Researchers have developed and validated a new tool for comparing gender inequality among different regions of a country, highlighting links between gender inequality, well-being, and participation in the
#MeToo movement within the US. Bruno Gabriel Salvador Casara of New York University Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates and colleagues present the tool and findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on July 17, 2024.

Gender inequality is a persistent worldwide problem with negative impacts for women and for society in general. To assess gender disparities, the United Nations and other groups typically favor a scoring system known as the Gender Inequality Index, which incorporates measurements of women's reproductive health, social and political empowerment, and participation in the labor market. However, this tool is designed to measure gender inequality only at the resolution of an entire country.

To enable within-country comparisons, Salvador Casara and colleagues adapted the Gender Inequality Index for state-level resolution. They demonstrated the new tool's effectiveness by analyzing gender-inequality dynamics among states within the US.

They found that US states were "substantially gender-unequal overall." Arkansas, Louisiana and Oklahoma scored highest for gender inequality, while Massachusetts, California and Maine scored lowest.

States with a higher index score—indicating greater gender inequality at the expense of women—tended to score lower on measures of women's wellness, including life satisfaction, financial well-being, and feeling safe. Men in these states also tended to have somewhat lower financial well-being, in line with prior research linking gender inequality with overall poorer economic growth.
The researchers also used Twitter data to test the link between gender inequality and involvement in the #MeToo movement, which pushed for greater awareness of sexual abuse and violence against women. They found that states with higher inequality scores tended to generate fewer tweets with the #MeToo hashtag, suggesting that greater gender inequality may diminish awareness and activism around #MeToo issues.

In addition, states with more conservative political leanings tended to have higher gender inequality scores.

The researchers call for further research to deepen understanding of the implications of their findings. Meanwhile, they note, their analysis demonstrates that the state-level Gender Inequality Index could be a valuable tool for policymakers and advocates to study and address
gender disparities within specific regions of a country.

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