

UDC 331

## A STUDY ON LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION OF MARRIED WOMEN IN PUBLIC SECTOR: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN WEST NUSA TENGGARA, INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed at analyzing social and economic argumentation related to labor force participation of married women in public sector in the province of West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The study was a descriptive qualitative study employing an ethnology method. Primary data were collected from key informants including working married women, family members, and other informants that were considered having the information needed. The involvement of other informants, in addition to the key informants, aimed at validating the findings. The study confirmed the following findings. (1) The main reason for married women to work was the economy of the family—the family income was under the subsistence level. (2) For families whose incomes were above the subsistence level, the reason for women to work was the social factor. (3) Two major categories were found related to the reason for married women in West Nusa Tenggara to work: need and want; this means, some women worked because they had to, while some others worked because they wanted to. (4) Married women performed double roles. (5) It was a family decision, not a personal one, for married women to work in both the extended family and the nucleus family form.

### KEY WORDS

Work participation, married women, the public sector, West Nusa Tenggara.

It is common for women to work these days. There seem to be no more gender stereotypes when it comes to schooling and working. While the culture of West Nusa Tenggara does not forbid women from going to work and perform double roles both as a mother and a career woman, it still sees men as the main breadwinners. Gender role separation has long been part of the culture and clings firmly within the social system that, whether they like it or not, women are placed within the domestic role. Law Number 1 of 1974 on Marriage Article 31 states that the husband is the head of the family and his spouse is the housewife—this stereotype applies up to this present time.

Female labor work participation (especially married women) is the main measure of women's participation in the economic activities of any country. The topic of female labor work participation has become a concern among researchers and development experts around the world because it is significant in measuring women's contributions to development (Amoateng, 2003).

The role of women as housewives, as workers in the labor market, as well as job seekers shows the participation of the female labor force participation in a region. Female labor force participation describes the involvement of the female population (married) in productive economic activities (Mantra, 2011). In a society that mostly adheres to a patriarchal culture, men function as breadwinners, and women play a big role in taking care of the household. However, as development progressed, women began to earn a living, for reasons like to help meet the needs of the family. This causes female labor force participation to continue to increase that affects not only the labor market but also the level of welfare of women and their families.

The labor force participation of married women has been limited due to the many responsibilities women have in their domestic lives. This signals the low participation of married women in the labor force since their domestic lives are seen as their main responsibility.

Women in West Nusa Tenggara have a low participation rate due to a lack of chances and choices to play a double role as housewives and working women. In particular, women's access to the labor market is determined by a rigid gender role, social and cultural restrictions on women's mobility and integration in the workplace, a segmented labor market, a lack of skills, and entrepreneurial gender bias—all of these factors have been giving a lower value to women's labor because of they are considered having their household as a priority.

For women, access to productive activities to earn money is, among other things, an important means of enhancing their position (Polachek & Robst, 1997). Furthermore, work is the main bridge between economic growth and opportunities for human development (UNDP, 1996). One of the factors driving the growth of development in China is the rapidly increasing rate of female labor force participation (Young, 1995).

Society still thinks that, ideally, a husband acts as a breadwinner and a loving leader, while a wife takes care of the children. However, the ideal stereotype seems to have changed especially when the economy of the family needs more support and that the wife has to take more roles—as a working woman.

Society considers a family ideal when the husband works while the wife does the household chores, and the change in such stereotype may cause disturbance to the life of the family. Surely, there are effects when a wife also works. The alternative to such a situation, nevertheless, is not to put wives to have a double role: a nursery and provider role. Married women, however, continue to face the dilemma due to the unavailability of a supporting system to ease their burden as they play a double role.

Decreasing women's relative or absolute economic status will have long-term ethical and economic implications. Any growth process that fails to improve welfare will only cause more difficulties to the vulnerable parties, especially women; this means the government has failed to achieve one of the main goals of development. In the long term, the low status of women is likely to slow down the rate of economic growth (Todaro & Smith, 2011). The majority of women who work in the formal sector occupy less strategic positions. This is often related to women's limited abilities (a reflection of their education). Another reason most cited is that women are only suitable for feminine jobs or jobs related to their role as housewives or servants of their partners, for example as teachers, nurses, waiters, cooks, telephone operators, bank tellers, and the like (Barry, 2009).

