

Global support for women's rights massively underestimated, research shows

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A far greater number of people around the world support women's rights than many believe, reveals new research from NHH Norwegian School of Economics.

According to Professor Alexander W. Cappelen, Deputy Director of The Centre of Excellence FAIR at NHH, and Professor Bertil Tungodden, Scientific Director of FAIR, a large global majority agrees that women should have the basic right to work outside the home.

Alongside colleagues from the University of Chicago, Stanford University, and the University of Zurich, they analysed 66,214 survey responses from 60 countries representing 85% of the world's population.

In 41 countries, they find more than 90% of the population supports basic rights for women, and in 37 countries, the majority of men and women support affirmative action policies for hiring females in leadership positions.

"There is a universal underestimation of the support for basic rights for women, particularly regarding men's support. To illustrate, more than 80% of males support women's basic right to work outside the home in Tanzania and Turkey, but it's still believed to be a minority view among men," says Professor Cappelen.

The researchers also find that people tend to underestimate support for affirmative action in less gender-equal countries, and overestimate it in more gender-equal countries.

"This misunderstanding is partly driven by people underestimating men's support for such policies in less equal countries, and overestimating women's support in countries that are more equal," says Professor Tungodden.

For example, in Zimbabwe, 72% of men support affirmative action, but this number is believed to be closer to 37%. And in the Netherlands, only 35% of women actually support these policies, while the number is misperceived to be around 62%.

The researchers say these findings could be used to correct miscalibrated perceptions of gender norms through information campaigns.

This could lead to relatively quick progress towards gender equality in many societies, while changing actual norms is a much slower process that requires deeper interventions, they suggest.

This research is available as a working paper from the NHH Department of Economics.

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For more information, or to speak with Professor Alexander W. Cappelen and Professor Bertil Tungodden,

contact Jamie Hose on jamie@bluesky-pr.com, or call +44 (0)1582 790 706.