Gender

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A journey into the life of Aisha
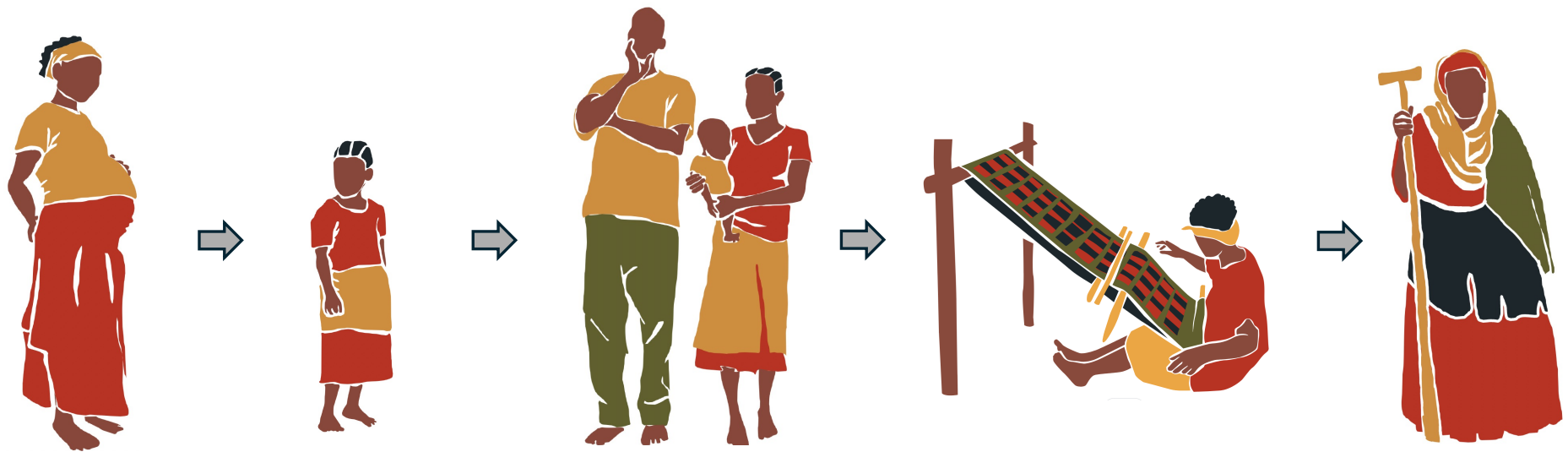
How will Aisha's life differ from the one she would have if she were a boy?
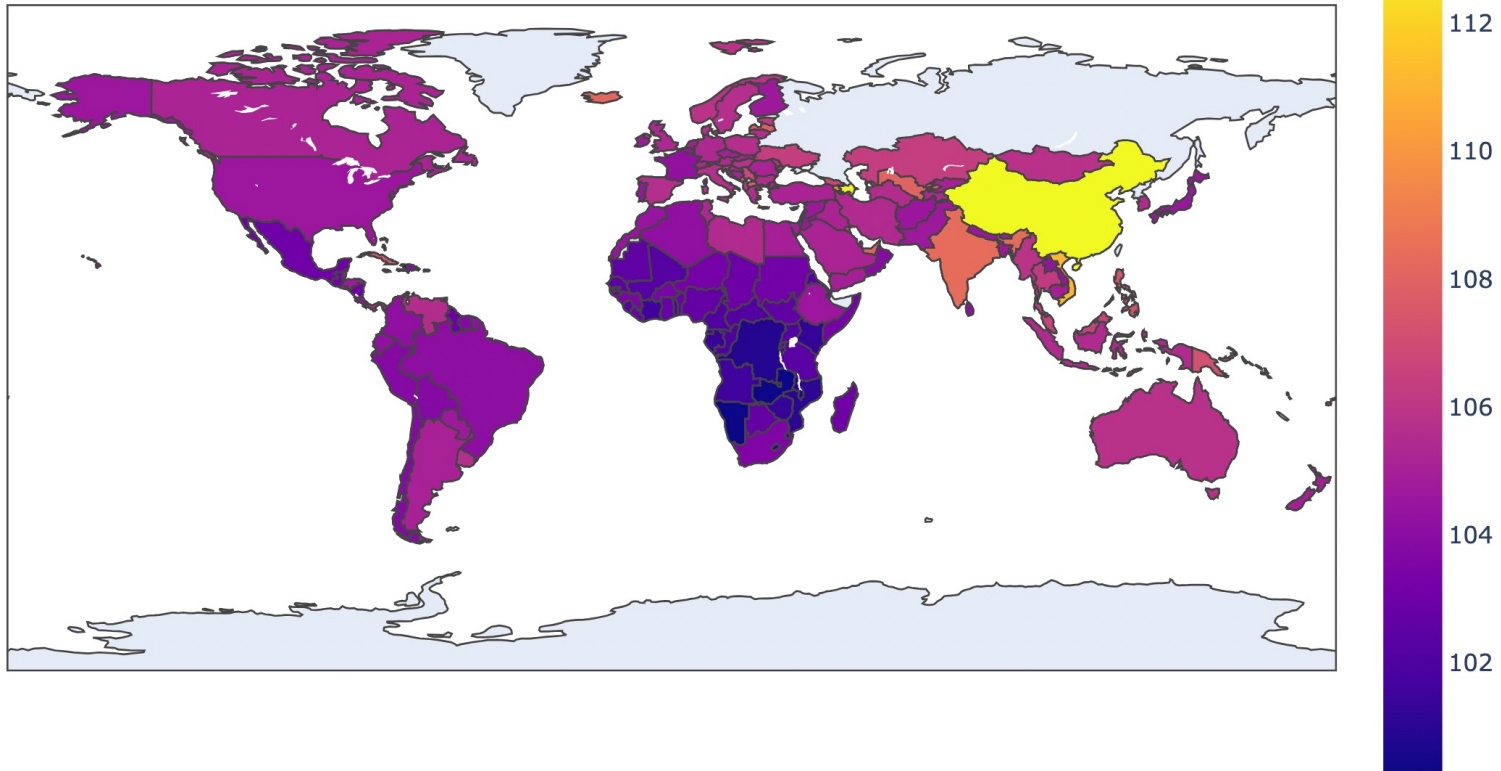Focus on NORMS

