

# Women Migrant Workers as the Primary Breadwinners: Case Study of Indonesian Women Migrant Workers (TKWs) in Hongkong

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**Abstract:** The role and the nature of women as wives and housewives who serve in the domestic sector is now shifting. At first, most of them play role as wives and housewives who are responsible to take care of domestic and household needs, but in turn, due to several factors, they have broadened their role and have eventually entered the public sector. They are, for instance, naturally motivated to work for a living in order to help their husbands or parents, and even occasionally endure their family needs. Such case has happened to Indonesian women migrant workers (*Tenaga Kerja Wanita*/TKW) in Hongkong. They have become the main breadwinners in their family, in which the needs of their household are mainly supported and covered by their work. Overall, this study aims at exposing the real phenomenon that actually happens or is encountered by the Indonesian women migrant workers (TKW) in Hongkong behind their status as the main breadwinners in the family.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Socio-culturally, Indonesian women are known as tough and tenacious workers. They have an important role in managing their family's economy and income. In an agrarian society, for example, the women play significant role in helping their husbands or parents and even replacing them working in the farm when they are ill or unable to work. In another words, they are really committed to support their family in meeting the needs of every day's life. It means the appearance of women in the work sector is very common among people in Indonesia considering that they have been involved in that sector for a long time, such as in agriculture, farming, marine, and trading.

As the time changes, the role of women in Indonesia has begun to shift. The decreasing of agricultural lands and the development of industrialization have forced rural women to walk into the snares of capitalization as employees or industry/factory labourers. Sadly, those who are less educated and less skilled are even willing to work as maids in order to sustain their family's needs.

Such phenomenon has often happened especially for widows or women who hold the

responsibility for the family to survive. Unfortunately, the low salary in the domestic country has not met the increasing needs of family from day to day. In the end, they—willingly or unwillingly—become labours or women migrant workers (TKWs) to survive.

Consequently, their role which is initially trying to help their husbands make a living while taking care of and raising their children in the family has eventually shifted into becoming the 'responsible person' who has to make sure the living of all family members. Quite often do their husbands even allow them to work abroad as women migrant workers in order to meet their household needs. In turn, the position and role of the husbands, which is supposedly becoming person in charge in the family, has suddenly changed. In general, the women earn higher income by working overseas compared to their husbands who work in the village. In the end, the role of the husbands has changed from dealing with breadwinning into taking care of domestic sector. In certain cases, they are likely to enjoy the income of their wives.

This phenomenon shows the role of today's women is not only becoming as housewives but also breadwinners as an effort to improve the living standards of their family. Simply saying, they are

willing to leave their husbands and children in the village and make a living in order to guarantee their family's survival. They do not only look after their children, parents, sisters, and brothers, but also to support their husbands.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Hongkong is a special administrative city located in the southeastern part of China (Geography and Climate, Hongkong, 2015). It is known as a specific or special city because it is famous for its expansive development and natural sea port. In the late 1970s, it became the major trade link and world financial center and was regarded as one global city. Surprisingly, it took the fifth position on the 2014's Global Cities Index after New York, London, Tokyo, and Paris (Global Cities Index and Emerging Cities Outlook, 2014). Financially, this city has high per capita income and appears to be the third most important financial center after New York and London (The Global Financial Centres Index, 2014).

There is no wonder if Hongkong becomes the destination for job seekers from various countries that have lower per capita income, including Indonesia. Besides applying extraordinary freedom, Hongkong also upholds human rights and enforces the law by punishing those who violate it (The Annual Report of Indonesian Workers, 2012). The high number of job opportunities in the domestic sector happens because many women in Hongkong—especially the wives—prefer working outside the home and having careers (Dila, 2015).

Nowadays, as regards to the Indonesian migrant workers (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia*/TKIs) in Hongkong, the city only employs women migrant workers (TKWs) and does not receive men workers because such position can be filled by Hongkong citizens. There are approximately more than 137,000 of TKIs who come from Central Java and East Java, and about 1,000 TKWs from West Java respectively. This is the highest number after the number of TKWs from Philippines (Chairman of KJRI, 2015).

