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INDONESIAN TRANSNATIONAL DOMESTIC WORKERS: LIFE EXPERIENCES AND STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING POST-CRISIS CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This study explores the life experiences of returned Indonesian female migrant domestic workers (FMDWs) residing in coastal areas, with a particular focus on the challenges they face upon reintegration and their strategies for overcoming post-crisis adversities. Conducted in Indramayu District, West Java, the research adopts a qualitative approach involving demographic surveys of 105 participants and in-depth interviews with 20 selected respondents. The findings reveal that returned FMDWs experience significant economic hardship, health vulnerabilities, and social insecurity, often exacerbated by gender-based roles and limited institutional support. Despite these constraints, many women demonstrate resilience and agency in rebuilding their lives. The study, framed through a gender-sensitive social work perspective, emphasizes the need for multi-level interventions including legal reform, family and community engagement, and stronger collaboration between sending and receiving countries. The article concludes by proposing sustainable reintegration and empowerment strategies to enhance the well-being of FMDWs and strengthen the resilience of their communities.

Keywords: Female Migrant Domestic Workers; Post-crisis Reintegration; Gender-based Challenges; Resilience; Empowerment Strategies.

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Abstrak

Kajian ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman hidup para pekerja migran perempuan Indonesia (FMDWs) yang telah kembali dan tinggal di wilayah pesisir, dengan fokus khusus pada tantangan yang mereka hadapi selama proses reintegrasi serta strategi yang mereka gunakan untuk mengatasi kesulitan pasca-krisis. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di Kabupaten Indramayu, Jawa Barat, dengan pendekatan kualitatif yang melibatkan survei demografis terhadap 105 partisipan dan wawancara mendalam dengan 20 responden terpilih. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para FMDWs yang telah kembali mengalami kesulitan ekonomi yang signifikan, kerentanan terhadap masalah kesehatan, dan ketidakamanan sosial, yang sering kali diperparah oleh peran berbasis gender serta keterbatasan dukungan kelembagaan. Meskipun menghadapi berbagai keterbatasan tersebut, banyak perempuan menunjukkan ketangguhan dan kemampuan untuk membangun kembali kehidupan mereka. Studi ini, yang dikaji melalui perspektif pekerjaan sosial yang responsif gender, menekankan perlunya intervensi pada berbagai tingkatan, termasuk reformasi hukum, keterlibatan keluarga dan komunitas, serta penguatan kerja sama antara negara pengirim dan negara penerima. Artikel ini diakhiri dengan usulan strategi reintegrasi dan pemberdayaan yang berkelanjutan guna meningkatkan kesejahteraan FMDWs serta memperkuat ketahanan komunitas mereka.

Kata Kunci: Pekerja Domestik Migran Perempuan; Reintegrasi Pascakrisis; Tantangan Berbasis Gender; Ketahanan; Strategi Pemberdayaan.

INTRODUCTION

As an aspect of globalization, transnational domestic work channels people across borders, spurring the development of communication, transportation, and technology. This international mobilization enables many individuals to leave their home countries in search of employment abroad. Nicholas & Lieberman, (2023) mentioned that the actors in this multi-billion-dollar industry include states, the private sector, and individuals.[1] Poverty in developing countries such Indonesia, Philippines and Bangladesh have significantly contributed to the rise in the number of their migrant workers.[2]

Migrant workers are motivated by factors such as the availability of promising jobs, income, and the social status attained by relatives or friends who previously migrated, as well as encouragement from local agents or intermediaries (worker recruiters).[3] From January to August 2017, the National Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Workers (BNP2TKI) successfully placed 148,285 Indonesian Migrant Workers in various countries across the Asia-Pacific region, America, the Middle East, and Europe.[4]

[1]Maxime Nicholas and Sarah Lieberman. "Public-Private Partnerships and Foreign Direct Investment for Space." In *The Commercialisation of Space*, 103–22. Routledge, 2023.

[2]Raihan Jamil and Uttaran Dutta, "Centering the Margins: The Precarity of Bangladeshi Low-Income Migrant Workers during the Time of COVID-19," *American Behavioral Scientist* 65, no. 10 (2021): 1384–1405.

[3]Reddy Anggara et al., "Understanding the Motivations of Being Indonesian Migrant Workers," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2024): 2333968.

[4]Ujang Komarudin et al., "Indonesian Domestic Workers in Taiwan: An International Migration and Workers Rights Perspective," *Lex Publica* 10, no. 1 (2023): 141–64.

This represents a decrease of 8,316 workers compared to the same period in 2016, which saw 156,601 workers placed abroad. The domestic work sector remains dominated by female workers, accounting for around 80%.[5]

Since 2000, the BNP2TKI was restructured and renamed BP2MI (Badan Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia) with a stronger focus on protecting Indonesian migrant workers, organizing its operations across various regions.[6] According to reports, the number of Indonesian migrant workers abroad from 2007 to June 27, 2024, reached 5,067,984, reflecting an increase of 820,004 workers over the past four years (2020-2024).[7] This phenomenon not only underscores Indonesia's economic dependence on labor migration but also reflects persistent vulnerabilities—especially among female domestic workers—due to gender-based inequalities, informality, and weak enforcement of labor rights.