1. Conception and birth

Missing women

Aisha is less likely to be born than her brother

Male to female ratio at birth

What we know about missing girls

- Long standing issue (Sen 1990)

- Dowry cost increases son-preference (Bhalotra, et al. 2020)

- Advent of **sex-selective abortion** has worsened the problem (Jayachandran 2016)
  - It is generally driven by higher parity (Lin, Liu, Qian 2014)
  - Yet, given that "unwanted" girls are not born, evidence of less neglect for later born female children born (Anukriti et al. 2022)

- Recent work on sex selective abortions and "instrumental births" (i.e., aimed at achieving target #boys) as two manifestations of the stopping rule (Baland, Cassan, Woitrin 2023)

Policy implications

- Discussion around technology for sex-selective abortion, but bans may be ineffective and cannot prevent other forms of neglect

- Need to **change parents' preferences → NORMS**

Open Q's

- How to **reduce son preference?**
  - Potential role of inheritance reform, social security

- Or is there an element of "status" from giving birth to a son, that does not disappear w/ the process of development?

2. Childhood

Education

Aisha's parents will invest less in her education than in her brother's

- Differential returns (Heath & Mobarak, 2015)
  - Families respond to economic incentives (Jensen, 2012)
- Parental beliefs (Dizon-Ross, 2019)
- Stereotypes on STEM (Riley, 2021)
- Safety concerns distort educational choices (Borker, 2021)
- Norms around "purity" may affect girls' school attendance and enrollment around puberty
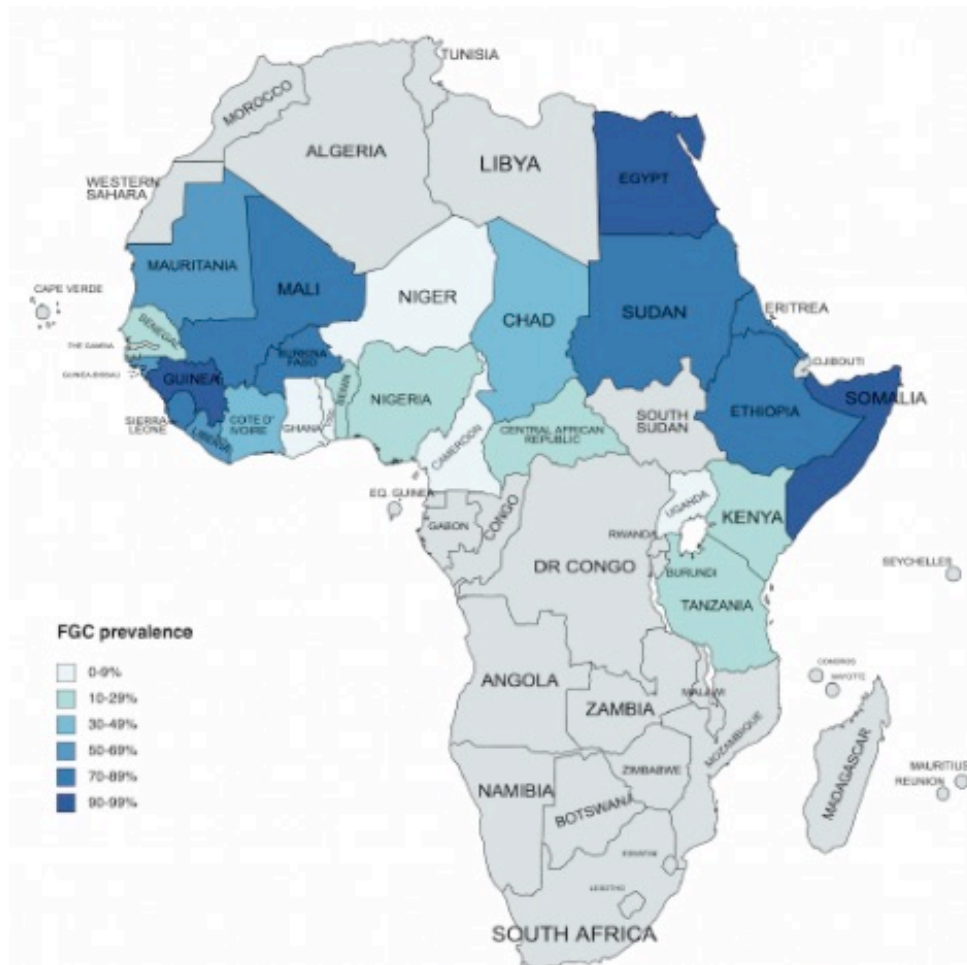
Health

