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Women in Political Positions and Countries' Level of Happiness

By Stefane Kabene¹, Said Baadel², Zahra Jiwani³, Vanessa Lobo⁴

Abstract

This study discusses the relationship between a country's happiness, and relevant country characteristics including gender inequality, levels of corruption, and the percentage of women in parliamentary positions. The aim of the study is to understand how these variables change according to female representation in political leadership. Secondary source data was collected and correlation analyses were performed between the variables using the SPSS statistical program. Results show that the lower the Gender Inequality Index, the higher the percentage of Women in Parliament Positions and the higher the Happiness Index. Furthermore, the results indicate that a higher number of women in leadership position is associated with a lower corruption level and a higher degree of Happiness. Results suggest that the context in which women reach political positions is characterized by less corruption and gender inequality alongside greater happiness in the country.

Keywords: Corruption perceptions index, Glass ceiling, Gender inequality, Happiness index

Introduction

Substantial research and literature has focused on the level of happiness in nations (Helliwell & Wang, 2012; Kalmijn & Veenhoven, 2005; Verme, 2009; Veenhoven, 2012). Most of these studies have looked at how happy citizens are in their countries with regards to health, education, governance, policy and others factors. Kalmijn & Veenhoven's study differed from the above in that it looked at the difference in happiness between nations, meaning, and the degree of divergence in happiness levels from country to country. To our knowledge, no studies have yet explored whether or not a nation having females in political positions is linked to the overall happiness of that country. This paper aims to explore the relationship between a country's level of happiness and gender equality and corruption levels.

In many countries women are still unable to express their capabilities or achieve their status. Gender inequality remains present in societies in general and workplaces in particular (Kathleen, 2014). Today, many countries are making it a priority to fight gender inequality and promote human rights through education and regulations that enforce equal treatment of genders. Women face numerous forms of discrimination such as unequal pay, sexual harassment, and

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promotion obstacles known as the glass-ceiling, where female employees are prevented from reaching higher positions in the workplace.

A study conducted by Helliwell et al. (2016) found that the higher the Gender Inequality Index (GII) the lower the Happiness Index (HI) within a country. The Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) also states that in order to reduce corruption, countries should hire more women into the workplace (GOPAC Position Paper, 2014). In this paper, we analyze what we consider to be the most relevant defining variables of countries such as: Corruption Perception index (CPI), Happiness Index (HI), Gender Inequality Index (GII) and the Glass Ceiling Index (GCI) in order to assess how they relate to the percentage of females present in parliamentary positions around the world. We chose to study women in parliamentary positions because we hypothesize that women in high leadership positions can increase the overall happiness of a country because empowering them brings them more happiness individually. According to Rosenbluth, the share of women in Parliaments has steadily increased in the last 15 years. In 2000, it was 13.1% and by 2015, the number had reached 22% (Rosenbluth et al., 2015).

The principal objective of this research is to explore and present the relationship between the number of females in political leadership and gender inequality, corruption and happiness. We begin with an overview of gender inequality to elaborate on the research hypotheses and methodology for the study. This is followed by a review of the literature, the development of exploratory hypotheses, and finally presentation of the results, analysis and discussion.

Theoretical Framework

Gender equality is accomplished when people are able to access and enjoy equal rewards, resources, and opportunities regardless of their gender. In the last few years, many countries have focused on improving their efforts towards achieving gender equality, especially in the education sector (Tyson, 2015). Unfortunately, women on average still earn less than men and are less likely to succeed in their careers (Tyson, 2015). Several objectives need to be achieved in order to maximize gender equality in the workplace. Firstly, workplaces need to provide women and men in similar positions with equal pay, equal participation opportunities and equal chances of promotion (Tyson, 2015). However, gender equality in the workplace does not only revolve around “equal pay” or “equal chances of promotion” (Gregory, 2003; Pachetta et al., 2013).

Gender inequality is a global problem and a key contributor to continuous poverty. There are direct economic and social costs involved when women and men do not have equal access to resources and equal chances. (Karoui et al., 2015).

