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Gender Harmony and Household Integrity in Migrant Worker Families in Ponorogo: A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract
This research analyzes the dynamics of gender harmony and household integrity in migrant worker families in Ponorogo through a qualitative case study approach. The feminization of international migration creates complex gender role restructuring that involves negotiation between Javanese cultural values, Islamic religiosity norms, and the practical demands of transnational life. The findings reveal heterogeneity in family adaptive responses, where the redistribution of domestic roles ranges from progressive transformation to the perpetuation of patriarchy, influenced by individual gender literacy, social stigma, and the quality of digital communication. Although women's** economic contributions increase their bargaining power, conservative gender ideology perpetuates the double burden and relational inequality. Family resilience is determined by the convergence of extended family support, remittance management strategies, legal literacy, and religiosity as a coping mechanism. The research identifies gaps in legal protection, risks of family disintegration due to boundary ambiguity, and the transformation of younger generation aspirations. The theoretical implications enrich the transnational family sociology discourse with local cultural perspectives, while practical recommendations include developing a holistic protection framework that integrates gender-sensitive pre-departure counseling, the strengthening of community networks, and sustainable empowerment programs.*

Keywords: *Family Integrity; Gender Harmony; Migrant Workers*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of international labor migration from Indonesia has undergone significant developments over the last two decades, with profound implications for family structures and gender dynamics in migrant-sending communities (Laili et al., 2024). Ponorogo Regency, East Java, is recognized as one of the areas with the highest rates of migrant worker deployment in Indonesia, where the majority of migrant workers are women employed in the informal sector as domestic workers in Middle Eastern and East Asian countries (Rosyada et al., 2022). This feminization of migration has not only transformed the economic landscape of families through remittances but has also triggered a fundamental

restructuring of gender roles within households, creating new dynamics in gender harmony and family integrity that require comprehensive sociological understanding (Yeoh, 2021). The physical absence of mothers, who traditionally serve as primary caregivers, compels remaining family members to renegotiate domestic and parenting responsibilities, presenting both challenges and opportunities for the transformation of long-established gender relations in Indonesian society (Maliki et al., 2025).

The literature review reveals that women's labor migration creates multidimensional complexities in the dynamics of left-behind families. Gender harmony in the context of migrant worker families refers to the balanced distribution of roles, responsibilities, and access to resources between men and women, which can be disrupted or reconfigured due to the migration process (Zhang, 2022). The absence of migrant mothers generates a wide spectrum of adaptive responses, ranging from fathers assuming parenting roles to the involvement of extended family members such as grandmothers or aunts, each with different consequences for children's psychosocial well-being and household stability (Yunianti, 2025). Family resilience in the context of migration is determined not only by economic capacity but also by the quality of transnational communication, social support systems, and the psychological adaptability of left-behind family members (Amanah & Jannah, 2025). However, significant gaps in the current literature are evident in the limited understanding of gender negotiation strategies employed by Ponorogo migrant worker families that interact with local cultural values, Javanese kinship structures, and community-based social support mechanisms (Wahyuni, 2025). Previous research has tended to employ quantitative approaches or focus on the economic impact of remittances, while the qualitative dimensions of gender role negotiation, culture-based coping strategies, and family resilience within Ponorogo's specific sociocultural context remain underexplored (Nasihah, 2024).

This study identifies a research gap in the scarcity of in-depth studies that integrate sociological perspectives with gender analysis to understand how migrant worker families in Ponorogo negotiate gender harmony in the absence of female family members who have migrated (Rahmadhani et al., 2024). The majority of existing studies focus on Philippine or Chinese contexts, while the unique characteristics of Ponorogo society strongly influenced by Javanese culture, Islamic values, and the nggendong system (temporary residence in a relative's house) require a more culturally sensitive contextual approach (Noghanibehambari

et al., 2020). Furthermore, previous studies have tended to view migration as a phenomenon that threatens family cohesion, without adequately exploring the transformative potential of migration in promoting gender equity and women's empowerment through their economic contributions, and how this can contribute to the creation of more sustainable gender harmony in the long term (Widyasari, 2023).