Hongkong has become a powerful magnet for TKWs who are willing to work overseas with high salary and comfort. There, the rights of migrant workers must be fulfilled by every employer who uses their services such as the right to get a dayoff in each week. If, for instance, they are asked to work, the employer is obliged to pay overtime wage in lieu of holiday.

“Besides having high salary, working in Hongkong is also pleasant. There must be a dayoff

each week. For those who are asked to work during the dayoff, they will get overtime wage. Usually, the dayoff offers a great pleasure for the TKWs. They can hang out to the city center, gather with friends, and go for shopping here and there.” Said Alin, a TKW from Tulungagung (Alin, 2015).

## 3 RESEARCH METHOD

To reveal the phenomenon of women migrant workers (TKWs) in Hongkong as the primary breadwinners in the family, this study applies phenomenology which is used to determine the identity of a person and see it as he/she imagines or defines. It seems that we experience what he/she experiences in his/her social life. In another word, the fact which is considered important in phenomenology is what is imagined by the actor at the time it is happening (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975).

In the process, this study uses empirical phenomenology to depict the experiences of the Migrant Women Workers (TKWs) as the primary breadwinners in the family. The goal is to analyze the role of TKWs in Hongkong which can only be done by acquiring data directly from them. Here, the researcher does not interfere in determining the meaning and essence of what they deliver. The essence and meaning is formulated according to their experiences and understanding towards the object or phenomenon of women who work in Hongkong as the primary breadwinners in the family.

In the meantime, this study uses descriptive-analysis approach (Bagoes, 2004) to describe the experiences and conditions of TKWs who become the primary breadwinners in Hongkong and their influences according to Islam and gender perspectives.

## 4 RESULTS

### 1. Woman Motivation in Working as TKWs

In general, there are several factors that encourage women migrant workers from East Java to find a job in Hongkong. According to the interviews with several informants who have ever worked in the city, they mention economic condition is the main factor encouraging them to seek employment in Hongkong.

#### a. Economic demands

The desire to earn more income and to improve the condition of the family life is the reason and the

main goal of rural women who dare themselves to work in Hongkong.

Economic demand as one of the factors for working as TKWs is mentioned by Juariyah (23 yo), from Cirebon. She had strong desire to go to Hongkong after getting divorced by her husband, while she had to support her child, younger sister and mother. Such case was also experienced by Kokom who was divorced and has not get married again. She has a daughter who is growing up and is a student in High School. In addition, she has a biological mother who still looks healthy. Her father died a long time. In the family, the relationship between her and her ex-husband is good, but it is only limited to the relationship among Muslims. However, her ex-husband has no longer provided a living and school fees for their daughter.

This also happens to Atun. She works as a TKW due to her family's economic circumstance and a desire to live more prosperously. As a woman raised in Javanese environment, she feels obliged to support her family which is basically the responsibility of her husband. Since her husband's income is nearly enough to meet the needs of the family, she is willing and ready to work as a TKW overseas.

Being a TKW is one quick way to change the economic condition for employment opportunities in Indonesia are scarce and become more difficult to find. Almost the entire informants explain that working as TKWs would earn high salary. Such idea is not without a cause, considering that the economic condition of the family before they become TKIs depends solely upon the wisdom of the traditional sources of livelihood (rice fields, gardens), whereas the traditional livelihoods are no longer able to provide welfare for farm-worker families. Consequently, the results obtained through the traditional sources of livelihood do not lead to balance the outcomes and the incomes.

#### b. Experience and Success Story from Other TKWs

Besides economic demands, another reason that encourages women to become TKWs in Hongkong is gaining success. They are motivated by successful experiences from the people in their region. Here, the trending story is that working overseas as TKWs will raise more money. Such story is supported by many TKWs who have returned and bring success which is seen from their ability to build a house or buy a motorcycle and other luxury goods. In addition, the success story also comes from friends or relatives who could be clearly proved. Indeed, the success of becoming TKWs overseas will make

people who are trapped under their family economic issues to feel tempted. At least, such success stories will stimulate the curiosity of those who live in the village and are willing to gain new experiences overseas.

