Gender Wage Gap Analysis in Riau Province Using the Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition Method

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Abstract

This study investigates the gender wage gap in Riau Province using the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method to examine its underlying factors. The analysis reveals a significant wage disparity, where women earn, on average, 29.56% less than men, despite higher educational attainment among women. The decomposition results highlight that only 2.44% of the gap is explained by observable factors such as education and employment type, while 76.76% remains unexplained, indicating the prevalence of discrimination and unmeasured structural barriers. This study identifies unique regional dynamics, including the paradox of women in urban areas earning less than their rural counterparts, contrary to global trends. Additionally, the study underscores the role of formal employment in reducing wage disparities, with women in formal jobs earning significantly more than those in informal sectors. These findings suggest that while improving education and transitioning women into formal employment can partially address wage disparities, structural reforms targeting workplace discrimination and cultural norms are essential for achieving gender wage equity. The study contributes to the literature by providing localized insights into gender wage gaps in Riau Province, emphasizing the need for targeted policy interventions to enhance equity in labor market outcomes.

Keywords: *Gender Wage Gap, Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition, Discrimination, Labor Market, Riau Province.*

Introduction

Gender inequality remains a persistent issue globally, affecting various dimensions of life, including education, health, and employment. One significant manifestation is the gender wage gap, a phenomenon where men, on average, earn more than women for similar roles or equivalent work. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023 ranks Indonesia 87th out of 146 countries, indicating that gender parity is still a challenge, particularly in economic participation and opportunities, with a score of only 0.666 (WEF, 2023). This score reflects declining progress from the previous year, highlighting the urgency to address gender disparities systematically.

In Indonesia, the labor force participation rate illustrates stark gender differences, with 86% of men engaged in the workforce compared to just 50% of women in 2022 (BPS, 2023). Moreover, women's wages remain 22.09% lower than men's on average, a gap that has widened by 1.7% from the prior year. Such disparities are not solely a result of differences in education or skills but are also driven by systemic discrimination in the labor market (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Becker's (1971) discrimination theory asserts that biases from employers, colleagues, and consumers often perpetuate wage inequality, underscoring the need for a nuanced analysis of this phenomenon in Indonesia.

The gender wage gap is particularly concerning in Riau Province, an economically advanced region with a high Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP). Despite its economic achievements, Riau ranks 16th nationally in gender inequality, with a Gender Inequality Index (GII) score of 0.47, indicating that gender-based disparities account for a 47% loss in potential human development (UNDP, 2023). These disparities are compounded by cultural norms that restrict women's access to high-paying jobs and limit their participation in decision-making roles, which aligns with Polachek's (1981) occupational self-selection

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theory, suggesting that societal expectations shape women's career choices and earnings

Educational attainment is often considered a key driver of wage parity. Interestingly, in Riau Province, more women than men attain higher education levels, yet their wages remain significantly lower (BPS, 2023). This paradox challenges the neoclassical human capital theory, which posits that increased education leads to higher productivity and wages (Borjas, 2016). The persistent wage gap despite women's educational advancement highlights structural barriers, such as occupational segregation and limited access to leadership roles (Chamberlain, 2016).

The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method provides a comprehensive framework to disentangle the factors contributing to wage disparities. Previous studies, such as Rahman & Al-Hasan (2019), demonstrate that while part of the wage gap can be explained by observable characteristics like education and experience, a significant portion remains unexplained, pointing to discrimination. In the context of Riau, analyzing the explained and unexplained components offers critical insights into the underlying mechanisms of gender-based wage disparities and the role of discriminatory practices.

This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap by focusing on Riau Province, leveraging the Blinder-Oaxaca method to quantify and decompose the wage gap. By examining variables such as education, marital status, employment type, and location, this research not only provides a granular understanding of wage disparities but also contributes to the broader discourse on gender equality. The findings are expected to inform policy interventions aimed at fostering equitable labor market outcomes, aligning with Indonesia's commitment to achieving the fifth Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality.

Literature Review

Theories of Gender Wage Gap

The gender wage gap is a complex issue influenced by a range of economic, cultural, and social factors. Blau and Kahn (2017) emphasize that wage disparities are not merely a function of observable characteristics, such as education or job experience, but also stem from systemic discrimination and structural inequalities. Becker's (1971) theory of labor market discrimination outlines how biases from employers, coworkers, and customers result in unequal treatment of women in hiring, promotion, and compensation. This theory remains foundational in understanding wage inequalities today.

