



Woman in Development and Politics

Income Inequality and the Intersectionality of Gender and Ethnicity in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Since the 1980s, researchers have adopted an approach to studying inequality, analyzing how various roots such as gender, socioeconomic class, religion, race, and ethnicity interact and intersect rather than examining them separately. This method of analyzing inequality is called the Intersectionality Approach. Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals possess multiple, intersecting social identities that are incompatible with isolation. For example, a person is not merely a woman or a Black individual; rather, they are a Black woman whose experiences are influenced by both race and gender simultaneously. In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the metaphor of “intersection,” asserting that white women and black women would encounter gender inequality in society in distinct ways. By comprehending the history and social status of black women, we can identify and pursue other comparable circumstances in which oppression and discrimination are established. Therefore, the Intersectionality Approach underscores that the impact of each identity classification (e.g., race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc.) on an individual’s life experience cannot be distinguished from that of other identity classifications. In other words, the experience of inequality in society is formed by the simultaneous interactions of all of those identities. Among a diverse array of identities, many intersectionality-based studies have concentrated on gender and racial identities. This study will focus on the gender and ethnic identities of individuals, as ethnic identity is more important in Iranian society than racial identity. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of the intersection of gender and ethnicity on income inequality in Iran.

Methodology

We use data from two sources: 1) The Household Expenditure and Income Surveys (HEIS) collected by the Statistical Center of Iran during 2016–2020. 2) The data from the National Survey of the Consumption of Cultural Goods (2019) are used to develop the variable of ethnicity. Currently, there is no documentation of the specific locations of the various ethnic groups in Iran and their migration patterns over time. Nevertheless, the location of one’s domicile can be used as a criterion for determining their ethnicity. In Iran, the primary distinguishing characteristics of ethnic groups are their unique language and region of residence, in addition to cultural factors. However, the precise borders of ethnic groups do not perfectly match provincial borders, and knowing a person’s region of residence cannot help accurately predict what ethnic group they belong to. Since many of the ethnic groups in Iran account for a low percentage of the total population, we categorize the ethnicity variable into two categories: the Fars category (which includes the Fars ethnicity) and the non-Fars category (which includes Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Baluchs, Lors, Turkmans, Mazanis, and Gilaks). The dependent variable is the natural logarithm of an individual’s total gross annual income, and the independent variables are age, years of education, residence (urban or rural), marital status, employment status, household income status, ethnicity, gender, and the interaction of gender and ethnicity. In this study, Ordinary Least Squares (which focuses on the relationship at the mean point of the distribution) and Quantile Regression (which focuses on the relationship at various points of the distribution) are used for statistical analysis through both cross-sections and pooled data. The intersection of gender and ethnicity subsequently enhances the research model to investigate the impact of ethnicity on the gender income gap in Iran. Gender and ethnicity are separately incorporated into the model.

Keywords:

Ethnicity,

Gender,

Income Inequality,

Intersectionality.

Results

Our findings, based on OLS and Quantile Regression, reveal a persistent gender income gap across all income percentiles and ethnicities, with women consistently earning less than men. Additionally, regardless of ethnicity, the gender income gap is the largest for women in the lowest income percentiles and smallest in the middle percentiles. Furthermore, the interaction term between gender (being female) and ethnicity (being non-Fars) is significant and negative for both low and high-income groups. This suggests that being non-Fars exacerbates the gender income gap for women (non-Fars women face a significantly wider gender income gap when compared to Fars women). Our findings emphasize the significance of taking intersectionality into account when developing policies. Policies that are exclusively designed to reduce the gender income gap may prove ineffective unless they recognize the diversity of ethnicities within a society. In 2016, 2017, and 2018, we observed a statistically significant interaction effect for low and high-income groups. This effect, however, became statistically non-significant in 2019 and 2020.

Conclusion

The Intersectionality Approach is a framework for identifying and elucidating the complexities that humans experience in their personal and social lives. This approach analyzes the interconnection of various forms of inequality and relevant effects on a person's life experience. As per the research findings, the gender income gap was observed in all percentiles and all ethnicities. Regardless of ethnicity, the gender income gap is the largest for women in the lowest income percentiles and smallest in the middle percentiles. Furthermore, for both low and high-income groups being non-Fars exacerbates the gender income gap for women (non-Fars women face a significantly wider gender income gap when compared to Fars women). The Intersectionality Approach is a suitable tool for enhancing the quality of policymakers' decisions. Our results highlight the importance of considering intersectionality when formulating policies. Policies aimed solely at reducing the gender income gap might be ineffective unless they acknowledge the diversity of ethnicities within a society. Some intersectionality-based policies are proposed as follows: Ensure that policies that prohibit discrimination in employment, promotions, and workplace practices are strengthened and enforced, with specific provisions in place to safeguard women from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. In the formulation and implementation of gender equality policies, it is important to consider the special needs and circumstances of non-Fars women. This includes investing in economic and educational empowerment plans for non-Fars women, supporting non-Fars women's entrepreneurship, eradicating the sociocultural obstacles that challenge non-Fars women in the labor market, providing female-headed households with further social and financial support, and providing childcare plans for working women in lower income deciles. Making sure that the composition of legislative bodies and political institutions mirrors the diversity found within the population; advocating for policies that cater to the requirements of marginalized groups.

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