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## Variation of Woman's Knowledge Power in the Fulfillment of Family Food Based on Economic and Social Status Difference

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### Abstract

The aim of this research is to analyze the variation of woman's knowledge power in the fulfillment of family food based on the difference of economic and social status. The study was carried out in Ogan Ilir regency, South Sumatra, Indonesia. The method of this research is qualitative method by using critical paradigm. Data were collected by in depth interview, observation and group discussion. The result of this research shows that in terms of power knowledge relation, women of high social and economic status family were subordinated by men. Women's knowledge power in the middle social and economic status family is more dominant than man's knowledge and power. The power relation of woman's knowledge in the lower economic and social status is inclined to be equal to man's knowledge power in every aspects of the fulfillment of family's food.

**Keywords:** *variatio; knowledge power; woman; economic and social condition; farmer family*

### INTRODUCTION

Food is human's primary needs that must be fulfilled. The needs for food increase along human's growth. According Malthus, the increase of human's growth is based on geometrical counting, while the increase of food is based on arithmetical counting. To make this condition serious attention of the world, FAO proposed food security initiatives. FAO's food security initiative has been developed since the middle of 1970s. At that time, the food security of FAO only focused on food availability problem, the goal is to ensure the availability and stability of food price, in international and national level. This definition has made a progress, then food security touch to individual level (Chow Garforth and Cardey 2013; Davis et al. 2009; Davis et al. 2012).

FAO formulate that food security means a situation when every people, as long time, has the access of physical, social, and

economy to food material that are enough, safe and nutritious, appropriate with food needs and food that were loved for healthy and active life. The definition of this food security was adopted by Indonesia's government in Law Food No. 7 year 1996 and President's Rule No. 68 year 2002 about Food Security. In both of those laws, food security is defined as the condition when food for household is fulfilled, and this fulfillment is reflected from the availability of enough, and good food, in amount and quality, safe and reachable. This law highlights the importance of food security, the availability of safe, various, nutritious and reachable food in amount and quality, and they are not in contradiction with religion, belief and culture for living a healthy, active and productive life (Food Law 2012).

The power of woman's knowledge in the fulfillment of family food has been done by woman since the beginning of human's

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age. In the hunter and gather society, woman responsible for family's food and care. The history of planting has been also begun by woman, so sign and symbol of prosperity and food is God "Sri". History showed that before knowing many kinds of jobs, farming is the first job known by human. So it can be said that being a farmer is the beginning of human job (Soeparto 2011).

Woman's knowledge of planting to fulfill family's food has been woman's modality to having power. Knowledge always relates to power. The relation consolidates each other. Desire for knowing is another name of desire to hold the power (Foucault 2004). When woman has knowledge for the fulfillment of family's food and is capable to practice them, woman has knowledge power in the fulfillment of family's food (Haraway 2006; Hosain and Jaim 2011).

The power of woman's knowledge in the fulfillment of family's food is differentiated by family's economy social status. Various literatures and researches show that economy and social condition influence society's social life in the way family's economy and social status to children's performance and nutritious level, etc (Suhariadi 1989).

Economic and social status is a position or social level identified to someone in their society life which can be seen by education level, job status, structure and infrastructure, and mobility (Suhariadi 1989). This research uses that indicator, also added with the measure of economy social and status according to community's opinion.

Farmer's family of swampy land, that generally consist of father, mother and unmarried child, or as often called as main family. When the children have married, they will make their own houses in the yard close to their parents. Family is a group or collection of people that live together as one unity or smaller unit in society and usually always there's connection of blood, marriage bond or another bond. They live together in one house and led by a head of family (Kim 2014; Plaisier 2007; Quisumbing and Pandolfelli 2010; Wei-wei 2005).

The purpose of this research is to ana-

lyze the variation of the woman's knowledge power in the fulfillment of family's food on farmer community of swampy land. For analyzing the variation of woman's knowledge power, farmer's family is categorized into different economy and social conditions: high status family group, middle status family group and low status family group.

## METHODS

This research used qualitative approach a critical paradigm. Data were collected by in-depth interview, observation and focus group discussion. Information were carried out from each case subject that consist of 3 highest family groups, 3 middle family groups and 3 lower family groups, and information from each informant of religion form, society form and head of village.

