

Measuring group disadvantage with indices based on relative distributions

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Abstract

A long literature on between-group inequality in Social Science and Statistics has developed statistical tools for measuring the extent of inequality of opportunity or, more narrowly, gender inequality. In this paper I propose a family of new indices that are sensitive to inequality between pairs of groups whenever that inequality implies relative disadvantage for a group of concern. The indices are based on cumulative relative distributions and the disadvantage is captured through indirectly measuring differences between the quantiles of the compared distributions. The indices are advocated to study topics like gender inequality. They are suitable for continuous variables; but, with a random transformation, the indices can also be applied to discrete variables. The indices are applied to study gender inequality in Chile over several dimensions of well-being. Gender differences turn out most detrimental to Chilean women in dimensions of earnings, dignity and life satisfaction.