Analyzing Wage Differential by Gender Using an Earnings Function Approach:
Further Evidence from a Small Developing Economy

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Abstract

Gender inequality in a number of aspects has been the subject of discussions at local, regional and global levels. The persistence of the gap despite economic progress has led to numerous studies seeking to determine the most effective ways of addressing the problem. This study examines the three schools of thought explaining gender inequality and by utilising primary data for Fiji, examines if gender differential with respect to wages exists. The study also examines if education plays an important role in the prevalence of the wage gap in general. The results of the study indicate that the inconsistency in wages is affected by both education and gender variables. This high disparity in wages based on gender raises serious questions about the government’s ability to meet the MDG targets as far as the reduction of gender inequality is concerned.
A. Introduction

The persistence of discrimination based on gender has been a key area of research amongst academics and NGOs. It has also been the focus of numerous meetings, symposiums and panel discussions and a matter of great interest to policy makers and politicians and the general public as well. With growing pressure, the objective of achieving gender equality has also been set as one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the United Nations Development Program. The third priority of the MDG is stated as the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. Due to this pressure to achieve MDG targets within the given time frame, governments of most countries are showing an increasing commitment to eliminating differences in earnings. Kahn and Blau (1992) argue that despite dramatic reductions in the male-female pay gap since the 1990’s, gender differentials persist in all industrialized nations although the degree of inconsistency varies considerably.

Gender differentials are also common amongst the small developing nations of the Pacific. In a study carried out by House (1995) for UNFPA, it was found that women in the Pacific are severely disadvantaged in a number of ways. The report suggested that the possible areas of disadvantage may include lowers wages, lower probability of employment, and access to education. Fiji is no exception to this finding where the issue of gender disparity and inequality has often been raised in the media by various NGOs and women’s advocacy groups.

The issue of gender discrimination in terms of lower wages for females has been examined extensively and a large volume of literature exists around the world. Partial equilibrium analysis of mean wages amongst the two gender groups could provide erroneous claims of discrimination as it does not take into account other factors that differentiate the two groups. It is important to evaluate the differences in wages by gender while taking into account factors such as education and work experience. The examination of gender differences in these terms has clear analytical implications for the study of labour market inequality (Jargowsky, 1997; and Nielson and Alderson, 1997).

Therefore, in this study, we examine the extent to which gender and education levels affect the wage differential in Fiji. The outline of the paper is as follows. The following section outlines the theory of gender inequality whilst the third section provides a theoretical and empirical model for use in this study. The next section gives an overview of the methodology and the fifth section contains the results and discussion. The last section summarise the results and draws conclusions.

B. Theorising Gender Inequality

The theory of gender inequality could be broadly summarized into three strands:

1) Modernisation (Neoclassical) Theory
2) Women in Development
3) Gender and Development Theory

These three theoretical strands are discussed below.

**Modernisation (Neoclassical) Theory**

The first set of studies on gender inequality argued that it’s incidence was going to decline with industrialization or economic growth (Weiss, et al., 1976; Clark, 1991; Clark, et. al, 1991; Charles, 1992, and Norris, 1987). A similar argument was put forward by the World Bank (1995) that economic growth has proved to contribute towards the gradual changes in women’s status and that public policies may have a significant role in breaking down institutional and cultural mechanisms of discrimination against women. Such an approach acknowledges that a proportion of existing gender gaps in wages or employment might be attributed to the persistence of discrimination (Aigner and Cain, 1977; Goldberg, 1982; and, Lundberg and Startz, 1983). Discrimination can arise in a variety of ways. In Becker’s (1957) model, discrimination is due to the discriminatory tastes of employers, co-workers, or customers. In models of “statistical” discrimination, differences in the treatment of men and women arise from average differences between the two groups in the expected value of productivity which lead employers to discriminate on the basis of that average (Aigner and Cain, 1977). However, Aigner and Cain, (1977); Goldberg, (1982); and, Lundberg and Startz, (1983) also argue that discrimination entails additional costs (such as the payment of higher wages to favoured groups) for the agents who engage in such practices while it provides benefits (e.g., the opportunity to employ discriminated groups at relatively lower wages) for agents willing to exploit the opportunities generated by the discriminatory activity of competitors (Darity, Jr. 1989).