Previous research has explored the vulnerabilities faced by Indonesian female migrant workers, primarily focusing on their working conditions abroad, yet there is limited attention on their lives after returning home, particularly in socio-economically fragile coastal areas. Studies such as those by Chaudhary (2024); J. Ferdous (2024); Mataradze, Turkiashvili, and Elikashvili (2024) highlight the gendered division of labor and the double burden women face, which extends to the challenges of reintegration post-migration.[8] While the systemic issues during their time abroad have been documented, the post-return challenges, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic, remain understudied.[9] This knowledge gap raises questions about how these women navigate reintegration, rebuild their lives, and what forms of support are necessary to ensure their successful economic and social reintegration. Furthermore, there is a need to explore how empowerment initiatives, as discussed by Ibričević, (2024); Nielsen & Yarker, (2024), can assist in their post-return recovery and contribute to enhancing their roles in their communities.[10]

The aim of this article is to explore the lived experiences of Indonesian female migrant domestic workers (FMDWs) who have returned to their communities and to investigate the strategies they employ in overcoming post-crisis challenges. Specifically, the study asks: How do returned FMDWs in coastal regions of Indonesia navigate

[5]Eleanor R Fapohunda, "Female and Male Work Profiles," in *Female and Male in West Africa* (Routledge, 2023), 32–53.

[6]Moh Faidol Juddi, Susie Perbawasari, and Feliza Zubair, "The Communication Flow in the Protection of Indonesian Female Migrant Workers through the Migrant Worker Family Community (KKBM)," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 22, no. 5 (2021): 19–37.

[7]Moh Faidol Juddi, "Communication Strategy Evaluation of the Empowerment Program for Women Ex-Migrant Workers in Indonesia," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 26, no. 1 (2024): 15.

[8]Teona Mataradze, Shorena Turkiashvili, and Elene Elikashvili, "From Migration to Reintegration: Examining the Post-Return Experiences of Georgian Women," *Georgian Scientists* 6, no. 3 (2024): 133–61; ANCHALA Chaudhary, "Women Labor Migration, Remittances, and Gender Transformation in Pokhara, Nepal" (Tribhuvan University Kathmandu, Nepal, 2024); Jannatul Ferdous, "Gendered Migrations," *Gendered Migrations. Navigating Challenges and Opportunities for Development*, 2024.

[9]Karen Anne S Liao, "Infrastructuring Repatriation: The Philippine Sending State and the Return of Migrant Workers Caught in Disruptions," *International Migration* 63, no. 1 (2025): e13155; Rosita Tandos, "Developing A Model for Women Economic Empowerment for Indonesian Former Migrant Workers," 2022.

[10]Aida Ibričević. "Decided Return and Reintegration in a Post-Conflict Society." In *Decided Return Migration: Emotions, Citizenship, Home and Belonging in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 75–119. Springer, 2024. Karina Nielsen and Jo Yarker. "'It'sa Rollercoaster': The Recovery and Return to Work Experiences of Workers with Long COVID." *Work & Stress* 38, no. 2 (2024): 202–30.

reintegration, and what support structures are essential to improve their socio-economic well-being?

Additionally, patriarchal and household ideologies, influenced by both local and global actors, impact the flow of women working as domestic workers overseas.[11] Female migrant workers from Asia are often funneled into low-wage, low-skilled jobs within the domestic service sector. This type of work is frequently unrecognized in both regulatory and legal frameworks. As a result, many female domestic workers receive little protection and empowerment. Numerous studies have explored this phenomenon.[12] Furthermore, the influence of gender norms often compels women to migrate under family pressure and economic desperation, despite inadequate preparation or skills.

The study examined the lives of female migrant domestic workers from the coastal area of Central Java Province, particularly focusing on women from Juntikedoan village who have worked abroad as domestic workers. Their destinations include Turkey, Taiwan, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Malaysia, Korea, Jordan, Hong Kong, and Abu Dhabi. By centering this specific locality, the article offers a grounded understanding of how global labor flows intersect with local gender regimes, economic pressures, and institutional shortcomings.[13]

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to fill a crucial research gap by shifting attention from the migration phase to the return phase, which is equally critical for evaluating the long-term impact of labor migration. It also seeks to contribute to the development of gender-sensitive reintegration strategies that promote sustainable empowerment and resilience among returned female migrant domestic workers.