In a study aimed at assessing workplace characteristics of inequality in 21 countries Pettit and Hook's (2009) show that no country took into account all potential factors. For instance, it was shown that Italy ranked first in wage equality but 20th in terms of the percentage of employed women. Sweden ranked first on the number of women at work, but 14th in terms of women having full time jobs. The authors stated that in order to further understand how gender inequality functions in the workplace it is crucial to consider the country's family policies and how it affects the division of labor. For example, while some countries supported working women publicly by providing child care, countries such as the United States have only private solutions to child care.

The gender inequality in many workplaces has resulted in what is called “Glass Ceiling”; a situation where female managers would attain a management level above which they cannot rise, even with clear paths of promotion. They believed that one of the main reasons behind this discrimination is the perception that women are too “emotional” to handle top positions and that

top positions require more masculine traits such as being assertive, aggressive, controlling, and competitive (Hennessey et al., 2014).

The latest Glass-ceiling Index for 2015 in 25 countries shows which countries give women the best opportunity in society. The Index includes data on labor-force participation, higher education, pay, maternity rights, and child care costs. The scores in the Glass-ceiling Index (GCI) vary from 0 to 100; 100 being the best. Finland is at the top of the list with a score of 80.0 whereas South Korea was on the bottom of the list with a score of 25.6. The results show that Nordic countries are doing well in terms of labor-force participation and educational attainment. Women in those countries tend to make up a high percentage of parliamentary positions. Surprisingly, although Sweden and Finland were the first countries that allowed women to stand for election and vote, women still had a lower pay than men, with a gap of 15% and 18.7% respectively. On the other hand, Japan and South Korea scored the lowest GCI of 20 and 15.5 respectively. In those countries, there are few female leaders, and a large pay gap; for instance, in South Korea the pay gap is 36.6%.

A study conducted to investigate the number of women in the labor force and government found that a higher rate of women in the labor force was associated with lower levels of perceived corruption (Jha and Sarangi, 2015).

The GOPAC's Women in Parliament Network (GOPAC, 2016) concluded that if corruption is to be reduced, countries should enable female participation in politics and take steps to raise political transparency along with strong penalties for corruption and greater parliamentary oversight. Rwanda, for example, is the only country in the world to have a majority of female parliamentarians; about 63.8% were women parliamentarians in 2013. As the proportion of women parliamentarians increased. In 2013, Rwanda scored 53 on its CPI hence ranking them as the 49th least corrupt country out of the 177 countries that were surveyed. This may be a result of increased women parliamentarians. A country's score in CPI indicates the perceived level of its corruption on a scale from 0-100, 0 meaning the country is highly corrupted, and 100 meaning the country is perceived to be transparent and honest.

On a yearly basis, the World Happiness Index (HPI) surveys a great number of people from different countries around the world, in order to assess their levels of happiness. The results of the survey are then compared against six other variables that are related to the Happiness Index such as: Level of gross domestic product (GDP), generosity, life expectancy, social support, corruption and freedom. Later, all the results are compared to the "Dystopia", (an imaginary country where everyone is assumed to be extremely miserable) that acts as a benchmark in order to graph the results (Helliwell et. al, 2016). The sample size from each country is between 2,000 and 3,000 allowing a confidence interval of 95%. For 2016, the results show that the countries that scored the highest on the Happiness Index were Denmark, Switzerland, Iceland and Norway respectively. The unhappiest countries were Afghanistan, Togo, and Syria.

According to the Happiness Index report, the ranking of those countries based on their Happiness Index only shows whether they are ready to pursue the United Nation's Sustainable Development goals including: improving healthcare, increasing the level of education, ending poverty, and ultimately achieving gender equality. For the first time, the World Happiness Report has focused on measuring and understanding the consequences of inequality in the distribution of wellbeing among countries and different regions. Unlike the previous reports, the authors are now arguing that the inequality of well-being gives a much better and broader measure of inequality. It was concluded that people live happier lives when they are living in societies where there are less inequality.

The Corruption Perception Index is usually based on the opinions of experts of public sector corruption with a poor score being a sign of extreme bribery, lack of punishment for corruption and institutions who usurp their citizen's needs. The CPI was created and used by Transparency International, an international nongovernmental organization established in 1993 with the aim of bringing together business, civil society, and government structures to combat corruption (Letki, 2016). The CPI is calculated using data from 17 different surveys or assessments produced by 13 organizations. All sources measure the overall extent of corruption (frequency and/or size of bribes) in the public and political sectors, and all sources provide a ranking of multiple countries

Hypothesis Testing

In this paper, the following four hypotheses will be tested:

- H1: The lower the gender inequality the higher the percentage of women in parliament positions
- H2: The higher the corruption perception (100 = least corrupted), the higher the percentage of women in parliament positions.
- H3: The lower the gender inequality, the higher the happiness index.
- H4: The higher the corruption perception, the higher the happiness index .

