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ASSESSING SOCIOECONOMIC DIFFERENTIATION OF RURAL HOUSEHOLD GROUPS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The variation of rural Malaysian household groups is a result of their different socioeconomic backgrounds, as each household group tends to carry its own distinct economic potential. Therefore, in order to plan for the development of rural areas, it is essential to acknowledge the determinants that causes these economic variations to occur. This paper aims to assess the differentiation of rural households' socioeconomic backgrounds in rural areas of Malaysia, and to highlight a review of relevant studies on 20 identified determinants for the differentiation of households' socioeconomic background according to five capitals (economic, social, human, cultural and environmental) as the fundamental framework in measuring household economic performance. Quantitative approach was used as a method to assess the variation of the determinants that causes the differentiation in socioeconomic backgrounds of household groups. Results from this study reveals the key findings on the levels of socioeconomic backgrounds based on six different household groups in Malaysia.

Keyword: Rural Households, Household Income, Rural Areas, Rural Livelihoods, Socioeconomic Background

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INTRODUCTION

Rural households and their socio-economic growth are key parts of rural development as they play a major role in rural development. Nowadays, most rural areas around the world, particularly rural households, are confronting new risks as a result of globalisation's uncertainties and rapid changes in the economic sector (Rashid et al., 2019a). Due to the challenges and economic potentials of rural areas being diverse across a country, the new rural development paradigm has highlighted various approaches to rural revitalization in different regions, as no solutions are 'one size fits all'. Therefore, it is essential to understand the nature of rural differentiation and the factors leading to the variations of rural performances as these would assist in acknowledging the potential of different rural regions and vicinities.

When the challenges from the uncertainties of globalisation affect communities in a country, rural households are considered the most vulnerable. The economical disadvantages of rural households are largely caused by their exposure to challenges towards attaining equal economic opportunities and socioeconomic sustainability, particularly those with limited sources of income (Rashid et al., 2019b; Thompson, 2014). This situation worsens in cases where there is a lack of new technology and innovative interventions that will assist in boosting the productivity of their economic activities, which mainly involve agriculture and livestock rearing. However, the resilience of rural households comes from the external components that are continually interacting and helping them to adapt to change. These components are their economic, social, political and physical elements.

Rural households have to deal with the issues of change. In order to succeed and perform in their socioeconomic background, their strengths and weaknesses can be assessed and fixed based on their identified elements. The variation of rural households indicates that each has its own unique socioeconomic background and the households in rural areas have differentiation in their economic performance (Rashid et al., 2020). Marginalised households often face the most challenges, especially those with low economic performance (Rashid et al., 2019a). However, there are also rural households with better performance. This issue prompted the question of how the variation in economic performance occurs across rural households and what variables contribute to this scenario. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to assess the determinants that influences the differentiation of household's socioeconomic background in rural Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural areas in Malaysia

Rural areas in Malaysia are diverse and experiencing rapid changes. The major causes of rural change were the accelerated rate of urbanisation and the on-going outmigration from rural areas (Kamarudin & Rashid, 2020; Preston & Ngah, 2012). The share of GDP in agriculture and employment has also declined considerably over time (Jomo, 2019). Although the issue of rural-to-urban migration is not new, rural communities are facing significant challenges in terms of the continual increase in outmigration of village dwellers, an ageing population and the instability of commodity pricing. Different rural areas have different potentials, hence the varying challenges. For example, the rural areas adjacent to the urban regions have been facing development pressures, encroachment of urban activities, environmental deterioration and straining infrastructure (Fredericks, 2017; Vorodam et al., 2022). In deeper rural areas, some economic activities are still done on a subsistence basis. Basic infrastructure in remote areas is still inadequate and the younger generation in the rural communities are migrating to urban areas with better economic opportunities. With the declining and ageing population, rural businesses and social services in villages as well as rural economic activities such as agriculture and small-medium enterprises can no longer be sustained and might face closure or abandonment. These issues and challenges would have a direct impact on rural communities' socioeconomic backgrounds.