Polachek's (1981) occupational self-selection theory highlights that gendered societal norms and expectations influence career choices, often steering women into lower-paying, flexible jobs. This aligns with findings by Goldin (2021), who argues that caregiving responsibilities disproportionately borne by women perpetuate their underrepresentation in high-paying roles and industries. These theories underscore the intersection of social and economic dynamics that perpetuate wage disparities.

Human Capital Theory and Its Limitations

Neoclassical human capital theory posits that wages are determined by individual productivity, which is influenced by education, training, and experience (Becker, 1964). According to this framework, gender wage gaps should diminish as women's education levels rise. However, recent empirical studies challenge this assumption. Borjas (2016) highlights that while education increases earning potential, it does not account for the unequal returns women receive for similar qualifications and skills compared to men.

Recent studies by Anker (2020) and Blau and Kahn (2021) suggest that even in regions with high educational attainment among women, structural barriers such as occupational segregation and limited access to leadership roles maintain wage inequalities. These limitations in the application of human capital theory reveal the need to consider discriminatory practices and institutional constraints in understanding gender wage disparities.

Discrimination and Segregation in the Labor Market

Gender-based discrimination continues to play a significant role in wage disparities. According to Chamberlain (2016), even within the same job roles and industries, women are systematically offered lower wages than their male counterparts. This phenomenon is linked to the "glass ceiling" effect, which limits women's progression to senior positions, and the "sticky floor" phenomenon, which confines them to lower-level, lower-paying roles (Hennigusnia, 2014).

In addition to vertical segregation, horizontal segregation, where women are concentrated in lower-paying sectors such as healthcare and education, exacerbates the wage gap. Laurensia and Yuliana (2020) found that in Indonesia, women are overrepresented in informal and low-skill jobs, where wages are substantially lower compared to formal sectors. These patterns highlight the systemic nature of wage discrimination.

Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition and Gender Wage Gap Analysis

The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method has emerged as a robust tool to analyze wage disparities. This method separates wage differences into explained components, attributable to observable factors like education and experience, and unexplained components, which often reflect discrimination (Blinder, 1973; Oaxaca, 1973). A study by Rahman and Al-Hasan (2019) in Bangladesh revealed that over 50% of the gender wage gap was due to discriminatory practices, despite controlling for human capital differences.

In Indonesia, similar findings have been observed. Lusiyanti (2020) applied the Blinder-Oaxaca method to analyze wage gaps in East Kalimantan and found that unexplained factors accounted for a significant portion of the disparity, underscoring the pervasive influence of labor market discrimination. This method provides a detailed framework for identifying and addressing the root causes of wage inequality.

Policy Implications and Contemporary Theories

Recent contributions to gender wage gap literature emphasize the role of institutional and policy interventions. England (2022) argues that enforcing pay transparency and implementing gender quotas in leadership positions can significantly reduce wage disparities. Additionally, Goldin (2021) highlights the importance of subsidized childcare and flexible working arrangements in enabling women to participate fully in the labor market.

In Indonesia, the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting and affirmative action policies have shown promise in narrowing disparities, yet structural challenges remain. Studies by Blau and Kahn (2021) and Laurensia and Yuliana (2020) recommend combining policy reforms with societal shifts to challenge deeply ingrained gender norms that perpetuate inequality.

Relevance to the Riau Province Context

The unique socioeconomic characteristics of Riau Province make it an ideal case study for gender wage gap analysis. Despite being one of Indonesia's most economically advanced regions, wage disparities persist, reflecting broader national trends (BPS, 2023). Using the Blinder-Oaxaca method, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of evidence on gender wage gaps, offering insights for policymakers to design targeted interventions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research approach to analyze the gender wage gap in Riau Province, Indonesia. Quantitative methods are particularly effective in identifying patterns, relationships, and

statistical significance within large datasets (Creswell, 2014). The research uses secondary data obtained from the 2022 National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas) conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS), focusing on individuals who are part of the workforce.

The analytical framework is based on the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method, which distinguishes between explained components (differences due to observable factors such as education and employment type) and unexplained components (indicative of discrimination). This method allows for a nuanced understanding of wage disparities by deconstructing the factors contributing to them (Blinder, 1973; Oaxaca, 1973).

Data Collection

The dataset consists of detailed information on workers' wages, educational attainment, marital status, employment type, job sector, and residential location. Data were filtered to include only working individuals, excluding those categorized as students, homemakers, or unemployed. This ensures the analysis focuses on labor market participants and their earnings.

Variables and Measurement

The study incorporates the following variables:

- *Dependent Variable*

Wage: Monthly earnings in Indonesian Rupiah (IDR), measured as net income including allowances.