Methodology

Data for the corruption perception index, gender inequality, women in parliament, and the happiness index has been collected from websites including: Transparency.org, Happiness Index Report, Economist.org, and Inter-Parliamentary Union site IPU.org. Correlations were run for each one.

Results

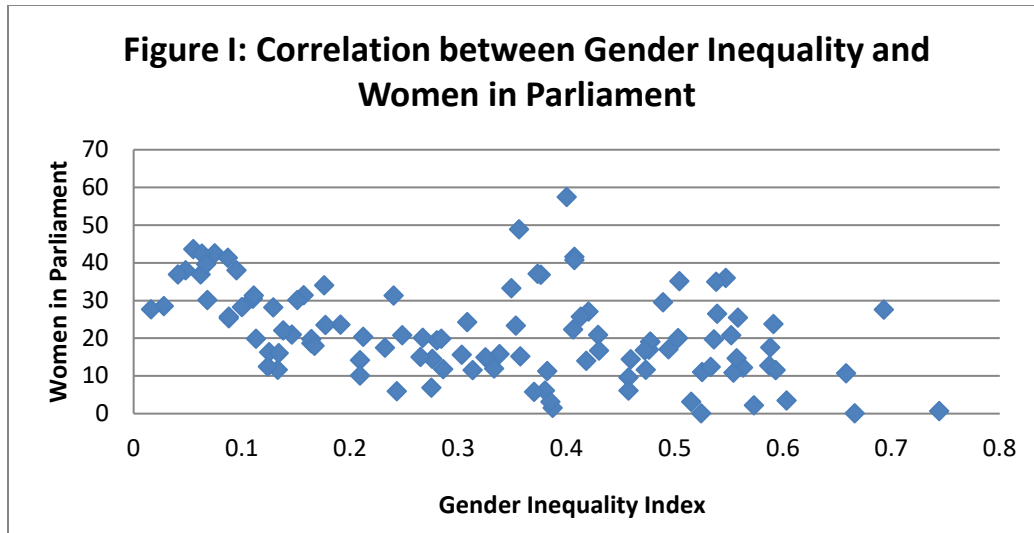
As mentioned above, the main objective of this study is to describe the context in which the role of females in leadership positions takes place. This was done by assessing the relationship between the percentage of Women in Parliament Positions (WPP) on one hand and the Gender Inequality Index (GII), Corruption Perception Index (CPI), Happiness Index (HI) on the other hand.

In order to assess the relationships between the different variables, we ran a Pearson linear correlation to calculate r and p. The average and standard deviation has also been computed for each of the variables as highlighted in table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Each Variable

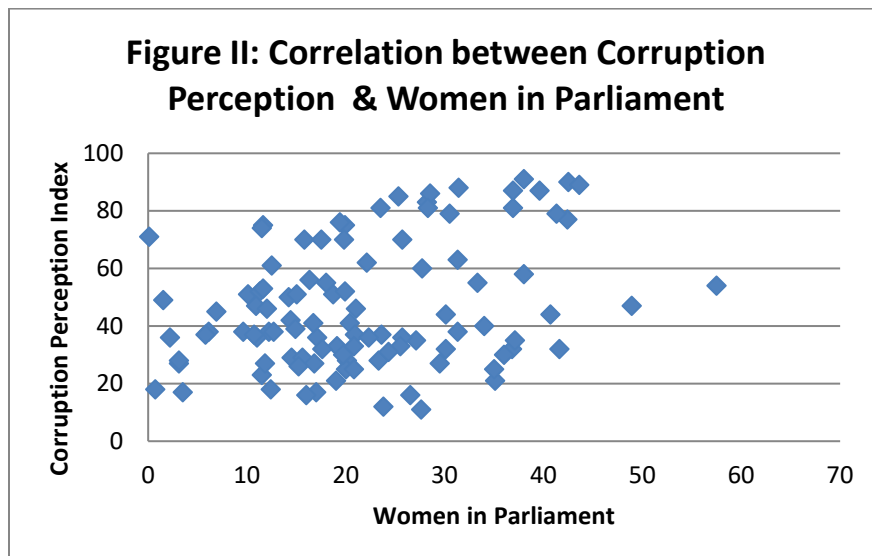
	GII	WPP	CPI	HI
Mean	.33250	21.275	46.77	5.57017
Standard Deviation	.184560	11.7665	21.610	1.148684
N	108	108	103	101

