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# The Philippine Review of Economics

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# Does gender stereotyping influence labor force participation in the Philippines?

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We implement a partially linearized Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition to analyze the labor force participation gap. Using data from the merged January 2024 Labor Force Survey and the 2023 Family Income and Expenditure Survey, findings show that over 90 percent of the participation gap arises from the unexplained component which is linked to gender stereotyping. Proxies for the stereotype that men are primary economic providers—such as educational attainment and potential experience—are significant contributors to the unexplained portion, especially for married individuals, but are inconsistent for single individuals. On the other hand, domestic responsibility proxies, such as the nuclear family structure and the presence of children, show negligible or no contributions, indicating that stereotypes assigning household chores and childcare to women do not significantly influence the participation gap. These findings demonstrate that only the stereotype of men as primary economic providers significantly affects the labor participation gap, which is more evident among married individuals and less so among single individuals.

**JEL classification:** J70, J01

**Keywords:** Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, participation gap, gender, stereotyping

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## 1. Introduction

Labor force participation among women in the Philippines remains significantly lower than that of men. Despite progress in narrowing the participation gap, the disparity still exceeds 20 percentage points (pp) relative to its 2016 level.

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This disparity could indicate gender stereotyping, as women are expected to prioritize household responsibilities while men are expected to act as primary economic providers [Cabegin and Gaddi 2019].

To understand this disparity, researchers have employed various approaches. Some studies have applied a separate binary regression and compared the results between genders (Cabegin and Gaddi [2019]; Epetia [2019]), while others have focused solely on female participation [Pacete 2020]. However, a comprehensive approach is to decompose the participation gap into explained and unexplained components.

The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method, developed independently by Blinder [1973] and Oaxaca [1973], was originally applied to wage differentials. Oaxaca [1973] posited that in the absence of discrimination, the unexplained component would be zero. If non-zero, this may be attributed to discrimination, biases, or other factors [Elder et al. 2009]. Applying this method to labor participation can quantify the extent to which gender stereotypes affect decisions on labor market entry.

Despite several studies on labor force participation in the Philippines, the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition method has not been utilized. The major challenge limiting its use is that linear regression is not well-suited to binary outcomes such as labor force participation, as decomposed estimates may not tally with the total labor force participation gap.

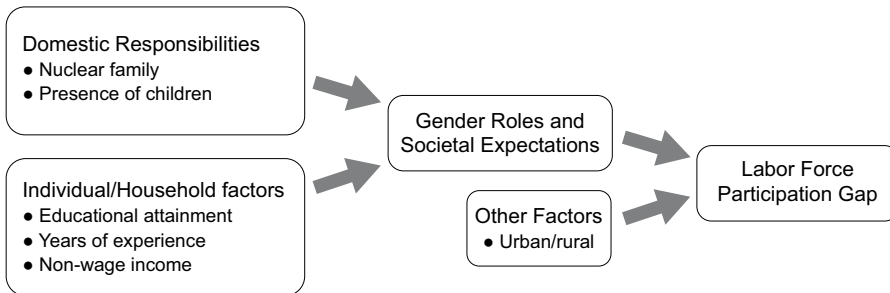
To address this problem, two methodologies have been put forward: the non-linear approach [Fairlie 2005] and the partially linearized approach (Even and Macpherson [1990]; Yun [2004]). The non-linear approach has available software implementation, but the main drawback is that the decomposition result is not robust to the ordering of the independent variables [Fairlie 2005]. On the other hand, the partially linearized approach has no readily available implementation, but the contributions of the independent variables to the participation gap are robust to ordering.

This study aims to quantify the source of the labor force participation gap using the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition. Specifically, it examines which percentage points in labor participation are due to the explained gap (i.e., differences in averages) and to the unexplained gap (i.e., differences in coefficients). If gender stereotyping plays a significant role, a substantial portion of the participation gap is expected to be due to the unexplained gap.

Three gender stereotypes that may contribute to the unexplained portion of the participation gap are examined. First, the assignment of household chores to women is proxied by household structure, specifically whether the household is nuclear as opposed to extended, where such tasks may be distributed among other members. Second, the assignment of childcare to women is proxied by the presence of children in the household [Epetia 2019]. The first and second stereotypes are grouped into domestic responsibilities in subsequent discussions (see Figure 1).

