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Gender inequality among Association of Southeast Asian Nation countries

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ABSTRACT

The study describes the social issue on gender inequality among Association of Southeast Asian Nation Countries. The study uses descriptive method through data mining from online sources. This data set was subjected to a Cluster Analysis. The study finds out the following interesting points: Gender Inequality is not about women's religious practices but by not exercising political and economic careers, and by not having been protected and educated. For women to be considered equal to men, they must not be underrepresented in the political seats, workforce and learning institutions. Women's confinement in the house exposes themselves to subjugation and deprivation of rights.

Keywords: *ASEAN countries, cluster analysis, gender inequality, women*

I. INTRODUCTION

The study maintains that women in ASEAN countries experience inequalities because of their less educational attainment, political underrepresentation and economic instability. Despite the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development Council's (2011) report claiming that women have gradually attained equal rights with men. Ridgeway (2011) postulates that gender inequality would persist even in the modern world because century-long traditions and practices cannot be eradicated at once. Related readings reveal differing points of view regarding gender inequality. Other studies maintain the causes and reasons of gender inequality; while other studies posit the direct and indirect effects of gender inequality. For instance, OECD Council (2011), Durand (2010), Assman (2014) and Lofstrom (2008) parallel gender equality with women having access to education, economics and entrepreneurship. Moreover, Kanbur (2002) adds empowerment to the equation. Another study by Jacobsen (2011)

finds out that gender inequality results in losses over the years because of the inefficient under utilization of women labor. Some authors however do contribute to a future that seeks to wipe away gender inequality altogether; for example, Mikkola and Miles (2007) affirms the relationship between gender equality and development. The advocacy of Wall (2014) is on finding ways on ceasing violence on women. Yet, Ridgeway (2011) has been skeptical about it because the existence of gender inequality still persists even in the modern world.

The previous studies have mentioned about the total dissolution of gender inequality which has deeply rooted into the culture. However, the apparent research gaps are imminent. First, consistent with Ridgeway's skepticism, the inequality is evident in the developing countries. In the study, this gap is addressed because the Association of Southeast Asian Countries (ASEAN) which are mostly having developing economies (Gross Domestic Product per capita) will be

under investigation. Second, religious practices have not been taken into consideration, although, the studies include this in the socio-cultural explanations why women have to be subjugated. In the current study however, this particular gap is not focused on and may very well be addressed through another study altogether. Third, there has never been a comparison among countries on whether or not gender inequality index is the sole determinant if women in a country have not enjoyed much liberation and empowerment.

As a result, the study would reveal the various aspects among women in the ASEAN countries. One is to compare women from countries in the ASEAN region by describing their mortality/fertility rate, political career, educational attainment and working conditions. Two is to group these countries based on their similarity index in order to see patterns to prove whether getting the lowest gender inequality index means that women have not enjoyed other forms of freedom and empowerment. Three is to intersperse the other variables that the study would be focusing on in order to get a total picture of gender inequality among ASEAN countries.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study establishes that gender inequality is caused by unequal opportunities given to men and women. This is explained in Israeli Kibbutz's Theories of Gender Inequality as explained by Buber Agassi (1979). Kibbutz (cited in Agassi, 1979) enumerates four causes of gender inequality: production and property relations (economic), family structure and household (social), occupational roles (socio-economic), and sexuality (psychoanalytic). However, Agassi (1979) analyzed these assumptions and came up with his own proposal of enumerating access to resources, autonomy and power as determinants to gender equality.

Hence, gender inequality theory developed by Kibbutz in Agassi's (1979) analysis, shows these prevalent concepts. Gender inequality is evident in the socio-cultural, economic and political aspects contrasting men and women.