For the first hypothesis: “The lower the gender inequality the higher the percentage of women in parliament positions” our results show (Figure I) a significant negative correlation between the WPP and the GII ($r = -.410, p < 0.01$).



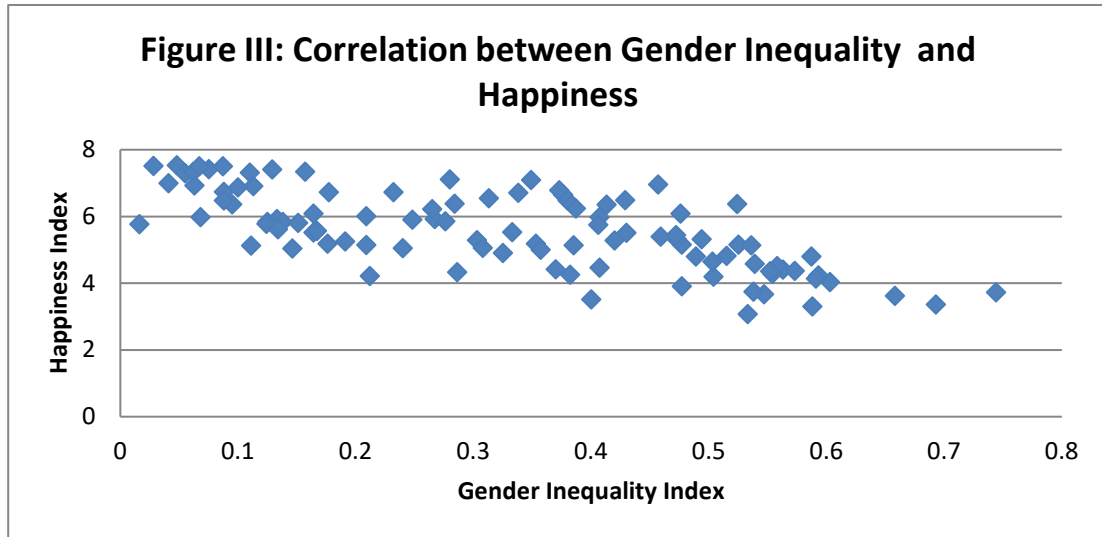
This suggests that countries having fewer women in parliament have a higher index of inequality. When gender inequality exists, it impacts the access women have to higher political positions.

The results for the second hypothesis (Figure II) “The higher the corruption perception, the higher the percentage of women in parliament positions” indicate a positive correlation between the CPI and the WPP ($r = .322, p < 0.001$).

