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UNDERSTANDING GENDER-ROLES BEHAVIOR IN SOUTH EAST ASIA'S (SEA) DEVELOPING NATIONS

Khairul Azfar Adzahar
azfar938@uitm.edu.my

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

Masilah Mohamad
masilahmohamad@uitm.edu.my

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Negeri Sembilan

Mohd Shafiz Saharan
shafizsaharan@uitm.edu.my

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

Mohd Fazil Jamaludin
m.fazil@uitm.edu.my

Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Kedah

Abstract

Although women in South East Asia have undergone enormous socio-economic changes in the last few decades; most nations are still struggling to position women as an active decision-maker both in home and at work. This is mainly due to the traditional patriarchal behaviour and women's lack of access to financial sources (Daniell, 2012). Apart from that, a stereotypical masculine workplace also creates a false dichotomy of what women can and cannot do; such as holding a leadership position. The known cause for this alarming socio-economic imbalance between man and women and attitudes to gender-roles behaviour in South East Asia are mainly due to the discerning social norms and culture.

Keywords: women, patriarchal culture, gender-roles behaviour.

Introduction

In today's world, ideally men and women should work hand in hand to achieve goals. However, in the less-affluent economy, women are still viewed as passive, weak and agreeable while men possessed what is deemed as culturally valued characteristics. While women make up half of Indonesia's total population in 2017 and one female president having served the country, there still a glaring signal that women in the country did not enjoy the same status quo as male due to perception towards gender and career-relevant jobs is different between men and women; where both are expected to function and move to different career directions; limiting one's true ability.

Although women in Malaysia are making significant progress in the society through public participation; 54% in 2015 from 46.7% in 2010, they are still thought to be less competent than men. To make sense of the social world, society tends to perceive gender beliefs as an important cultural scheme (Correll, 2001). Thus, making it pivotal to identify the root-cause of gender-roles bias behavior and to promote gender equality in South East Asia region

Despite equal opportunities for both men and women in getting jobs in Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines there still exist a need for the governments to provide a special program, policies and provisions just to increase the number of women to actively participate in the economy. This indicates that despite all the advancement that the countries have achieved, women are still viewed as weak and need some sort of support in order to progress in the in society. Failing to understand the root-cause to the issue will results in negative attitudes to gender roles amongst citizens of the region thus creating future conflict in gender relations (Utomo, Utomo, Reimondos, & Mcdonald, 2012). Therefore, it is the aim of the paper to better comprehend the gender-roles bias behavior and to promote gender equality amongst the citizens of South East Asia nations.

Gender-Roles Bias Behavior

In spite of the remarkable progress made by women in social participation, concerted efforts have to be made to bridge the socio-economic divides between men and women. While society generally believes that gender differentiates man and women career choice, it is crucial to change the perception. In modern society, task competence above all is the most important variables in choosing career path. Although many efforts have been done by the government and organizations to eliminate inequality, prejudice and discrimination in the workplace, social norms still contribute to women's low participation in a leadership roles (Claus, Callahan, & Sandlin, 2013). Despite having two female presidents and a remarkable progress in closing the gap between man and women in the country- championing the effort's amongst the neighboring SEA nations, Philippines is still struggling to position women as active decision-makers because women did not have the same access to resources that yields power over their male counterparts (Mylene, 2003).

While many research use Hofstede's cultural dimension of Masculinity and Femininity to further lens the gender gap across various cultural backgrounds and nationalities; this theory, however, could not be used as the theoretical base for Malaysia as the country is at intermediate score of 50 for both Masculinity and femininity; making a preference for this dimension cannot be further explained. Another, theory that explains gender differences and its role in social stratification is called "Sexual Script Theory". The theory explains that sexuality is scripted and are shaped through ones' own experience and through social encounters; providing instructions to individuals to understand their particular roles in the society (Wiederman, 2015). On the contrary, Philippines scores 64 on Hofstede's masculinity dimension indicating that in Philippines, men are

more driven by money, success and things compared to women. This is due to the long history of Philippines's patriarchal behavior where fathers are expected to provide for the family while mothers are only expected to perform traditional roles at home (Daniell, 2012). With man being the bread-winner for the family and women's lack of access to financial sources in most SEA developing nations, they will possess more power in decision making and control compared to women; resulting to the never-ending socio-economic imbalance between man and women in the region.

Gender Inequality At The Workplace

Even though women share equal opportunity with men in finding and getting jobs, they are making less wages for the same workloads and only few that make it to the top positions. This is in accordance with study conducted by (Parcheta, Kaifi, & Khanfar, 2013) ; where man and women are evenly represented in the low and middle level positions, not in top positions and women are also earning less than their male counterparts. This has been going on for years, if not hundreds of years as man is perceived to be more self-oriented, dominating, assertive and ambitious (Babcock & Laschever, 2003) compared to women, where they face a burden of having to constantly prove their capability (Eagly, 1983). Specifically, segregation of jobs based on gender prohibiting women to actively participate in job market. Based on the study conducted by Asian Development Bank, although women in Philippines are given equal opportunity as men in primary and secondary education, clear signs of gender segregation can be seen in tertiary education, where number of women who enrolled in specific courses like technical, law, engineering, agriculture and architecture are substantially low. With respect to man and women's gender gap in earnings, women in SEA, particularly in Indonesia are still facing a considerable wage gap due to the sidelining of women in both public and private sectors and overall perception towards women's role in the traditional patriarchal culture (ILO, 2013). Although opinion made by Malaysian women is generally valued in the workplace, they are still trapped in the patriarchal cultural mindset where they themselves believe that there is a "reason" why they cannot actively participate in the decision making process (Sharifah Syahirah, 2015). More often, these invisible barrier to advancement forced women to level up to their male counterparts because notably, the prerequisite for leadership roles such as assertive, dominant, and competitive are stereotypically being perceived as male behaviors (Catalyst, 2007). These perceptions create a false dichotomy of what women can and cannot do – creating a stereotypically masculine workplace.

Conclusion

Concerted efforts need to be done to reduce gender disparity gap between men and women as well as to increase the overall status of South East Asian women. Although they are given equal

educational opportunity, they are marginalized in the labor market. The root to gender specific roles behavior in this region are mainly due to discerning social norms and culture where women are expected to play the role of caregiver in the household and man's domain is to provide for the family. This patriarchal attitude leads to the occupational segregation by gender in both public and private sector. Specifically, the perception to what women can and cannot do creates barriers to their entry in the labor market particularly in areas where strong mental and physical ability are the main pre-requisites. Though, much have been done by the governments to increase women's participation in job market; the real question now is how long it will take to bridge the gap and what are the implications of such imbalance to south east Asia's citizens in the long run.

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