METHOD

This section outlines the research methodology, including the study's objectives, data collection, and data analysis processes.[14] The study focused on female migrant workers from the coastal area of Indramayu District, West Java Province. Participants included 105 former female migrant workers, with 20 of them participating in in-depth interviews. The study aimed to explore life in the coastal community, understand the experiences of women before, during, and after working abroad, and identify solutions to improve women's

[11]Joseph Kofi Teye et al., "Negotiating Gender Roles and Power Relations through the Management of International Migrant Remittances in a Patriarchal Community in Ghana," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 60, no. 1 (2025): 36–50; Giulia Garofalo Geymonat, Daniela Cherubini, and Sabrina Marchetti, "The Feminist and Domestic Workers' Movements: Disconnected Practices, Discursive Convergences," *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 4, no. 2 (2021): 273–90.

[12]Stevanus Wisnu Wijaya, Jason Watson, and Christine Bruce, "A Virtual Ethnography Study of Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers' Empowerment in Online Communities," *Behaviour & Information Technology* 42, no. 7 (2023): 921–39; Isabel Eggers del Campo and Janina Isabel Steinert, "The Effect of Female Economic Empowerment Interventions on the Risk of Intimate Partner Violence: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 23, no. 3 (2022): 810–26.

[13]Heidi Gottfried, "Multi-Scalar Geographies of Inequalities: Trajectories of Gender Regimes in a World Regional Perspective," in *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 98 (Elsevier, 2023), 102713; Shyamain Wickramasingha and Neil M Coe, "Conceptualizing Labor Regimes in Global Production Networks: Uneven Outcomes across the Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan Apparel Industries," *Economic Geography* 98, no. 1 (2022): 68–90.

[14]Andrea J Bingham, "From Data Management to Actionable Findings: A Five-Phase Process of Qualitative Data Analysis," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 22 (2023): 16094069231183620.

empowerment programs.[15] The points are expected to recommend improvements in policies, programs, and services applicable to other coastal areas. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals with transnational domestic work experience and residence in coastal communities. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Head of Juntikedokan Village, Indramayu. Prior to data collection, all participants provided written informed consent after being assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the voluntary nature of their participation.

A qualitative approach was used for data collection, incorporating observations, a short survey, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).[16] The selection of participants followed a purposive sampling technique, targeting women with prior transnational domestic work experience and who had returned to coastal communities. In some cases, snowball sampling was applied, particularly to reach participants with sensitive migration experiences or undocumented histories.[17]

To supplement the primary data, a literature review was performed, examining previous research reports, academic journals, and other relevant online publications. The survey component was conducted to gather demographic and background data on the 105 participants, which served both as contextual information and as a means of triangulating the qualitative findings. The integration of survey data (quantitative) allowed researchers to categorize participants based on education, marital status, and migration history, which then informed the sampling for in-depth interviews and FGDs.[18]

Data analysis was conducted in two stages: coding and analysis, following the qualitative research stages outlined by Miles and Huberman - data reduction, data display, and data verification - and analysed through memo writing, interview transcripts, coding, and theme development.[19] The demographic survey data was processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), providing a descriptive statistical profile of the sample group and enabling cross-analysis with emergent qualitative themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Gender Relation and Unfair Life Systems

This section discusses gender relations within maritime communities and the modern slavery experienced by transnational domestic workers. It highlights the impact on

[15]Waluyo Handoko et al., "Empowering Former Women Migrant Workers: Enhancing Socio-Economic Opportunities and Inclusion for Sustainable Development," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 13, no. 1 (2024): 199–210.

[16]Seçil Tümen Akyıldız and Kwestan Hussein Ahmed, "An Overview of Qualitative Research and Focus Group Discussion," *International Journal of Academic Research in Education* 7, no. 1 (2021): 1–15.

[17]Luz Garcini et al., "Protective Factors to the Wellbeing of Undocumented Latinx Immigrants in the United States: A Socio-Ecological Approach," *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 19, no. 4 (2021): 456–71; Luz M Garcini et al., "Effectiveness of Respondent-Driven Sampling for Conducting Health Studies among Undocumented Immigrants at a Time of Heightened Immigration Enforcement," *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 2022, 1–9.

[18]Vibian Angwenyi et al., "Caregiving Experiences and Practices: Qualitative Formative Research towards Development of Integrated Early Childhood Development Interventions Targeting Kenyans and Refugees in Nairobi's Informal Settlements," *BMC Public Health* 24, no. 1 (2024): 2636; Noshin Tasnim Zaman et al., "Factors Shaping Bangladeshi Students' Migration Decision Using Push–Pull Theory: A Focus Group Study," *SN Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (2023): 4.

[19]Heather E Price and Christian Smith, "Procedures for Reliable Cultural Model Analysis Using Semi-Structured Interviews," *Field Methods* 33, no. 2 (2021): 185–201.

family dynamics, including the roles of husbands and wives, and the subsequent effects on children and communities.