Advocates of this group also argue that differences between men and women (e.g., in employment, wages or vulnerability to poverty) result primarily from human capital differentials (education, skills, expected length of labour force participation) that are bound to wither away over time (Becker, 1957, 1964 and 1985; Mincer, 1958, 1962, and 1974; Mincer and Polacheck, 1974; Oi, 1962; O’Neil and Polacheck, 1993; Schultz, 1961 and Smith, 1984). Given the traditional division of labour on the basis of gender in the family, women tend to accumulate less labour market experience than men. Further, because women anticipate shorter and more discontinuous work lives, they have lower incentives to invest in market oriented formal education and on the job training and their resulting smaller human capital investment will lower their earnings relative to those of men. The longer hours that women spend on housework may also decrease the effort they put into their market jobs compared to men and this also has a detrimental effect on their productivity and hence their wages (Becker, 1985).
Women in Development (WID) Theory

The WID theory is based on the work of E. Boserup who argued that economic growth during the initial stages of development is characterized by a growing gap between men and women and that such a gap only begins to diminish once countries develop beyond a certain threshold (Boserup, 1970). The theory also argued that productivity differentials between men and women prior to urbanization and the growth of a market economy are negligible, but the emergence and development of an urban economy leads to “the polarization and hierarchization of men’s and women’s work roles (Boserup, 1970). The theory also states that economic growth is not the sole variable shaping women’s labour-force participation and overall standing relative to men as “cultural traditions, including the role of women in the traditions, including the role of women in the traditional sector of market trade, seem to be a more important factor in determining the place of women in the modern trade sector than is the stage of general “modernization” achieved by the country (Boserup, 1970). In such a case, rapid development is likely to be accompanied by greater rigidity in countries with a tradition of patriarchal institutions (Forsthe, et. al., 2000). Boserup’s (1970) contribution has been widely used for policy making with regard to women’s issues. Given the hidden contribution of women to development, Boserup (1970) has called upon the policy makers to become more sensitive to the importance of non-market activities such as household work or subsistence production activities. Boserup (1970) argued that such recognition would not only reduce gender inequality, but also enhance the likelihood of success of the development efforts in general.

There are quite a few empirical studies that lend support to Boserup’s (1970) thesis. This includes Pample and Tanaka (1986), Evenson (1983) and Chafetz (1984). Pample and Tanaka (1986) focused on patterns of female labour-force participation (FLFP) and argued that available data on 1965 and 1970 confirmed a curvilinear relationship between economic development and FLFP. Evenson (1983) undertaking an international comparison of the allocation of women’s time, argues that female labour force participation is likely to initially decline under conditions of economic growth. Chafetz (1984) also makes a similar assertion while developing her typology of societal types according to level of gender inequalities.

Gender and Development (GAD) Theory

The GAD theory is another body of literature which selectively draws on material from Boserup’s (1970) work to emphasis the rising vulnerability of women over the cause of economic development.

There are two schools of thought within this strand of literature. The first school of thought argues that inequalities between men and women are shaped by institutional arrangements such as patriarchal family structures, and discriminatory labour practices and property laws, that are relatively unaffected by the process of economic growth (Beneria, 1982; Folbre, 1986; Youssef, 1972; Semyonov, 1980; and, Draper, 1985). Within this school of thought, we can also incorporate the theory of labour market
segmentation which views the labour market as stratified or segmented by institutional barriers. Within each segment, neo-classical principles are generally assumed to continue to be relevant. One of the best known theories of labour market segmentation is the dual labour market theory which distinguishes between two types of jobs: primary sector jobs which are relatively good in terms of pay, security and opportunities for advancement, and secondary sector jobs with low pay, low security and opportunities for advancement (Wilkinson, 1981; Leontaridi, 1998 and Magnae 1991). The primary sector jobs require a high degree of worker stability and due to the the fact that women are associated with high turnover, they are more likely to be relegated to secondary jobs.

The second school of thought argues, based on cross-national and individual country data that economic development, in fact, exacerbates inequalities between men and women (Tinker, 1976; and Ward, 1984). Tinker (1976:22) argues that “development by widening the gap between incomes of men and women, has not helped improve women’s lives, but rather has had an adverse effect upon them”. Ward (1984:43) argues that “the intrusion of the world system through foreign investment from and trade dependency on core nations has operated to reduce women’s status relative to men’s. There are a number of studies that support the notion of a persistent deepening gap between men and women. These include the studies of Levy, 1998; Murrane and Levy, 1996; McCall, 2000; Moore and Shackman (1996), Nuss and Majk; a (1983), Elson (1995). Levy, (1998); Murrane and Levy, (1996) and McCall, (2000) argue that with economic development, rising earnings inequality is largely due to skill biased technological change in which the demand for low-skill workers has fallen relative to workers with computer, information based and other technical and high level skills. Moore and Shackman (1983:287) evaluated the relationship between levels of economic development and women’s empowerment and have found that “neither high levels of economic prosperity nor development of women’s “human capital” through education and employment necessarily results in increased access to authority positions for women”. Similar conclusions were reached by Nuss and Majka (1983) who argued that economic development may improve women’s status by increasing education levels or decreasing fertility levels but its direct effect on women’s authority position is small or negative. Elson (1995) indicates that structural adjustment programs through cuts in public spending and social programs increase the scope and intensity of women’s unpaid household labour and even where such programs enhance market opportunities, men are likely to control the resulting income gains producing little benefits for other household members or leading to domestic violence as the outcome of attempts to renegotiate intra-household distribution. World Bank (1995:107) has also noted that “the relative position of women has often deteriorated during structural adjustment periods”.