The success of becoming TKWs indirectly has encouraged other citizens to follow the path of their relatives or neighbors to also become TKWs, especially after considering that the resources in the village are too unreliable to improve their family economy. Such perspective is the factor that encourages TKWs in Hongkong to willingly go there.

Supiani, a TKW from Tulungagung, said that her motivation to work overseas is influenced by her surroundings. "Those who are highly educated also become TKWs because many friends and relatives in their neighbourhood go overseas. As you can see, a husband who has worked as a teacher for 2-3 years may not be able to build a house. By becoming a TKI, to build a house is almost easy.

The same thing has happened to Kokom. Prior to working in Hongkong, she ever worked as a TKW in Singapore. Practically, what she earned from the time she worked in Singapore was sufficiently enough to use as capital for her business in the village, but she had another obsession; she wanted to accumulate more capital and get more experiences working overseas as she thought she was young and strong enough to work hard. In other words, besides a desire to get more experiences, her motivation to work in Hongkong was that she wanted to seek fortune and get more income in order to live properly, have a nice house, rice fields, and farms, fulfil her family's needs and her two children's educational fees, and make some savings for the future.

Thus, the motivation to get experiences by working overseas plays significant role in attracting rural women's interest. The experiences here are not only related to working in Hongkong, but also some experiences outside of work such as having a chance to go overseas and visiting some places that they have never seen before. Therefore, ones of advantages of working overseas such as in Hongkong are getting experiences, gaining wonderful life, and being able as well as courageous to live independently without having to rely on others.

#### c. Encouragement from Family and Friends

According to the interviews, most TKWs in Hongkong stated that their decision to work in Hongkong as TKWs is driven by families, parents or

husbands, and friends. In this case, family has also played a major role in shaping their motivation to work as TKWs.

## 2. The Role and Contribution of TKWs to the Family Livelihoods

The existence of TKWs in Hongkong does not only play significant role in improving the welfare of their own family, but it also gives significant influence to the welfare of the environment in which they come from.

The high salary they earn by working in foreign countries will have an impact on the socio-economic status of their families. In the process, their high income has great impact on increasing and improving household revenue and economy. They are able, for instance, to open and expand economic activities (opening shops and trading), buy land and make good house, buy vehicles or electronic equipments, and pay their children education.

Before working as TKWs overseas (Hongkong), most of them admit that they have experienced financial issues such as difficulties in meeting their economic needs. In fact, some have had to make loan to cover their family needs. However, after becoming TKWs, their economic condition has drastically changed to get better.

As the result, their hard work and persistence is now paid as they can feel it in their lives now. According to the interview, almost all of TKWs in Hongkong have already benefited from their hard work such as having nice houses, farms, rice fields, and vehicles. In addition, after returning from Hongkong, they plan to use the money to open their own businesses.

Retno, a TKW from Ngawi, is a picture of one of successful TKWs. Before going to Hongkong, she did not own farms, rice fields, and vehicles. But after three years of working, she is able to purchase rice fields and farms, buy a motorcycle and renovate her parents' home. "My life used to be very simple. I was unemployed, so I helped my parents to work in the rice fields or clean the house. But after getting a chance to work overseas as a TKW, my economic condition has begun to improve day by day. In the end, I could enjoy what I have earned after four years of work."

TKWs have given significant contribution in terms of daily needs to their family, husbands, children, and parents. In addition, they also brings a positive impact on the society.

Economically, the TKWs family seems to cover all of their needs because they have one of the member working as a TKW. In addition, they always receive some amount of money which is

transferred through a bank or other transferring services. In the process, their lives can also be seen from the houses they have built, vehicles they possess, or businesses they run. Simply saying, they have experienced a very drastic change. In the beginning, their houses were very simple or they did not even have homes. However, after working in Hongkong, they can build houses as they wish and own motorcycles and a variety of facilities.

Another indication of economic changes of the TKW's family in the region is the increase of purchasing power by the TKW's family, not only on the primary and secondary needs, but also the tertiary needs, and often it leads them to consumptive behaviors. Although most people think it is not good behavior, but in general it can be tolerated considering that the TKWs have wandered too long and have not met their family, relatives, and neighbors. Therefore, the money they send to their families each month in which it is used to buy goods or renovate their house becomes a "redeemer" to the time and distance that separate them. In other words, their existence in the family and society is represented by the appearance of nice house and cars which in turn becomes a symbol of their hard-working and success working as TKWs overseas. Essentially, they want to show the results of their hard work to their families and make them happy.