1. Gender Relations and Hardship of Living at Coastal Area

The increasing number of coastal women becoming migrant workers reflects the influence of a patriarchal social structure, where women are traditionally confined to the domestic sphere but are now also taking on critical economic roles. Within households, these women have become essential economic contributors, often complementing or even replacing their husbands in meeting family needs. Their work abroad and the remittances they send home have not only supported household livelihoods but also contributed to national foreign exchange earnings. [20] One participant shared, "I decided to go overseas because my husband's income from fishing was not enough. I had to help—otherwise, we couldn't afford school for the children."

Gender, in general, is a social construct supported and maintained by social, economic, and political systems.[21] The goal is to create equality and justice for both women and men in exercising their rights and obligations, such as labour division, political participation, and economic contributions, even within domestic settings.[22] In coastal communities, gender roles are further shaped by economic hierarchies tied to marine livelihoods. A study found that 'patron-client dependency'—where fishermen rely on boat owners and brokers for income and access to markets—creates vulnerability, powerlessness, and exploitation of fishery resources. Social stratification in these areas reflects two dominant groups: fishermen who work under precarious conditions with limited assets, and boat-owning elites or traders who control production tools and distribution channels.[23] This unequal structure leads to persistent poverty among laboring fishermen's households. As economic pressures intensify and men struggle to provide, women are often compelled to seek alternative sources of income abroad as domestic workers, viewing migration as a survival strategy for the family.

The mutual work relationships or 'patron-client relationships' provide traditional social security resources to maintain the survival of fishermen.[24] Fishermen often request their salaries in advance from boat owners to fulfil family needs, including during sickness. Even if fishermen own their boats, they remain indebted to middlemen who buy their catch at lower prices. Seasonal factors, such as rain, cause uncertainty in catch amounts and force fishermen to borrow money from boat owners or brokers. Additionally, changes due to economic policies, exploitative coastal and marine resource management, and global warming's impact on fishing livelihoods exacerbate living conditions. If these issues persist, they pose a serious threat to the survival of coastal communities.

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[20]Marta Bivand Erdal, "Migrant Transnationalism, Remittances and Development," in *Handbook on Transnationalism* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2022), 356–70.

[21]Sonya G Smith and Jeanne C Sinkford, "Gender Equality in the 21st Century: Overcoming Barriers to Women's Leadership in Global Health," *Journal of Dental Education* 86, no. 9 (2022): 1144–73.

[22]Kristen Meagher, Bothaina Attal, and Preeti Patel, "Exploring the Role of Gender and Women in the Political Economy of Health in Armed Conflict: A Narrative Review," *Globalization and Health* 17 (2021): 1–9.

[23]Victor Owusu and Moses Adjei, "Politics, Power and Unequal Access to Fisheries Subsidies among Small-Scale Coastal Fisherfolk in Ghana," *Ocean & Coastal Management* 214 (2021): 105920.

[24]Rehnuma Ferdous and Fiona Nunan, "How Patron-Client Relations Influence Fisheries Co-Management: A Case Study of Bangladesh," *World Development* 192 (2025): 107043.

Such economic hardships lead many children to drop out of school as children follow their fathers or siblings to sea to earn income directly. Similarly, girls and women push themselves to work overseas as domestic workers. Several of them worked in very young age facing cultural shocks and demanding work environments.[25] Coastal communities are structured patriarchally, dividing roles between men in public and women in domestic spheres. Due to insufficient wages from local jobs, women seek higher salaries as migrant workers to improve their family's living conditions. Becoming migrant domestic workers is often driven by the desire to repay debts (for fishing capital) and fulfil family needs, despite lacking knowledge, skills, and experience. The participants made their decision to work in overseas through self-initiative and family involvement particularly their husbands.

2. Unfair System in Transnational Domestic Work

Transnational domestic work often functions within an unfair system, particularly affecting women.[26] This can be seen in three main aspects: work contracts, salaries, and life protection. The first is work contracts created before the workers leave their home country. The contracts bind the workers to agencies both in Indonesia and overseas, often written in the language of the destination country. Due to short language programs in pre-departure training, these contracts are often not clearly explained to the workers.

In the current situation, laborers are increasingly alienated from traditional employer-employee relationships and are instead recruited by middlemen contractors and sub-contractors. Many of these workers are exploited laborers from poor villages and families. They are often burdened with excessive placement fees and loans from labor agents, sub-agents, banks, or informal lenders, which they are expected to repay after departure, leaving them in a state of financial dependency and restricted mobility. Indebted and bonded factory workers, like their counterparts in the modernized farming sector, have little involvement in the recruitment process, apart from a few regular employees constituting the formal workforce.[27] This systemic cycle of debt and dependency reflects a structurally imbalanced labor market, particularly for low-skilled female migrant workers from rural areas.[28]

Traditionally, slavery referred to individuals trafficked and enslaved in their country of birth.[29] These individuals are terrorized by their owners into fearing the authorities, even though they are technically entitled to state protection. This perspective is based on the

[25]Li Bai and Ying Xian Wang, "Combating Language and Academic Culture Shocks—International Students' Agency in Mobilizing Their Cultural Capital.," *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 17, no. 2 (2024): 215; Norhayati Zakaria and Bibi Noraini Mohd Yusuf, "Sacrifices from Relocation to a Foreign Land: Multifaceted Challenges Experienced by Self-Initiated Expatriate Female Nurses during Cross-Cultural Adjustment," *Current Psychology* 42, no. 13 (2023): 11303–19.