Studies of rural development in Malaysia range across various disciplines, from macro-based (policy, strategy and programme, economic determinants and consequences, rural changes and transformations) to micro-level (village economic performances, individual and behavioural studies, community responses and social consequences). Yet, very few have addressed issues that reflect rural differentiation at household level. One of the recent macro-based studies and literature on rural change and development in Malaysia is the work of Preston and Ngah (2012), which provides a comprehensive account of the rural changes related to historical processes, market forces, and government intervention. Turning to the micro-level perspective, attempts have been made to understand the rural changes and performances of villages in Malaysia, such as the work of Rashid et al. (2019a), which highlights a territorial innovation model approach in evaluating the level of economic performance in Malaysian rural villages.

Factors influencing the differentiation of economic performance

Rural communities frequently encounter numerous challenges in establishing economic equality and socioeconomic sustainability. This has been an on-going issue that specifically affects rural households. Identifying reasons that lead to the differentiation of socioeconomic performances of rural families is crucial in

the creation of government policy or planning procedures, particularly in terms of rural economic development, to revitalise rural areas and their households.

Understanding these determinants that are influential towards rural changes and performances is critical in rural planning and development as the rural area's performance is directly related to the interaction of exogenous and endogenous elements as explained by Peet and Hartwick (2015) in the theory of territorial innovation model. This theory of territorial innovation model defines both external and internal factors as sources of economic performance in rural areas. Rural areas tend to be involved in both external and internal networks in this changing global setting, even though the size, direction and intensity of networks vary across different villages. Therefore, this theory highlights that the rural development approach must emphasise a complex interplay of external and internal causes in which local resources are successfully mobilised to accomplish rural growth.

There has been a growing interest in the occurrence of disparities in rural economic performance. In the last two decades, the literature has shown increasing evidence of spatially uneven development within rural regions and the differentiated economic performance of rural areas in developed countries (Agarwal et al., 2009; Courtney & Moseley, 2008; Terluin, 2003). The differences in economic performance are also prevalent between households. Bryden et al. (2004) examined the structural change and household activity in agricultural farming in rural areas; they concluded that the economic success of these rural households depended to a large extent on the success of the surrounding economy and infrastructure. This study revealed that different types of household groups have varying characteristics in terms of economic performance and potential.

A more recent study on the differentiation of rural economic performance defined the drivers of economic performance in terms of five capitals, specifically economic, human, social, cultural, and environmental capitals (Sánchez-Zamora et al., 2014; Rashid et al., 2020; Straka & Tuzova, 2016). In overall, twenty determinants based on five capitals to assess the differentiation in the economic performance of rural households were identified, as shown in Table 1. These five capitals and twenty identified determinants were then incorporated into the instrument used in this study as factors to assess differentiation in the economic performance of rural households.

Table 4: Determinants for Differentiation in Rural Household Economic Performance

| Capital | Determinants | References |
|----------|--------------|--|
| Economic | Income | Agarwal et al. (2009); Kamarudin et al. (2020); Sánchez-Zamora et al. (2014); Straka & Tuzová (2016); Yusoff et al. (2022) |
| | Occupations | Curry & Webber (2012); Kamarudin et al. (2020); Rashid et al. (2019a); Yusoff et al. (2022) |