C. Theoretical Model

Individuals often maximize utility by consuming certain goods. These goods are purchased by income earned by the individual. Therefore, maximization of the utility depends on optimization of consumption and optimal consumption depends on an individual’s income. Individual income depends on a number of factors, particularly the
education and skill endowment of the individual. However, other factors such as work experience and work hours may also affect the level of income. Furthermore, gender type and post secondary capital investment may also differentiate income levels. Utilising the household production function of Becker (1965), we develop the following theoretical and empirical model:

Individual maximizing his utility over the consumption of $Z$ goods subject to a budget constraint:

$$\text{Max } U_i = f(Z_i)$$  \hspace{1cm} (1)

where $Z = \text{goods, services that an individual may need.}$

Now amount of $Z$ good available to an individual “$i$” for consumption depends on the level of income:

$$Z_i = f(Y_i)$$  \hspace{1cm} (2)

where $Y_i$, the level of income of individual “$i$” depends on various factors.

$$Y_i = f(\text{Edu}_i, \text{WExp}_i, \text{Gen}_i, \text{K}_i, \text{S}_i)$$  \hspace{1cm} (3)

where \text{Edu} = \text{education level;}
\text{WExp} = \text{Work experience;}
\text{K} = \text{Post secondary investment on education;}
\text{Gen} = \text{gender (male = 0/female =1);}
\text{S} = \text{other goods such as protection from security from political instability, lawlessness, violence and intimiditation;}

Therefore, based on a-priori knowledge, the income earned by an individual $i$ is formalized as:

$$\beta_{\text{Edu}} > 0, \beta_{\text{WExp}} > 0, \beta_{\text{Gen}} < 0, \beta_{\text{K}} > 0, \beta_{\text{S}} > 0$$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

Using the above exposition, we now can state the earnings function of an individual as follows:

$$Y_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{WExp}_i + \alpha_2 \text{ED}_2i + \alpha_3 \text{ED}_3i + \alpha_4 \text{Gen}_i + \alpha_5 \text{Eth}_i + \alpha_6 \text{PSC}_i$$  \hspace{1cm} (5)

where $Y_i = \text{Annual gross income (S);}$
$\text{WExp}_i = \text{Work experience (years);}$
$\text{ED}_2i = \text{Dummy for education: D= 1 if high school education D=0 Otherwise}$
$\text{ED}_3i = \text{Dummy for education: D= 1 if high tertiary education; D= 0 otherwise}$
$\text{Gen}_i = \text{Dummy for gender 1= Female}$
\[
\text{Eth}_i = \text{Dummy for ethnicity} \quad \begin{cases} 
0 = \text{Male} \\
1 = \text{Indo-Fijians} \\
0 = \text{Ethnic Fijians} 
\end{cases}
\]

\[
PSC_i = \text{Post secondary education investment (\$)}
\]

The above model can be estimated using the Ordinary Least Squares estimation technique.

**D. Methodology**

Data for this study was collected from Suva and Lautoka, the only two cities in Fiji. While a country wide sample would have been more appropriate, finance was the single most constraint that prohibited such a large scale study. However, Suva and Lautoka are the only two cities in Fiji with a large peri-urban base as well. Therefore, a representative sample from these two areas is quite likely to converge on the population. Apart from randomly interviewing workers on the streets of the two cities, three low income settlements were randomly picked from Suva: the settlements of Sakoca, Jittu Estate and Vatuwaqa. In these places, every third household was surveyed and from each household, the first working age person encountered were interviewed. However, in most of the cases, the head of the households chose to be interviewed. While no theoretical basis was used for taking a particular sample size, the idea was to keep it sufficiently large to ensure that sample mean responses converge on the population mean with a socially accepted level of confidence. The survey, using structured questionnaires, was administered over a 3 month period in March-May, 2006. While a total of 500 households were targeted, a total of 412 questionnaires were received from which 351 questionnaires were used. Of these questionnaires, 231 were for Suva, the largest City while 120 were from Lautoka. The survey was carried out with the support of University undergraduate students. The questionnaires that were not utilised in the study had incomplete information on key variables.