The category of family was determined though five strategies; first, using the data from BKKBN's official about prosperity family status. Second, observing and asking ownership of the goods that has economic value as engine boat, fish pond, rice milling, rice barn, etc. Third, asking and observing the ownership of electronic devices. Fourth, asking about wide and ownership of farmer's field and yard. Fifth, asking about family's income, education and job beside farmer and position in the society.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The social status of farmer's family rice field valley in this research is fixed based on objective and subjective approach. The objective approach is based on objective measures. Position of economy social status, according Melly G. Tan, can be seen from kind of job, income and education. Based on these indicators, family can be classified to lower, middle and highest position of economic and social status (Koentjaraningrat 1981). This research bases its categorization of economic and social status of highest, middle and lowers family group on four sources; first, using data from BKKBN's official, Sub district of Pemulutan Selatan Ogan Ilir Regency about prosperity family status. Second, observing and asking ownership of the goods that has economic value as engine

boat, fish pond, rice milling, rice barn, etc. Third, asking and observing the ownership of electronic devices. Fourth, asking about wide and ownership of farmer's field and yard. Fifth, asking income, education and job beside farmer and position in the society.

Subjective approach is done by understanding the experience, perspective and attitude of community citizen about family's economic and social condition through focus group discussion and in depth interview to the informants.

Based on the interview, families are called as highest family group when they can fulfill food needs in a year, and do not have a debt. Beside that they said the family that has highest economy social status is a family that has assets such as engine boat, fish pond and rice milling. Middle family group is a family that sometimes can fulfill family's food and sometime must have a debt on fulfillment food needs in a year. They have area for farming but not wide, and they do not have economy assets like high group. Low family group is a family that always has a debt to fulfill the family's food needs, not having farming area so they work as worker farmer or peasant.

The relation of man's and woman's knowledge power in fulfillment family's food is analyzed in three main aspects. First, the relation of knowledge power in the division of public roles between man and woman. Public role that has been mentioned in this research is the role to look for income outside of the house. Second, the relation of knowledge power in the division of domestic working that is jobs inside the house between man and woman. Third, the relation of knowledge power in taking decision between man and woman. Each of aspects is studied further in the following part.

### **The relation in the highest family in the fulfillment family's food**

#### ***The relation of knowledge power in public role: public role is dominated by man's knowledge power***

Public role is to obtain income and family's food material on highest family groups are

done by every husband. The highest status family has asset farming area, but wife is not permitted to work in farming sector of rice field valley with the reason that the availability of family's food has been fulfilled by the man.

In the rice field, the woman of highest family group is not involved in the process of agriculture, so their knowledge of planting didn't develop and the ability to practice in the rice swampy fades. Their husbands are more authorized in planting knowledge, especially when food security program is executed. It is because the head of family has the access of information, farming knowledge and the access to the community. Meanwhile woman does not have direct access for grouping and farming program as long as they still have husband. When the husband died there's a chance to join a farmer group, as highlighted by Jasiyah (50 yrs) as follows:

"I also join farming group, there is seed distribution from the government. First who invited me to join farming group is the head of village. One group is consisted from each RT or village. Usually men join the farming group."

If it is seen from feminism theory, then in highest family group, the relation of knowledge power between man and woman are dominated by man's knowledge power. It is looked when man's knowledge is more than the women and used in doing relation with their wife, for example: show to selling things, to buying things, to determine the price of all family activities. Women only follow what is suggested by their husbands.

Culture also influences the mindset of husband in the highest economic and social status family. According their understanding, husband's main purpose is to fulfill their family needs and protect their wife and other family's member, when food needs is fulfilled so the wife is not necessary to hard work for helping their husband. On this case relational process between husband and wife in highest economy and social status family, also preserve the culture value. Jamali (63 yrs) said

"In this world there are day and night, every woman is to be husband's responsibility, there is no man to be woman's responsibility. The example is the prophet Muhammad, who has many wives, there's no woman who has many husbands, it must be about a responsibility."