| | | |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--|
| | Remittance | Bryden et al. (2004); Rashid et al. (2019a) |
| | Government and Private Aid | Agarwal et al. (2009); Rashid et al. (2019a); Sánchez-Zamora et al. (2014) |
| | Asset Possession | Curry & Webber (2012); Rashid et al. (2019a) |
| Social | Trust and Norms | Klok (2011); Scott et al. (2018); Straka & Tuzová (2016) |
| | Membership and Participation | Agarwal et al. (2009); Rashid et al. (2019b); Roberts & Townsend (2016); Scott et al. (2018) |
| | Collective Action | Courtney & Moseley (2008); Sánchez-Zamora et al. (2014); Rashid et al. (2019b); Scott et al. (2018) |
| Human | Health | Agarwal et al. (2009); Courtney & Moseley (2008); Sánchez-Zamora et al. (2014); Yusoff et al. (2022) |
| | Education | Agarwal et al. (2009); Roberts & Townsend (2016); Sánchez-Zamora et al. (2014) |
| | Skill | Rashid et al. (2019a); Straka & Tuzová (2016) |
| | Leadership | Courtney & Moseley (2008); Rashid et al. (2019a) |
| Cultural | Attitudes | Kamarudin & Rashid (2020); Rashid et al. (2019b); Scott et al. (2018) |
| | Religious | Courtney et al. (2006); Rashid et al. (2019b); Scott et al. (2018); Sørensen (2018) |
| | Way of Life | Kamarudin et al. (2022); Rashid et al. (2019b); Scott et al. (2018); Straka & Tuzová (2016) |
| | Resilience | Kamarudin & Rashid (2020); Kamarudin et al. (2022); Rashid et al. (2019b); Scott et al. (2018) |
| Environmental | Natural Environment | Courtney et al. (2006); Kamarudin et al. (2020); Razali & Rashid (2021); Sørensen (2018) |
| | Environmental Quality | Klok (2011); Rashid et al. (2019b); Razali & Rashid (2021); Sørensen (2018) |
| | Accessibility to Facilities | Ahmad et al. (2022); Klok (2011); Razali & Rashid (2021); Straka & Tuzová (2016) |
| | Location | Agarwal et al. (2009); Ahmad et al. (2022); Sørensen (2018) |

METHODOLOGY

For this case study, the questionnaire survey method was used as an instrument to collect data in the field. This is based on aspects of rural economic performance. Purposive sampling was used as the sampling method; with the survey involving the head of each household. A quantitative study method was utilised to collect opinions on disparities in rural household economic performance. This study investigates differences in rural economic performance that are not linked to a macro-scale of analysis. However, this research employs large-scale demographic data and includes every family that resided in traditional villages in the study area.

The primary research instrument for this study is a questionnaire-based household survey. The data gathered through the field survey included background information on rural households as well as perception of five capitals that influence the economic performance of rural villages. These capitals were

assessed using a Likert scale questionnaire, as this is the most appropriate technique for measuring the elements in each capital. The mean score analysis of factors for differentiation in village economic performance was used to assess the identification of factors in five capitals of rural economic performance. The evaluation of factors in the economic performance of household groups from each capital was done using a scale based on mean score analysis. The utilised scale consists of five (5) levels of overall household economic performance. F-test was used to determine whether there were significant differences in factors between the household groups. This step was carried out to assess if any of the 20 identified factors had an impact on the disparities in economic performance among the six household groups (Table 2).

Table 2: Aspects of Analysis

| TYPE OF ANALYSIS | ASPECT |
|--|--|
| Economic performance of household groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptive analysis using Mean Score: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 0.00 – 2.00: Very low level ▪ 2.01 – 4.00: Low level ▪ 4.01 – 6.00: Moderate level ▪ 6.01 – 8.00: High level ▪ 8.01 – 10.00: Very high level |
| Level of significance of capitals and factors in economic performance among household groups | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inferential analysis using F-test (part of Analysis of Variance) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant*: Below 0.05 ▪ Not Significant: Above 0.05 |

Study area

Categorization of density level was a suitable approach in selecting the study area in Johor state, Malaysia. According to the OECD (2016), a rural region is defined as having a population density of less than 150 persons per square kilometre. Based on the identification of the density level of 93 sub-districts in the whole ten (10) districts in the state of Johor, only 33 sub-districts were identified with urban density level. As the study region was chosen based on its rural density level, there were 60 sub-districts classified into three (3) categories of rural density which are low density rural (0-50 people/km²), medium-density rural (51-100 people/km²), and high-density rural (101-150 people/km²).