Third, the assignment of the economic provider role to men is proxied by educational attainment, years of experience, and non-wage income. If these stereotypes hold, the proxy indicators should contribute positively to the unexplained component of the participation gap (see Figure 1). Conversely, if the contribution of these indicators is zero or negative, the data do not support the presence of such gender stereotypes.

**FIGURE 1. Gender stereotypes and the participation gap**



The next sections are arranged as follows: the second section examines the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition and its probit extension; the third section provides an overview of the data source and variable descriptions; the fourth section presents the results and their implications; and the final section offers a summary and conclusion.

## 2. Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition

The Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition technique separates the average difference in the outcome variable  $Y$  between the two groups, say male ( $M$ ) and female ( $F$ ), into explained and unexplained components. This is formally given as:

$$\bar{Y}_M - \bar{Y}_F = (\bar{X}_M - \bar{X}_F)\beta_M - \bar{X}_F(\beta_M - \beta_F) \quad (1)$$

where  $\bar{Y}_j$  is the average outcome of gender  $j = M, F$ ;  $\bar{X}_j$  is the vector averages of independent variables (observable characteristics); and  $\beta_j$  is the vector of estimated coefficients (returns to the characteristics).

For the outcome variable labor force participation, the left-hand side is the participation gap. The first term on the right-hand side,  $(\bar{X}_M - \bar{X}_F)\beta_M$ , captures the explained gap, which mainly arises from the average differences of the independent variables between the two groups  $(\bar{X}_M - \bar{X}_F)$ . For example, if the average educational attainment of males is higher,  $(\bar{X}_M - \bar{X}_F > 0)$ , then this contributes to the explained gap adjusted by the coefficient  $\beta_M$ .

The second term,  $\bar{X}_F(\beta_M - \beta_F)$ , accounts for the unexplained gap, which mainly stems from the differences in coefficients,  $(\beta_M - \beta_F)$ , rather than differences in averages. If the coefficients for males and females differ such that  $(\beta_M - \beta_F) > 0$ , this contributes to the participation gap. In this study, this could be attributed to gender stereotypes as shown in Figure 1. In the case where the difference in coefficients is negative,  $(\beta_M - \beta_F) < 0$ , the independent variable does not contribute to or even minimizes the participation gap. This means that the data does not support a particular gender stereotype.

Given that labor participation is a binary variable, Equation (1) cannot be used directly for decomposition. The alternative approaches are non-linear and partially linearized decomposition. Of the two approaches discussed in the previous section, this paper uses the partially linearized approach, as it is robust to the ordering of variables. Following Yun [2004], Equation (1) above is estimated using probit regression and decomposed via a partially linearized technique. Let  $\Phi$  be a probit function,  $i$  represents the independent variable, and “over bar” represents the sample’s average. The detailed decomposition is shown as follows:

$$\bar{Y}_M - \bar{Y}_F = \sum_{i=1}^{i=K} W_{\Delta X}^i [\overline{\Phi(X_M \beta_M)} - \overline{\Phi(X_F \beta_M)}] + \sum_{i=1}^{i=K} W_{\Delta \beta}^i [\overline{\Phi(X_F \beta_M)} - \overline{\Phi(X_F \beta_F)}], \quad (2)$$

where:

$$W_{\Delta X}^i = (\bar{X}_M^i - \bar{X}_F^i) \beta_M^i / (\bar{X}_M - \bar{X}_F) \beta_M,$$

$$W_{\Delta \beta}^i = \bar{X}_F^i (\beta_M^i - \beta_F^i) / \bar{X}_F (\beta_M - \beta_F), \text{ and } \sum_{i=1}^{i=K} W_{\Delta X}^i = \sum_{i=1}^{i=K} W_{\Delta \beta}^i = 1.$$

Since no readily available implementation exists, Equation (2) is implemented using R software. Standard errors and statistical significance of coefficients are computed through bootstrapping.

### 3. Data description

This study utilizes a merged dataset of the January 2024 Labor Force Survey (LFS) and the 2023 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES), both conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). These surveys interviewed approximately 163,000 sample households and are publicly accessible through the PSA Data Archive (PSADA).

The focus of this study is on individuals between 25 and 59 years old, as they represent the most active segment of the labor market, having completed formal schooling and not yet reaching retirement age. The analysis is restricted to married and single individuals, excluding other marital statuses for tractability, given that this portion is small, at around eight percent.

