

Social status and measuring reproductive success in the modern nonindustrial man

September 6 2016, by Bob Yirka



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(Phys.org)—A pair of researchers, one with the University of Richmond in Virginia, the other Emory University in Georgia, has found that the reproductive success of the modern nonindustrialized man correlates with his social status across a wide variety of society types. In their paper published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Christopher von Rueden and Adrian Jaeggi describe the research they

undertook in seeking to learn more about the role that status plays in measuring reproductive success in modern non-industrialized societies and the results they found.

In generations past, it was easy to understand a man's reproductive success—all a researcher had to do was measure the number of viable offspring he had produced and compare that number with others in the same or similar societies. But because of technological advancements, life has changed for both men and women, which means the rules for measuring reproductive success might have changed as well. It is no secret that in most modern industrialized societies, for example, men at the top of the economic ladder, unlike in previous generations, actually produce fewer offspring than do men at the middle or bottom. But the researchers wondered what is going on in unindustrialized modern societies.

In this new effort, they set out to test the 'egalitarianism hypothesis,' which suggests that [status](#) plays a less significant role in reproductive success in societies that are still based on foraging to get their food than on those that are non-foragers (those who either grow their own food or get it another way.) To learn more, they looked at 46 prior research efforts involving 33 nonindustrial societies. They then conducted an analysis of the data looking for correlations between such factors as physical build, wealth, hunting ability and influence, with other factors such as number of sexual partners, fertility and numbers and health of offspring.

The researchers report that they found that correlations that existed between the status of males in such societies and their [reproductive success](#) was not much affected by the way in which they made a living—instead, they were much more influenced by the marriage system in place. Societies that were polygamous, they found, had more associations between offspring mortality and status. In polygamous

societies, there were more associations between what was deemed a quality wife and status. These findings suggest, the researchers note, that traits that helped a man acquire status were not necessarily tied to the means by which food was obtained, but by strategies that correlated with enhanced fertility, and to a lesser extent, the well-being of the offspring that were produced.

More information: Men's status and reproductive success in 33 nonindustrial societies: Effects of subsistence, marriage system, and reproductive strategy , *PNAS*,
www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1606800113

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