- *Independent Variables*

Education: Highest level of education attained, categorized as basic (elementary) and advanced (secondary and higher).

Marital Status: Classified as married or unmarried.

Employment Type: Formal or informal employment based on contract status and job benefits.

Job Sector: Agricultural or non-agricultural sectors.

Residential Location: Urban or rural residence, indicating geographic context.

These variables were selected based on their relevance to gender wage disparities, as identified in previous literature (Blau & Kahn, 2017; Borjas, 2016).

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis involves three stages:

- *Descriptive Statistics*

Provides an overview of the dataset, including demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of male and female workers. This step helps identify initial patterns and disparities in wages across gender.

- *Robust Regression*

To address potential violations of classical assumptions such as heteroscedasticity and outliers, robust regression using the Method of Moments (MM) estimator is applied. This ensures unbiased and efficient parameter estimates (Susanti et al., 2013).

- *Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition*

  The wage gap is decomposed into explained (endowment factors like education and experience) and unexplained components (indicative of discrimination). This method quantifies the contribution of each factor to the overall wage disparity (Blinder, 1973; Oaxaca, 1973).

Analytical Framework

The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition model is expressed as follows:

$$\varDelta W = (X_m - X_f)\beta_m + X_f(\beta m - \beta f)$$

Where:

- ΔW = Wage gap between men (m) and women (f)

- X = Vector of explanatory variables (e.g., education, employment type)

- β = Coefficients estimated from regression models for men and women

The first term $(X_m - X_f)\beta_m$ represents the explained component, while the second term $X_f(\beta_m - \beta_f)$ captures the unexplained component due to discrimination or unobserved factors.

Sampling and Population

The study focuses on 10,957 working individuals in Riau Province, with 7,457 men (68%) and 3,140 women (32%). The sample represents diverse sectors and employment types, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the labor market.

Ethical Considerations

Secondary data usage complies with ethical research standards. The data were anonymized to protect respondents' privacy and were used solely for academic purposes, following regulations set by the Central Bureau of Statistics.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis highlights significant gender disparities in employment and wages in Riau Province. Out of 10,957 individuals in the workforce, 68% are men and 32% are women. However, wage inequality is evident, as only 24.2% of women earn above the minimum wage compared to 46.17% of men. This gap is consistent across sectors and job types, reflecting systemic challenges faced by women in the labor market.

Women in Riau are more likely to attain higher education than men, with 53.79% of women having secondary or tertiary education compared to 44.99% of men. Despite this advantage, women's average earnings remain lower. The findings align with Polachek's (1981) self-selection theory, which attributes wage disparities to occupational choices influenced by societal norms.

The distribution of employment types reveals another critical disparity. Women are overrepresented in informal jobs (66.11%) compared to men (70.40%), while fewer women are employed in formal sectors offering higher wages and benefits. Furthermore, women predominantly work in non-agricultural sectors such as services and trade, yet their earnings in these sectors are significantly lower than their male counterparts.

Regression Analysis

The robust regression analysis provides insights into the factors influencing wages for men and women separately. Key findings include:

- *Education*

Education has a positive and significant impact on wages for both genders. Men and women with secondary or tertiary education earn 29% and 27% more, respectively, than those with basic education. This underscores the role of education in enhancing productivity and earnings, consistent with human capital theory (Borjas, 2016).

- *Employment Type*

Workers in formal employment earn significantly higher wages than those in informal jobs. Men in formal jobs earn 73% more, while women earn 66% more, highlighting the importance of transitioning workers into formal employment to reduce wage disparities.

- *Marital Status*

    Marital status significantly influences men's wages but has a less pronounced effect on women's earnings. Married men earn 74% more than unmarried men, reflecting societal expectations of men as primary breadwinners. For women, the wage premium associated with marriage is minimal and statistically insignificant.

- *Residential Location*

    Urban residents generally earn higher wages, but the effect differs by gender. Men in urban areas earn 6% more than their rural counterparts, whereas women in urban areas earn 10% less than those in rural areas. This unexpected finding for women may reflect greater competition or discrimination in urban labor markets.

Blinder-Oaxaca Decomposition Results

The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method quantifies the explained and unexplained components of the gender wage gap in Riau Province. The total wage gap is 0.91 million IDR (29.56%), with the following breakdown:

- *Explained Component (Endowment Factors)*

    Endowment factors account for 2.44% of the wage gap, driven primarily by differences in education, job sector, and employment type. Women's higher representation in non-agricultural sectors and formal jobs contributes positively to narrowing the gap.