Supiani, for instance, has got nice house which consists of three buildings, including the front, back, and side building. The house is a Javanese house dominated by teak woods with a 16 cm main home pole. In addition, the home yard is quite wide and is used by local residents as a area to practice *Setia Hati* martial arts. Unlike most residents in Kwadungan Ngawi, her family members are not only farm labors, but they also own large agricultural land with a three time a year harvest. In the land, cassavas, maizes, bananas, and other plants are farmed.

The above results are achieved by her hard work as a TKW. Prior to working in Hongkong, she had ever become a TKW in Singapore for two years. She has moved to Hongkong and has worked there for three years. "I send all the money I get from work as a TKW to my parents because I am still single and do not have my own family. The money is then invested by purchasing rice fields and farms including palm oil plantations in Sumatra". Her parents hope, after reaching her success, she soon meets her soulmate, gets married, and then returns home, living with her family.

### 3. TKWs as the Primary Breadwinners

The responsibilities in the family are a manifestation of awareness to rights and duties in which every member of the family has different rights and duties. The difference is adjusted according to their status and role. A husband, for instance, is entitled to get services from his wife both biological and social services, but he is obliged to provide a living for his family. Similarly, a wife is entitled to get a living from her husband, but she is obliged to take care of the household.

#### a. The Involvement of Women as the Breadwinners

Biologically, the tasks within the family are divided according to physical conditions; men are stronger than women. Therefore, husbands usually get harder tasks which require considerable power. In the meantime, women do domestic chores such as taking care of children, sweeping and cleaning the house, washing clothes and so on. To this end, it is often said that men are more *public oriented* while women are more *domestic oriented*.

It is common among the society that men should go out and work hard to earn a living, whereas women become wives and mothers in the family. Due to the life demands and employment opportunities that require wives to make a living, the roles undertaken by the wives become the responsibility of the husbands and likewise. Consequently, the care for the family seems to be incomplete.

Basically, the difficulty experienced by a husband to meet his family income is not because he is lazy to work, but mostly because access to employment opportunities or economic opportunities is rare. This is known as structural poverty which is suffered by a group of society because they cannot use the sources of income which are actually available to them. The structural poverty includes lack of settlement, education, communication, and facilities to develop business and obtain employment opportunities, and the lack of legal protection.

In order to meet the life needs, many parents work as farmers, labours, or construction workers. Many women, especially wives, finally join to seek other alternatives to meet the needs of the family. One alternative that many take is working as a TKW overseas.

According to Sumar, a TKW from Semarang, she explained, "During an emergency, when my husband is unable to work such as getting sick or experiencing other obstacles that cause him to be incompetent to produce a living for the family, I can

contribute some money by working as a TKW to support the family income, or to save some money to start the family business."

#### b. Women's Perspective Concerning Their Role as the Primary Breadwinners

Siti Maimunah assumes that her husband is responsible for the household because he is the head of the family, although she offers much help by becoming the backbone of the family economy. According to Siti Maimunah, her relationship with her employer is relatively good even though she feels tired due to a lot of work that she must finish each day.

The same thing happens to Aini. After her leave has expired, she plans to continue working as a TKW in her old employer. According to her, the employer only allows her to take leaves, not terminate the employment. Basically, her relationship with the employer in Hongkong is quite good. All rights are fully granted by the employer such as rights to have holidays, to obtain wages or to take leaves. She plans to go if her husband allows her to leave him and her child in order to meet the economic demands of the family.

Indeed, ideally after the marriage, a husband is in charge of dealing with the family income and meeting all the family needs and other operational costs. In addition, he should be able to become the leader in the family who is assigned not only to educate the family but also play significant role on taking important decisions in the family.

However, in certain cases where a husband is unable to seek and meet the family income, he should let his wife, if she is willing to help, meet the family needs by finding a job outside the home, including becoming a TKW overseas. Indeed, it is risky when she is away from home, especially if she has school age children in which she is supposed to educate, supervise and accompany. Consequently, she cannot complete such tasks.

