i>
Women in labor force (%) ¹	-0.339**	-0.077
Women in legislature (%) ²	-0.349**	-0.029
Fertility rate ³	0.456**	-0.081
Democracy ⁴	-0.603**	-0.188*
GDP per capita ⁵	-0.591**	-0.136
GEM	-0.714**	-0.220
GDI	-0.613**	-0.071
CIRI Women’s Economic Rights	-0.493**	-0.123
CIRI Women’s Political Rights	-0.468**	-0.099
CIRI Women’s Social Rights	-0.671**	0.128

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$. N ranges from 70 (GEM and GDI) to 169.

¹ World Bank (2005).

² Lower house (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2007).

³ World Bank (2005).

⁴ Polity2 variable, Polity IV dataset (Marshall & Jaggers, 2002).

⁵ World Bank (2005).

GEM, GDI, and the three CIRI measures of women's equality and then correlate each cluster with the most frequently used single measures of women's equality – percentage of women in the labor force, percentage of women in the legislature (lower house), and fertility rate.

The correlations between our Physical Security Cluster and Son Preference/Sex Ratio Cluster highlight the variation in the type of women's inequality within states. Son Preference/Sex Ratio is not correlated with the WomanStats Physical Security Cluster. Though female infanticide and sex-selective abortions certainly qualify as violence against women, the norms legitimizing violence against adult women seem to be different from those justifying violence against the female child and fetus.

Democracy and GDP per capita correlate with the WomanStats Physical Security Cluster, thus suggesting that women tend to fare better in wealthy democratic regimes. In contrast, the Son Preference/Sex Ratio cluster is not correlated with GDP per capita and only minimally associated with democracy. When controlling for GDP per capita, the impact of democracy on the Physical Security Cluster is reduced by roughly 23%, and the correlation between democracy and Son Preference/Sex Ratio loses its statistical significance. Similarly, when controlling for democracy, the impact of GDP per capita on women's physical security decreases by about 23% and the correlation with son preference remains insignificant. Thus, it appears that the combination of wealth and democracy best protects women from violence. What remains unclear, however, is whether democracy and wealth predispose a society toward better treatment of women; or whether the better treatment of women predisposes a society toward democracy and prosperity. Even if one chose the former interpretation, an increase in GDP per capita and strengthening of democracy would better ameliorate

women's physical security than it would norms relating to son preference.

When comparing the WomanStats clusters to percentage of women in the labor force, percentage of women in the legislature (lower house), and fertility rate, we find that the Sex Ratio/ Son Preference Cluster is not correlated with any of these measures. On the other hand, the Physical Security Cluster is correlated with all three individual measures, though the association is relatively small. In general, states with higher levels of violence against women are more likely to have lower levels of women in the labor force and women in the legislature. When women have lower levels of physical security and thus less control over their own bodies, their fertility rate increases. Indeed, the correlation between Women's Physical Security and fertility rate is 46%. This association highlights the strength of fertility rate as a proxy measure for norms supporting violence against women, though clearly the measure falls far short in capturing the totality of this dimension of women's equality.

The lack of statistical significance for the correlations between Son Preference and GEM, GDI, and all three CIRI measures of women's rights further distinguishes this measure of violence against women. Given the security implications of having skewed sex ratios in favor of men (Hudson & Den Boer, 2004), scholars and policymakers should take heed. The Physical Security Cluster is statistically correlated with GEM, GDI, and all three CIRI measures of women's rights, with the highest substantive impact with GEM, closely followed by the correlation with the CIRI Women's Social Rights measure. GEM seems to be a better measure of women's physical security rather than a general measure of gender equality. A comparison of the top scoring³

³ For WomanStats Physical Security Cluster scoring 1 (11 states); WomanStats Son Preference scoring 0 (6 states); GEM scoring > .8 (12 states); CIRI Women's Social Rights scoring 3 (15 states).

states in each measure reveals little commonality. For instance, Sweden is among the most gender-equal states in terms of Women's Physical Security, GEM, and the CIRI Women's Social Equality measure. Iceland is located in the top-ranking gender equality states according to Son Preference, GEM, and the CIRI women's social equality measure and is the only state Son Preference shares with the other measures. Otherwise, the measures differ in their rankings, with Women's Physical Security sharing five states in common with the CIRI women's social equality measure; and four, with GEM. The United States appears only on the GEM list; and the United Kingdom, only on the CIRI women's social equality measure.

Measures of gender equality need to capture both de jure and de facto aspects of women's inequality. This discrepancy has been a focus for WomanStats, with its multiple variables assessing the legal and customary environment surrounding women's equality. The relatively low level of correlation between the single indicators of women's equality and the WomanStats clustered scales may well be explained by the clusters' unique attention to law and practice, which capture underlying societal norms. This may also explain the lack of association between the WomanStats Son Preference/Sex Ratio cluster and percentage of women in the legislature, fertility rate, and percentage of women in the labor force, as the WomanStats cluster measures custom/practice rather than legal status, for in no state is female infanticide legal.

Concluding Thoughts

The WomanStats Database is a powerful new tool to explore propositions regarding gender issues. WomanStats is already the most comprehensive compilation of information on the status of women in the world today, with over 260 variables for 174 countries, and is

a new and important resource for capturing the situation of women worldwide. Our exploratory analysis, using only a fraction of the variables in the database, has already produced some significant findings worthy of further investigation. Using WomanStats, we systematically assess and visually highlight the secondary status of women worldwide. The inferior status of women is evidenced through violence and female infanticide, often perpetrated without repercussion. Not only do cultural norms of shame and silence, coupled with the inferior status of women, protect the perpetrators, countries often look the other way or blatantly refuse to take action.

Because of these sobering and important findings, it is our hope that the WomanStats database will become a tool oft-used by researchers, policymakers, and advocates in order to gain a deeper understanding of women's experience and how it relates to issues of central concern in international politics, including representation, violence and war, and in turn, to facilitate holistic theory and policy. As previously noted, the database facilitates multiple analytic methods, including interpretive, case study, and quantitative analyses. This database offers scholars an important new tool by means of which novel theoretical questions can be raised and existing theoretical questions can be addressed in fresh and perhaps more meaningful ways.

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