A summary profile of the respondents is provided in Table 1 below. The mean age of the respondent is 33 years. This is a reasonable approximate of the average working aged person in the country. The gender bias towards male, 65.8% reveals the correct picture of more males engaged in waged employment. The education variable is measured in terms of primary, secondary or tertiary education. The mean income of the respondents was $12,511.00. This income level is above Fiji’s poverty line income of $7200. The mean post secondary investment is equivalent to $11,000. Some of the respondents have made zero investment after secondary education as reflected by the zero minimum value for this variable. The ethnicity variable is quite biased towards Indo-Fijians. This is regrettable because ethnic Fijians population is significantly more than Indo-Fijians. However, the low response rate from is a reflection of apathy on their part towards these kinds of survey work.
### Table 1: Basic Profile of the Urban and Rural Sample Households.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample size (No)</td>
<td></td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Years)</td>
<td>Min</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Max</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (%)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>65.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level (%)</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross Income ($)</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1,400.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>77,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>12,511.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Secondary Investment on Education ($)</td>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>175,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>10,998.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity (%)</td>
<td>Ethnic Fijian</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indo-Fijian</td>
<td>79.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data obtained from primary survey.

### E. Results and Discussion

The Ordinary Least Squares estimate of the earnings function is presented in Table 2 below. The model has a reasonable fit with $R^2$ of 41%. Note this low $R^2$ value is common in cross-sectional studies when we have quite a few dummy variables on the right hand side. Furthermore, another indicator of fit of the model is the significance of the independent variables. Of the six variables, 4 are significant at 5% level of significance. The results presented make some interesting revelations. The gender variable, the key variable of interest, does stand by the a priori expectation of significant inequality in favour of men. The gender variable, which is significant at 5% level, indicates that female’s remuneration is lower than males by an average amount of $2663.70. This finding is quite worrying not only because of the difference but because of the size of the difference. There are three other variables which are significant. The secondary education dummy is not significant indicating that there is not a significant difference between income for primary and secondary educated workers. However, the tertiary education variable is significant indicating that workers with tertiary education earn significantly higher income than workers with primary or secondary education. Taking
into account the constant value, we can interpret this variable as follows. Those workers with tertiary education earn, on an average, $6137.70 over primary educated worker and $5082.40 over secondary educated worker. The results reveal that tertiary education is a source of major wage/income gain for workers. This result is reinforced when one examines post secondary capital investment variable which is highly significant indicating that a 1% percent increase in post secondary studies will raise income by 0.15%. Another variable that accounts for income variation is work experience. This variable significantly affects the variation in income. The coefficient of the variable indicates that a years increase in work experience raises income by $198.59.

Table 2: Ordinary Least Squares Estimate of Earnings Function

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>Elasticity at Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-2663.70</td>
<td>-0.072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-3.439)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>-1162.30</td>
<td>-0.074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-1.225)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Dummy 2</td>
<td>1055.30</td>
<td>0.021</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.816)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed Dummy 3</td>
<td>6137.70</td>
<td>0.308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.247)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td>198.59</td>
<td>0.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.447)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.787)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>6808.40</td>
<td>0.545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4.381)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>351</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F. Summary and Conclusion

This study examines how an individual’s earnings is affected by individual specific factors such as gender and education. The results presented in this study conforms to public statements of gender biases ness and importance of tertiary education. The gender investigation reveals that female’s wages are significantly lower than that of males. The large wage gap between males and females in Fiji’s labour market is an interesting revelation given the governments effort to ensure that MDG targets are met. Government must set the right example by ensuring that ,being the largest employer, it does not discriminate workers based on gender. The private sector can also get the appropriate signals and thus ensure that the gap is eliminated from this exhibition of commitment by the government.

The impact of education on income also provides an important signal for labour market reforms. The findings reveal that the labour market’s sensitivity to education level and
consequently its tendency to reward workers based on qualification and education implies that education could be a escape route from unemployment. Therefore, knowing that the labour market is sensitive to higher education, the long term strategy to raise peoples income would be to ensure that they pursue post-secondary education. For this to happen, in a developing society where a large proportion of households are earning below poverty line income, the government must promote the facilitation of education of its subjects by providing financial assistance, whether it is in the form of scholarships, fellowships or student loans.

Successful elimination of gender discrimination will require the concerted effort of the policy makers, the NGOs, civil society and the private sector. For this to be achieved, the contribution of females to non-formal and informal sector must be acknowledged as well. Furthermore, the increasingly market oriented economies require differentiated labour. In developing countries, with a large proportion of its population earning below poverty line income, this differentiated labour, embodied with human capital can only be achieved with a greater public sector input in ensuring that finance is made accessible. Financial obstacles at all levels, primary and secondary and tertiary must be addressed as lack of it at lower levels will see very few reaching the top.
G. References


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