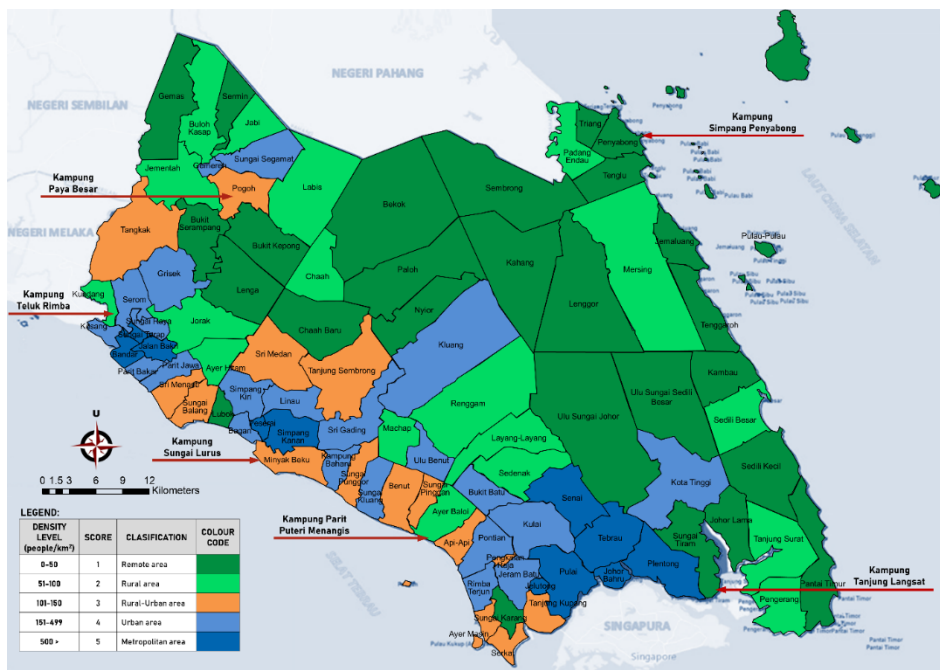


Figure1: Location of six (6) study areas in Johor

Identification of villages that would represent the selected sub-districts was chosen based on their rural density level. There were two (2) steps involved in the process of study area selection. First, the selection was carried out according to the three (3) levels of rural density as six (6) sub-districts were chosen from a total of 60 rural sub-districts in Johor. The six (6) sub-districts were chosen based on the features of the study area, particularly in terms of demographics and geographical context, representing the northern, southern, western, eastern parts of Johor (Figure 1). Second, purposive sampling was used to select the head of each household as respondents from each of the chosen rural sub-districts. A total of 302 respondents were selected from six (6) rural sub-districts and these respondents were categorised under six (6) different household income groups (Table 3).

Table 3: Background of Study Areas and Household Groups

| Density Level | District | Sub-District | Total Respondent (%) | Household Income Group (RM) by % | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | | | B1 | B2 | B3 | B4 | M1 | M2 |
| 0-50 people/km ² | Mersing | Penyabong | 21.5 | 26.2 | 27.7 | 15.4 | 15.4 | 6.2 | 9.2 |
| | Johor Bahru | Sungai Tiram | 13.9 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 21.4 | 11.9 | 14.3 | 19.0 |
| | Pontian | Ayer Baloi | 17.2 | 7.7 | 13.5 | 21.2 | 23.1 | 7.7 | 26.9 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------|-------------|------|-----|------|------|------|-----|------|
| 51-100 people/km ² | Ledang | Kundang | 10.9 | 6.1 | 30.3 | 18.2 | 18.2 | 9.1 | 18.2 |
| 101-150 people/km ² | Batu Pahat | Minyak Beku | 21.5 | 1.5 | 32.3 | 26.2 | 21.5 | 6.2 | 12.3 |
| | Segamat | Pogoh | 14.9 | 6.7 | 26.7 | 33.3 | 11.1 | 4.4 | 17.8 |