Those values may appear to give advantage to woman, but if they are analyzed deeper they show the inequity of gender where woman's space is limited by this culture value. The inequity of gender is a condition that is not fair for woman and man through culture process and policy that causing the troubles of role for woman and man. The case of the highest economy social status family, so the side that experience gender in equity is woman. Mabsout's research (2004) in Ethiopia showed that in the group where it is got gender norm that is not equal in individual level or household will affect the bargaining power. This needs to be mediated with wide individual approach to institutional approach for supporting the woman empowerment.

On the other side, women are involved in the hegemonic process by cultural value of the husband or the community. Hegemony according to Gramsci is the form of power where the women are powered and they voluntarily accept it. Woman voluntarily accepts the reality and they do not have to work when husband is able to fulfill family's food. This type of value put woman in economic safety zone. However, this condition can decrease woman's role, knowledge, idea and mobility. Women seem to be comfortable for what they experience. This condition can be understood because farmer community of swampy land is a subsistent farmer community which means that when food needs is fulfilled, safe feeling will be created.

Woman's comfort in the family of highest economy social status, will be susceptible when there are external factors that happened to woman, such as the husband is sick, died and having an affair meanwhile woman does not have skill, knowledge and

empowerment. This thing is happened because of social process in the relation of family is dominated by man. The factor that pushes the domination is cultural values in the community and variety government's program that is held has benefit for man.

The basis of local knowledge came from cultural and religious values that believe man as the main actor for family income. This value was strongly maintained by the group family of highest economy and social status.

Man domination in the public area is not only in the farming sector, but also in non-farming sector, such as the chance to develop business, to open shops and to be merchant of rices. Man also has the asset to work in transportation service sector such as engine boat and *ojek* motorcycle.

***The relation of knowledge power in the domestic role. The power of woman's knowledge is relative dominant but there is still intervention the power of man's knowledge.***

Highest family also has wide farming area of rice field valley, approximately above 2 hectares. In the normal condition, once harvest can produce 13 tons of rice. This amount can fulfill the needs of rice for high family's group food, so the husbands want their wives are not involved in farming activities. According to Imron (54 yrs), if man can fulfill the family needs, the wife is not necessary to work in rice field. The wife is enough to work in the house for caring the child and cooking, and ordered to keep the shop.

*"... actually according to the marriage, the meaning of woman is responsible to the house, the family's needs if there is food need to cook so they must cook it, the husbands that buy the material, it must be the head of family" (Interview with Imron)*

Women of high class farmers are put in domestic area. The initiative for "housing" the wife begins from man's wish, growing from their assumption that if man can fulfill income needs the wife does not have to work at all. This condition can cause the decrease

<sup>2</sup> of power of woman's knowledge in the availability of food from public sector, but in the other side the power of woman's knowledge for domestic sectors is dominant.

The domination power of woman's knowledge is seen from their domination in domestic work such as cooking, washing, caring the child, and cleaning the house. No doubt, women practice their knowledge in the daily life of high family group. Men do not touch the domestic job at all, but they often intervene domestic tasks such as by ordering to cook specific type of food.

From feminist perspective, this dominance in domestic job is a form of woman's marginalization because it can constrain woman to have access to productive job that can yield money. Different from feminist perspective, Foucault see the power situated between the subjects. Subjects who have knowledge and are able to practice it in the relation are powering subject. This is to say that knowledge can become an empowering tool. In this point the power of knowledge in the domestic area can be understood as environmental form for subordination according to feminist perspective, but according to Foucauldian perspective, this is a form of knowledge power. Knowledge produces power in the relational relationship of woman and man.

<sup>1</sup> ***The relation of knowledge power in decision making: the power of man's knowledge dominates.***

The relation of knowledge power in decision making of high family group is dominated by the man. Man serves as the main person in the family responsible for productive work to increase family income such as opening shop, making *keramba*, renting motorcycle and boat, deciding the process of rice field valley farming and even deciding the type of specific food consumed by family. This decision making is seldom discussed with the wife; the wife only follows whatever their husband decides.