In one side, the husband should tolerate this condition. However, in another side, the wife should not—in such condition—assume that the responsibility to educate children disappears. The wife who decides to work as a TKW overseas should still feel responsible for controlling and supervising her children from far. In a situation where she can earn income and her husband is helpless and could not make a living for the family, she must remain conscious of herself as a woman and a wife who needs to respect and obey her husband. On the contrary, she should not act arbitrarily and show disrespect. In dealing with the important decisions

related to the family, he has to become the leader who is ready to make the right decision.

"In my opinion, during an emergency, when the husband is unable to work such as getting sick or experiencing other obstacles that cause him to be incompetent to produce a living for the family, his wife who works as a TKW can contribute some money to support the family income, or to save some money to start the family business. In the end, if she can independently manage her economic and social activity, she should not be worried about what happens to the family when her husband passed away or she gets divorced."

Similarly, Novi as a young TKW also thinks that after getting married, a husband must play role as the family breadwinner and be responsible for meeting all the family needs and operational costs. In addition, he should be able to become a leader in the family. He is not assigned to educate his family, but also play important role in making decision in the family. Her mother hopes, after successfully working overseas and having a lot of savings, Novi immediately gets married and then returns home to live with her family.

However, if a husband is unable to make a living for the family, a wife should voluntarily help to meet the family needs by finding a job outside the home. Consequently, the husband is fully responsible for educating, supervising and accompanying their children to learn, whereas the wife only helps as she can. However, she should not consider that her responsibility to educate her children fades away. She is held accountable for controlling and supervising their children as she could from far. Additionally, although he is unable to make a living for the family, she should remain obedient and show respect to her husband. In dealing with important decisions concerning the family, he remains becoming the leader of the family. She said, "A husband is responsible for dealing with the family income and meeting all the family needs of children and operational costs. In the same way, he also becomes the family leader who is assigned to educate the family, and play significant role in making important decision.

According to Dila, her husband is unable to earn the family income, and he allows her to help meet the family needs by working as a TKW overseas. Consequently, she may not be responsible for educating, supervising and accompanying their children to learn. Fortunately, he understands such condition, and in the process she is able to control and supervise the children from far by intensely communicating on the phone. "Although I have my

own income and my husband is unable to make a living for the family, I, as a wife, remain obedient, show respect, and appreciate my husband. In practice, he remain becoming the decision maker concerning the family matters after some negotiation or discussion."

The above descriptions regarding the TKWs perspectives show how significant their role is in meeting the family needs. In other words, their role as economy actor greatly contributes to their families and households as they can make a living or big wealth and even double the income earned by her husbands. The aspect of contribution in this economy is also in line with their role in the aspect of controlling or decision-making. This shows that they have an important position to take part in family's decision.

In addition, it also indicates that the contribution of women in terms of the family income positively affects their position in the family, especially in making decision. Further, it could also improve the status and role of TKWs in the family life which depends on the socio-economic condition of the household. Suffice to say, the household needs become a major factor that causes women to work outside the home.

In other words, the shift of the role of women in earning the family income makes them more appreciated and respected. In this regard, the cultural values applied in society and the understanding on religious values or teachings among them should compromise their role and position.

Social and cultural barriers binding that women are not allowed to work outside the home and leave their village is no longer valid among rural communities. In fact, the number of migrant women is higher than that of male migrants. As the result, the view on the role of women in the village where they come from after they work as TKWs overseas has now changed. Before the widespread of phenomenon regarding women working as TKWs, local people usually place them in the domestic sector and they even occasionally help their husbands work in rice fields or farms. However, in the last two decades, with the increasing number of people who have worked as TKWs and have returned home, a shifting has occurred and the old view has been no more popular although it is not the main cause of the changing of the view, but it has contributed to the change.

In conclusion, women play role in earning the family income and their contribution to the household is generated through productive activities that they acquire by working as TKWs overseas. In

the end, their participation in public sector as breadwinners will increase their contribution to their households. Nevertheless, they keep respecting and understanding men as the leaders responsible for the family.