The novelty of this research lies in an integrative sociological approach that combines Durkheimian functionalist theory with a feminist perspective to analyze how migrant worker families in Ponorogo maintain household integrity while renegotiating traditional gender constructions (Rajan & Arcand, 2024). This study explores the specific adaptation mechanisms developed by families in Ponorogo, including how the values of harmony-seeking in Javanese culture interact with changes in household power structures resulting from women's significant economic contributions (Rosiana, 2023). By employing a qualitative case study method with in-depth interviews and participant observation, this research provides nuanced insights into the lived experiences of migrant worker families, capturing the voices of wives left behind, husbands who assume new domestic roles, children who experience parental absence, and extended family members who provide substitute care (Maulidia et al., 2025).

This research aims to answer the following questions: (1) How do migrant worker families in Ponorogo reconfigure gender roles and maintain family integrity in the context of mothers' prolonged absence? (2) What cultural, social, and economic factors influence the success or failure of gender role adaptation in these families? (3) How do remittances and transnational communication affect women's bargaining power and domestic decision-making dynamics? (4) What coping strategies and resilience mechanisms are employed by left-behind families to address psychosocial and practical challenges? (5) How do migration experiences influence children's educational aspirations and their perceptions of gender roles for the future? Through answering these questions, this research is expected to contribute theoretically to transnational family sociology and gender studies, while practically providing evidence-based policy recommendations to strengthen the protection and empowerment of migrant worker families in Indonesia.

This study adopts a qualitative approach with an exploratory-descriptive case study design to uncover the complexity of gender harmony and household integrity in migrant

worker families in Ponorogo Regency. The interpretivist constructivist paradigm is used to understand social reality as a subjective construct that is formed through social interactions and specific cultural contexts (Henderika et al., 2025). The research location is focused on villages with the highest rates of female migrant worker deployment based on data from the Ponorogo Regency Manpower and Transmigration Office. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: the family has female members who have worked as international migrant workers for at least two years, still has family members left behind in Ponorogo, and is willing to provide informed consent. The principle of data saturation determines the number of participants, estimated to involve 15-20 families including husbands, adult children, parents/in-laws serving as caregivers, and migrant workers who have returned or are on leave (Nasihah, 2024).

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and participatory observations. The interviews lasted 60-90 minutes in private locations, and were audio-recorded with participants' consent, covering topics of migration experiences, changes in domestic roles, family communication dynamics, parenting strategies, remittance management, and perceptions of gender relations. Participatory observation focused on family interactions, division of domestic tasks, and gender dynamics in naturalistic settings with detailed field notes recorded (Murdiana et al., 2025). Secondary data were collected through the analysis of digital communication records, family photos, and migration administrative records. Data analysis used an iterative thematic analysis approach: verbatim transcription, data immersion, coding of significant meaning units, grouping of thematic categories, and development of main themes. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation (interviews, observations, documents), member checking, prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing. Ethical considerations included institutional ethics committee approval, written informed consent, anonymity guarantees using pseudonyms, and special protection of vulnerable participants.

DISCUSSION

Negotiation *of Gender Harmony* in Ponorogo Migrant Worker Families

The dynamics of *gender harmony* in migrant worker families in Ponorogo have undergone a significant restructuring involving complex negotiations on domestic roles and

family responsibilities. The findings of the study revealed that the absence of women who migrate for work forces family members who are left behind to redistribute the long-established gender roles in within Javanese households atau within Javanese family structures. This negotiation process does not take place in a linear fashion, but rather involves a dialectic between traditional cultural values and the practical demands of daily life that migrant families have to face.

The results of the interview with Mr. Narsan revealed a pattern of progressive gender adaptation when his wife worked in Hong Kong since 2010. He stated, *"I am alone. Sometimes children. Yes, children must be educated. Moreover, junior high school must start to be taught independently. You have to be able to cook it yourself. So when parents come home, the child can cook."* This statement suggests that the absence of wives traditionally gendered domestic tasks , but also transform parenting approaches by emphasizing the independence of children from an early age. Mr. Narsan further explained the practice of domestic division of labor: *"Even though my wife has gone home, I still often help with cooking. Make your wife's favorite green sauce. Every day I also mop the floor. I don't feel embarrassed doing housework; I don't just delegate tasks to the children."* This adaptation is in line with the findings (Anam, 2023) which state that even though there is a transfer of the role of breadwinner to the wife, the husband still plays the role of a secondary breadwinner , which implies how religious teachings interact with modern reality.