[26]Louisa Acciari, Juana del Carmen Britez, and Andrea del Carmen Morales Pérez, "Right to Health, Right to Live: Domestic Workers Facing the COVID-19 Crisis in Latin America," *Gender & Development* 29, no. 1 (2021): 11–33.

[27]Carin Håkansta et al., "What Is the Role of Minimum Wages in Addressing Precarious Employment in the Informal and Formal Sectors? Findings from a Systematic Review," *International Journal of Social Determinants of Health and Health Services* 55, no. 2 (2025): 124–47.

[28]Dina Abdel Fattah et al., "The Potential Skilling, Upskilling, and Reskilling Opportunities for the Migration and Mobility of Workers, with a Specific Focus on Gender Aspects of Workers in the Countries of Origin," n.d.

[29]Brooke N Newman, "Historical Perspective: Slavery over the Centuries," in *Human Trafficking* (Routledge, 2022), 32–52.

traditional idea of natal alienation, wherein persons illegally transported to foreign countries fear seeking protection from law enforcement and other state authorities.[30] As a result, they are isolated from familial and social ties. Modernization has radically institutionalized traditional slavery. The abundant and growing body of modern slavery appears under the guise of institutional domination in the present era of globalization. The role of brokers or agencies in this migration industry is visibly expressed by abusive employers, often described as "modern slavery".[31]

The second is salaries and life protection. Migrant workers typically work in the private sphere, which is not considered a workplace, thus escalating the risk of forced labor and slavery. Due to salary deductions, they are often dependent on their employers for shelter and food. A few who are brave enough run away. The availability of employers is another crucial point, influencing how long women might wait for departure. Some women wait multiple months. Once the call comes from an overseas agent, the worker signs an employment contract covering rights (salary, rest time, health insurance, holiday breaks, incentives, and facilities) and obligations (contract length, work hours, types of work). Additional information, such as the employer's name and the number of family members, is also included. The contract states that if the domestic worker breaks the rules, she may not receive her full salary, sometimes only half or none at all.

"*Cabutan*" refers to salary deductions imposed by overseas agents to cover migration-related costs, including placement fees, domestic and international transportation, accommodation prior to departure, and administrative processing. Participants in this study who had worked in the UAE, Qatar, and Taiwan reported deductions ranging from one month to an entire year's salary. Such deductions were typically made without clear breakdowns or formal agreements, leaving workers with limited understanding or control over their earnings. Interestingly, this system did not apply to workers in Saudi Arabia, where some reported that their employers had covered all placement-related expenses. In certain cases, participants also revealed exploitative practices by agents who transferred them to new employers before the completion of their original contract, allegedly to collect additional fees from incoming employers. This practice not only violated contractual terms but also increased the psychological and financial burden on the workers.

Lastly, as mentioned previously before going overseas, participants signed work contracts written in Bahasa Indonesian or the host country's language. Contracts for those going to Taiwan were in English, while those for Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar were in Arabic. Many participants could not understand the contract content because it was in a foreign language. Although a Bahasa Indonesian translation was provided, limited time to read the text prevented thorough understanding. Agents typically explained only the main points of the workers' rights and obligations, and some participants received copies of the signed contract. This unfair system in transnational domestic work, characterized by exploitative work contracts, salary deductions, and lack of life protection, reflects modern slavery and highlights the need for better protections and empowerment for female migrant workers.

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[30]Sandiso Bazana, "Revisiting the Marikana Massacre through Anti-Blackness: An Afropessimism Perspective," *Organization* 32, no. 2 (2025): 247–75.

[31]Orisanmi Burton, "Captivity, Kinship, and Black Masculine Care Work under Domestic Warfare," *American Anthropologist* 123, no. 3 (2021): 621–32. Caf Dowlah, "Cross-Border Labor Mobility in Current Century: Modern Slavery, Human Trafficking, and Migrant Labor," in *Cross-Border Labor Mobility: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Springer, 2024), 373–429.