In the rice farming sector, high woman group is not involved at all in the farming process or decision taking for the seed, the using of pesticide, harvesting so their know-

wledge about planting does not develop and the skill to practice it in the field valley fades. Their husbands are more authorized in the knowledge of farming. The power of man's knowledge in this decision making is triggered by food security program to increase the productivity of rice, developed by government. The head of family is the one who has the access of information, farming knowledge and the access for grouping. This program causes man's knowledge more developed than woman's. Therefore, in the relation with woman, man has more farming knowledge than women.

The decision is in the husband's hand for deciding any aspects in the family. This reality makes women participation is smaller than their husband. Haddad and Kasbur (1990) argue that woman's small power for making decision in the using of family resources results in the failure of women's participation.

Intentional or not, the absence of women in family decision making process kills women's creative power. Women in this group only follow their husbands because economically the availability food and other needs have been fulfilled by their husbands. Woman's creative power in the preparation of family food does not develop because woman's initiative is not appreciated. Man is more superior in the family. In that position, men subordinate woman. Subordination is a belief that one sex is regarded to be more important than the other sex. There is one sex feeling step aside or their voice is unheard, even their energy is exploited.

Seen from the perspective of Foucault's theory, killing women's creative idea and desire for knowledge cause the amputation of women's power, because the desire for knowing is the power itself. When woman does not have the skill for talking, saying and practicing they actually do not have the power of knowledge.

<sup>2</sup> ***The power of woman's knowledge in the middle family to fulfillment family food***

***The relation of knowledge power in public role: public role is done by the***

**man and woman, in the aspect of information access and the credit power of woman's knowledge is more dominant**

The relation of woman and man knowledge power in the public sector in middle family group is relatively equal, where both man or woman are involved in looking for income outside the house. Even man or woman has a chance to practice their knowledge power in the farming sector of rice field valley (although the role of woman is not as much as the man's role), collect food from swamp, and works for getting money.

Woman's knowledge and skill increase and develop because woman has the access to knowledge, government facilities and they also can work freely. Women's participation, and skill such as sewing *songket*, is nurtured in the socialization process of the family. For example, Mustika (28 yrs) say:

"I have sewn for long time ago, when I graduated from Junior High School. I learned from my aunt and nephew. I can sew in one week. After learning sewing I practiced to make cloth, using the tools that I bought by myself."

Middle woman group has the access to government financial support for sewing *songket*. They have been the tailor of *songket*, however after getting better job, they do not sew *songket* anymore. The beginning of this middle woman group was *songket* worker from *songket* entrepreneur in Palembang City. Usually *songket* seller is in the Market 16 Ilir. An informant, Alwi (66 yrs) approves that there are financial benefits to the group, which in turn give the advantage for the society:

"... but now there is a financial help from the government 6 million, for *songket* tailor. For first step in learning *songket* 1,5 million for financial help to buy the tools, every month they have to pay 150 thousand."

This socialization skill and interaction are very useful for them especially when these women interact with woman from high or low status family. The skill for managing this relation is applied by middle woman group.

They have the skill in negotiation that they can exploit to sell credits and offer money renting. Besides, they are also brave to challenge cultural and religious values in their efforts to fulfill family food. For example, they become *rentenir* although they know and realize that being *rentenir* is forbidden by religion.

They also challenge traditional concept of collective solidarity particularly when they must rent the money with credit and they must be brave when they collect. The emergence of money lenders begin from the need for fulfilling family food.

Woman's income seeking activities outside of rice farming in this middle family group implicate the relation of gender in their family. Women are relatively equal with their husband. Woman is free to create for increasing family's income, such as selling the credit things, selling fish, sewing *songket* even renting money to their neighbor. They also can follow working group and get any information in the public spaces of village without having obstacles from the husband.

When there is gender negotiation, woman can give addition income for the family and this creates better condition for family's food fulfillment. Valdivia and Gilles (2001) argue that that gender dynamics and equality between wives and husband influence the access of household for reaching the better condition. Better access depends on gender negotiation capacity. They show central role of woman in their community that give the chance for them especially when their voice is unheard.