Aisha will have worse health than her brother

- Girls tend to be in larger families and compete with more siblings for scarce resources (Barcellos, Carvalho, Lleras-Muney, 2014)

- Girls are breast-fed for shorter periods, have higher risk of neglect, malnutrition and illness (Jayachandran and Kuziemko, 2011)

- Birth spacing shorter after a girl, w/ negative consequences for mortality (Milazzo, 2018)

- Girls more likely to be subject to harmful practices, e.g., Female Genital Cutting (FGC)

Prevalence of FGC in Africa

- >200m women worldwide
- Prevalent in 27 African countries
- Illegal in 24 out of 27
- Severe health consequences at time of cutting and later

Existing explanations

- Signal of purity on marriage mkt
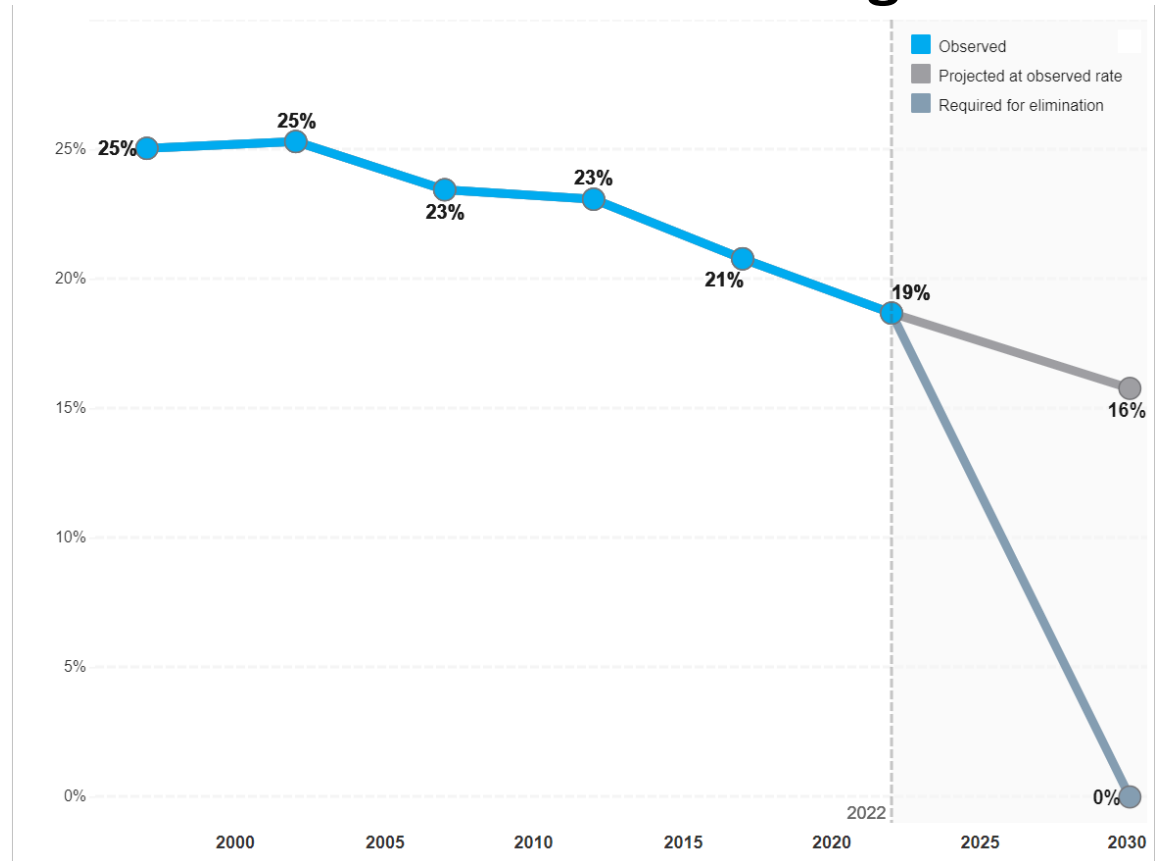- "Bad" equilibrium in social norm coordination game
- Identity

3. Marriage

Early/child marriage

Aisha has non-negligible probability of getting married before age 18

% women aged 20-24 who were married/in union before age 18

Source: Unicef (2023)

Early/child marriage

- Negative consequences: low education, early fertility, low bargaining power within the hh, high risk of IPV

We have learnt that
- In the presence of marriage payments, early/child marriage responds to income shocks (Corno, Hildebrandt, Voena 2020)
- Can be disincentivized through CCTs (Buchmann, Field, Glennerster, Nazneed, Wang, 2023)

Marriage payments

Aisha's parents will most likely pay a dowry or receive bride price

These payments are understood as a way to:
- clear marriage mkt (Becker 1991; Anderson 2003)
- cope w/ mkt imperfections & restrictions to intergenerational transmission of wealth (Botticini & Siow, 2003)

- Significant implications for parents' saving behavior (Anukriti et al. 2020)
- Women poverty decreases with dowry (Calvi & Keskar, 2021)
- Dowries facilitate male migration (Bau, et al. 2023)

Open Q's

- Why do marriage payments persist in areas that have experienced fast economic growth?
  - Increasing the returns to women's HK should lead to disappearance of marriage payments (Anderson & Bidner 2015)
- Intersection w/ identity cleavages (e.g., caste)

