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# **Gender in Economics: From Survival to Career Opportunities**

Gender inequality goes beyond discrimination and sexism. It is also a matter of efficiency and development, and therefore, the socioeconomic losses that result from such inequality must be acknowledged and tackled. This policy brief summarizes the presentations held during the 6<sup>th</sup> SITE Academic Conference at the Stockholm School of Economics on December 17-18 2018. The event brought together scholars from around the world to examine existing forms of gender inequality, its causes, consequences, and policy interventions through a series of keynote speeches, research presentations and panel discussions.



## Gender and survival

The reality of gender inequality is diverse throughout the world. The extent to which women and men face different opportunities and reach different outcomes vary substantially across countries and regions, and the forms of inequality that women face also vary geographically.

While richer countries have mostly closed their gender gaps in health and education, in other parts of the globe women are still struggling to survive, to make their marriage and reproductive choices freely, and to achieve the same educational opportunities as men. This is exactly where modern economic research can facilitate the understanding of the roots of such inequalities in each society, as well as the most likely drivers of change.

Corno, Hildebrandt and Voena (2017) show that in Sub-Saharan Africa and India, the age of marriage is a result of short-term changes in economic conditions (such as a reduction in crop yields due to droughts). Therefore, through for instance insurance mechanisms and temporary transfers, economic policy can influence marriage markets and the age of marriage. Relatedly, according to Ashraf, Bau, Nunn and Voena (2018), a girl in Indonesia or Zambia has a higher probability of being educated if she belongs to a group practicing bride price, defined as the “price” paid by a groom or his family to the bride’s family. This means that marriage markets could be a driver of educational investment. Cousin marriage is another issue within this context. Edlund (2018) suggests that this system serves as a barrier for economic growth by favoring men over women, the old over the young, and the collective over the individual. In general, challenging these marriage systems and improving female economic opportunities require a deeper understanding of the economic role of traditional cultural norms and institutions.

Some groups of women struggle for survival even in the so called “developed world”, being victims of gender violence. Sex workers in the United

States are a particularly vulnerable population in this matter. Cunningham, DeAngelo and Tripp (2017) point out that, given that prostitution in most cities of the US isn’t only illegal, but also very dangerous (recording the highest homicide rate of any female occupation), it is critical to improve sex workers’ safety. Craigslist Erotic Services (CES) seemed to have contributed to it, by reducing female homicide rates by 17.4%. Apparently, this was a result of street prostitutes moving indoors and being able to filter clients to be safer. It is, therefore, suggested that the closure of such a platform put sex workers in an even more vulnerable position. Similarly, when it comes to adult entertainment establishments and its relation to sex crimes, Ciacci and Sviatschi (2018) argue that this type of businesses helps decrease daily sex crimes between 7-13% in the precinct where they are located.

When discussing approaches to prostitution, the “Nordic Model” has been highly praised and adopted by several countries. The term refers to a reform initiated in Sweden that considers buying sex a criminal offense, while decriminalizing those who are prostituted. However, preliminary results from Perrotta Berlin, Spagnolo, Immordino and Russo (2018) suggest that intimate partner violence and violence against women might have increased because of its enactment in Sweden.

Gender violence, however, isn’t only domestic or affecting sex workers. Borker (2018) claims that, in India, female college students are willing to choose less prestigious universities, to make additional expenses and to spend more time on transportation than their male counterparts only to avoid harassment on the street or public transportation. Street harassment, therefore, perpetuates gender inequality in both education and potentially the labor market.

## Challenging social norms

As already seen, even the most gender-equal countries still suffer from persistent forms of inequality that need to be acknowledged and



tackled. Doing so will result both in fairer societies and in more efficient economies, because it will make full use of both halves of the world's skills and knowledge.

Friebel, Auriol and Wilhelm (2018) state that, in Europe, it is harder for women to make a career in economics. The representation of women in academics is low, and the higher ranked the university, the lower is the representation. This could be a consequence of several issues, one of them being the "glass ceiling".

