

Extended Abstract

**Romanticising the gender wage gap in modern Indonesia:
Old themes and new ideas in labour market expectations**

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Introduction

Six decades after Indonesia's Independence, economic growth and its association with demographic transition and structural change in urban Indonesia had saw an emerging class of tertiary educated women in formal white-collar employment. Sen (1998) specifically noted that one featuring characteristic associated with modernization in Indonesia is the shift in the paradigm of the female subject in many institutional discourses, where the image of the iconic housewife prevalent in the 1970s had been transformed to that of the affluent professional working woman in 1990s [1].

Currently, in an era of so-called democratic reforms (Ind: *reformasi*) after the fall of the New Order government in 1998, women in Indonesia are seemingly enjoying further promotion of gender equity norms in the public sphere. For example, following the appointment of a female President in 2001, calls to address the deeply-rooted gender inequalities in the structural level was responded with the introduction of the 30 per cent quota for female candidates in the 2004 national house of representatives' election.

This study addresses the persistence of gendered labour force outcomes in the context of a society in transition. Following previous studies in the United States on social change and the shifts in gender role attitudes, the study adds to the literature illustrating how, in spite of the ongoing redefinition of gender roles in the public domain, gender roles between husbands and wives are more resistant to change [2, 3]. Amidst forces of globalization that continue to sweep urban Indonesia, the study aims to evaluate whether traditional norms on gender relations in the household continue to shape the labour market expectations of the young tertiary educated men and women. The study offers insights into a potential mechanism by which macro level institutions and social norms are generating the gender gap in labour force outcomes, through their influence on the demographic and labour force decisions at the household level.

Theoretical focus

In social demography, family theory regards marriages as both institutions and functioning social forms based upon gender role socialization, where the husband plays a largely economic role, and the wife being mainly responsible for reproduction and looking after children at home [4]. In the Indonesian case, cultural norms that depict gender role specialization are institutionalized into the 1974 National Marital Act. Although the Act stated equal positions of husbands and wives (article 31(1)), it further stipulates that the husband is the head of the household and the wife is the mother of the household (article 31(3)), and that the husband is the provider of the family (article 34(1)). The Act resonated Islamic teachings of the so-called God's ordained roles for men and women that place the breadwinning responsibility solely on men. In short, as opposed to income generating or career-oriented individuals, women's *noble role* in Indonesia connotes to their function as wives and mothers [5-7].

Despite the recent trend in delaying marriage, middle-class women are continually subjected to fulfill social expectations to marry and have children, hence conform to their

noble role. Among the middle class, even though a fulltime domestic role does not equate to high social status and educated women are increasingly expected to continue working after marriage, women are entailed to place family as their first priority [8]. While men are perceived as primary income earners, the perception of married women as secondary earners continue to dominate much of the discourse on middle class educated women. Being secondary earners, these women are expected to generate additional income for the family by choosing a career path, which does not interfere with their primary roles as wives and mothers. In such situation, we expect to see married women to work in less demanding jobs than their husbands, work less hours, obtain less labour market experience, have lower labour force attachment, and to endure slower wage growth. As suggested by supply-side theories, the gender gap in labour force outcomes as often proxied by the wage gap, partly masks the earnings gap between husbands and wives, which in turn reflects the continued traditional division of labour within the household [9, 10].

Within the context of an increasingly consumerist society where a single income household can no longer suffice the thirst for a *modern* lifestyle, the study postulates that the demographic and labour force aspirations of the target population are geared to accommodate both rising economic pressures, and a slightly modified version of the long-standing traditional gender role ideals. Egalitarian marriage ideals are bounded by social norms that place women as secondary earner, which origin can be traced back to cultural accounts, as well as state and religious ideologies. As such, women's curtailed labour force achievements remain to be seen as necessary to facilitate both family harmony and prosperity.

Data and Methods

The study uses data from a fieldwork conducted in the two cities of Jakarta and Makassar between March – June 2004. Jakarta, being the Indonesian epitome of “modernity”, is compared to Makassar, where despite being the economic center of Eastern Indonesia, its educated young people are portrayed as exhibiting a stronger adherence to traditional gender roles ideals.

A survey of senior university students in Jakarta (N=1087) and Makassar (N=675) is conducted from 7 universities in Jakarta and 5 in Makassar. The universities were selected by stratified sampling to ensure representation from national universities and private universities in each city with different levels of academic reputation. To further control for the type of education, a stratified sample of senior students from a male-dominated faculty, a female-dominated faculty, and a faculty with a roughly equal gender distribution in each university were purposely selected. Questionnaires were self-completed by respondents, with sections on: personal background, parental background, university experience, expectations on family formation, career and earnings expectations, ideal job criteria, perceptions on employment prospects, and attitudes to gender roles.

Descriptive statistics are used to explore the respondents' labour force expectations of themselves and their spouse. Multivariate analysis is used to identify factors influencing the respondents' gender role attitudes, and respondent's preference of ideal household scenario.

To complement quantitative findings, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected male and female respondents from the survey. In-depth interviews respondents also included university-educated job seekers, university educated single men and women already in the workforce, and married tertiary educated dual-earner and single-earner couples. The qualitative data serves to provide the socio-cultural contexts of expectations and attitudes towards gender roles in career and family life throughout analysis in this study.

Preliminary findings

The majority of both male and female respondents express their preference for the *compromise dual-earner model*, where the husband works longer hours and the wife takes on the position of a secondary earner with a larger share of domestic work. In particular, both male and female respondents perceive an ideal husband as someone who is older, works longer hours, earns more money, and has equal or slightly higher educational qualifications than the wife.

Students in Jakarta exhibit more egalitarian gender role attitudes than students in Makassar. The preference for an *egalitarian dual-earner marriage* model is more prevalent in Jakarta than in Makassar, and amongst women relative to men. Men and women who are religious, grew up outside the city, and exhibit more traditional gender roles, are less likely to opt for the egalitarian dual-earner model. Overall, the majority of both male and female respondents in both cities continue to perceive income earning as the responsibility of the husband.

Open-ended questions and in-depth interviews suggest that the respondents evaluate the gender gap in labour force outcomes as a reflection of God's ordained roles for each sex (Ind: *Kodrat*). A considerable number of respondents attribute the gender wage gap to the inherent nature of men and women, in terms of their biological and psychological differences, and the inevitable reproductive role of women. Wife's employment is encouraged as long as it does not hinder her primary role as the maintainer of the household.

Respondents in both cities continue to accept the universality of marriage and having children, viewing both as natural and expected progressions to follow schooling and employment. Reflecting the relatively more homogenous nature of Makassar's ethnic make-up, respondents in Makassar are more likely to refer to local customs and Islamic cultural norms as factors that influence gender differences in labour force behaviour, than the respondents in Jakarta.

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