Decision making within the household

Aisha will not have much say on key decisions in her hh

Large literature on decision making & intra-hh allocation

- Unitary model typically rejected (Thomas 1994, Duflo 2003, Attanasio & Lechene 2014)
- Cooperative models (e.g., collective model)
  - Restrictions typically not rejected (Bourguignon et al 2009; Bobonis 2009; Attanasio & Lechene 2014)
  - But evidence of inefficiencies (Udry 1996; Dercon & Krishnan 2000; Anderson & Baland 2002)
  - Information asymmetries are pervasive, contrary to assm of collective model (Ashraf 2009)

- Non-cooperative models
  - Lack of a unified framework → open Q

Within-hh inequality

Within collective hh framework, recent estimates of "**sharing rules**" find:

- Women's shares significantly lower than men's (Almas et al 2021)

- Within-hh poverty rates higher for women than for men: 85% vs 60% (Dunbar et al 2021)

- Even in non-poor hh's, women & children are effectively poor (e.g., in Bandladesh: Brown et al 2021)

Open Q
- Need better data to estimate within-hh inequality in ways that require less strong assm's
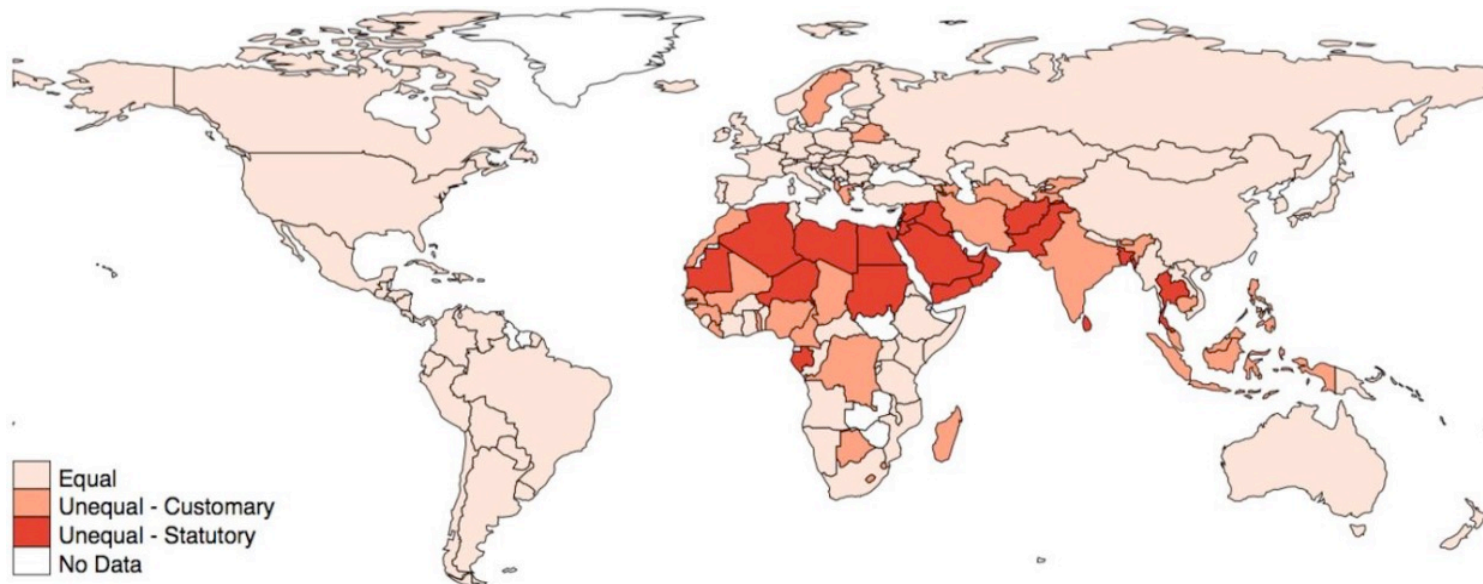
Why are women at a disadvantage in hh bargaining? (1)

Low outside options (exog.) due to **institutions & norms**:
- divorce; bride price (reimbursed if divorce); unequal inheritance (La Ferrara & Milazzo 2017); polygyny (Rossi 2016)

Divorce rights of men & women

Source: Anderson & Bidner, 2023

Why are women at a disadvantage in hh bargaining? (2)

- Low outside options (endog.) due to **irreversible investments**: education (Ashraf, Bau, Nunn, Voena, 2020); early fertility; specialization

- Bargaining frictions generated by inter-generational **co-residence** in patrilocal societies (Duflo 2003)

- Limits to mechanisms that would facilitate cooperation through **other-regarding behavior**: early & arranged marriages vs. "love" marriages

- Bargaining frictions associated w/ **intimate partner violence** (Bloch & Rao 2002)