Women are largely ignored in the social, economic, political, and legal fields; they do not get a proportional share of the development process. The HDI (Human Development Index) and GDI (Gender-related Development Index) shows when the economy slumps during the economic crisis, and poverty increases, the economic gap is also widening. The greatest impact of the economic downturn and poverty is felt and experienced by women. This also applies to women in West Nusa Tenggara.

I chose West Nusa Tenggara as the study site since no previous studies specifically examined the labor force participation of married women in the province. Besides, married women hold the potential to participate in the labor force and regional development if they are well taught. This study aimed at analyzing social and economic argumentation related to labor force participation of married women in the public sector in the province of West Nusa Tenggara. Although married women hold the potential as a labor force, they have not been given enough chances to do productive activities, such as working or earning a living. Barriers to labor force participation of married women and the continuing gender discrimination they face are real worldwide (ILO, 2015).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Individuals need time for productive and reproductive activities. Becker (1965) described individual behavior in allocating time for various activities; the theory assumes three (3) types of activities by individuals related to time allocation. First, an individual needs time for consumption (non-market activities) such as sleeping, eating, drinking, and resting.

Second, individuals need time for market needs, such as time to work. Third, individuals need time for investment in human capital.

At its most basic level, neoclassical economics confirms that people act rationally according to their interests. Becker (1976) developed many of the theoretical frameworks of human capital and their application to labor market segregation and discrimination. Becker (1976) hypothesized that women have a comparative advantage in nonmarket domestic work and men have a comparative advantage in a more traditional labor market.

Feminist theories explaining the differences between male and female labor force participation focus on the larger social institutions and processes that influence gender dynamics. This paradigm is not only rooted in economics but also incorporates the influence of traditional and cultural institutions, government policies, religion, and other sources of gender attitudes up to the labor market. Feminist paradigms attempt to explain the failure of many neoclassical theories to consider pre-market gender discrimination.

So far, barriers to the participation of women in the labor force and wage inequality due to gender discrimination have been analyzed primarily from the economic and cultural point of view. From a psychological perspective, however, an understanding of group relationships and individual behavior within a group can provide substantial insight into why gender-based barriers exist in the labor market. The social identity theory is a psychological perspective that examines the threats associated with being a woman in the labor market in a male-dominated society.

The involvement of women in the labor market can be seen from several dimensions, namely economic, social, and demographic, which includes income, age, area of residence (rural-urban), marital status, education level, religion, and culture (Manning *et al.*, 1993).

Azid *et al.* (2010) found that a negative relationship between working hours and the number of children under five women have. At the beginning of the marriage, the work participation of married women is quite high, but it will decline after having children and will increase again after the children are at school age. This is because the cost of caring for children is quite high compared to the level of salary a woman receives if she works.

Sanchez-Marcos (2005), in "Family Composition and Married Female Employment, Fertility, and Divorce in Spain", suggests the relationship between the dependent variable of women's position and the independent variables of income, education, non-labor income, and rates of divorce and birth. He found that an increase in the position of women was greatly influenced by education, non-labor income, decreased birth rates, and high divorce rates.

Anbreen Bibi & Asma Afzal (2012) examined the determinants of married women's work participation in Wah Cantt (Pakistan). They concluded that respondent education, number of dependents, family size, husband's income, monthly family expenses, positive attitudes of husband and family members towards women's work, and job satisfaction had a positive impact on the labor force participation of married women

## METHODS OF RESEARCH

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method, a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of speech or writing and behavior that can be observed from the people (subjects) themselves (Moleong, 2001).

The study was in the form of ethnomethodology, assessing reality that has a practical interpretation. It is an approach to human nature including meaning in real behavior. This concept sees every group of people (society) has a local and organized situation with its special stereotypes and ideologies, including race, social class, and gender. This approach will side with the lower class society with a very populist ideology. The most appropriate method to use within this method is dialogue. Ethnomethodology is a methodology that studies how social behavior can be described as it is.