Firstly, socio-economic aspects can be translated into the population with at least Secondary Educational Attainment (SEA). Agassi

(1979) explained that access to resources is one of the determinants of the prevailing inequality. Women, who have to follow a pattern of occupational roles as mothers and wives, would not be motivated to further their educational attainment. Secondly, economic factors can be translated into the number of women in the labor force. Secondary education is the minimum requirement for women and other citizens alike to get jobs, thereby gaining economic independence. Agassi (1979) explained this factor as women autonomy. Thirdly is the political career to be pursued by women. Political seat means power (Agassi, 1979).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used descriptive research design. Data were gathered online through data mining from (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, 2012; and International Labour Organization, 2012). This data set was subjected to cluster analysis in order to group countries with similar characteristics. From the gathered data via online, the information on ASEAN countries were extracted and alphabetically arranged as an Excel File, ready for input in statistical software. First, the information was presented in a tabular form in order to get which country had the highest Gender Inequality Index (GII). Second, the data had been clustered using the software because the accuracy of grouping the countries manually might lead to erroneous results. Third, the dendrogram showed the number of observations belonging to a cluster. Fourth, the cluster revealed much of the similarities and differences among ASEAN countries; hence, the textual data from the literature review came in handy for interpreting the results.

The significant if not the whole truth on gender inequality could be revealed.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part of the study presents, analyzes and interprets data based on the method used.

Demographics of the ASEAN countries

Table 1 presents the demographic data of the ASEAN countries. The countries are enumerated

on the first column and the variables on the next columns together with their corresponding values.

These include the Gender Inequality Index (rank and value), seats in national parliament, population with at least secondary education (female and male), and labor force participation rate (female and male).

Table 1

COUNTRIES	Gender Inequality Index Rank	Gender Inequality Index Value	Seats in national parliament	Population with at least secondary education (% ages 25 and older) Female	Population with at least secondary education (% ages 25 and older) Male	Labor force participation rate (% ages 15 and older) Female	Labor force participation rate (% ages 15 and older) Male
Cambodia	96	0.473	18.1	11.6	20.6	79.2	86.7
Indonesia	106	0.494	18.2	36.2	46.8	51.2	84.2
Lao People's Democratic Republic	100	0.483	25.0	22.9	36.8	76.5	79.5
Malaysia	42	0.256	13.2	66.0	72.8	43.8	76.9
Myanmar	80	0.437	4.6	18.0	17.6	75.0	82.1
Philippines	77	0.418	22.1	65.9	63.7	49.7	79.4
Singapore	13	0.101	23.5	71.3	78.9	56.5	76.6
Thailand	66	0.360	15.7	29.0	35.6	63.8	80.0
Viet Nam	48	0.299	24.4	24.7	28.0	73.2	81.2

Demographics of ASEAN countries

As can be noticed in the table above, the three countries with the lowest gender inequality index are Singapore (V=0.101), Malaysia (V=0.256) and Vietnam (V=0.299). However, the three countries with the highest gender inequality index are Cambodia (V=0.473), Laos (V=0.483) and Indonesia (V=0.494). The other countries which lie between the low and high gender inequality indices are Thailand (V=0.360), the Philippines (V=0.418) and Myanmar (V=0.437). Interestingly, these values differentiate from one country to the other because of the observed tabular data on seats in national parliament, population with at least secondary education (female and male), and labor force participation rate (female and male). The lower the gender inequality index, the higher the number of seats represented by women in the national parliament, the higher

women population who finished high school, and the higher number of women their is in the labor force.

These data presentations are quite raw. By using statistical software to standardize these values, one would put them on the same scale. Thereby, comparison can be made. Table 2 shows the standardized values of the variables.