IPV attitudes

% women age 15-49 years who say husband justified in beating his wife
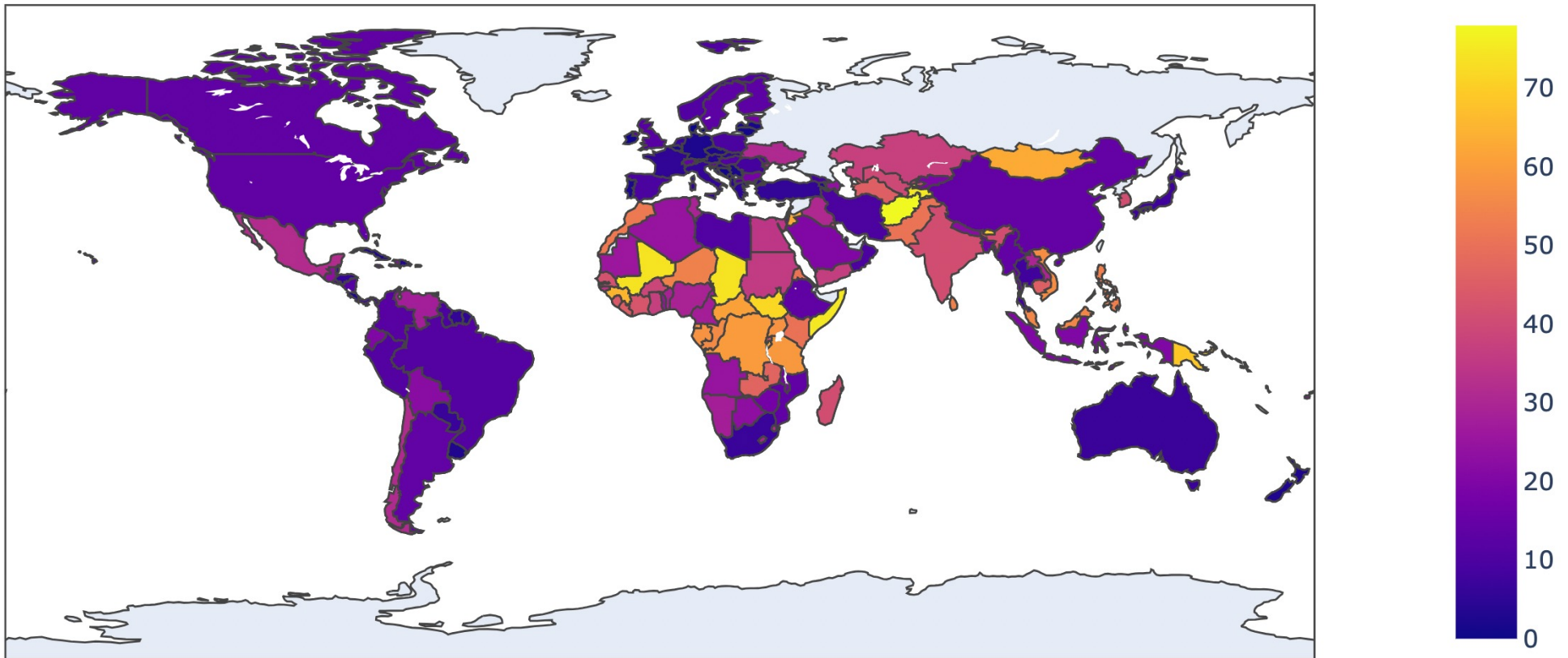
How to reduce IPV

Improving **women's outside options** may reduce IPV
- Women's property rights (Anderson, 2021)
- Paid employment (Sanin, 2021)

or it may increase it:
- Psychological IPV increases w/ female education (Erten & Keskin, 2018)
- Male backlash (Guarnieri & Rainer, 2018)

Open Q's

Why is **IPV still widely accepted**?
- Puzzling extent to which women internalize men's preferences
- Role of long-run cultural factors

Dynamics of "**power**"
- Recent literature on *measuring* control over decisions & resources: using ML (Jayachandran et al 2021); structural measures based on collective hh model (Calvi et al 2022); lab-in-the-field experiments (Almas et al. 2018)
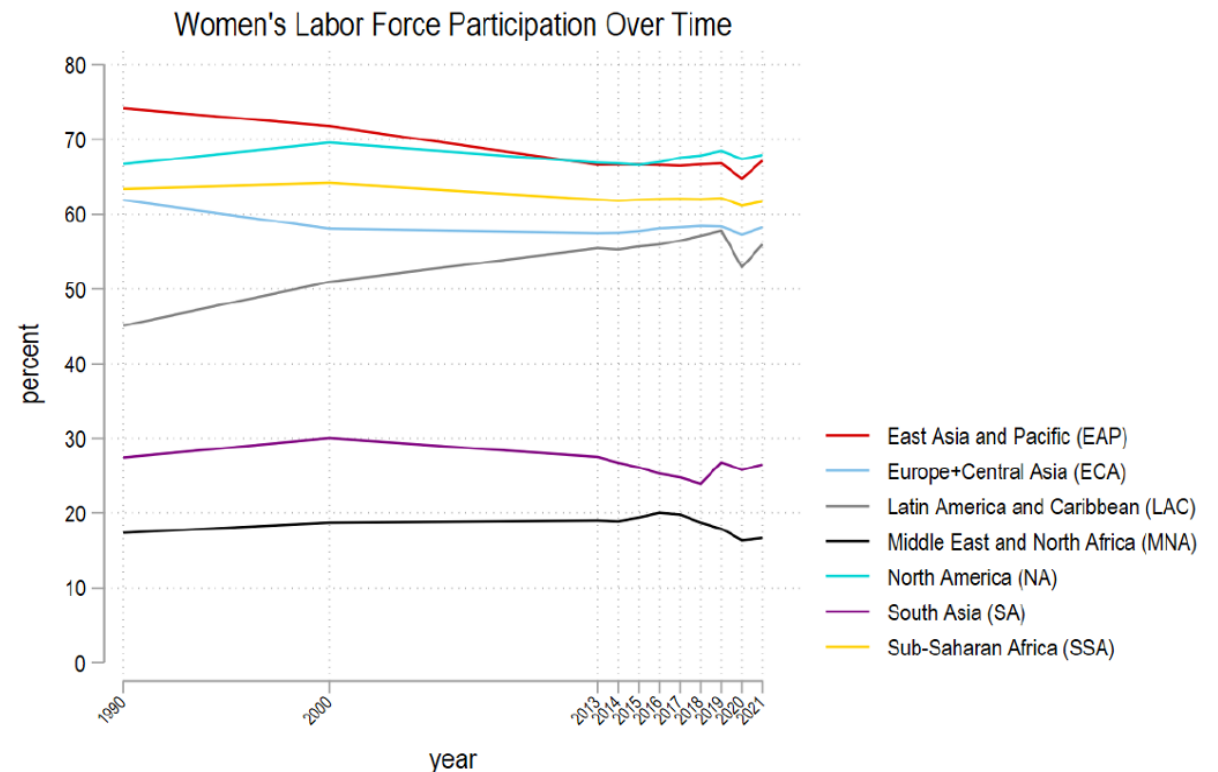- Much more can be done on the *modeling* side to incorporate "power" into decision making