B. Improving Life of FMDWs

This part explains the results of survey measuring work satisfaction index of the former female migrant workers who become the respondents of the study. The number of samples taken is 100 respondents who work as FMWs. The educational history of the respondents consisted of graduates from SD, SMP, and SMA. Respondents who have the last education as SMA and SMP tend to dominate, which is about 38% and 36%. The demographic data of the respondents was shown below on figure 1:

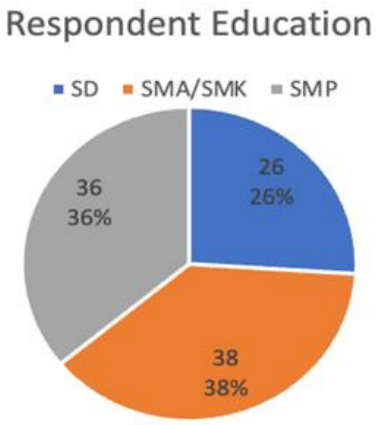

Figure 1. Pie Chart of Respondent Education.

Figure 2 shows that the participants' educational attainment includes elementary school (26%), junior high school (36%), and senior high school (38%). In conclusion, a significant proportion of participants (62%) did not complete the basic, compulsory 12 years of education. The next figure shows the marital status of the FMDWs who participate in the study.

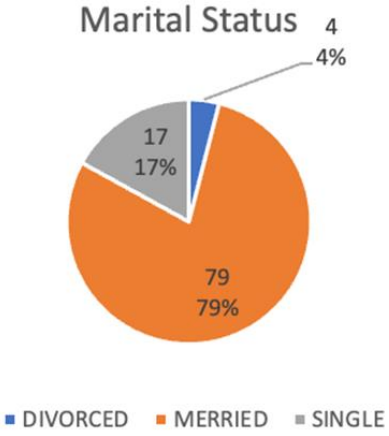

Figure 2. Marital Status of Respondent.

Figure 2 illustrates the respondents' marital status, revealing that 79% were married, while 21% were single, and 4% were divorced. The research also found that some respondents had been married two or more times and experienced divorce after working abroad. A significant trend emerged, showing that many participants left their homes, families, and children, thereby putting their marriages and education at risk due to their absence. This issue is explored further in the next section, which discusses efforts to improve coastal living conditions and the experiences of female migrant domestic workers (FMDWs).

C. Supporting the Life of FMDWs

This section examines efforts to empower maritime communities through the lens of social work or social welfare perspectives, highlighting the impacts of transnational domestic work across various levels: micro (individual, family, and group), mezzo (organization and community), and macro (policy change and program improvement). Figure 3 illustrates these intervention levels.

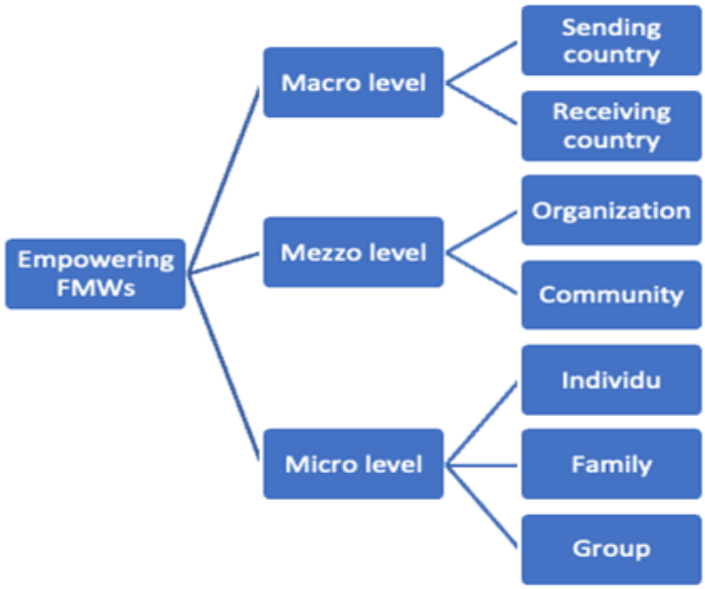

Figure 3. Levels of Interventions.

Reflecting on the points illustrated in Figure 3, integrating a social welfare perspective into the discussion of transnational domestic work reveals three critical intervention levels that institutions responsible for welfare policies and programs should address to protect and empower female domestic workers (FMWs): first at the community level, ensuring safe recruitment and placement processes involves stringent oversight of agencies and sponsors. Family involvement is also crucial, as family members often exert significant pressure on women to work abroad as domestic workers. Kinship obligations and social pressures can compel daughters and young women to seek work overseas, placing them in vulnerable positions within their families.[32] The International Labour Organization (ILO) highlights the substantial economic contributions of female migrant workers to their families.[33] However, many Indonesian female migrant domestic workers, lacking sufficient knowledge and skills, face significant challenges including harsh working conditions and cultural adjustments.

Furthermore, programs like advocacy, education, and training are essential for empowering individual female migrant workers (FMWs) at families, youth, and communities should focus on enhancing awareness and building capacities—knowledge, skills, and experiences—among female migrant workers. Despite their roles as migrant

[32]Richa Shivakoti, Sophie Henderson, and Matt Withers, "The Migration Ban Policy Cycle: A Comparative Analysis of Restrictions on the Emigration of Women Domestic Workers," *Comparative Migration Studies* 9, no. 1 (2021): 36.