Table 2

Standardized Values of the Variables

COUNTRIES	Gender Inequality Index Rank	Gender Inequality Index Value	Seats in national parliament	Population with at least secondary education (% ages 25 and older) Female	Population with at least secondary education (% ages 25 and older) Male	Labor force participation rate (% ages 15 and older) Female	Labor force participation rate (% ages 15 and older) Male
1 Cambodia	0.85337	0.79754	-0.03219	-1.16193	-1.06190	1.20011	1.82705
2 Indonesia	1.17881	0.95858	-0.01694	-0.09538	0.10057	-0.90154	1.06153
Lao People's Democratic Republic	0.98355	0.87422	1.01991	-0.67201	-0.34312	0.99745	-0.37766
4 Malaysia	-0.90400	-0.86656	-0.77934	1.19662	1.25417	-1.45698	-1.17381
5 Myanmar	0.33267	0.52147	-2.09065	-0.88446	-1.19501	0.88486	0.41849
6 Philippines	0.23504	0.37576	0.57773	1.19228	0.85041	-1.01413	-0.40828
7 Singapore	-1.84777	-2.05519	0.79120	1.42640	1.52482	-0.50373	-1.26567
8 Thailand	-0.12294	-0.06902	-0.39814	-0.40754	-0.39637	0.04420	-0.22455
9 Vietnam	-0.70873	-0.53680	0.92843	-0.59397	-0.73357	0.74976	0.14290

Cluster analysis of Observatios

The use of statistical software clusters the standardized values to compare countries. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

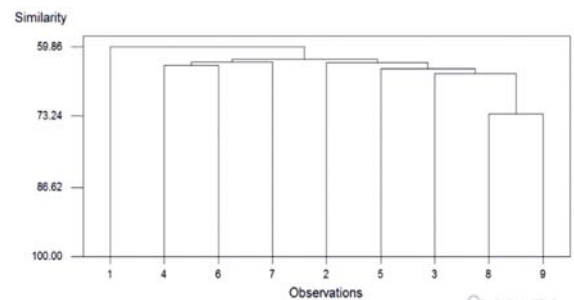


Figure 2. *Standardized Values of the Variables*

Table 3
Final Partition of Observations

	Number of Observations	Within Cluster sum of squares	Average distance from centroid	Maximum distance from centroid
Cluster 1	1	0.000	0.000	0.000
Cluster 2	5	15.556	1.705	2.205
Cluster 3	3	7.746	1.573	1.813

Nine (9) ASEAN countries are clustered into three. Table 3 shows that cluster 1 has been observed with one country to be relatively different from the others. In the dendogram, this country is (1) Cambodia. Cluster 2 has been observed with five countries which include (4) Malaysia, (6) Philippines, (7) Singapore, (2) Indonesia, and (5) Myanmar. Cluster 3 has been observed with three countries which are relatively similar. This includes (3) Lao People's Democratic Republic, (8) Thailand, and (9) Vietnam.

Table 4 presents the similarities and differences of the ASEAN countries among the standardized values of the variables.

Table 4
Cluster Centroids

Variable	Cluster1	Cluster2	Cluster3	Grand centroid
std GHR	0.8534	0.3327	-0.8389	0.0000
std GHV	0.7975	0.3497	-0.8487	0.0000
std SNP	-0.0322	-0.1115	0.1965	0.0000
std PSE (F)	-1.1619	-0.5307	1.2718	0.0000
std PSE (M)	-1.0619	-0.5135	1.2098	-0.0000
std LFP (F)	1.2001	0.3549	-0.9916	0.0000
std LFP (M)	1.8271	0.2041	-0.9493	0.0000

Comparison of the three clusters is clearly shown in the numeric data of Table 4. The bigger the value would mean a higher level of manifestations of the variables. Cambodia (cluster 1) has the highest gender inequality indices in rank and value; Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Myanmar (cluster 2) have relatively higher inequality indices compared to Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Vietnam (cluster3).

Noticeably, clusters 1 and 2 which show positive loadings in gender inequality indices received negative values in seats in national parliament and population with secondary education for both men and women. Despite that, Clusters 1 and 2 also show positive loadings in labor force participation for both men and women.

As mentioned in the presentations earlier, the following observations are made comparing men and women. In Cluster 1, men outnumber women in the national parliament, in the labor force and in receiving secondary education. In Cluster 2, women are underrepresented in the national parliament; but interestingly, there are a number of women who finish secondary education and participate in the labor force compared to their men counterpart Cluster 3, which has the lowest gender inequality index, has shown almost similar patterns in Cluster 2. More women are educated and career-oriented compared to men. However, the figure in the national parliament has not shown much greatness. Hence, women are still not well-represented in the national parliament.