Note: Income Classification by Malaysia's Household (DOSM, 2019): B1 (Less than RM 2,500); B2 (RM 2,500 to RM 3,169); B3 (RM 3,170 to RM 3,969); B4 (RM 3,970 to RM 4,849); M1 (RM 4,850 to RM 5,879); M2 (RM 5,880 to RM 7,099)

*Data sources are based on household survey conducted by the researcher in 2022.

Findings of household economic performance in rural areas

The finding has revealed that M2's household group (6.92), M1's household group (6.60), B3's household group (6.36) and B4's household group (6.14) have generally indicated high performance in overall economic performance at the household level. Meanwhile, Table 4 shows that the B2's household group (5.91) and B1's household group (5.59) performed moderately in terms of overall economic success at the household level.

It can be determined that the M2's household group is relatively considered the top performing household, particularly in terms of the amount of capital obtaining a good index of performance when compared to other household groups. Nonetheless, the B1's household group was relatively considered the lowest performing in overall economic performance at the household level. The general pattern indicates that households with higher income levels tend to have higher scores of indicators and factors for each of the capitals.

Table 4: Analysis of Household Economic Performance

| Capital (Factor/ Indicator) | | Household Income Group (RM) | | | | | | F-test |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| | | B1 | B2 | B3 | B4 | M1 | M2 | |
| Economic Capital (EC) | | 3.88 | 4.35 | 5.01 | 5.00 | 5.32 | 5.79 | 0.000* |
| Factor | Indicator | | | | | | | |
| Income | Income increment | 2.87 | 4.63 | 5.26 | 5.73 | 5.18 | 6.84 | 0.000* |
| | Career stability | 3.89 | 5.27 | 6.15 | 6.25 | 6.35 | 7.57 | |
| | Additional source of income | 3.82 | 5.47 | 5.99 | 6.41 | 6.52 | 7.24 | |
| Occupations | Balanced work and salary | 5.18 | 5.34 | 6.70 | 7.56 | 7.60 | 8.25 | 0.000* |
| Remittance | Money transfer | 5.31 | 4.24 | 5.35 | 5.32 | 7.39 | 4.64 | 0.006* |
| Government and Private Aid | Financial and welfare assistance | 4.67 | 3.39 | 3.30 | 2.75 | 2.72 | 2.26 | 0.029* |
| | Assistance for economic activity | 2.35 | 2.12 | 3.23 | 2.11 | 3.15 | 3.26 | |
| Asset Possession | Considerable yields from asset | 2.96 | 4.36 | 4.12 | 3.88 | 3.63 | 6.23 | 0.000* |
| Social Capital (SC) | | 6.23 | 5.89 | 6.50 | 6.13 | 6.84 | 7.25 | 0.000* |
| Factor | Indicator | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| Trust and Norms | Trust in neighbours | 8.30 | 8.14 | 8.56 | 8.02 | 8.20 | 8.51 | 0.000* |
| Membership and Participation | Involved in social organisations | 4.71 | 3.86 | 4.77 | 4.11 | 4.88 | 5.41 | 0.000* |
| | Engaging in community activities | 5.14 | 5.18 | 6.34 | 5.68 | 7.28 | 6.95 | |
| Collective Action | Relationship with community leaders, creditors & entrepreneurs | 5.63 | 5.07 | 5.60 | 5.38 | 5.48 | 6.78 | 0.001* |
| | Prosperous community life | 7.36 | 7.22 | 7.22 | 7.47 | 8.36 | 8.60 | |
| Human Capital (HC) | | 4.39 | 5.55 | 6.26 | 5.98 | 6.39 | 6.69 | 0.000* |
| Factor | Indicator | | | | | | | |
| Health | Level of health | 6.91 | 8.21 | 8.13 | 8.12 | 8.70 | 8.20 | 0.025* |