- *Unexplained Component (Discrimination)*

The majority of the wage gap (76.76%) is unexplained, indicating the presence of discrimination and unmeasured factors. This aligns with findings by Blau and Kahn (2017), who note that wage disparities are often rooted in systemic biases and unequal treatment in the workplace.

Sectoral Analysis

Wage disparities vary across sectors. In agricultural jobs, women earn significantly less than men, reflecting the undervaluation of women's labor in traditional roles. In non-agricultural sectors, women's wages are higher relative to their male counterparts in the same positions but remain insufficient to close the overall gap.

Formal jobs provide better wage parity, with a narrower gap observed in professional and managerial roles. However, the underrepresentation of women in these roles limits their potential to achieve equitable outcomes.

Implications for Wage Parity

The results suggest that while improving education and access to formal employment can reduce wage disparities, these measures alone are insufficient to eliminate the gender wage gap. Structural reforms targeting discriminatory practices and enhancing women's representation in high-paying sectors are essential. The findings underscore the need for policy interventions that address both observable and unobservable factors driving wage inequalities.

Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

The results of this study reveal critical insights into the gender wage gap in Riau Province, highlighting both the explained and unexplained factors contributing to wage disparities. Using the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method, this study provides a nuanced analysis that not only quantifies the wage gap but also identifies the underlying mechanisms driving inequality.

Novel Insights into Education and Wage Disparities

A significant finding in this study is the paradox of women's educational attainment. Despite higher levels of education among women compared to men, their average wages remain substantially lower. This contradicts the human capital theory, which posits that education should directly correlate with higher wages (Becker, 1964). The results suggest that the returns to education are not evenly distributed across genders in Riau Province. This aligns with Blau and Kahn's (2017) assertion that systemic barriers often prevent women from fully capitalizing on their educational achievements.

The novelty lies in identifying how these barriers manifest within the context of a region like Riau, which is economically advanced yet exhibits significant gender inequalities. Unlike previous studies focusing on national trends, this research provides a localized analysis, revealing the interplay between education, job type, and wage outcomes in a specific provincial setting.

Structural Challenges in Employment

Another key finding is the role of employment type and job sector in shaping wage disparities. Women are overrepresented in informal jobs and non-agricultural sectors, which, while offering higher wages than agricultural jobs, still fail to close the wage gap. Interestingly, formal employment significantly reduces wage disparities, highlighting the need for policies promoting women's participation in formal sectors.

The discussion extends beyond the general observation of wage inequality by dissecting sector-specific dynamics. For instance, the unexpected finding that women in urban areas earn less than those in rural

areas suggests the presence of unique urban labor market challenges, such as higher competition and potentially stronger biases. This observation underscores the importance of geographically targeted interventions, an area often overlooked in gender wage gap research.

The Persistence of Discrimination

The decomposition analysis reveals that 76.76% of the wage gap is unexplained, pointing to persistent discrimination and unmeasured factors. This unexplained component exceeds the findings of similar studies in other regions, suggesting that structural biases may be more pronounced in Riau. For example, societal norms and cultural expectations could be limiting women's access to leadership positions and high-paying roles, a hypothesis supported by Goldin (2021).

The novelty of this study lies in its use of the Blinder-Oaxaca method to uncover the disproportionate impact of unexplained factors in Riau Province. By doing so, it contributes to a growing body of literature that emphasizes the role of discrimination in perpetuating gender wage gaps, while also providing specific evidence from a regional perspective.

Policy Implications and Strategic Interventions

The findings have significant policy implications. Enhancing women's access to formal employment is crucial, as formal jobs offer higher and more equitable wages. Furthermore, policies addressing workplace discrimination, such as enforcing pay transparency and promoting gender-sensitive workplace cultures, are essential. England (2022) highlights that such policies have been effective in narrowing wage gaps in other contexts, and their adaptation to Riau's labor market could yield similar benefits.

A novel aspect of this study is its suggestion to focus on improving the transition from education to employment for women in Riau. Although women are attaining higher education levels, the lack of mechanisms to translate these achievements into higher earnings is a critical gap. Programs aimed at career mentoring, leadership training, and addressing biases in recruitment processes could bridge this divide.

Localized Context and Regional Specificity

This study emphasizes the importance of understanding gender wage gaps within localized contexts. Riau Province, with its high economic potential, presents a paradox where progress in economic development has not translated into equitable labor outcomes. By focusing on a specific region, this study uncovers unique patterns and challenges that are often obscured in national-level analyses.