**TABLE 1. Description of sample working population, aged 25 to 59**

	Single		Married	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Total Sample	19,615	31,043	89,197	84,615
Participation rate (percent)	78.8	85.2	60.8	95.0
Participation gap (pp)	6.04		34.23	
Nonwage income <sup>1</sup> , mean	47,590	43,070	35,809	32,562
Potential experience, mean	15.4	17.4	24.4	26.4
Age, mean	33.5	33.8	40.7	41.8
Dummy Variables <sup>2</sup>				
Nuclear family	9,077 (46.3%)	16,932 (54.5%)	59,513 (66.7%)	57,517 (68.0%)
Presence of children aged 0-5	3,659 (18.7%)	4,771 (15.4%)	35,138 (39.4%)	34,785 (41.1%)
Presence of children aged 6-14	6,369 (32.5%)	8,682 (28.0%)	54,518 (61.1%)	51,619 (61.0%)
Urban dummy	12,140 (61.9%)	16,906 (54.5%)	44,265 (49.6%)	41,325 (48.8%)
Below elementary	1,220 (6.2%)	4,757 (15.3%)	10,936 (12.3%)	17,382 (20.5%)
Elementary level	732 (3.7%)	3,919 (12.6%)	9,584 (10.7%)	15,859 (18.7%)
High school undergraduate	913 (4.7%)	3,574 (11.5%)	12,605 (14.1%)	12,796 (15.1%)
High school graduate	4,550 (23.2%)	9,544 (30.7%)	34,207 (38.3%)	31,032 (36.7%)
College undergraduate/vocational	82 (0.4%)	230 (0.7%)	124 (0.1%)	105 (0.1%)
College graduate and above	12,850 (65.5%)	12,938 (41.7%)	31,325 (35.1%)	23,300 (27.5%)

Note 1-2: Non-wage income is in pesos per capita terms, computed from total income minus wage income; potential experience in years, computed as age minus years in schooling minus childhood years. As for dummy variables, the first row is the number of observations, while the values in parentheses (second row) are percentages relative to the total sample within gender.

Source: Subset of merged LFS 2024 January and FIES 2023. Philippine Statistics Authority.

The dataset descriptions include counts, percentages, and means for relevant variables as shown in Table 1. Some independent variables are derived from the original data. For example, the presence of non-wage income, expressed per capita, is included because prior research has shown that it reduces labor force participation [Cabegin 2006]. The potential experience variable, used as a proxy for work experience, is computed as age minus years of schooling minus childhood years. This proxy variable may not accurately reflect experience [Miller 1993], but it is still included for its potential to predict labor participation.

Other independent variables are indicators for domestic responsibilities. For example, a dummy for nuclear households is included as a proxy indicator for household responsibilities, as these households generally lack extended family members for support. The presence of children is also an indicator of childcare responsibilities that may affect labor force participation [Epetia 2019].

Educational attainment is captured through five education dummy variables, with “below elementary education” serving as the reference category in probit regression. Past studies indicate that higher levels of education tend to increase labor force participation [Pacete 2020].

## **4. Results and discussion**

This section examines the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition estimates in which the coefficient values for the explained and unexplained components represent their respective contributions to the total participation gap, as shown in Table 2.

### *4.1. Gap components*

The results show that the participation gap is substantial for the married working population, at 34.2 pp, which is five times larger than for the single working population at 6.4 pp. Notably, less than ten percent of the gap for both groups can be attributed to the explained component due to differences in observable characteristics between genders. This means that more than 90 percent of the gaps are due mainly to unexplained component, likely influenced by gender stereotyping, which is discussed further below.

#### *4.1.1. Domestic responsibilities*

One gender stereotype, as proxied by the nuclear family, is the assumption that women are primarily responsible for household chores. For single women, this is not statistically significant, whereas for married women, its contribution to the participation gap is small and negative. This indicates that this gender stereotype does not meaningfully contribute to the labor force participation gap for both marital statuses.

Another gender stereotype that may also influence labor participation is the expectation that women prioritize taking care of children over employment. The results show that the presence of children in the household, whether younger or older, has a negative contribution to the participation gap, regardless of marital status. This suggests that this second gender stereotype does not contribute to the labor participation gap.

