

Australian women and corruption: The gender dimension in perceptions of corruption

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Abstract

The relationship between corruption and potential determinants of corruption has been of increasing interest due to a greater understanding of the cost of the phenomenon and the ongoing movement towards improved governance. The literature on corruption suggests that a range of factors may be significant in whether or not an individual engages in criminal and/or corrupt behaviour. This paper offers some preliminary analysis focusing on the influence of one variable, gender. By drawing on an empirical study, the paper examines the possible relationship between gender and perceptions of corruption within Australia. It suggests that, in general, Australian women appear to be less tolerant of corrupt scenarios than their male counterparts, although gender difference was not automatic across all scenarios. The results suggest that there may indeed be a gender dimension with respect to perceptions of corruption.

Keywords: Corruption; Public Perception; Gender Effect; Australia

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Introduction

Corruption - it is a term that can be difficult to define, and encompasses a range of activities that may be more difficult to detect and measure. Even in countries such as Australia, which are perceived to be relatively 'corruption free' by international comparative surveys (Transparency International, 2005, 2006, 2007), the pervasive nature of corruption ensures that it is never too far from the headlines, the policy agenda, or the public consciousness.³

The impact and cost of corruption within the Asia Pacific region was again highlighted by the World Bank in their recent report on transparency, trade and economic expansion (Heble, Shepherd and Wilson, 2007). The report, which focused on promoting economic development by improving transparency, noted for instance that 'there is now an emerging body of evidence to support the view that corruption matters for trade' (Helble, Shepherd and Wilson, 2007: 18). The report suggests increases in transparency, including reductions in current trade barriers, and greater control over 'unofficial payments,' would result in inter-regional trade gains of \$US148 billion to economies within the Asia-Pacific region (Helble, Shepherd and Wilson, 2007). Not surprisingly, reducing corruption within both the public and private sectors has become a priority for leaders within the Asia-Pacific region. For example, in September 2007 members of the inter-governmental forum for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), 'reaffirmed [their] commitment to combat corruption and promote good governance in order to build prosperity and a predictable business environment' (APEC, 2007:3). In doing so, APEC members endorsed the development and implementation of Anti-Corruption Principles for the Public and Private Sectors as two new mechanisms for countering corruption (APEC, 2007a). With APEC members 'account[ing] for approximately 41% of the world's population, approximately 56% of world GDP and about 49% of world trade' (APEC, 2007b),⁴ the impact of these new anti-corruption mechanisms have the potential to have a positive impact across many jurisdictions.

With the issue of corruption gaining currency within the Asia-Pacific region, this paper focuses on public awareness and perceptions of corruption within the Australian context, and in doing so, builds on the work of Gorta (1994) and the New South Wales's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) (ICAC, 2001, 2003, 2006). In particular, the paper looks at the possible relationship between perceptions of corruption and gender, and explores whether females are less tolerant of corruption than their male counterparts. The influence of characteristics including gender on an individual's perception and justifiability of corruption has received increasing attention over the past few years (Gorta, 1994; Dollar, Fisman and Gatti, 2001; Swamy et al, 2001; Sung, 2003; Goetz, 2007). These studies have found, for instance, that women are less likely to be involved in corrupt behaviour than their male counterparts (Swamy et al, 2001), that women are 'more trust worthy and public-spirited than men' (Dollar, Fisman and

³ See for example the Australian Wheat Board (AWB)'s \$A300 million corruption of the UN's 'Oil-for-Food' program and the recent allegations against members of the Victorian police force and links to members of the underworld (Botterill, 2007; Rennie, 2007).

⁴ The current members of APEC are as follows: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, People's Republic of China, Hong Kong, China, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, The Republic of the Philippines, The Russian Federation, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, United States of America and Viet Nam (APEC, 2007b).

Gatti, 2001: 429), and that 'being female rather than males increase[d] the probability of a person stating that accepting a bribe is never justifiable by 5.8 percentage points' (Torgler and Valev, 2006: 142). While Gorta (1994:52) similarly observed an influence of gender in relation to attitudes to perceptions and tolerance of corruption, she and colleagues at ICAC found 'that the effect of gender was not straightforward. While more females than males described seven of the twelve scenarios as corruption, there was no difference for four scenarios and a reverse trend for one'. These earlier studies suggest a general trend in relation to gender implications and corruption. However, as noted by Gorta (1994) and Torgler and Valev (2006) other characteristics (or variables) including culture, age, educational opportunity, peer influence, socio-economic status, and marital status may similarly influence an individual's perception of corruption.