However, this negotiation of gender roles does not always result in an equal distribution across migrant workers' families. Ms. Yeni described a contrasting experience when she worked in Hong Kong, where her husband was left behind showing resistance to a more egalitarian division of domestic labor. He said, *"He helps occasionally, but not consistently. For example, even though I work abroad like this, he should help with tasks like washing dishes. But he doesn't help much. To him, if the house isn't swept for a few days, it's not a problem."* This experience indicates that although women have made significant economic contributions through remittances through remittances, patriarchal gender norms entrenched in Javanese culture still limit men's willingness to share domestic responsibilities proportionately. Furthermore, Ms. Yeni expressed the social pressure from the environment that maintains the traditional gender construction: *" The problem is also an environmental factor. There was a time when I had just returned from Hong Kong. My husband helped me carry my bathing supplies, and a neighbor saw this and immediately made mocking comments. Ironically, it was his own cousin who was talking."*

The social stigma against men who do domestic work reflects the still strong traditional gender ideology in Ponorogo society which considers domestic work as the exclusive domain of women. The difference in responses between Mr. Narsan and Mrs. Yeni's husband shows that *gender harmony* in migrant workers' families cannot be generalized, but is influenced by various factors including individual understanding of gender equality, social pressures from the surrounding environment, and power dynamics in the household. These findings are in line with the research of (Andriani et al., 2024) which found that Javanese priyayi women show high social and spiritual resilience in the face of patriarchal stigma and economic double burden, where cultural values such as *nrimo* and spiritual practices are understood not as passive surrender, but as adaptive strategies that are in line with the principles *of maṣlaḥah* and *iḥsān*.

Migration motivation and decision-making dynamics in the family also greatly influence gender harmony negotiations. Mrs. Yeni revealed that her decision to work abroad was a personal initiative driven by the desire to have her own house separate from her in-laws: *"My husband actually has a job, but you know how it is in the village the income is limited. At that time, we were still living with my in-laws in their house. I wanted us to have our own house; that's a normal aspiration for married couples."*

This autonomous decision of women to migrate challenges the traditional gender construct that places men as the main breadwinners. However, even though women take a dominant economic role, societal expectations of their parenting responsibilities remain unchanged, creating a double burden for migrant women (Al & Chandra, 2025). The psychosocial dimension of negotiating gender harmony is evident in the experiences of children left behind. Yeni's mother described the emotional impact of her daughter's departure on her granddaughter as follows: *"The problem is that she seems to carry a lot of emotions. Every time her mother comes home for a visit, you can tell from her words and her attitude that she doesn't accept her mother leaving again. When she was younger, the way she spoke wasn't typical for a child of her age it was more mature, more guarded."*

These children's emotional responses indicate that children often appear to respond more sensitively to maternal absence than to paternal absence due to internalized gender expectations regarding maternal primary caregiver roles. These findings are consistent with the study by (Ramli, 2022), which reveals that intergenerational conflicts in migrant worker

families arise from boundary ambiguity caused by parental absence, communication disruptions reinforced by indirect communication norms, and economic tensions that reflect the worldviews of different generations.

Transnational Communication Strategies in Maintaining Household Integrity

Transnational communication emerged as a fundamental strategy in maintaining household integrity in the midst of long-term geographical separation. The research findings identify that the intensity and quality of communication, as well as the strategies employed, play a crucial role in maintaining family cohesion and negotiating changing gender roles. Advances in communication technology, particularly *video call* and instant messaging apps, have facilitated a new form of virtual *presence* that allows migrant parents to remain involved in their children's daily lives despite being physically separated. Mr. Narsan explained the daily communication pattern that he maintained with his wife in Hong Kong with full temporal awareness,

"I understand that the time difference with Hong Kong is one hour. So I have to be able to adjust and understand when it's time for my wife to work, when to take a break, so as not to disturb her either. My wife and I spend time every day making phone calls or video calls."