4. Work

Female labor force participation

Aisha may not work. If she works, she'll likely have a low paying job

- U-shaped relationship b/w FLFP and GDP p/c (Goldin 1995)

- Extremely low FLFP in MENA & South Asia

Women's Labor Force Participation Over Time

Source: Heath, et al. (2024)

Obstacles to FLFP

- Housework and **childcare** load (Donald, et al. 2023; Ajayi, et al. 2022)
- **Safety** at work and travel
  - 79% women in India have been harassed in public in their life (ActionAid, 2016)
  - 8% Bangladeshi female garment workers sexually harassed (Boudreau, et al. 2023)
  - Safety at work (Boudreau, 2022)
  - Safe transport options increase job search (Field & Vyborny, 2022)

- **Disagreement** in the hh: men may have veto power over women's labor supply decisions; but encouraging couple to discuss job options may reduce FLFP (Lowe & McKelway, 2021)

Agreement w/ statement
"Women should have the freedom to work outside the home"
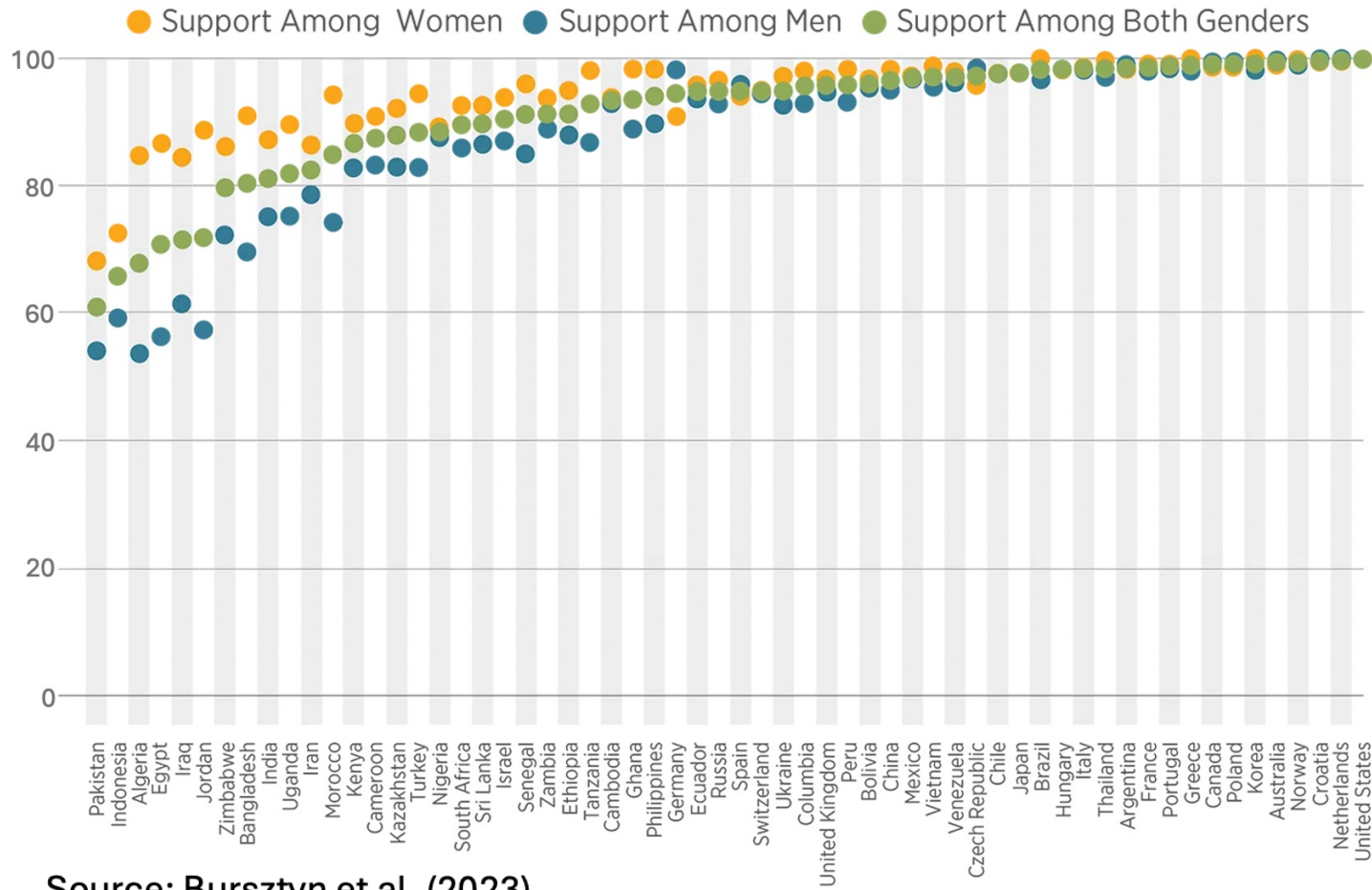
Source: Bursztyn et al. (2023)