The regional focus not only highlights the distinct economic and cultural factors influencing wage disparities but also provides actionable insights for policymakers. This localized approach represents a novel contribution, filling a gap in the literature that often generalizes findings across diverse regions.

Contribution to Literature and Future Directions

This study advances the understanding of gender wage gaps by integrating a localized analysis with robust methodological tools. It demonstrates the utility of the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method in identifying both observable and unobservable factors driving wage disparities. The findings also challenge traditional theories by revealing context-specific dynamics, such as the paradox of urban wage disparities for women.

Future research could build on this study by incorporating qualitative methods to explore the cultural and societal norms influencing women's employment choices in Riau. Additionally, longitudinal analyses could provide insights into the impact of policy interventions over time.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to address the gender wage gap in Riau Province:

- *Promote Equal Access to Education and Skills Development*

  Although women in Riau have higher educational attainment than men, policies should focus on aligning education with labor market needs. Programs aimed at vocational training and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields should be prioritized to equip women with skills relevant to high-paying industries. Career counseling and mentorship programs can also help bridge the gap between education and employment.

- *Encourage Women's Participation in Formal Employment*

  Formal employment significantly reduces wage disparities. The government and private sector should collaborate to create incentives for women to enter formal sectors. These could include flexible working arrangements, maternity benefits, and gender-sensitive workplace policies. Expanding access to formal employment in rural areas can also address the urban-rural wage paradox highlighted in the study.

- *Enforce Pay Transparency and Anti-Discrimination Laws*

  Transparent pay structures can reduce unexplained wage gaps. Employers should be required to disclose salary ranges and criteria for promotions. Stronger enforcement of anti-discrimination laws is necessary to ensure that women receive equal pay for equal work. Regular audits and penalties for non-compliance could further incentivize equitable practices.

- *Promote Gender Parity in Leadership Positions*

  Women's underrepresentation in leadership roles contributes to wage inequality. Affirmative action policies, such as gender quotas in management and public sector leadership, can help address this imbalance. Leadership development programs specifically tailored for women can also enhance their career progression and earning potential.

- *Target Discriminatory Norms and Practices*

  Cultural and societal norms that limit women's economic participation need to be addressed through awareness campaigns and community engagement. Programs promoting shared household responsibilities and the economic value of women's work can help shift traditional perceptions.

- *Conduct Further Research and Longitudinal Studies*

  While this study provides significant insights, further research is needed to explore the unobservable factors contributing to wage disparities. Longitudinal studies can assess the long-term impacts of policy interventions and track progress toward achieving gender wage equity. Including qualitative methods could also provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of women in the workforce.

- *Strengthen Localized Policy Interventions*

  The unique dynamics of the gender wage gap in Riau Province necessitate region-specific policies. Local governments should collaborate with academic institutions and NGOs to design interventions tailored to the province's socioeconomic characteristics, including urban and rural disparities.

By implementing these recommendations, policymakers and stakeholders can take meaningful steps toward reducing gender wage disparities and fostering a more equitable labor market in Riau Province.

Conclusion

This study highlights the persistent gender wage gap in Riau Province, where women earn on average 29.56% less than men. The findings underscore the complexity of wage disparities, which are influenced by both observable factors, such as education and employment type, and unobservable factors, primarily attributed to discrimination and structural barriers.

A key insight from this study is the paradox of women achieving higher educational attainment than men but still earning less on average. This suggests that education alone is insufficient to address wage disparities without structural reforms to ensure equitable returns on education. The overrepresentation of women in informal sectors and lower-paying roles further exacerbates these disparities, despite the significant wage premium offered by formal employment.

The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition reveals that while 2.44% of the wage gap can be explained by differences in characteristics, 76.76% remains unexplained, highlighting the prevalence of discriminatory practices in the labor market. This calls for immediate action to address both explicit and implicit biases that hinder women's economic opportunities.

The study also identifies unique regional dynamics, such as the surprising finding that women in urban areas earn less than their rural counterparts. This emphasizes the need for localized policy interventions that address specific socioeconomic and cultural contexts in Riau Province.

By focusing on a regional perspective, this study contributes novel insights to the literature on gender wage disparities and provides a foundation for targeted interventions. Future research should explore qualitative dimensions of the gender wage gap and assess the long-term impacts of policy measures to achieve sustainable progress toward gender equity in the labor market.

In conclusion, addressing the gender wage gap in Riau Province requires a multifaceted approach involving education reforms, formal employment incentives, enforcement of anti-discrimination policies, and cultural shifts. These efforts are essential not only for achieving gender equity but also for harnessing the full economic potential of women in the workforce.

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