With this in mind, a survey was undertaken in late-2004 to investigate public attitudes to corruption among the Australian population. The survey was underpinned by two key questions: how common do Australians believe corruption is in Australia and how important an issue is corruption?⁵ This paper utilises the same survey data to build on the work of Bowman and Gilligan (2006) which examined the relationship between occupation and perceptions of corruption by considering specifically the relationship between gender and perceptions of corruption. This paper also discusses possible multifaceted relationships between gender, occupation and corruption.

Unravelling Perceptions of Corruption in Australia: Does Gender Matter?

A starting point for the study was to investigate how serious a problem corruption was thought to be within Australia, and the question of whether females and males were equally likely to state that corruption was an issue at the national level. Of the 300 respondents all but 2 stated, (to varying degrees), that corruption was an issue of concern. Of the 298 respondents stating that corruption was an issue in Australia, 56.7% were female and 43.3% were males ($z, p=0.02$). Those over 40 years of age were more likely to state that corruption was an issue compared to those 39 years of age or younger, and this was the case for both females and males ($z, p \leq 0.05$).

In order to determine perceptions and understanding of corruption, a series of hypothetical scenarios were presented to respondents. In contrast to the twelve scenarios presented by Gorta (1994: 46), each of which contained 'some potentially undesirable features', a broader range of the scenarios were presented within the context of this survey, (for a fuller description of these refer to Bowman and Gilligan 2006, 2007). Table 1 illustrates the 'gender gap' observed in attitudes of male and female respondents in relation to six of the twelve scenarios.

Overall, Table 1 indicates a statistical difference in the distribution of responses between females and males in each of the six scenarios presented above. For instance, when considering gender differences and the perception of whether professionals offering 'mates rates' for friends and associates is corrupt, a higher proportion of female

⁵ For a discussion of the survey method, please refer to Bowman and Gilligan (2006, 2007). Statistical significance was set to $p \leq 0.05$. To assess the influence of occupation (professional/white collar and trade/self employed) on gender difference in respect to perceived corruption logistic regression was used with responses being classified as either 'corrupt', or 'not corrupt'. The corrupt category includes 'maybe corrupt'. Logistic regression results are presented as Odds Ratios, which compares the likelihood of one group rating the theme as 'corrupt' relative to the 'other' group.

respondents (27.5%) declared this activity to be ‘definitely corrupt’, with a further 44.9% stating that it ‘maybe corrupt’. These findings may be contrasted to the 18.8% of males who believed that it was ‘definitely corrupt’ and the 40.6% who thought that the offering mates rates was ‘maybe corrupt’. These differences were statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$. Univariate logistic regression analysis indicated that females were 79% more likely than males (CI: 1.10-2.93, $p = 0.02$) to state that offering mates rates was corrupt, while blue collar workers were 49% less likely than their white collar counterparts to state this practice was corrupt (OR: 0.51, CI: 0.26-0.98, $p = 0.04$). However, once adjusting for occupation, this gender difference was no longer statistically significant (OR: 1.28, CI: 0.66-2.49, $p = 0.4$).

Table 1: Important Difference in the Perception of Corruption by Gender

	<i>Definitely not corrupt %</i>	<i>Maybe corrupt %</i>	<i>Definitely corrupt %</i>	<i>P</i>
<i>Professionals offering mates rates for friends and associates</i>				
Males (n=128)	40.6	40.6	18.8	$p \leq 0.05$
Females (n=167)	25.7	44.9	27.5	
Total (n=295)	33.2	43.1	23.7	
<i>Appointing your friends into senior jobs in government and institutions</i>				
Males (n=128)	7.8	43.8	48.4	$p \leq 0.05$
Females (n=168)	10.7	28.0	61.3	
Total (n=296)	9.5	34.8	55.7	
<i>Asking a high-rank executive to employ a relative of yours</i>				
Males (n=126)	30.2	42.1	27.8	$p \leq 0.05$
Females (n=165)	15.8	40.0	44.2	
Total (n=291)	22.0	40.9	37.1	
<i>Gift to a doctor to take special care of you</i>				
Males (n=123)	30.9	42.3	26.8	$p \leq 0.05$
Females (n=167)	32.9	28.7	38.3	
Total (n=290)	32.1	34.5	33.4	
<i>Accepting under the counter cash payments in business or office to reduce your tax liability</i>				
Males (n=128)	7.0	14.1	78.9	$p \leq 0.05$
Females (n=170)	3.5	24.1	72.4	
Total (n=298)	5.0	19.8	75.2	
<i>Accepting bribes to not do your official duties</i>				
Males (n=129)	5.4	7.8	86.8	$p \leq 0.05$
Females (n=171)	1.2	3.5	95.3	
Total (n=300)	3.0	5.3	91.7	