#### 4. The Pattern of Task Division in the Household

The factors that cause a woman to play role as a breadwinner in the family among TKWs in Hongkong occur for several reasons, such as financial issues, encouragement from the family, and desire to get experience. Basically, the family's opinion concerning the role of wife as the breadwinner implies that they willingly allow her to earn a living overseas in order to meet the family needs and to solve the financial issues such as paying debts and alike.

In addition to the changes in the structural and social functions, social impacts in terms of the pattern of tasks division in the household have also happened. Some statements of the TKWs and their families have shown that such pattern has changed when one of family members, a daughter or wife, works as a TKW. In general, the change is unavoidable considering that the father or the husband as the head of the family could not fulfill his tasks, roles and functions. The wife or daughter eventually becomes the breadwinner in the family instead. At last, the tasks which are routinely undergone by the father or husband are now distributed to other family members after the wife or daughter decides to work as a TKW in Hongkong.

##### a. The Shifting Role

Generally, the risks faced by the working wives cause them neglect their tasks in the family, exhaust their energy and thoughts, and confuse them with conflict of role of women as housewives and workers.

By working as TKWs overseas for a certain period of time, the physical presence or the figure of a mother does not exist at home. Consequently, the duties in terms of domestic affairs such as taking care of children which should be performed by a wife are taken over by a husband. In addition, the duties of a woman as a wife for her husband and a mother for her children cannot run properly. In fact, as we know, a mother plays more significant role in parenting than a father. The task of educating and caring for children are the duties of a wife. In this case a father takes over the responsibility of parenting.

The attitude of a child's dependence on his/her mother is formed because she is a more sensitive compared to a father in responding to his/her states

such as crying or being happy, angry and spoiled. In fact, such states are important expressions in parenting and she can make him/her safe and secure. This is in line with the idea that a mother is the first and the main person who ties the inner and emotional bond with the child. In other words, her role in building the child's personality is considered as the most important role exceeding another role.

For most people in Indonesia, the idea of men doing household chores is considered taboo because most of them are generally reluctant to do household chores and their work is not clean or tidy enough. In terms of parenting, they are less sensitive in understanding their child.

In turn, the issue which then arises is the shifting of the function and role of members in the family, in which a mother cannot supervise and pay attention to her children at any time while they and their fathers are always in need of her affection. In practice, a mother as a parent has a primary task of arranging the household life and plays an important role in teaching children to understand the prevailing values in order to build their personality as the qualified young generation. Consequently, she cannot perform the responsibility properly.

However, in practice the above issue can be overcome by giving understanding to the family. In this regard, attention and long distance communication with a mother who works as a TKW becomes an important thing to do to carry out her tasks and roles in the household, even with the shifting of the tasks and roles among husbands and wives.

Dila, for instance, works as a TKW in Hongkong in order to reach the family targets and she has compromised it with her husband. One of the targets is to pay off their debt. In addition, they also need to collect some amount of money to use as capital for their business in the village after the completion of her contract in Hongkong. For this reason, they are willing to separate to achieve their targets. Fortunately, during the last four years, their family's burden has seemed to start lowering as the debt is paid and their children have started to be independent. "This time, my children attend Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*), so my husband is not so busy with them and he can focus on his work. Essentially, what I earn from my work here is not to spoil my husband, but it is to meet the basic needs of family life, such as paying debts and collecting money to start our business."

Currently, she has got a wide farm and rice field. Usually, the money that she gets from her work as a TKW is transferred to her husband in the

village. In turn, the money is used to renovate the house, buy farms, purchase means of transport (2 motorcycles), pay their two children educational fees in the Islamic boarding school, and cover her husband needs (Dila's Husband). Meanwhile, he works as he can while farming in the rice field although his income cannot cover the family needs.

Dila admits that she does not aim her presence in Hongkong as a TKW to be the backbone of her family, but as an alternative to meet the family needs.

"This is my way. This is a personal decision and I am not invited or approached by an agent. Luckily, my relatives also support to help me to work as a TKW in Hongkong. Our life is very simple. Initially, we lived in my parent-in-law's. Since I worked in Hongkong, all household needs such as cooking for the children are taken care of by her. But after she died, my husband has taken over."

