

DOES LOCATION MATTER IN GENDER EQUALITY? THE IMPACT OF LOCATION ON RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL IDEOLOGIES, SEX ROLE PREFERENCES AND DIVISION OF LABOUR AMONG SIKH COUPLES IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study looks at the role of location in influencing the religious and cultural ideologies and sex-role preferences, and the pattern of division of labour of the Sikh community in Malaysia. The respondents were selected from metropolitan, urban and rural areas in Perak, Malaysia. The diverse locations are vital in understanding the possible effects of these different environments on the religious and cultural ideologies, sex-role preferences and division of labour of the communities. The different locations were used to measure the effect of different levels of development on gender ideology, sex-role perceptions and practices in their household division of labour. Thus this study takes into account development through its proxy location, in its examination of the above aspects of the Sikh community.*

Keywords: Gender Equality, Sex Role Preferences, Gender Ideology, Division of Labour, Sikh, Marriage

INTRODUCTION

This study utilized a primary data set gathered through a survey questionnaire administered to 197 Sikh households from the metropolitan, urban and rural areas of Perak. Perak is also a state in Malaysia rapidly undergoing development. Thus, this permits the identification of metropolitan, urban and rural areas. It was important to obtain a diversity of areas to see the relationship between resources, ideology, and marital power. The above areas were identified in Perak based on the definition set by the Statistical Department of Malaysia (as of 1999) as below;

Metropolitan areas consist of a population with more than 100,000 persons, Urban areas consist of a population of 1,000 - 99,999 persons and Rural areas consist of a population of fewer than 1,000 persons.

Conceptualization

Religious and Cultural Ideologies

Religion and culture are closely interlinked with each other. This can be seen in the definition of religion given by researchers [1], which states that there are some important concepts in understanding the basic elements of religion. Power and conflict can reflect the nature and significance of each of these basic elements of religion. It is stated that "Beliefs and symbols are crucial elements of culture" [1]. They further state that at the heart of religion lays a system of sacred beliefs and symbols. "Beliefs are cultural certainties that do not require empirical proof to be accepted as true or real. The beliefs enforced in religion about what is right and wrong are prescriptions for behavior and principles as guides in the daily lives of a community" [1].

In its traditionally accepted meaning, culture denotes all historically created designs for living and is transmitted from generation to generation. But it is constantly being modified by activities from within the culture and from outside. Culture in its more dynamic aspect provides for adaptation and adjustment to change. In other words, culture refers to a shared way of life among the members of society. Culture is an agreement of members in society about appropriate behaviour, values, history and heritage or rituals that should be respected and observed [2]. Culture is the language, norms, values, beliefs, knowledge, and symbols that make up a way of life. It is the understanding of how to act that people share with one another in any stable, self-reproducing group [1].

In this study, the religious and cultural ideologies on gender in various aspects of everyday life were measured using 14 identical questions asked to both the husband and wife according to researcher [3] benchmarking model. These questions were derived from the aspects of gender equality in Sikh religious and cultural ideologies. The issues cover equality of men and women in education, funerary rites, widows, equal participation in Sikh ceremonies, dowry, veil, purity and pollution, wedding ceremonies, equality in congregations and the community kitchen. These questions were formulated to establish the religious and cultural ideologies pertaining to egalitarian gender values.

Sex-Role Preferences (SRP)

Sex-role preferences are defined by researchers [4] as "preferences for desired goals and interests". Thus, a person can be referred to as "traditional" or "egalitarian" in terms of their sex-role preferences. That is, they want the rewards (and are willing to accept the costs) associated with the division of labour at home and in the society that is regulated by gender. In the traditional sex-role preferences, the woman is expected to be the primary caretaker of their children. The husband will share in their rearing in certain clearly defined but limited ways. The wife will also allow her husband to pursue his occupation without any serious intrusion on her part, as long as he is a "good provider" [4]. The application begins by conceptualizing subjective orientations as preferences for desired goals or interests. Women and men vary on the degree to which they do or do not prefer the kinds of tastes, utilities, goals, interests, rewards, costs and so forth as indicated by the sex-role preferences. The variation is generally measured by Likert-type responses (strongly agree, agree, mixed feelings, disagree, strongly disagree) to the items. This measures the index of preferences regarding a role either of a wife, husband, mother, and father [5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12]. To measure sex-role preferences in this study, respondents were asked 13 questions. These questions were asked to see the influence of gender ideology in the sex-role preferences held by the husband and wife. Both sets of questions were identical.

Division of Labour

The division of labour refers to work that is broken down into specialized tasks, with each task performed by a different set of persons [13]. The division of labour refers to the differentiation and distribution of the tasks involved in the production of goods and services. The division of