[33]Deniz Bade Akkoyun and Zeynep Banu Dalaman, "Exploring the Intersection of Legal Regulations and Feminization of Migration: A Focus on Migrant Women Working in Domestic Services in Türkiye," *Migration and Diversity* 3, no. 1 (2024): 11–27.

workers, these women often remain trapped in a cycle of poverty, exacerbated by mismanagement of their earnings by their families back home. At this point, families as the fundamental unit of society play a critical role in fostering norms and values. Effective family communication is vital for maintaining harmony, yet migrant work can disrupt marital stability, leading to increased instances of divorce among transnational workers. To address these issues, family intervention programs should be designed to protect women from abuse and exploitation, especially those affected by illegal recruitment practices.[34]

Moreover, the decision of women to migrate for work impacts their children's development. Parenting responsibilities often fall to grandparents, fathers, or other family members in their absence. Education for children in coastal areas frequently receives little attention, with many dropping out of school or never attending at all. This is due to a prevalent belief within fishing communities that education does not guarantee future prosperity and that children are more likely to follow in their parents' footsteps as fishermen.

Finally, initiatives and efforts to enhance family support can mitigate the influence of illegal agencies and sponsors, thereby bolstering protection and empowerment initiatives for women. However, family support programs have not been adequately addressed by the Indonesian government. Future policy changes should prioritize the needs of low-income families of migrant workers, recognizing them as vital partners in the process. Policymakers should strive for a comprehensive understanding of these issues to improve protection, support, and empowerment for women and their families, especially in terms of child development and family stability.

D. Life in a Post-Crisis Migration Context

Indonesian Female Migrant Domestic Workers (FMDWs) represent a vulnerable group whose conditions deteriorated significantly during global crises that disrupted international labor systems. Workers in this category faced abrupt job terminations, reduced wages, limited mobility, and increased psychological stress due to heightened restrictions in their host countries. As a result, their capacity to send remittances—which many families in Indonesia depend upon—was severely affected. According to official reports, remittance flows declined by 10.28 percent between 2020 and 2022 [35], signaling broader socio-economic repercussions for households dependent on overseas income.

In several destination countries, these workers experienced intensified forms of discrimination, often framed through public health regulations that disproportionately targeted migrant domestic workers. For instance, in Hong Kong, domestic workers were classified as a high-risk group and subjected to mandatory health protocols, including compulsory vaccinations as a condition for employment and visa renewal [36]. While such measures were intended to protect public health, their selective application exacerbated social stigma and institutionalized exclusion, deepening the vulnerability of FMDWs.

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[34] Ligia Kiss et al., "Violence, Abuse and Exploitation among Trafficked Women and Girls: A Mixed-Methods Study in Nigeria and Uganda," *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 1 (2022): 794.

[35] Henny Rosalinda, "Impact of Covid-19 on the Socio-Economic Conditions and Access to Health Care Services of International Female Migrants and Their Left-behind Families in Indonesia" (University of Portsmouth, 2023).

[36] Thomas Williams, "Quarantine, Isolation, and Metaphorical Takings: Balancing Individual Rights and Public Health Responses to Disease Outbreaks," *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law* 23, no. 2 (2021): 409.

Additionally, female migrant workers in the Middle East reported stricter confinement rules. One respondent explained: *"We were not allowed to leave the house for months, even for basic necessities. All communications and movements were monitored by the employer."* Such testimonies point to the gendered and hierarchical nature of the domestic labor sector in many host countries, where power dynamics limit workers' autonomy and well-being during crisis periods.

E. Strategies for Overcoming Post-Crisis Challenges

The impact of global crises on FMDWs has revealed persistent structural gaps in labor protection, economic security, and psychosocial support. Drawing from field interviews and organizational reports, several strategic areas have emerged as essential for supporting the long-term reintegration and resilience of returned migrant workers:

1. Legal Reinforcement and Rights Recognition: Strengthening the inclusion of domestic work in national and international labor frameworks is essential. Many FMDWs still fall outside formal legal protections, making them vulnerable during disruptions. Legislative reforms must ensure fair contracts, enforceable rights, and accessible dispute mechanisms.[37]
2. Improved Regulation across Sending and Receiving Countries: Coordinated regulations between sending countries like Indonesia and host nations can improve recruitment standards and accountability of placement agencies. Mechanisms must be put in place to track violations and impose sanctions on agencies involved in exploitative practices.[38]
3. Comprehensive Health and Safety Measures: Future preparedness must include protocols for domestic worker protection during health emergencies. These include access to personal protective equipment (PPE), healthcare services, and mental health support regardless of immigration status or employer discretion.[39]
4. Economic Resilience through Financial Inclusion: Financial instability remains a major issue. Programs aimed at encouraging savings, providing micro-insurance, and offering emergency relief funds are vital to reduce dependency on irregular remittances and enable workers to invest in long-term livelihood goals.[40]
5. Psychosocial Support and Family Reintegration: Reintegration is not only an economic process but also a social and emotional one. Building support systems through counseling services, community education, and family mediation programs is crucial to reduce stigma, prevent isolation, and facilitate smooth social reintegration[41].