Primarily as presented, the country in Cluster 1 has high inequality index value compared to the other countries in Clusters 2 and 3. Looking at the values, one might overlook the fact that behind all these unequal practices are much larger societal routines. These include socio-religious practices that have stuck in the people's systems. For instance, one might wonder why Cambodia has the highest inequality index which in fact can be solved by sending women to school, to get a career, and to be heard in the parliament. Perhaps this is where other factors come into the picture. For example, Buddhism as the country's major religion may have contributed in holding women back from participating actively in politics.

The codes have called for women to be graceful and silent in their actions. Thus, pursuing higher education might be offset because it conflicts with her main duty to take care of her siblings, get married and be a wife and mother (Kanbur, 2002 & OECD Council, 2011).

At this point, it may also be interesting to note that countries in Cluster 2 have different religious practices, yet their gender inequality indices are almost of the same scale. Malaysia and Indonesia observe Islam; Philippines observes Roman

Catholicism; Singapore is the home of quite a number of atheists; Myanmar observes Buddhism and Hinduism. It would be interesting for future studies to delve into the role of religion in gender inequality. More women are sent to school than men are; and more women have jobs than men do. Yet, women are still outnumbered in the national parliament than their men counterparts (Mikkola & Miles, 2007; Löfström, 2008; Jacobsen, 2011 & Durand, 2010).

Cluster 3 on the other hand, has countries with almost similar characteristics. Part of women's psyche is their prime function in the house which includes home-making and child care; or any role associated in the house. Yet, there is no distinctive discrimination in terms of providing education between men and women (Wall, 2014; Ridgeway, 2011).

Summarily, Cluster 1 has shown very wide disparity between men and women representation in the national parliament. This is because more men are sent to school; and more men get jobs (OECD Council, 2011). Hence, women having received little education would also not be able to get high-paying jobs. Being subordinates to men, their political will is only put to the minimum. Cluster 2 and 3 have so much in common. Women in these two clusters have been quite well-educated and have been adept at keeping jobs, thereby gaining more economic independence from men.

However, the first implication one must take note of is that the seats in parliament do not accommodate more women for all clusters. The ratio of men and women in the parliament is almost always more than half in all countries. Perhaps laws favoring women are better drafted by women themselves. If these voices are just too little, chances are, they will never be heard.

The second implication is that though more women in clusters 2 and 3 have received secondary education and kept careers, the disparity is not too wide to conclude that they are more economically stable. Women population is bigger than men population. It might be true that the ratio of men getting some education and career is more than that with women. Nonetheless, women are outnumbered politically. The disparity of ratio between men and women who go to secondary

schools is not large; however, the seats in the parliament represented by women are scant. Inequality is revealed by having received almost an equal degree of education, but the political freedom is stereotypically given in favor of men.

The third implication, the patterns of gender inequality index is revealed in the economic aspects though. Women in Clusters 2 and 3 have had participated in the labor force. Contrary to having been secluded in the house, three quarters of women in most countries in these clusters have gotten jobs. It is fair enough even though their representation is outnumbered by men. Inequality resurfaces only because women are underrepresented in high-paying jobs, and in managerial positions in companies. This is one of the reasons for women resorting into staying in the house and getting married.

The fourth and last implication is that Cluster 3 has the lowest inequality index because of its higher values in the seats in national parliament, population with at least secondary education and labor force participation. As these values between men and women become large, the inequality index also increases (OECD Council, 2011; Durand, 2010; Assman, 2014; Kanbur (2002); and Lofstrom, 2008).

V. CONCLUSION

Women in ASEAN countries experience inequalities due to a combination of various factors. Whenever they are outnumbered in gaining educational attainment, in representing the national parliament and in participating in the labor force, gender inequality index arises. However, countries have given women privilege in education and career, but not so much in political will. This paper only looks at demographic data of ASEAN countries; hence the raw data might not include more dimensions as to the real characteristics of the ASEAN countries. Series of studies related to the study might help expand the cluster interpretations.

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Grammarly:	Checked

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