Sensitivity to each partner's work schedule and willingness to adjust communication time indicate a commitment to the maintenance of family bonds. This routine communication not only serves as a means of exchanging information, but also as a relational ritual that affirms the continuity of emotional relationships in the midst of physical distancing. Mr. Narsan further emphasized the importance of communication: *"Yes, ma'am. I always maintain communication with my wife, children, and family so that they understand each other's situations and conditions."* Ms. Yuni, whose husband works in Taiwan, described a more structured communication strategy aligned with her children's daily activities: *"I understand because I have also worked abroad in the past and can adjust my schedule with my husband, for example, when I am free and my husband is home from work, it is used to communicate with children's activities such as studying, playing, reciting or others through video calls."*

Mrs. Yuni's personal experience as a former migrant worker gave her an empathetic perspective that facilitated more effective communication with her husband who is now abroad. This communication strategy shows that video calls function not merely as technical

tools, but as a medium of virtual co-presence in daily parenting practices, allowing migrant parents to remain involved in the supervision of education and the formation of children's character. However, transnational communication also faces various challenges that can threaten household stability. Mr. Miswanto identified the role of third-party information in triggering conflicts:

> *"Personally, I think everything is related to human resources. My loyal TKW friends are also many. Sometimes the existence of a stove from a third party also has an effect even though they don't know what the facts are in the relationship. The fall even pitted sheep. Meanwhile, women are more easily influenced and easily believe the information they hear."*

According to Mr. Miswanto's perception, women in migrant worker communities may be more susceptible to external influences and third-party information. However, this observation reflects his personal viewpoint and gendered assumptions rather than empirical evidence, and warrants critical examination as it potentially reinforces gender stereotypes about women's decision-making capacities.

This statement underscores the importance of communication literacy and the ability to filter information in the context of transnational migration. Diaspora communities, while they can be a source of social support, also have the potential to be an arena for the spread of rumors and status competitions that can undermine trust in marital relationships. Mrs. Suryati revealed her first-hand experience regarding the negative influence of social networks abroad *"I experienced this myself when I was still working abroad. I confided in some friends about a personal relationship matter, and the information spread quickly throughout the migrant worker community. Many friends then gave me conflicting advice and warnings, saying 'don't do this' and 'don't do that,' which created confusion rather than clarity."* The speed of information dissemination in the migrant worker community and *peer pressure* can influence individual decisions about marital relationships.

This phenomenon suggests that social networks in the destination country do not always serve as a support system, but can be a source of pressure that challenges the commitment of marriage. A successful communication strategy also involves openness and honesty in sharing information about each party's circumstances. Mr. Narsan emphasized: *"At least we have WhatsApp to share updates and be honest with each other—that keeps us safe, God*

willing. Every household has problems, but both partners shouldn't be stubborn at the same time. One of us needs to be flexible and compromise. If both are rigid, the relationship is more likely to break down quickly."

The principles of communicative transparency and willingness to compromise are foundational in managing long-distance conflicts. Mrs. Suryati emphasized the importance of ego management in communication: *"Even though we as humans cannot avoid problems entirely, we must be able to manage our egos wisely."* These findings are consistent with the study by (Murdiana et al., 2025), which found that the synergy between women and families in achieving family resilience can be seen in the collective culture built within family members.

The Role of Cultural Values and Religiosity in Mediating Changes in Gender Relations

Javanese cultural values and Islamic religiosity play an ambiguous role in mediating changes in gender relations due to women's labor migration. On the one hand, these values provide a moral and spiritual framework that helps migrant families cope with the challenges of separation, on the other hand, conservative interpretations of gender norms can reinforce inequality and limit migration's transformative potential to gender relations. Mrs. Yeni revealed the contradiction between formal religious knowledge and gender practices in the Ponorogo society: *"Religious understanding would help if it were actually deep and meaningful. Even though we live close to the mosque and the environment seems religious, people don't really have a deep understanding of Islam. Knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) is very limited here. When problems arise like conflicts with in-laws or family disputes people still struggle to resolve them according to Islamic principles. The question is, why is our fundamental religious understanding still so shallow despite living in a religious environment?"* This criticism shows that although Ponorogo has many Islamic boarding schools and active religious activities, a deep understanding of Islamic principles regarding gender responsibility in the family has not been widely internalized. Ritualistic religious practices do not automatically translate into awareness of gender justice and mutual responsibility in the household.