The glass ceiling, according to Bertrand (2017), is the phenomenon by which women remain underrepresented in high-level occupations, and earn less. Even in countries such as Denmark and Sweden, women still receive less for the same jobs. There are many potential explanations for this. One of them refers to the gender differences in psychological attributes in work, such as the idea of women performing worse under pressure or being unwilling to compete. This interpretation ultimately falls under the nature vs nurture discussion and only accounts for up to 10% of the pay gap. Another reason states that women suffer the penalties associated with demanding more flexibility. Such demand comes from the need to perform non-market work, like domestic work and, especially, caring for children. This means that women, especially the more educated ones, are paying a disproportionate price in the labor market for raising a couple's children. Giving women more flexibility won't crack the glass ceiling, *au contraire*, it will backfire because flexibility is negatively priced in the market. Besides, it doesn't address the earning gaps. A more compelling proposal is to shift the focus from increasing flexibility to changing social norms and gender role attitudes. Normalizing and encouraging paternal child care in workplaces, for example, could be a way to do so.

Social norms based on traditional gender stereotypes also seem to be the reason why in Sweden, promotions to top jobs dramatically increase women's probability of divorce but do not affect men's marriages, as reported by Folke and

Rickne (2018). In this case, promoting norms and policies with a more gender-equal approach to couple formation could increase the share of women in top jobs.

Given the importance of social norms, understanding how they can change is crucial. In Saudi Arabia, two studies were conducted on the influence of misperceived social norms. Both showed that the low-cost intervention of simply providing information could make a big difference. In one case, Bursztyn, González and Yanagizawa-Drott (2018) have evidenced that most young married men privately support female labor force participation (FLFP) outside of home. Nevertheless, they tend to underestimate the level of support for FLFP by other men. When correcting those misperceptions, the men's willingness to let their wives join the labor force increases. Comparably, Ganguli and Zafar (2018) have shown that there is an increased likelihood of working full-time for female students when they, along with their close circles, receive information about the labor market and the aspirations of other women peers.

Challenging social norms isn't only beneficial when discussing the glass ceiling and FLFP, it also has the potential to improve public health. In fact, Milazzo (2018) argues that women's increased mortality rate in India can be an unintended consequence of son preference. Son preference induces women with a first-born daughter to adopt behaviors that increase the risk of maternal morbidity and mortality. Therefore, interventions to change deeply rooted social norms such as the boy preference could significantly reduce maternal mortality risk.

## Bridging research and policy

In Malawi, research by Perrotta Berlin, Bonnier and Olofsgård (2017) on aid project location suggests that proximity to aid has a positive effect on the lives of women and children. Likewise, Goldstein (2018) reports that the World Bank's Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents



(ELA) program in Uganda has also led to positive reproductive outcomes and income effects. These results illustrate the importance of reducing the divide between research and policy. Research has the potential of serving as an instrument for informed policy-making and aid intervention.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), for instance, applies research to create tools that help improve economic and social well-being. Two of those tools are the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Gender Equality Policy Markers. On one hand, Missika (2018) explains that the SIGI is a cross-country measure of discriminatory social institutions against women and girls. Though the progress is slow (it might take around 200 years to close the gender gaps), its use gradually promotes the creation of locally designed solutions that, combined with adequate legislation, could enhance gender equality. On the other hand, Williams (2018) states that the DAC Gender Equality Policy Markers are meant to ensure that women have access to and benefit from finance.

Consistently, for the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), which works on behalf of the Swedish government, gender equality is a priority that permeates its interventions. In this context, the Feminist Foreign Policy has strengthened Sweden's commitment in the topic.

Prior to finalizing the conference, representatives of the FROGEE Network (Forum for Research on Gender Economics in Eastern Europe and Emerging Economies) made a short presentation about the key challenges for achieving gender equality in their countries and the research opportunities available.

Conference material, including presentations, can be found [here](#).

## Speakers at the conference

Marianne Bertrand, University of Chicago

Alessandra Voena, University of Chicago

Alessandra González, University of Chicago

Anders Olofsgård, SITE

Annamaria Milazzo, World Bank

Bathylle Missika, OECD Development Centre

Eva Johansson, SIDA

Girija Borker, World Bank

Guido Friebel, Goethe University Frankfurt

Ina Ganguli, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Johanna Rickne, Stockholm University

Lena Edlund, Columbia University

Lisa Williams-Katz, OECD

Maria Perrotta Berlin, SITE

Markus Goldstein, World Bank

Michal Myck, CenEA

Riccardo Ciacci, The University Loyola Andalucía

Scott Cunningham, Baylor University

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Williams, Lisa E. 2018. [“Financing for gender equality beyond ODA”](#). [Mimeo]





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As an Obama Foundation Scholar at the Harris School of Public Policy, her main interest is the inclusion of women in the policymaking process around sustainable development interventions.

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