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[37]Shahra Razavi, "Making the Right to Social Security a Reality for All Workers," *The Indian Journal of Labour Economics* 65, no. 2 (2022): 269–94.

[38]Oleh M Omelchuk et al., "Analysis of the Activities of Law Enforcement Authorities in the Field of Combating Crime and Corruption Offences," *Journal of Money Laundering Control* 25, no. 3 (2022): 700–716.

[39]Emily Franzosa et al., "Essential but Excluded: Building Disaster Preparedness Capacity for Home Health Care Workers and Home Care Agencies," *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association* 23, no. 12 (2022): 1990–96.

[40]Matt Withers, Sophie Henderson, and Richa Shivakoti, "International Migration, Remittances and COVID-19: Economic Implications and Policy Options for South Asia," *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 15, no. 2 (2022): 284–99.

[41]Bewunetu Zewude et al., "A Social-Ecological View of the Factors Affecting the Effectiveness of Reintegration Interventions Targeting Children out of Family-Based Care Situations: A Scoping Review," *Cogent Social Sciences* 9, no. 2 (2023): 2277343.

6. Empowering Local Networks and Civil Society: Partnerships with NGOs, migrant forums, and grassroots organizations can ensure that returned workers have access to information, legal aid, and reintegration programs. Strengthening such networks is key to bridging policy with community-based solutions.[42]

In summary, the experiences of Indonesian FMDWs during times of global disruption have exposed longstanding gaps in migration governance, social protection, and gender equality. While the crisis period amplified these challenges, it also presents an opportunity to reimagine more equitable systems of labor mobility and reintegration. A sustainable path forward demands collaboration among state institutions, civil society, and international actors to ensure that FMDWs are not only protected during employment abroad but also empowered upon their return. These strategies should prioritize dignity, agency, and resilience as central pillars of post-crisis recovery.

CONCLUSION

Women are at the forefront of the transnational domestic work industry, with Indonesia being one of the primary countries sending female workers to participate in this multi-billion-dollar sector. Both sending and receiving countries benefit from this arrangement: sending countries gain remittances that support their economies, while receiving countries obtain a steady supply of affordable labour. For many women, this migration is a critical opportunity to enhance their economic circumstances, enabling them to support their families, invest in property, and establish small businesses upon their return.

However, it is undeniable that female migrant domestic workers frequently endure various forms of abuse - be it verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual. Many women face these challenges in isolation, driven by their aspirations and dreams. Furthermore, the lack of robust worker protection is a persistent issue, as transnational domestic work is often classified as 'unprofessional' or informal. To address these concerns, it is essential to implement measures that enhance protection and empowerment for these women. Such efforts must take into account their significant sacrifices and contributions, both in their countries of origin and within their workplaces abroad.

This study has revealed that reintegration challenges faced by female migrant domestic workers (FMDWs) returning to coastal communities are not solely economic, but also deeply social and psychological. These women navigate a complex web of vulnerabilities that demand comprehensive, multi-level policy responses. Based on the findings, three specific and actionable recommendations are proposed: first, the Indonesian government—through BP2MI and local administrations—should institutionalize reintegration support programs that include legal assistance, psychosocial counseling, and skills-based economic empowerment training; second, bilateral agreements between Indonesia and major receiving countries must be revised to include mandatory enforcement mechanisms ensuring fair labor contracts, transparent salary systems, and accessible grievance procedures; and third, a nationwide database and monitoring system should be developed to track the conditions of FMDWs throughout their migration cycle,

[42] Michelle Bellon et al., "Community in the Pandemic: Experiences and Strategies by People with Acquired Brain Injury and Their Families during COVID-19," *Disability and Rehabilitation* 45, no. 6 (2023): 1038–45.

ensuring accountability among placement agencies and enabling targeted interventions. If implemented effectively, these measures can shift short-term crisis management into sustainable protection systems that promote the dignity, security, and long-term resilience of Indonesian transnational domestic workers.

The recent global crisis has highlighted and exacerbated the challenges faced by female migrant domestic workers. The health risks, economic hardships, and isolation they experienced underscore the urgent need for systemic change. By strengthening legal protections, improving health and safety standards, promoting financial inclusion, and enhancing support networks, stakeholders can address the issues exposed by past crises and work toward a more equitable and humane environment for FMDWs. Ultimately, these women should not only be recognized for their economic contributions, but also be empowered as rights-bearing individuals whose well-being matters both at home and abroad.

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