Secondly, the majority of female respondents (61.3%) stated that the appointment of friends into senior jobs in government and institutions was ‘definitely corrupt’, with a further 28% stating that it was ‘maybe corrupt’. In contrast 48.4% of males considered that the activity was ‘definitely corrupt’, with a further 43.8% stating that this behaviour was ‘maybe corrupt’. These gender differences were found to be statistically significant, $p \leq 0.05$. To further examine gender differences on whether appointing friends to senior government roles was corrupt, logistic regression was used to adjust for the impact of occupation role on this judgement. To facilitate this comparison, we combined those

respondents that stated such practices were 'maybe corruption' with 'definitely corrupt'. Once adjusted for occupation, no gender difference was found ($p=0.1$). While the percentage of both white and blue collar workers stating that appointing friends to senior roles was corruption, there was a strong trend to suggest that blue collar workers were less likely than their white collar counterparts to state that such practices were corrupt (OR: 0.35, CI: 0.10-1.13, $p=0.08$).

When considering gender differences and the issue of asking a high-ranked executive to employ a relative, 44.2% of all female respondents considered this sort of behaviour to be 'definitely corrupt, with only 15.8% of females believing that the activity was 'definitely not corrupt'. 27.8% of males stated that asking a high-ranked executive to employ a relative was 'definitely corrupt', with a further 42.1% thinking that it 'maybe corrupt. These differences were found to be statistically significant, $p\leq 0.05$. Further analysis showed that females were more than twice as likely (OR: 2.3, CI: 1.31-4.06, $p\leq 0.05$) than males to state that the scenario was corrupt than their male counterparts; occupation was seen to have no effect on perception.

On the issue of whether gifts to a doctor to take special care of you constituted corrupt behaviour, female participants were more likely to consider the gifts to be 'definitely corrupt' (38.3%) than the male respondents (26.8%); they were also more likely to consider the behaviour to be 'definitely not corrupt' (32.9%) than males (30.9%). These differences across gender were found to be statistically significant, $p\leq 0.05$. However, once responses were collapsed into 'corrupt' versus 'not corrupt', neither gender or occupation had any influence on perceptions of whether this scenario was corrupt.

Somewhat surprisingly, given the responses to the other five scenarios shown in Table 1, when considering gender differences and the scenario of accepting under the counter cash payments in business or office to reduce one's tax liability, the survey found that males were more likely to state that this behaviour was 'definitely corrupt' (78.9%) compared to females (72.4%). Females were more likely to indicate that the activity was 'maybe corrupt' (24.1%) than males (14.1%). This difference between males and females was found to be statistically significant, $p\leq 0.05$. Once responses were collapsed into 'corrupt' versus 'not corrupt', 93% of males and 96.5% of females stated that this practice was corrupt, and due to this ceiling effect, no statistical differences could be detected. As such, in the logistic regression model, neither gender nor occupation was related to this judgement.

Finally, when considering accepting bribes to not do your official duties and potential gender differences, 95.3% of female respondents believed that accepting bribes to not do your official duties was 'definitely corrupt', compared to 86.8% of males. As with the five earlier scenarios, this difference was found to be statistically significant, $p\leq 0.05$. Further analysis indicated that females were 4.8 times (CI: 1.00-23.7, $p=0.05$) more likely to state that accepting bribes in this context is corrupt compared to their male counterparts; occupation status was not seen to influence perceptions of corruption in this instance. Table 2 below summarises the responses for six additional scenarios.