Ms. Yeni's experience also reveals the tension between normative Islamic teachings and their practical application in social reality: *"Perhaps it's because I'm here alone, dealing with challenges without much support. There's also a religious factor some people don't have a deep understanding of religion. There are even those who smirk dismissively, as if they can't help themselves. Even though that's*

her own brother." The expression *"A Woman Can't Do Anything"* reflects a patriarchal view that ignores the substantial economic contribution of women migrant workers. The discrepancy between religious teachings about the husband's obligation to provide for the family and the reality in which women are the main breadwinners creates a form of cognitive dissonance that is resolved not by changing gender norms, but by devaluing women's contributions. These findings are in line with the study by (Hijriyati et al., 2025), which found that the gender equality perspective of the parties in the divorce case of migrant workers in Kediri Residency showed a moderate view of the fulfillment of alimony influenced by family law that is still less gender-sensitive and the existence of patriarchal culture in society.

On the other hand, Islamic values can also be a source of resilience and coping strategies for migrant worker families. Mrs. Yuni emphasized the role of religiosity in maintaining household integrity: *"The most important thing is mutual trust between the two parties, then no less important in terms of religion, namely through prayer and night prayers, for example. Religion is the most important tool and force that can help a person's heart, outlook, and attitude wherever he is."*

Spiritual practices such as *tahajjud* (night prayers) serve as a mechanism for regulating emotions and a source of psychological strength in dealing with the stress of separation. Religiosity also provides a framework of meaning that helps individuals interpret the sacrifices of migration as part of a morally worthwhile effort to improve family well-being. The cultural dimensions of the values of *nrimo* (acceptance) and *sabar* (patience) in the Javanese tradition also influence the way migrant workers' families respond to migration challenges. Mrs. Yeni described her attitude in dealing with her husband's unresponsiveness to important family issues: *"When I raise important issues, he doesn't respond at all. As his wife, I should be able to communicate with him about these matters. But it seems that every time I want to discuss something important, there's never any response. So I just stay silent for the sake of our children, rather than create conflict."*

Despite facing gender injustice, Mrs. Yeni chooses to remain silent in order to maintain family harmony, reflecting the internalization of Javanese values that emphasize the avoidance of open conflict and the maintenance of social balance (*rukun*). Furthermore, she explained the consequences when trying to assert her concerns: *"When I push the issue, things get loud and he asserts his authority in a way that everyone can hear. I know I'll be the one who suffers the consequences in the end. He's a good person in many ways, but he feels his economic power gives him strength,*

and he will defend that position." This strategy illustrates how cultural values can perpetuate asymmetrical gender relations by normalizing women's unilateral sacrifices. Mrs. Yeni contrasted her experience in East Java with Sundanese culture in Garut:

"In my home region of Garut, houses may be modest not grand like here where houses are magnificent. Even though they're small, women there are more accepting (nerimo) and content staying at home. They don't feel compelled to work abroad."

This comparison reveals regional variations in gender constructions and materialistic values within Indonesian society. Mrs. Yeni identified higher materialistic pressures in Ponorogo as a driving factor for women's migration:

"What surprises me is how materialistic this village is even more so than in cities. Usually cities are known for being materialistic, but here in the village, the materialistic expectations are actually much higher than in urban areas." Social pressure to demonstrate economic status through the ownership of grand homes and modern consumer goods creates an economic imperative that drives women to migrate, even when this contradicts traditional gender norms. These findings are consistent with the study by (Sari, 2024), which found that economic transformation presents a welfare dilemma for young people in Ponorogo, where the lure of immediate income from migration work often outweighs the long-term benefits of continuing their education.

Factors Affecting the Resilience and Disintegration of Migrant Workers' Families

The resilience of migrant worker families in Ponorogo is determined by the complex interplay between social support systems, economic strategies, the quality of surrogate parenting, and the psychological adaptability of family members. On the other hand, a variety of factors also contribute to family disintegration, creating a diverse spectrum of outcomes within migrant worker families.