Unlike Dila, at first Maryati faced a difficult choice to work as a TKW overseas. Her husband, for instance, was only a labor in the rice fields and farms owned by her neighbours, while she was only as a housewife with one son. In addition, her family's income was not enough to meet the everyday's needs. "In the meantime, I still have to pay my child's educational fees. This condition makes me think to work to help my husband." (Maryati, 2015).

In the end, her friends and relatives who have worked overseas as TKWs encouraged her to do the same thing. After getting permission from her husband and family, she prepared all required documents to work as a TKW immediately. On the day of departure, with a heavy heart she was forced to leave her family and she asked her parents to take care of her child in the village.

Within six years of working in Hongkong, she has finally enjoyed the results of her hard work. Basically, she sends some amount of her salary to her family and save some for the future. As the result, she is able to meet all the household needs including financing her children educational fees, renovating her house, and helping her husband's to start a business. She is even ready to return home whenever her husband asks as she is so determined to immediately gather with her family and start a new business in her hometown.

With experience and salary she gets by working in Hongkong, Maryati has been ready to return to Indonesia and open her own business to help her husband support the family. In addition, she also expects that the results of her efforts are blessed and beneficial for her and her family in the future. "My

husband has told me that the family of a TKW should always be careful in managing the family's financial affairs as the income earned by working overseas does not last forever."

According to the statements from the TKWs, working in Hongkong is the most correct choice in order to cope with economic problems in the household, especially for those who do not have special skills, high educational qualification, or capital to start business. However, the decision to work as TKWs does bring risks to married couples or even the children.

In addition, the above circumstance also causes a wife or a woman unable to carry out her duties as a wife. Essentially, it is not considered as an exaggerated opinion considering that, at the same time, a husband cannot meet the household needs properly.

Consequently, Dila and her husband should be able to divide their roles and even switch roles in running the household life. She, for example, goes working overseas to support the family, while her husband educates as well as takes care of their children and manages the fund sent by his wife as the breadwinner. In another sense, he must be willing to replace her taking care of their children and household chores and she would work hard as a TKW to achieve their dream. Almost every day she and her husband intensely communicate with each other—by phone, sms or social media—to ask each's condition, share information, and discuss as well as find solutions when they encounter problems in the family.

In this case, the ability to communicate and to pay attention to each other, and to trust each other is a fundamental principle in maintaining a harmonious relationship between husbands and wives who have been separated for a long time, as experienced by Dila.

A wife who works as a TKW overseas should keep in touch with the family in the village, especially with her children. She can communicate by phone, *facebook*, and other means of communication. "According to me, despite separated by distance and communication by phone, a husband and a wife can share tasks, build mutual trust and motivate each other to maintain transparency in managing the assets of the wife which are sent to her husband." Expected Alin.

"We all work together. In the sense, if, for instance, my husband is unable to work, I would assist and help him. In the past, I often went to the rice fields to help my husband's work such as planting and lifting rice or vegetables and alike".

Furthermore, she added, "Similarly, my husband also helps me do the domestic chores such as sweeping, washing, drying clothes and so on."

It means that wives who work as TKWs overseas should stay in touch with their family in the village, especially with children, by telephone and other means of communication. "To me, a husband and a wife can share tasks, build mutual trust and motivate each other to maintain transparency in managing the assets of the wife that is sent to him although they only communicate by phone."

Similarly, in terms of educating children. Indeed, a mother who works as a TKW cannot directly supervise or observe the development of her children. However, she should at least be able to recognize their character and activities through her husband and other family. This indicates how important communication is. In this regard, means of communication such as phone, sms, or social media, can be used as ways of giving attention and monitoring the development of children despite the distance and time.

#### b. Keeping Harmony in the Household

The long duration of work and the lack of communication with the family are some factors that slightly hinder the TKWs social relationships with the families. Here, their families live far away, so in the process they are getting closer to their friends during the work. To that end, social relationships should be maintained, especially with families because they have protected them since childhood. Besides building relationship with the families and friends, the social relationship with the surrounding environment is also needed to strengthen, such as the social relationship between the TKWs and the environment where they come from and they come back to. In addition, they need to understand how the social relations that occur between them change.