The study took place in West Nusa Tenggara. The unit of analysis was the labor force participation of married women. The informants in this study were married and working women. As many as 18 married women were chosen as the main informants. Supporting

informants were husbands, children, and family members in the household; they helped in validating data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Reasons for Married Women to Work

In general, married women are hesitant to enter the labor market due to their domestic role (taking care of the household). Meanwhile, the chance for married women to enter the labor market is increasingly open. This shows the independence of women to meet their needs and the expansion of job opportunities. Married women have various reasons to participate in the labor market, including education, opportunities provided by the public sector, job opportunities, acceptable levels of wages or income, and cultural attitudes towards working women. At the household level, female labor force participation in work is very dependent on their socio-economic background. Based on this economic background, women can be classified into three (3) categories. The upper socio-economic strata consist of highly educated women (professionals); the majority of these women can advance their careers or gain personal achievement, and financial need is not the main reason for them to work. In most of the cases, the husbands of such women are high professionals as well. The Edison effect favors working women in this category. The next is a group of women who are in the formal professional sector. This group is classified as intermediate or lower-level professionals (such as nurses, paramedics, telephone and computer operators, and administrative workers). Most of them have completed secondary education and have several technical certificates. Their husbands usually have the same range of education and the same profession. Both fall into the category of formal work. Formal and informal work appear to require different skills as the requirement for work.

Before deciding to work, married women have some reasons to consider, including the husband having difficulty providing enough for their wife and family members. A wife who chooses to keep their marriage work is then forced to work to help to support the husband and the family. Women facing such a situation then decide to work willingly. However, working must not stop women from performing their domestic roles. They have to be present when the husband and the family need them.

Women working in the formal sector tend to have a smaller family—they have fewer children than those working in the informal sector. At the lower strata of the women labor force, there are uneducated women from poor families doing low-paid jobs in the informal sector. These include factory workers, domestic helpers, freelancers, and those working on a household scale. The husbands of these women are mostly unskilled workers, laborers, and self-employed workers. These women work because of the low income of the family.

A woman's life has different phases including (a) young and single women, (b) married, divorced or widowed with children, (c) women with grown-ups (married, divorced, or widowed), and (d) older women without husbands and children. Women in the first and second last categories are more likely to join the labor market since their domestic conditions allow them to do so—the work does not take too much time of their domestic work. However, the situation may be different for divorced or widowed women, even those with young children—these women must work to support the family; this can only be done if they receive help from other family members to take care of the children.

Understanding women's inspiration and motivation are important in analyzing their decisions to be economically productive. Aspirations are determined by the socio-cultural-economic dimensions such as cultural influences, education, and norms adopted by society (the values, positions, and roles of women are accepted by society).

Some factors have been driving women to be involved in the public sector. The first is economic factors due to the increasing needs of their life. Today's household needs are not only limited to food, clothes, and shelter. There are additional needs as well such as education, health, organization (association), recreation, and others. Under today's circumstances, married women seem to have more reasons to participate in the public

sector. They also have a desire to increase their self-esteem (prestige) and to have equal rights just like educated women and urban women.

Many factors affecting the participation of married women in the economy of their households, such as education, socio-culture, and others. The participation helps these women to help the economy of their family and at the same time helps them to have more experience. Thus, women have even a stronger position in their family and society. Families represent the most important primary group within society. A person works to reach a certain socio-economic position, a position arranged socially within the structure of society. This position comes with a set of rights and obligations one must fulfill (Koentjaraningrat, 1992). The social level refers to a non-economic factor such as culture, education, age, and gender, while the economic level includes income, types of work, education, and investment. Sayogyo (2002) states that the socio-economic position includes three factors, namely work, education, and income.

The results of the present study confirmed that married women participate in the public sector to obtain socioeconomic status, in which they can place themselves well in their environment. Thus, these women could make their own decisions based on what they had, they could also show their ability to successfully run a business, and they could succeed in fulfilling their daily needs. At least, the household had two sources of income so it would have better financial conditions.

#### **Participation of Married Women in Labor Force Based on Socioeconomy Strata**

The assumption that women work to gain equal status with men is not entirely true. The findings of the present study showed that married women worked to help their husband to support the family. For our informants, the husband remained the main breadwinner; they worked to help the husband. Modern families, especially those living in big cities exposed to modernization, find it difficult to rely only on one source of income. Working not only help these married women to earn a living to support the family, but it also brings other advantages for women such as feeling happier because they can hone their skill and have other communities outside of their family members. These working married women also have the chance to learn to balance their work and home life. They believe that having both work and family life has helped them to think positively and to find many interesting things in their life.