Protective Factors: Family Support and Economic Management

The extended family *support system* is a crucial protective factor in maintaining the welfare of abandoned children. Mr. Narsan explained the role of grandmothers in parenting: *"Because since he was a child, since he was a child, his mother has also left him to work abroad. So from the past, if there was anything, he was closer to his grandmother."* The involvement of older generations in parenting provides continuity of parenting and the transmission of cultural values,

although it can also create complex power dynamics within the family. Mr. Narsan also explained his dedication in caring for his grandmother despite his advanced age, that: *"Alhamdulillah, even though she is in her 80s, I take care of my grandmother. She only wants green vegetables she won't eat eggs or milk at all. Sometimes I secretly add milk or eggs to her food, telling her there's no milk in it, so she'll eat it without realizing."*

This caregiving narrative demonstrates the reciprocal nature of family support systems within Javanese kinship structures. Mr. Narsan's dedication to his elderly grandmother's care reflects the principle of intergenerational reciprocity a moral obligation to repay the care received in one's youth. This ethic of filial responsibility becomes particularly significant in the context of migration, as it reveals how extended family members who provide surrogate care for migrant workers' children are themselves supported within the same network. The grandmother who once helped raise Mr. Narsan's children during his wife's absence is now cared for by him in her old age, illustrating the cyclical flow of care obligations that bind extended families together (Yuda et al., 2025). This reciprocal caregiving pattern serves as a foundation for family resilience in transnational contexts when migrant mothers are absent, grandmothers step in to care for grandchildren; when grandmothers become elderly and frail, adult children assume responsibility for their care. Such intergenerational care chains embody the Javanese concept of *tepo seliro* (empathy and mutual consideration) and reinforce the collective nature of family welfare, where individual sacrifices are understood within a broader framework of shared responsibility and long-term reciprocal obligations.

However, extended family arrangements do not always function effectively as a source of support. Yeni's mother revealed her experience with in-laws conflict as a motivation for migration: *"Yes, it's because we live with our in-laws. If the situation is conducive, okay. But this is understandable, yes, there are conflicts."* Furthermore, she described the lack of emotional support from her husband's family after returning from Hong Kong: *"Yes, because it's different. I, with him, with his family, he is different, his mindset is different. The problem of children's education is different."* Social isolation and lack of support from *in-laws* exacerbate the psychological pressures faced by migrant women and can erode family resilience. A prudent economic strategy in managing remittances also contributes to long-term resilience. Mrs. Yuni explained her husband's investment-oriented approach that focused on productive assets:

"We're mindful not to waste the money earned from working abroad on unnecessary things. It's better to save and invest in buying rice fields. With this land, we're thinking long-term when my husband no longer works overseas, we'll have rice fields as a source of income."

Investment in productive assets such as farmland reflects long-term planning oriented towards post-migration economic sustainability. This strategy contrasts with the consumption patterns of conspicuous consumption that can drain remittances without resulting in long-term economic security (Shen & Raymer, 2024). Instead, Mrs. Yeni revealed a problematic financial management experience in which she gave all her remittances to her husband without an accountability system: *"Yes, how about it? The name is that we work for our husband, yes, everything is given. It means shared property. That's it, so how about it. That is a lack of appreciation for a woman."* The absence of financial control and personal savings puts migrant women in a vulnerable position, especially in the event of a marital crisis. Further, she expressed deep disappointment: *"Yes, I finally like it or not, I get my ration every month. Even though it is still a salary deduction, 6 months. Then after the salary deduction, the same one gives even bigger, to make a house too, right. So I don't have an account, I don't have anything, everything is just sent."*

Education and childcare are long-term investments that are prioritized by resilient migrant worker families. Yeni's mother explained her decision to enroll her daughter in a pesantren (Islamic boarding school) in response to social risks: *"I enrolled my daughter in the boarding school when I returned from Hong Kong. She was still in elementary school, 5th grade, but her language had become inappropriate ery harsh for a child her age. It was impossible for a child of that age to speak that way. That's why I placed her in the pesantren."*

This decision reflects an awareness of the social risks faced by children of migrant workers and efforts to provide a protective educational environment that combines academic learning with moral formation. Despite facing opposition from her husband's family, Mrs. Yeni prioritized her children's religious and moral education:*"At that time, my husband also disagreed. He was happy for me to continue working abroad, but I didn't want to worry constantly about my children's wellbeing. Working isn't just about building a house or meeting household material needs. For me, the most important thing is our children and their education that's what truly matters."*

