

Measuring Patriarchy: Meso-level Variations in the Strength of Patriarchy in Sub-Saharan Africa

Presenter: Ajit Zacharias, Levy Institute

Our work builds on the work of historians of family and feminist theorists and hypothesizes that patriarchy at the meso- or community level is a social force that operates in multiple and interdependent dimensions. One dimension relates to the objective factors that describe the living arrangements (e.g., the prevalence of patrilocality) and marriage patterns (e.g., the median age of first marriage among ever-married individuals) in the community. The ideological dimension consists of the dominant values or perceptions that the community holds regarding gender roles and attitudes. For example, most individuals may believe that it is never justifiable for a man to be given priority over a woman in obtaining higher education regardless of their aptitude or credentials. Finally, there are forms of individual or collective action that can strengthen or weaken patriarchy (e.g., the incidence of domestic violence or the percentage of women belonging to a women's organization advocating equal rights in the community).

We have completed the construction of the measures that belong to the objective domain. Public-use microdata (1-in-10 sample) from the national censuses made available by the University of Minnesota was utilized for this purpose by constructing composite indices for the regions of each country (Ethiopia 2007; Ghana 2010; Mali 2009; South Africa 2009; and Tanzania 2012). We have also estimated measures for the ideological domain. Our data for this exercise came from the Afrobarometer surveys (Ethiopia 2013; Mali 2018; and Tanzania 2017) and World Values Survey (Ghana 2007; South Africa 2013). We used latent variable modeling to construct our measures of ideology. Our findings so far indicate that regional variations in the strength of patriarchal structures and ideology are considerable. Interestingly, generational domination is equally important as male domination in determining the strength patriarchal structures in all the countries studied. We also find that there is a positive association between the strength of structures and strength of ideology (e.g., the Upper West and Upper East regions in Ghana). However, the relationship appears to be complex: regions that show the greatest strength of structure sometimes show the least strength of ideology. Factors related to agency may mediate the relationship between structures and ideology. Our next phase of research on this topic focuses on estimating region-level measures of agency utilizing the demographic and health surveys as well as national sources of data.