A type of communication through technological means can also be used by a husband and a wife to establish bond of affection and maintain the harmony in family. "We always communicate each day by phone or sms or on Facebook. We exchange information and share our respective activities ranging from what we do, where we go, with whom we go, and so forth. Usually, when I travel, I am always with friends. I introduce them to my husband, so there would be no suspicion. Simply saying, we are always open to each other and we maintain mutual trust. To meet the biological needs, we trust each other. As often as possible we do fasting or do a lot of activities, so that the desire and lust can be transferred to positive things. The point

is, we should not betray our couple or violate the provisions of the religion."

In practice, almost every day the TKWs in Hongkong communicate with their families; husbands, children, and parents. Typically, they share information concerning their respective state. This is what makes them more appreciated and their families miss them. In addition, they routinely send some amount of their monthly salary and report their expenditures while working in Hongkong. Wisely to say, they have a strong religious and philosophical foundation in maintaining long distance relationship.

They remain keeping their principles; that husbands are the head of the family and they need to respect them. In addition, their departure to Hongkong to work as TKWs is not to guarantee the family income or replace their husband's responsibility. Although their income is far higher than their husbands', they keep considering it as a help to their husbands to meet the family needs. This is according to Dila:

"Basically, I work here to help my husband and ease his burden as the head of family, not to replace his roles and responsibilities for covering the family needs. However, that does not mean he can entirely rely on me to fulfill the needs. He should still be responsible for them."

During her time working as a TKW, Dila and her husband have always maintained their communicate concerning their own states and have share their problems and needs. Additionally, they have also voluntarily and lovingly changed their roles. They have done that to establish harmonious relations in their household. Sri Atun, Maryati, and Alin also claim that their relationship with their husbands run very well. Whatever the problems are, they always share and talk to each other.

Actually, being a TKW is not their choice of life. It means after they have improved the economic condition in their family, they will stop working as TKWs and decide to return home and build a harmonious life with their husbands. Most of TKWs admit that the relationship with their husbands run very well. Not even once do they have issues that interrupt the harmony in their family.

As the results, the study shows that the nature of women as wives and housewives who play their role in the domestic sector has shifted. Initially, most of them act as wives and housewives who take care of the domestic needs. However, due to several factors, they have work outside the home and have eventually entered public sector as workers and breadwinners. The TKWs, for instance, even become the main breadwinners in the household,

who show significant contributions to their family needs.

In fact, according to the Law concerning Marriage and KHI (*Kompilasi Hukum Islam/ Islamic Legal Compilation*), husbands are the breadwinners and are obliged to meet the family needs. However, because of the difficulty in making a living, many wives are willing to go out of the home and even go overseas to earn the living. In the same way, they are also willing to stay apart from their husbands and children in order to meet the needs as their husbands are unable to do.

Thus, when no one is willing to guarantee the needs in the family, by nature a woman is more likely to work for a living to help and is even ready to bear the family needs. Similarly, when a husband is unable to meet the basic needs of the household, a wife plays an important role in earning a living or dealing with the financial issues in the household.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The involvement of women in public sector, such as being TKWs to make a living, is actually not a new thing in Indonesian society's. Their involvement in helping earn a living is hereditary tradition that has occurred in an agrarian society for a long time. It means if a husband is not able to meet the needs of the family, a wife is then courageously willing to participate in helping her husband or parents in the family earn a living.

This study proves that TKWs in Hongkong, especially those who have a family, are basically aware that they are wives or mothers in the family. As wives, for instance, they work to help their husbands in making a living. In the process, although their income is generally much higher than their husband, they do not necessarily feel that they are the backbones of the family. Additionally, they also do not position themselves as heads of household. They keep placing themselves as wives who keep respecting their husbands and perform their duties as wives. Further, they also still put their husbands as the heads of the household who must be responsible for earning income and making decision in the family.

The phenomenon regarding the involvement of TKWs as the breadwinners shows that they have the same rights and role in helping ease the burden of the family. Here, they are placed equal with men (husbands) in public sector. Therefore, the dominance of men in the family in making decision has now faded away from their everyday's life

because the economic base of women migrant workers (TKW) becomes a reference to negotiate gender relations in the family.

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