Risk Factors: Divorce and Family Disintegration

The high divorce rate in Ponorogo involving migrant worker families reveals a concerning dimension of international labor migration. The study identified factors that

contribute to family disintegration, including widening economic gaps between spouses, the influence of social networks in destination countries, ease of access to divorce procedures, and the transformation of migrant workers' aspirations and self-identities. Mr. Miswanto analyzed divorce patterns based on his observations with specific data: *"From my analysis with fellow migrants, most divorce cases involve Taiwanese migrant workers. In cases of infidelity, 60% involve women and 40% involve men. This is partly because the workforce in Taiwan is predominantly female there are very few men."*

These qualitative observations suggest that gender composition in diaspora communities may influence the likelihood of extramarital relationships and ultimately divorce (Mukhammad, 2025). The female-majority composition of migrant worker communities in Taiwan creates social dynamics that may facilitate the formation of new romantic relationships. Furthermore, Mr. Miswanto identified the role of legal infrastructure in facilitating divorce:

"It is precisely abroad that such information is very easily accessible, and lawyers are easy to find."

Mrs. Suryati confirmed and elaborated on this observation: *"In my opinion, beyond internal family factors, the process is also made convenient and accessible. In Taiwan, many lawyers offer services to handle all divorce proceedings. Couples who want to divorce simply pay the fees, and everything is taken care of."*

The procedural ease and availability of legal services targeting migrant workers lowers structural barriers to divorce, allowing the decision to end a marriage to be made unilaterally without adequate mediation processes. Mr. Narsan confirmed this phenomenon: *"Many women don't communicate their intentions beforehand. Those who are abroad decide the relationship is not working, and suddenly a divorce letter arrives at the house through a lawyer."* These findings are consistent with the study by (Hasanah et al., 2023), which reveals that legal awareness campaigns on family rights and responsibilities for Indonesian migrant workers are crucial for protecting family integrity throughout the migration cycle (Indah & Ma, 2025).

Legal awareness as a dimension of family protection in the context of safeguarding migrant workers' family rights is also a crucial factor affecting family resilience. Field findings show that the majority of migrant worker families in Ponorogo have limited understanding of their legal rights, legal protection procedures, and available dispute resolution mechanisms. Mrs. Yeni expressed her experience of ignorance regarding her rights in the context of shared

property and financial protection: *"I don't know if I actually have rights that are protected by law. In the past, I just gave up the important thing was that my children could go to school."*

This limited legal literacy places migrant women workers in vulnerable positions regarding domestic economic exploitation and inequitable distribution of assets derived from their remittances. These findings confirm the research by Ramli (2022), which emphasizes the importance of legal awareness campaigns on family rights and responsibilities for Indonesian migrant workers, demonstrating how comprehensive legal education programs can raise migrant workers' awareness of their legal rights and the implications of their decisions on family dynamics.

Mr. Miswanto, as a former migrant worker companion, identified gaps in the protection system: *"Many migrant workers do not receive sufficient briefings about their rights, both in the destination country and when they return home. They only focus on how to work and send money, but they don't know how to protect their rights as wives and mothers."* These observations underscore the importance of pre-departure counseling programs that not only focus on technical skills, but also include education on marital rights, financial management, and family communication strategies. (Mulyani & Anugrah, 2025) confirms that the disharmony between international legal instruments and national regulations in the context of the protection of Indonesian migrant workers leads to inconsistencies that not only weaken legal protection at all stages of the migration cycle, but also pose serious legal implications for the state as a guarantor of the rights of its citizens.

Transforming Women's Aspirations and Empowerment through Migration

While women's labor migration creates challenges to family integrity, it also opens up potential opportunities for identity transformation and women's empowerment. The experience of working abroad gives migrant women exposure to different values regarding gender, autonomy, and women's rights that can change their perception of traditional roles in Javanese society. Suryati's mother described her change in perspective after working in Taiwan: *"After working outside, I became more courageous to make my own decisions. If in the past everyone had to ask my husband or in-laws, now I am more confident because I am the one who makes a living."* This transformation reflects how economic contributions can translate into increasing

women's *bargaining power* in family decision-making and the renegotiation of patriarchal gender constructions.