Role of norms

- Inter-generational persistence of outdated women's roles in the labor mkt (Fernandez & Fogli 2009)
- Social sanctions against husbands of a working women (Arielle, et al. 2018)

Role of misperceptions

- People may underestimate others' support for FLFP (Bursztyn, Gonzalez, Yanagizawa-Drott, et al. 2018)

5. Aging

Old women's well being in LICs

Aisha will likely experience unusual hardships in old age

- Older missing women (Anderson & Ray, 2019)

- May be killed as "**witches**" in response to negative income shocks (Miguel 2005)

- **Widowhood** & female headship associated with poverty (Milazzo & Van de Walle 2017)

- Often unable to **inherit** land & assets due to unequal laws

Open Q:

- Support in old age traditionally provided through co-residence with one's son. Transition towards nuclear families in the absence of social safety nets?

6. Changing norms

How to change norms

Culture and norms are **persistent** (Alesina, et al. 2013) and evolve over long time periods

- Can we expect gender norms to **naturally evolve** towards more equality?
- What can **policy** do to facilitate the transition?

Piece-wise change and norms evolution

Gulesci, Jindani, La Ferrara, Smerdon, Sulaiman, Young (2023)

Suppose we start from an equil w/ a very gender-unequal norm, where individuals choose trait T
- e.g., women not allowed to work for pay
- e.g., most harmful form of FGC (infibulation)

If the goal is elimination of T in the long run, what are the consequences of having a "mildly unequal" alternative (t) in the short run?

- e.g., women can only do remote work for pay
- e.g., less harmful form of FGC (clitoridectomy or excision)

Answer is not trivial

On the **positive** side
- People reluctant to completely abandon trait T may be persuaded to go from T to a "less harmful" alternative t
- Once the 1st step is taken, it may be easier to take further steps and eventually eliminate T altogether
  → Stepping stone convergence

On the **negative** side
- Precisely because t is less costly, incentives to abandon it are lower and it may become an *absorbing state*

What we do

Propose a **model** to understand effect of introducing intermediate traits in a context w/ social interdependence
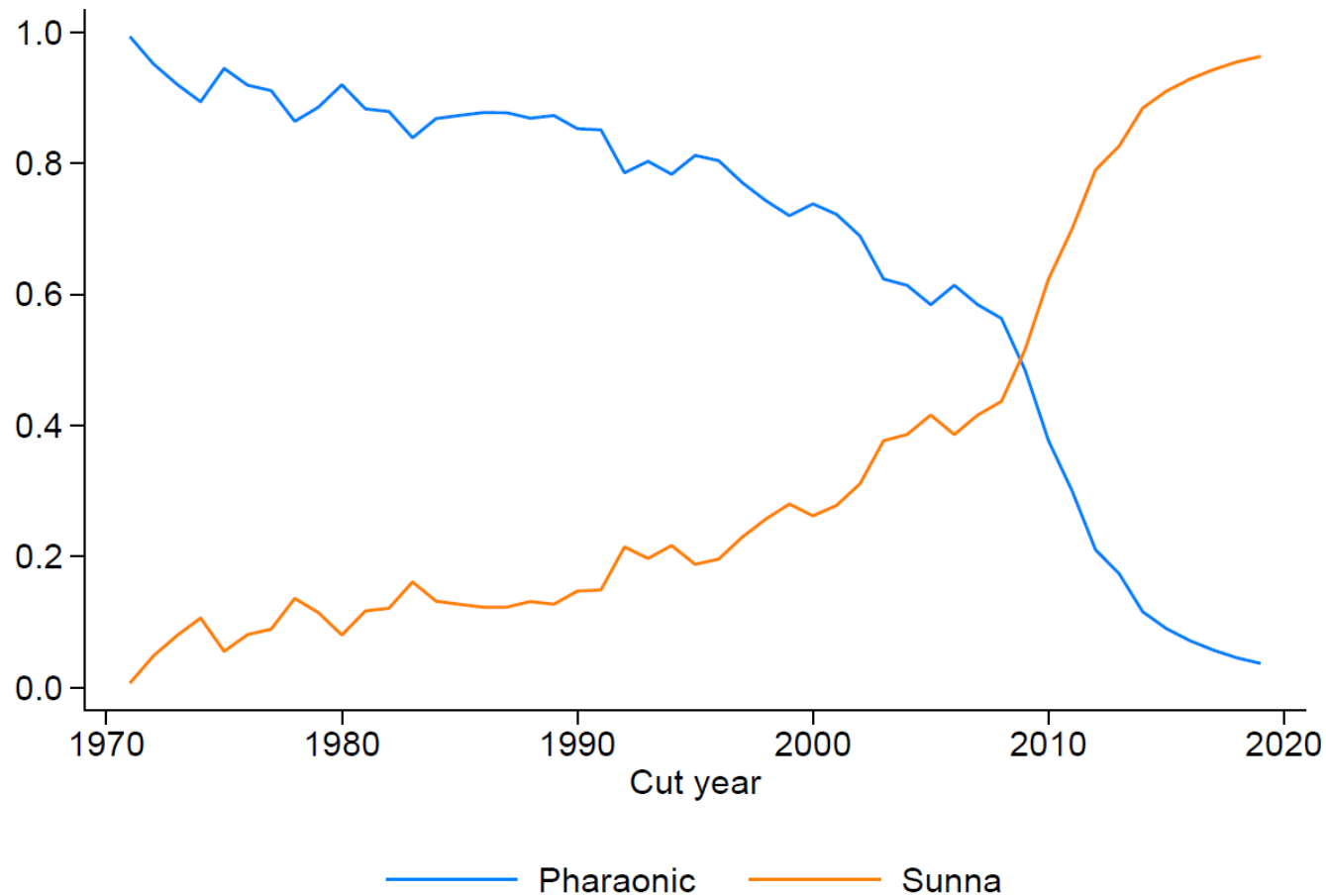• Study transition dynamics
• Characterize when intermediate trait is a stepping stone