| | Ability to work hard | 5.99 | 7.49 | 7.64 | 7.37 | 8.43 | 7.37 | |
| Education | Perfect formal education | 4.84 | 6.57 | 7.52 | 7.50 | 7.13 | 8.52 | 0.000* |
| Skill | Training and skills | 1.83 | 2.59 | 3.74 | 3.34 | 3.60 | 4.72 | 0.000* |
| Leadership | Ability to be a leader | 2.36 | 2.89 | 4.28 | 3.55 | 4.11 | 4.66 | 0.007* |
| Cultural Capital (CC) | | 5.96 | 6.08 | 6.26 | 6.12 | 6.42 | 7.08 | 0.000* |
| Factor | Indicator | | | | | | | |
| Attitude | Attitude and personality | 8.28 | 8.22 | 8.53 | 8.32 | 8.61 | 8.21 | 0.000* |
| Religious | Fulfil duty as a believer | 7.65 | 7.62 | 7.80 | 7.58 | 7.72 | 8.21 | 0.000* |
| Way of Life | Exercise/sport regularly | 4.07 | 4.14 | 4.44 | 4.46 | 4.65 | 5.53 | 0.000* |
| Resilience | Financial assistance | 3.83 | 4.34 | 4.26 | 4.10 | 4.70 | 6.39 | 0.000* |
| Environmental Capital (AC) | | 7.51 | 7.65 | 7.76 | 7.47 | 8.03 | 7.78 | 0.000* |
| Factor | Indicator | | | | | | | |
| Natural Environment | Attractive natural resource | 8.46 | 8.66 | 8.54 | 8.38 | 9.00 | 8.44 | 0.021* |
| | No natural disasters occur | 6.20 | 6.47 | 6.82 | 6.25 | 7.01 | 6.73 | |
| Environmental Quality | No pollution problems | 7.42 | 7.38 | 7.30 | 7.04 | 7.66 | 7.30 | 0.113 |
| | Soil fertility level | 8.48 | 8.62 | 8.81 | 8.86 | 9.08 | 8.92 | |
| Accessibility to Facilities | Basic infrastructure | 9.16 | 9.10 | 9.19 | 9.11 | 9.02 | 9.39 | 0.005* |
| | Public transport services | 5.22 | 5.11 | 5.08 | 4.14 | 5.11 | 4.40 | |
| Location | Proximity to town | 7.66 | 8.22 | 8.56 | 8.50 | 9.36 | 9.29 | 0.000* |
| Overall Household Economic Performance | | 5.59 | 5.91 | 6.36 | 6.14 | 6.60 | 6.92 | 0.000* |

Note: Income Classification by Malaysia's Household (DOSM, 2019): B1 (Less than RM 2,500); B2 (RM 2,500 to RM 3,169); B3 (RM 3,170 to RM 3,969); B4 (RM 3,970 to RM 4,849); M1 (RM 4,850 to RM 5,879); M2 (RM 5,880 to RM 7,099)

*Significant value at 0.05

CONCLUSION

Rural areas encounter multiple obstacles in order to achieve economic equality and socio-economic sustainability; these obstacles have largely been affecting the well-being of rural communities. Since the development of rural areas is a crucial component of the nation's development, findings from this study will contribute towards providing a clear view of how rural areas particularly are in Malaysia. The findings can help to revitalise the country's economy through an aggregated framework that incorporates various determinants differentiating the economic performances of rural households. Future studies can employ the identified determinants in these five capitals of family economic performance as a holistic approach to address rural concerns and challenges at a household level. The 20 factors and 41 indicators identified in this study were significantly supported by a complex interplay of internal and external influences within the five capitals. This comprehensive approach is therefore essential for future rural economic studies and can be used as an important instrument to assess the differentiation between rural household groups' economic performance.

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