

Life Histories, Blood Revenge, and Warfare in a Tribal Population

Cultural and Reproductive Success in
Yanomamö Warfare

Blood revenge:

- Blood revenge defined "retaliatory killing in which the initial victim's close kinsmen conduct a revenge raid on the members of the current community of the initial killer. Although Yanomamö raiders always hope to dispatch the original killer, almost any member of the attacked community is a suitable target."

How the “Cycle of Revenge” begins

- “Most fights begin over sexual issues: infidelity and suspicion of infidelity, attempts to seduce another man's wife, sexual jealousy, forcible appropriation of women from visiting groups, failure to give a promised girl in marriage, and (rarely) rape” (986).

Measures of violence

- 44% of men 25 and older have participated in a killing
- 60% of men, however, who have killed have participated in only 1 killing.
- 66 % of all Yanomamö older than 41 have lost at least one close kin in violent death (cousin to half-cousin range minimum).
- While 57% of the same age-group have lost two or more.
- Depending on the area, 15% to 30% of men who reach the age of 18 will die violently.

Hypothetical benefits of warfare:

- Group and individual:
 - Kin groups who gain a reputation for swift retaliation will deter others from taking advantage of them (deterrence theory)
 - Individuals who exact revenge may have higher reproductive or marital success than those who do not. Successful warriors have higher prestige and this prestige leads to greater marital success measured by fertility and/or number of wives through lifetime.

Some results

- *Unokais* have higher marital success than non-*unokai* men (1.63 wives thru lifetime versus 0.63 for non-*unokais*).
- *Unokais* have higher reproductive success (or fertility) than non-*unokais* (4.91 to 1.59)
- Non-*unokais* don't have higher death rates than *unokais*, therefore non-*unokais* are not being killed off at a higher rates which reduces their fertility.
- No evidence that *unokais* loose fewer kinsmen than non-*unokais* which suggests that *unokais* cannot better protect their kinsmen.

Criticisms and ...

Ferguson notes the following:

1. Polygynous headmen were in the sample and headmanship is associated with polygyny
2. Older men are likely to be *unokai* and age is associated with fertility
3. *Unokai's* have lower life expectancy than non-*unokai's*

Responses

1. It is probably very important to become an *unokai* before becoming a headman. A potential headman cannot lead unless he has a strong track record in political and military affairs.
2. Chagnon, in a reanalysis, looked at the relationship between RS and *unokai* status by 5 year age intervals while excluding headman and found that the correlation between RS and *unokai* still obtained and that *unokai* status and polygyny still occurred for all intervals except that of 31 to 40 years interval.
3. There is no evidence that *unokai*'s or non-*unokai*'s differ in mortality rates

“Corrected” measures of RS and *Unokai* status – headmen removed

Table 1.^a Comparison of marital and reproductive performances of *unokais* and non-*unokais* (headmen removed).

Age category	<i>Unokais</i>		Non- <i>Unokais</i>		Z ^b	P (1-sided)
	Avg. rank	Cases	Avg. rank	Cases		
A. Wives						
20–24	68.30	5	40.31	78	– 3.99	.0001
25–30	44.58	13	34.08	58	– 1.84	.0326
31–40	56.23	42	48.19	60	– 1.50	.0672
41 +	65.31	65	42.85	46	– 3.84	.0001
B. Offspring						
20–24	68.60	5	40.29	78	– 4.03	.0001
25–30	44.54	13	34.09	58	– 1.78	.0374
31–40	57.17	42	47.53	60	– 1.64	.0500
41 +	62.99	65	46.12	46	– 2.73	.0031

^aMann-Whitney-Wilcoxon Tests for a Difference of Medians

^bCorrected for ties

A proper statistical analysis

- Chagnon attempted to control for age effects and headmanship effects
 - by comparing within age classes (but note the 31-40 interval is larger than the others) and by
 - subtracting headmen from the analyses
- While better than his previous analysis a general linear model and partial correlation would have been a superior solution.
- Whether or not headmen should be excluded is problematic