Nevertheless, these married women see that the husband is the main breadwinner—they work only to help the husband for the sake of the family. These women believe that two sources of income are much better than only one source. They also consider this as anticipation if one day their husband passes away or anything happens that makes them a single parent.

Women also work as a form of self-actualization and self-development; the work has a positive impact on the economy of their household and social resilience. These days, women do not only play a reproductive role (bearing children) but also play a productive role. Working helps them to reduce boredom in doing household chores, and at the same time, it also helps them to be more productive and to improve their social status.

The need for self-actualization reflects an individual's desire to become a person following their wishes and potentials. Schultz (2010) asserts that self-actualization is the use of all talents and it represents the highest development. Self-actualization is a person's need to be what he/she should be according to his/her abilities.

It is interesting to note that, from the point of view of ethnomethodology, women who are ethno-qualified tend to participate in political parties to become members of the legislature with the full support of their husbands in an ethno-economic manner. Armed with favorable socio-economic conditions, some of them are also supported by an established husband to take part in regional head elections.

The reason those women play multiple roles is to express themselves more creatively and productively. They can have their own money. They can develop themselves by using their knowledge (because it is considered a shame if they graduate high school but they do not work). They can get the social status they want. They can even channel their hobbies and interests as they wish. In addition to being able to meet economic needs and grow pride

in themselves, they also get the opportunity to socialize and interact with other people from different backgrounds so their lives become even more colorful.

Although the husband does support the decision of these women to work, they understand their position as a wife and a mother—their home life is their priority. There has been no exchange in position—the husband is still the main breadwinner, while the wife works for some good reasons. The double role these women have is their own choice. If they can choose, their priority is the family because they believe that it is their utmost happiness.

Two major categories were found related to the reason for married women of the three tribes in West Nusa Tenggara to work: need and want; this means, some women worked because they had to, while some others worked because they wanted to.

Married women in West Nusa Tenggara needed to work because their family had a low income—the husband did not earn enough for the basic needs of the family. Women at this household-level usually came from a family with a low socioeconomic status. These women would work to help the husband to reach the subsistence income.

Married women who wanted to work usually came from the upper-middle class. The family income had been enough to support basic household needs that their decision to work was not merely economic. Their participation in the labor market was due to non-economic motives such as to fill spare time, to seek self-satisfaction, for personal pride, and/or to have more social circles for self-existence.

Families with low income have a target income at the subsistence level. The labor force participation of married women will depend on the ability of the husband to generate income compared to the target income. The closer the household income is to the target income, the less will the wife have to work, or the fewer the hours they spend in the labor market.

Each individual can choose how to spend their 168 hours per week—working or not. Each individual, however, regardless of their social class, needs a fixed biological time for sleeping, eating, and so on. The household activities (leisure time) does not mean that they cannot produce goods and services economically—as such, individuals can act as a consumer as well as a producer. Individuals must make choices based on their needs and satisfaction with the existing constraints that will affect their decision to participate in work.

In the end, every career woman must compromise with her obligations as an 'angel' in her home, to take care of her children, and to serve her husband because women understand that it is not their main responsibility to become a breadwinner. This kind of thinking somewhat causes them to work without certain career goals nor ambitions. It is 'enough' for them to be able to work and success for them means they can make their children, husband, and family members proud of their contributions to the household outside of their domestic roles as a wife and as a mother.

## CONCLUSION

1. The main reason for married women to participate in the labor force was the economy for those whose family income was under the subsistence level; thus, working was a necessity for them.
2. In addition to the economic factor, the social factor became another reason for married women to work because they wanted to apply the knowledge they got in school as a form of self-actualization. Some worked because they were bored with their daily routine of taking care of the household. Some worked because they believed that it would help them to have more social circles and that they could earn their own money—these reasons were for married women whose family income was above the subsistence level.
3. Two major categories were found related to the reason for married women in West Nusa Tenggara to work: need and want; this means, some women worked because they had to, while some others worked because they wanted to. The different reasons were related to their social status.
4. Married women performed double roles: the domestic and productive role.
5. It was a family decision, not a personal one, for married women to work in both the extended family and the nucleus family form.

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