Women in this group also can practice knowledge and skill in non-farming sector such as sewing *songket*, to be seller, to be money *rentenir*, credit the things. They also can exploit the ecology of swamp for family's food fulfillment.

Savitri and Fremerey (2008) in their research about the mutation of role and the access of woman farmer Bolapapu in around of the area National Park Lore Lindu showed that the mutation from subsistent farming to cacao commercial production farming marginalize women's access and control. Howe-

ver this research finds that commercialization helps women. Middle woman group is able to practice the knowledge power. It is because of commercialization that happened does not change the main elements of their farming sector and the commercialization complement the family's income.

In the same vein, Spring (2000) suggests that while farming development has negative impacts on women and woman's commercial activities have positive impacts on women. Further he said that woman involved in commercial production usually has money to buy food (in better quantity or quality) and they can also buy the field. Woman who does commercial production has good strategy for food security and better life of their family just than subsistent farming family who only depends on their couple or man.

***The relation of knowledge power in domestic role: done by man and woman***

The relation of woman and man's knowledge power in domestic role is relatively equal, where man often changes the role in domestic work. When woman is out of the house to look for money from cleaning fish, creditting money, man is not reluctant to clean houses. When woman sews *songket*, man washes plates. This condition is done because there is communication process between man and woman. Besides that, the pressure of food needs makes them (man and woman) doing domestic work together. They share role, or even change role. All is done for fulfilling their daily food. Here is what Zainuna (50 yrs) said:

*"... man and woman's job is same. If I was busy to sew. My husband was washing plates. He wanted to wash the plate. If I was busy cooking, my husband sew songket.. He also could sew but just the shawl. If cloth he could not yet."*

This equality of man and woman's knowledge power is important for them to fulfill family's food. With this equality, they no longer feel taboo doing domestic or public role.

***The relation of knowledge power in decision making: the power of woman's knowledge was dominant***

The pattern of decision making in the middle family is more dominated by woman although sometime there are compromise and fluctuation. Woman has the access of information and knowledge more than their husbands. The pattern of decision making indicates that there is a structured process for decision making in the group necessary for reaching particular purposes. Pudjiwati Sajogya (1981) differentiates patterns of decision making in the household into five categories; first, decision is made by the wife without involving the husband. Second, decision is made together by husband and wife but with wife's influence. Third, decision is made together and same without any signs of bigger influence from one another. Fourth, decision is made together by the husband-wife with husband's influence. Fifth, decision is made by the husband without including the wife. For middle family group, the pattern of decision taking is more often done by the wife (woman).

The power of woman's knowledge in decision making includes the decision for getting family's income through money credit, sewing *songket*, cleaning fish, accessing the information and knowledge from various sources. Middle woman group has the idea and creativity for increasing family income and has the freedom to decide what they must do to fulfill family's needs. This is illustrated by Fatima (33 yrs):

*"There is no prohibition from my husband. If I want to clean the fish and sew songket as my please... Everything I decided by myself, he did not forbid me... If the kitchen needs must be fulfilled so the women must be smart to look for the income."*

Based on that explanation, women in this group are able to practice and determine the kind of woman's job to increase family income. Their husband is not capable to forbid woman work because woman has domestic and public knowledge that can be used to earn money for family needs.



Community's perspective that man is the main actor for family income is not taken seriously in the mind because they are forced by family needs.

This condition shows that economy problem can change perspective and habit in the community. The pressure of family's economy increases the power of woman's knowledge. Economic factor makes the power of woman's knowledge on the decision making in the middle family is more dominant than man's the power of knowledge.

<sup>2</sup>  
**The power of woman's knowledge in the lower family to fulfillment family food**

***The relation of knowledge power in the public role: public role is done together by man and woman***

The relation of woman and man's knowledge power in public role in the low family group is more equal than the woman with middle and high economy social status. This is because men or women are together in their efforts to look for the money. For low status family group, the important one is how they can eat in daily life. Economy condition and shortage of food solidify men and women in low group to yearn income. They work in the rice farming of high family group. This is illustrated by Jamali and Alwi:

"Both man and woman are involved in the process of farming. The rich pay the low family; man and woman are included to that paying."