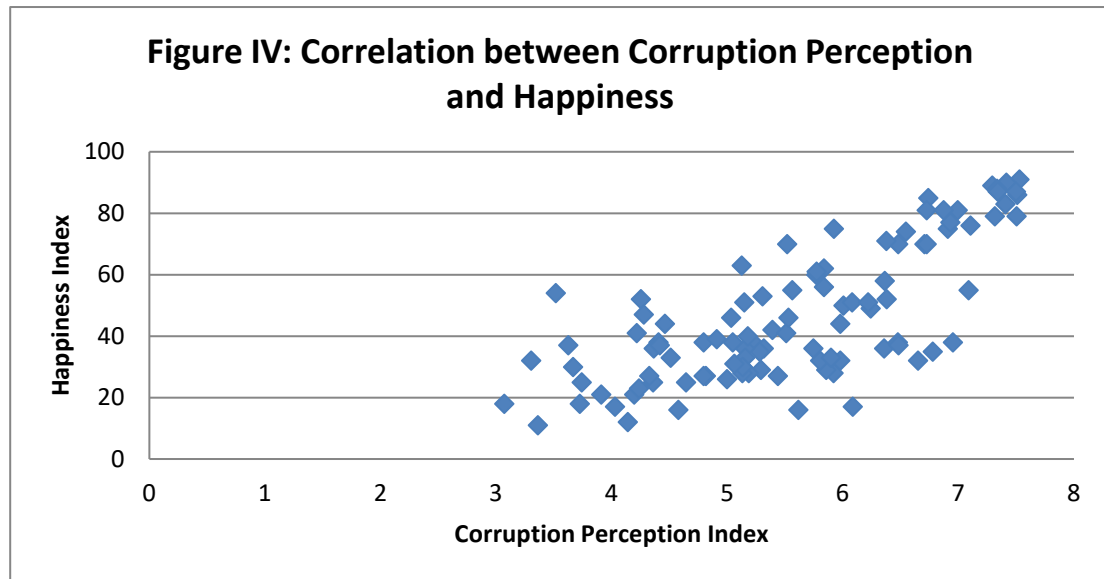


This suggests that in countries with fewer women in positions of political leadership, corruption is perceived as being high. This correlation shows that the higher the number of women in parliament positions, the lesser the corruption in a country.

The result for the third hypothesis “The lower the gender inequality, the higher the happiness” is highlighted below in (Figure III). This shows a very strong negative correlation between GII and HI ($r = -.702$, $p < 0.000$) suggesting that countries where people feel happier are those where gender equality is the strongest. This means that the higher the gender inequality in a country, the less happy the population seems to be.



Finally, results regarding the last hypothesis, “The higher the corruption perception, the higher the happiness index” are shown below in (Figure IV).



There is a very strong and significant positive correlation between CPI and happiness ($r = .745$ and $p < .000$). Remember that a high CPI score indicates a low corruption explaining the positive correlation. This suggests that countries where corruption is perceived as low people seem to be happier.

Discussion

Our goal was to assess how some variables could relate to the number of women in parliament. These variables were: Gender Inequality Index (GII), Corruption Perception Index (CPI), and Happiness Index (HI). Our results suggest that countries having more perceived corruption and gender inequality have fewer women in political parliamentary positions. This could be explained by the fact that countries where an ethical attitude exists as reflected by the CPI are fairer by giving an equal opportunity to both men and women.

Across countries, there is a disparity in societal roles between genders. In some societies the assumption that men and women could not be equal in the workplace prevails. Gender equality is accomplished when people are able to access and enjoy equal rewards, resources, and opportunities regardless of their gender. Where gender inequality exists, it is generally women who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to economic and social resources. Consequently, a critical aspect of stimulating gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. As seen in the findings, an unexpected yet positive finding is that this initiative is also related to greater well-being in society. Thus, gender equality is essentially linked to sustainable development and is fundamental to the realization of human rights. Gender inequality is a global problem, as it is a key factor of continuous poverty. When women and men do not have equal access to resources and equal opportunities, there are direct economic and social costs (Karoui et. al., 2015). These largely affect women but also have consequences for their children, communities, and the countries in general.

When discussing gender equality in countries, we should also take into consideration its relationship to happiness levels in these countries. According to our results, the lower the Gender Inequality rates the higher the happiness. The results show that the lower the corruption in a country, the higher the number of females in Parliament positions. This could suggest that countries where ethical behavior exists, give women a greater chance of success. As well, women being more co-operative and risk-adverse are less likely to accept bribes or to indulge in corrupt practices, as they will perceive these actions as illegal (Turgut and Rajib, 2012). Happiness seems to co-exist with ethical behavior and equality between genders.

Conclusion

This study explores the relationship between having females in political power positions, and country variables such as gender inequality, corruption, and happiness. Our results suggest that countries with the highest degree of gender inequality and corruption give women a lesser chance to occupy positions of leadership. Furthermore those same countries seem to be less happy, suggesting that where inequality and corruption co-exist there is a feeling of unhappiness by the population. In some countries, women are reaching the same level of power as men. It is not surprising that the countries that allow women and men to have similar shares of power and leadership are developing most successfully. This gender equality could lead to less social tension and conflict and thus lead to stronger feelings of happiness.

Following our results we can only emphasize the importance of promoting countries' gender equality and ethical behavior. After all it seems to be the path to population satisfaction, growth and happiness.

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