Women’s property ownership is critical for their economic empowerment with benefits not only for women themselves, but also for their households and community. While policy makers have recognized this, till recently, there has been little nationally representative data across countries. Household surveys typically use the household as the unit of data collection and any gender analysis uses the sex of the household as a proxy for men and women’s asset ownership. However, in order to understand gender gaps in property ownership, one needs individual-level data on asset ownership. The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) have collected such data in its latest round of household surveys. Using the nationally representative DHS data across 35 countries, ranging over the time period 2010-2017, this paper explores intrahousehold gender gaps in property ownership.

The intrahousehold literature has established that the identity matters; in terms of income generation or ownership of economic resources. Thus, from a bargaining power perspective, it is important to understand the distribution of economic resources between men and women within the household. Using the couple sample from the DHS surveys, we estimate multinomial logit models of property ownership within the household. In addition to individual and household characteristics, we explore the associations between the legislative framework and social institutions.

Women’s education reduces gender gaps in urban and rural areas. Women’s engagement in agriculture and professional jobs tends to reduce gender gaps, but the relationship is weak and often insignificant. On the other hand, women’s engagement in services and manual jobs tends to reduce the probability of either partner owning property. As per expectations, community property regimes and equal inheritance rights between sons and daughters are favorable for women’s property ownership. In terms of regional patterns, the gender gaps are relatively small in East Asia and Pacific, Southern Africa; they are much larger in South Asia and West Africa. Understanding the reasons and how these gender gaps could be reduced would help in designing appropriate policies and measure things in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).