Table 2: Shared Perceptions of Corrupt Behaviour by Gender

	<i>Definitely not corrupt</i> %	<i>Maybe corrupt</i> %	<i>Definitely corrupt</i> %	<i>P</i>
<i>Individuals or organisations making large donations to political parties</i>				
Males (n=123)	15.4	49.6	35.0	P=0.6
Females (n=169)	14.8	44.4	40.8	
Total (n=292)	15.1	46.6	38.4	
<i>Government officials accepting gifts</i>				
Males (n=127)	13.4	44.1	42.5	P=0.07
Females (n=167)	6.6	40.7	52.7	
Total (n=294)	9.5	42.2	48.3	
<i>Organisations sponsoring government initiatives</i>				
Males (n=124)	25.8	54.0	20.2	P=0.6
Females (n=159)	22.0	60.4	17.6	
Total (n=283)	23.7	57.6	18.7	
<i>Biased media reporting of politics and political parties</i>				
Males (n=121)	12.4	37.2	50.4	P=0.8
Females (n=165)	10.3	39.4	50.3	
Total (n=286)	11.2	38.5	50.3	
<i>Paying a judicial figure to influence the results of a case in your favour</i>				
Males (n=128)	4.7	6.3	89.1	P=0.2
Females (n=167)	1.2	7.2	91.6	
Total (n=295)	2.7	6.8	90.5	
<i>Using an official position in order to perform private business</i>				
Males (n=129)	6.3	28.6	65.1	P=0.5
Females (n=171)	3.6	26.6	69.8	
Total (n=295)	4.7	27.5	67.8	

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that male and female respondents had somewhat shared perceptions of what constitutes corrupt behaviour in relation to six of the twelve hypothetical scenarios presented. As such, while ‘criminologists agree that the gender gap in crime is universal’ (Steffensmeier and Allan, 1996: 459), a number of underlying factors, or confounding variables, are likely to be similarly important in shaping an individual’s view of corruption.

Conclusions

Overall, what conclusions might be drawn from the above discussion? First there may be a correlation between a less corrupt environment and societies in which women have attained higher levels of political and economic power. However, the impact of confounding variables, including the opportunity for women to offend, the motivational factors, the strength and transparency of democratic organisations including oversight bodies and the media, needs to be examined empirically.

Second, as Table 1 indicates, within the Australian context women seem to be less tolerant of corrupt scenarios than men. These findings support the notion that women may be the fairer sex, with female respondents in five of the six scenarios being found to be less tolerant of corrupt behaviour than their male counterparts, when permissible responses were ‘definitely not corrupt’, ‘maybe corrupt’, and ‘definitely corrupt’. Using the categories of ‘not corrupt’ and ‘corrupt’ further analysis was conducted to assess the

potential impact of occupation on gender differences in perceptions of corruption. This analysis reinforced the findings that females were less tolerant of corruption than males in three of the six scenarios, these being offering mates rates, asking a high-ranking executive to employ a relative, and accepting bribes to not conduct your official duties. Notably, blue collar workers, who were predominantly male (72%) were significantly less likely to view 'mates rates' as being corrupt than white collar workers, while a similar trend for appointment of friends into senior jobs in government was also apparent.

So, in the above discussion we have assessed whether occupation was a significant predictor of corruption, and failing that whether occupational role influenced, or confounded, the influence of gender on perception of corruption. In all but one instance (appointing friends to senior government jobs), occupation was not significantly related to, nor influenced the magnitude of the gender effect. Consequently, the influence of gender on corruption is independent of occupation for questions, with the single exception noted above. As illustrated by Table 2, this gender gap is not universal, with females and males seeming to share perceptions as to what constitutes corruption in six of the twelve hypothetical scenarios presented in the survey.

Obviously the sample size is very small and so assertions in this regard must be qualified, but if this trend is representative of the broader population within Australia, then it may have ramifications for anti-corruption efforts on both micro and macro levels. For example, it may benefit the Australian community and indeed individual firms, if both business organisations and governments made greater efforts to appoint more women to both oversight, and to policy development roles, in those contexts in which experience has demonstrated that corruption might be more likely to occur. Such a response may also prove to be beneficial for countries that are considered to be afflicted with a high level of corruption. However, as Goetz (2007: 102, 103) notes, women cannot be viewed as a magic bullet for problems of corruption that may be systemic in nature or 'a panacea for problems of corruption in politics and public bureaucracies by the World Bank or other major development agencies.' More investigative work involving larger scale studies is required, constituting not only a representative cross-section of actors, but also a broad array of social and institutional settings in order to test whether the findings of this preliminary study equate with the reality of corruption and its prevention across contemporary Australia. In terms of furthering research on corruption more generally, it would also be beneficial to determine if the Australian findings have traction with respect to perceptions of corruption in other jurisdictions.

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