However, economic empowerment is not always accompanied by the transformation of equal gender relations in the household. Yeni's mother reveals the paradox between substantial economic contribution and subordinate positions in the family: *"Even though I was the one who sent money to build this house, but still in the eyes of my husband's family, I was considered to be just helping. Big decisions are still made by her husband and in-laws."* This phenomenon indicates that the deep-rooted patriarchal ideology can persist despite the shift in the economic structure in the household. Despite the transfer of maintenance responsibilities to wives who work as migrant workers, husbands still play a secondary breadwinner role, demonstrating how religious teachings interact with modern economic realities (Mulyani & Anugrah, 2025).

The aspirations of children in migrant worker families are also undergoing a complex shift. On the one hand, remittances allow for better access to education and economic opportunities, on the other hand, the role model of migrating parents can shape the migration aspirations of the next generation. Mr. Narsan expressed his concerns: *"My older son sometimes says that when he graduates from high school, he wants to follow his mother to work abroad. I'm worried that he won't want to continue his studies because he sees that his mother can earn a lot of money from working outside."* The transmission of these cross-generational migration aspirations can create a cycle of dependence on migration as a key economic strategy, potentially hindering local economic diversification and long-term human resource development. (Pharisees, 2025) confirms that changes in economic activity pose a welfare dilemma for young people in Ponorogo who want to become migrant workers rather than continue their education, where family economic factors greatly influence the choice to work abroad rather than continue their education.

Ms. Yuni, who now accompanies her husband to work in Taiwan, offers an alternative perspective on the positive impact of migration on children's educational aspirations: *"Because my husband and I work abroad, we can send our children to college. We always tell our children that our goal is to work hard so that they can pursue higher education and won't need to become migrant workers like us."* This experience demonstrates that value orientations within migrant worker families play a crucial role in determining whether remittances translate into educational investment or consumptive spending. Families that prioritize social mobility

through formal education tend to use migration as a temporary strategy for capital accumulation that supports children's educational attainment, rather than as a long-term career model or an intergenerational pattern to be replicated.

The findings of this study make a significant contribution to the theoretical understanding of gender dynamics and family resilience in the context of transnational migration. From the perspective of Durkheimian structural functionalism, this study reveals that migrant worker families undergo a process of structural adaptation to maintain social cohesion despite facing disruptions to traditional family functions. The redistribution of gender roles, although not always egalitarian, represents families' efforts to achieve a new equilibrium that allows for the continuity of socialization, social reproduction, and emotional support functions. However, a feminist perspective reveals that this adaptation often perpetuates gender inequality by imposing a double burden on women without fundamentally changing the patriarchal structures that underlie gender relations in Javanese society.

In practical terms, these findings underscore the need for holistic and gender-sensitive policy interventions to support migrant worker families. Protection programs cannot focus solely on employment and economic aspects, but must integrate psychosocial, educational, and gender empowerment dimensions. The Ponorogo local government needs to develop accessible family counseling services, mentoring programs for children left behind, legal awareness campaigns regarding the family rights of migrant workers, and strengthening of community-based social support networks that can serve as informal social protection systems.

CONCLUSION

A sociological investigation of migrant worker family dynamics in Ponorogo reveals the complexity of gender harmony negotiations shaped by multilayered interactions between economic transformation, the persistence of Javanese cultural norms, and the heterogeneity of individual adaptive responses. This study found that the absence of women who migrate for work triggers broad-spectrum restructuring of domestic roles, ranging from progressive redistribution to patriarchal reinforcement, mediated by gender literacy, community social pressures, and the quality of transnational communication.

Although women's economic contributions increase their bargaining power in household decision-making, conservative gender ideologies perpetuate the double burden and relational subordination. Family resilience is determined by the convergence of extended family support, productive investment-oriented remittance management, legal literacy for the protection of family rights, and the internalization of religious values as psychological coping mechanisms. Policy implications underscore the need to develop a holistic protection framework that integrates gender-sensitive pre-departure counseling, the strengthening of community support networks, comprehensive legal awareness campaigns, and sustainable economic empowerment programs. Future research should explore the longitudinal impact of migration on second-generation aspirations and the effectiveness of community-based interventions in strengthening gender equity and the integrity of transnational households.

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