The power of woman and man's knowledge low group in the availability of food such as knowledge and skill about planting is also manifested in being a farmer, searching food source in the swamp and field like snail, silver poil, fish and leafy vegetable. Their role in searching family's food is main public role that must be served; meanwhile public role related to social society problem doesnot become their attention. Family economy takes all their attention: they feel its pressure every day, borrowing from one neighbor to another neighbor, asking family's helps for eating.

The availability of food is about life and

death. That is why, family's food becomes the focus of attention. Variety of sources is directed to fulfill family's food. Husband, wife and child all look for food. Their child is often involved in rice farming and fishes cleaning. After going home from school the children work to be cleaner of fishes together with their peer group for getting paying 500/kg. In a day (not every day there is job to clean the fish), they get 3 thousands. That money is used for buying school tools and for pocket money. They also often give some of their money to their parents to buy rice.

The woman in the low family group has skill in sewing, but because they do not have sewing tool they use their knowledge and skill by being a *songket* worker. The power of woman's knowledge in *songket* becomes one source family income. Men often help women sew *songket*. Man only authorizes the technique of sewing shawl because the size is smaller and it is not difficult.

***The relation of knowledge power in domestic role: domestic role is done together by man and woman***

The relation of man and woman's knowledge power in domestic role is more equal than middle and high family group. Man or woman does the housework starting from sweeping, washing, cooking and another work. They do not consider community values as obstacle. This is reflected in the statement of Nursyam (55 yrs):

"... We do not care what people say... man and woman we think the same everyone need to eat... A job to look for money and housework can be worked by man and woman, anyone has the time can do it... the children too."

The values of community that give advantage to them is strong family bond and tight social connection among neighbors. These values are helpful for them especially when they do not have food to eat; they borrow to the family or neighbor. Here is Taruna's saying (48 yrs), a widow that must feed her three children and utilize the neighbor and family's solidarity values:

"If we do not have rice... We borrowed to the neighbors... We pay it if there is giving from our relative, or we borrowed to relative ... If I run out of money... There is no food and our debts have been much... We asked the helping from our relative..."

Low family group borrows to the nearest neighbor as first step when they do not have food. When their debts to neighbors have been much while food needs must be fulfilled, they borrow to the relative to pay debts and fulfill family's food. This mechanism is operated in daily life.

***The relation of knowledge power in decision taking: man and woman discuss to each other for taking the family's decision***

Decision making in low family group is done together by men and women. The husband and wife talk about the problems that they face to get the solution. The economy problem is decided with empowering the source for getting food material and income. The entire family member is included as paying worker for getting family's income, looking for the material from swamp with fishing while taking the leafy vegetable, snail and being worker for cleaning the fish and sewing *songket*. Income is used for buying rice and other needs. It is the same with Hendratno's finding (2006) that decision making and the implementation of production and consumption activity in farmer's house, there is always cooperative compromise between the husband and wife.

Decision making together between man and woman is one of indicator that there is gender equality in the family. Gender equality is a condition when woman and man enjoy the equal status and have same condition to create the fully rights and potential. Gender equality is being important factor in fulfillment family's food. Through this equality, man or woman has the responsibility to work for family's food.

Equality is capital for the empowerment of low woman group. There is gender equality in the family when it has lots of obstacle to increase family's income. As

Scahlan (2004) argues that woman empowerment and the inclusion of gender in development program does not only increase woman's knowledge and power but also gives lots of advantages for the whole society.

**CONCLUSION**

Economic and social condition of farmer's family determines the relation of woman and man's knowledge power in the fulfillment of family needs. Woman's knowledge power in the highest family is subordinated by man's knowledge power. Men dominate all aspects of fulfillment family's food; from public role, decision making and food selection. Woman's knowledge power in highest family is only visible at domestic role; women process the food for family's consumption. The relation of woman's knowledge in middle family is relative dominant than the power of man's knowledge. Women are able to practice in public area such as getting food material and looking for income. They are also active in social life and in domestic area. Women and men in lower family are relatively equal in every aspect of family's food fulfillment. Both in the public arena and in domestic area, the power of man and woman's knowledge is well played for the fulfillment of family foods and needs.

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