

## **Using Data To Link The Status Of Women To Peace and Security**

By Sarah Friedmann, Passblue

Researchers and investigators at WomanStats have created one of the most comprehensive databases on the status of women around the world, and are assessing how these data points can help explain the behavior and security of a state.

IN 2001, A pair of academics at Brigham Young University in Utah aimed to identify data linking the status of women to the security and behavior of countries. Seventeen years later, what began as a single article has evolved into a vital, comprehensive global database, offering insights into women's lives in 176 countries.

Meet the WomanStats Project, with 13 principal investigators and some of the first-ever wide-ranging data in database format in the growing field of women, peace and security – legal, physical, economic and social. Innovative “ordinal scales” and other data, says the project's co-founder, Valerie Hudson, shed light on such things as the practice of polygyny, or polygamy; women's property rights; bride prices, or dowries; the prevalence and legality of cousins marrying; the phenomenon of rapists who offer to marry the women they have raped; and women's mobility in public spaces.

The information on rape, for example, features an exhaustive set of variables, starting with a given country: official and unofficial estimates of the incidence of rape, laws concerning rape, laws concerning who can testify in a rape case, estimates of the level of enforcement of rape laws within the society and across various subnational regions, customary practice after rape (ostracism, honor killings, effect on marriageability or on divorce), laws concerning abortion in the case of rape, laws on marital rape, the use of rape as a weapon by government or subnational forces and even firsthand accounts by rape victims (collected by nongovernmental organizations) of their treatment within the society. An ordinal scale of rape and sexual assault is available to compare the phenomenon cross-nationally.

Overall, the entire database draws from more than 350 variables – quantitative and qualitative – derived from statistics provided by governments, nonprofit organizations and individual experts; first-person statements and laws and similar documents.

The donor-supported database can be used by anyone, free of charge, in exchange for simply creating a log-in.

Hudson points to a range of real-world impacts sourced from the database. In 2011, the polygyny scale was used in empirical research submitted by a key expert witness, Rose McDermott, a professor at Brown University, to the Supreme Court of British Columbia, and was considered “instrumental” in the “upholding of the constitutionality of the ban on polygyny in Canada,” Hudson said.

<https://www.newsdeeply.com/peacebuilding/articles/2018/07/20/using-data-to-link-the-status-of-women-to-peace-and-security>

Yu-Ming Liou and Paul Musgrave, authors of a 2016 paper in *International Studies Quarterly*, drew from the database to better understand the paradoxical lagging behind of women's development in oil-rich countries with autocratic regimes – what is called the curse of the resource-rich.

Liou said the database “allowed us access to a broad range of measures of women's well-being that went far beyond blunt measures of formal legal rights and labor force participation,” adding that the project is “vital to researchers who want to measure and understand the forces that shape women's social, economic and political opportunities across the world.”

Kristen Yee, a senior program manager with the Criterion Institute, a finance-focused think tank based in Connecticut, similarly said that the database had been essential in the organization's work on women's economic empowerment in Southeast Asia. “Finance cares about data, particularly trend data,” Yee said. “WomanStats is an important partner in our efforts to reveal how trends in gender patterns around the world can inform calculations of risk and return over time, getting finance to take gender patterns seriously.”

The availability of reliable data has helped elevate the field of women, peace and security and make it an integral component of international affairs. Now others have been encouraged to do similar work, such as the 2017 Women, Peace and Security Index from the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security in Washington, D.C.

“I remember the days when WPS-like sentiments were dismissed by those who would say: Prove it, or come back when you have some real research findings, not just anecdotes,” Hudson said.

“Those days are long gone,” she continued. “We can now answer questions that we never even could ask before because there wasn't any data.”