**TABLE 2. Partially linearized Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition of labor force participation between genders by marital status**

Dependent variable: Difference in labor participation between genders				
Participation gap	Single		Married	
	Explained Gap	Unexplained Gap	Explained Gap	Unexplained Gap
	0.0645		0.3423	
	0.0057*** (0.0013)	0.0588*** (0.0036)	0.0013*** (0.0002)	0.3410*** (0.0018)
Contribution to Gap				
Proxy for domestic responsibilities				
Nuclear family	0.0002 (0.0003)	-0.0020 (0.0016)	0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0643*** (0.0079)
Ages 0-5 dummy	0.0003 (0.0002)	-0.0023* (0.0009)	0.0001* (0.0000<)	-0.0465*** (0.0054)
Ages 6-14 dummy	0.0005* (0.0002)	-0.0024* (0.0012)	0.0000<*** (0.0000<)	-0.0311*** (0.0047)
Education (base reference, below elementary)				
Elementary level	0.0210*** (0.0026)	-0.0005 (0.0004)	-0.0029** (0.0009)	0.0100*** (0.0023)
High school undergraduate	0.0177*** (0.0021)	0.0001 (0.0004)	-0.0006*** (0.0001)	0.0248*** (0.0023)
High school graduate	0.0197*** (0.0024)	0.0064*** (0.0013)	0.0012*** (0.0002)	0.0805*** (0.0051)
College undergraduate	0.0006*** (0.0001)	0.0001 (0.0001)	0.0000<*** (0.0000<)	0.0005*** (0.0001)
College graduate and above	-0.0529*** (0.0065)	0.0461*** (0.0047)	0.0079*** (0.0013)	0.1511*** (0.0059)
Other indicators				
Potential experience	-0.0017*** (0.0005)	0.0003 (0.0026)	-0.0048*** (0.0008)	0.2065*** (0.0167)
Nonwage income	0.0003* (0.0002)	0.0004 (0.0011)	0.0001* (0.0000<)	0.0066** (0.002)
Urban dummy	0.0000< (0.0003)	0.0125** (0.0028)	0.0001*** (0.0000<)	0.0031 (0.0029)

Note: Significance codes: \*\*\*\* 0.001, \*\*\* 0.01, \*\* 0.05 and . 0.10; bootstrapped standard errors (SEs) in parentheses.

#### 4.1.2. The economic provider role

The third gender stereotype that may contribute to the gap in labor force participation is the expectation that men are the economic providers. Among married men, the results indicate that educational attainment at all levels contributes positively to the unexplained component of the participation gap. For singles, however, this contribution is concentrated among those with higher

educational attainment. This suggests that this stereotype is more pronounced among married men and relatively weaker among single men.

It is important to note that being a college graduate is the largest contributor to the unexplained component of the participation gap for the single working population and the second largest for the married working population. However, the greater number of single female college graduates (66 percent in Table 1) contributes to narrowing the explained component of the participation gap, offsetting part of the disparity. This may explain why the participation gap is smaller for the single working population.

Additional proxies for the economic provider role stereotype were also examined. Potential experience among the married working population is significant and the biggest contributor to the unexplained component of the participation gap. However, it has no significant effect on the single working population. Non-wage income contributes to the unexplained gap for married individuals but not for singles. These findings suggest that the expectation of men as economic providers is strongly reflected among married men in potential experience and non-wage income, like educational attainment.

#### *4.2. Other indicators*

Location has a significant but small contribution to the participation gap in the single working population but is not a contributing factor in the married working population. The pattern suggests that the effect of urban location may not be tied to gender stereotypes as expected in the framework.

### **5. Summary and conclusion**

In summary, the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition results show that the labor force participation gap is five times larger among married individuals compared to singles. More than 90 percent of the gap is attributed to the unexplained component, which is likely linked to gender stereotyping.

Domestic responsibility proxies, such as nuclear family structure and the presence of children, do not significantly contribute to the unexplained part of the participation gap. Their coefficients are either small or negative, suggesting that the data do not support stereotypes assigning household chores and childcare to women.

Educational attainment emerges as a strong contributor to the unexplained gap, particularly among married men, reinforcing the stereotype of men as economic providers. For single men, this effect is concentrated among those with higher levels of education, indicating a weaker but still present stereotype. Interestingly, the relatively high proportion of single female college graduates contributes to narrowing the participation gap, which helps explain the smaller disparity among singles.

Potential experience and non-wage income also contribute to the unexplained participation gap, but only for married men, indicating that the economic provider stereotype is significant among them.

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that the labor force participation gap is substantially composed of an unexplained gap. This is linked to gender stereotyping around the economic provider role, particularly among married men. Conversely, stereotypes related to domestic responsibilities do not appear to affect the labor participation gap.

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