Application to **FGC in Somalia** using original survey data

Two types of FGC
• Sunna (clitoridectomy, excision)
• Pharaonic (infibulation)

Type of FGC by year of cutting

Will Sunna be a stepping stone?

Based on our model estimates, no...

Source: Gulesci et al, 2023

Policies to change gender norms

1. Information: assessing cost/benefits and aligning beliefs
2. Coordination: tipping points
3. Preferences: aspirations

1a. Information: assessing cost/benefits

Recent experiments on information provision

FLFP
- McKelway (2023) finds effects in the short run, but not after 1 yr
- Dean & Jayachandran (2019) do not find effects

Gender roles
- Dhar, Jain, Jayachandran (2022) find positive effects of classroom-based discussions

FGC
- Corno & La Ferrara (2023) find that providing info on outcomes negatively associated w/ FGC in Sierra Leone leads to a reduction in prob. of cutting. Similar effects from "norm replacement" intervention that proposes an initiation ritual w/o cutting (→ identity component)

1b. Information: aligning beliefs

2nd order beliefs (i.e., what we think others think) may "lag behind" evolution of private values. Not uncommon, given **inter-generationa**l nature:

• Socialization by parents

• Some actions are observed for indiv's who made choice long before

Pluralistic ignorance

Individuals may privately oppose a given practice, but continue to comply b/c they (erroneously) believe others support it

• Correcting misperceptions may shift beliefs and actions

• Bursztyn et al. (2018) show this for FLFP in Saudi Arabia

Correcting misperceptions about infibulation in Somalia

(Ferreira, Gulesci, La Ferrara, Smerdon, Sulaiman, 2023)

- RCT at community level where meeting participants (i) anonymously expressed support –or lack of– for abandoning Pharaonic circumcision; (ii) incentivized to guess other participants' support; (iii) true share in support was revealed (treatment)

- Result: 2 yrs later, share of girls w/ Pharaonic decreased by 37%

Open Q:

- How to transpose "belief correction interventions" to a natural policy setting

2. Coordination

Even if people have correct beliefs, in the presence of conformism "bad" equilibria may persist b/c no one has incentive to move unilaterally → need a critical mass to "tip"

Public declarations

- Policy approaches where groups of families "pledge" to abandon a bad norm (see work by NGO Tostan)

- Efferson et al (2015): FGC is not a social coordination norm

- Ferreira et al. (2023) implement a lab-in-the-field version of public declarations in Somalia, finding that coordination per se is not enough. In communities w/ pessimistic baseline beliefs, coordination exercise backfires

Open Q's

- Anonymous vs. non-anonymous coordination tools
- Budreau, Chassang, González-Torres (2023): escrow mechanisms for group-based reporting in Bangladesh's garments sector

3. Role modeling & aspirations

Exposure to **in-person** role models can change attitudes and stereotypes

- Female political leaders in India (Beaman et al. 2009)

Vicarious role models (in the **media**) also work:

- Fertility in Brazil declines after exposure to soap operas portraying small families (La Ferrara et al. 2012)
- Gender attitudes in India improve after introduction of cable TV (Jensen & Oster 2009)
- Watching "Queen of Katwe" improves math test scores for female adolescents in Uganda (Riley, forthcoming)
- Edutainment TV series changes IPV attitudes & behavior in Nigeria (Banerjee et al. 2019)

Conclusions

- One view: the process of development and the economic opportunities it generates will lead to changes in gender norms (in the spirit of Boserup 1970)

- My view: we want to actively intervene w/ policy to change gender norms b/c:
  - Transition may be slow
  - Longer exposure to realities where women are at a disadvantage may consolidate gender stereotypes
  - Those w/ decision making power may not have an interest in realizing efficiency gains, if their share of the pie goes down

Thank you!

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