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## **Issues and Challenges Constraining Women Workers in Indonesia's Informal Sector: the Case of Palembang City**

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### **Abstract**

The equal gender employment opportunity rights has not only significantly heightened women's employment interest but also their dilemma in balancing their employment and home-making roles. In fact, the dilemma has hampered the smooth running of their employment. This study sought to understand the nature of constraints women workers in the city of Palembang face when running their businesses. Primary data was gathered from a field survey of 300 women working in Palembang's informal sectors, and focus interviews of 6 main women informants in the informal sectors and 4 key informants selected from the labor sector agency. Descriptive statistics techniques were utilized to process the data obtained. The results of the study and analysis revealed that 66 percent of women workers in the informal sector were more interested in working specifically as traders / entrepreneurs; that 27 percent of their problems were related to lack of capital, 25 percent to weather, 13 percent families, 7 percent time, 4 percent education, 1 percent regulation, and the remaining 23 percent other types of obstacles. Lack of capital seemed to be the most dominant constraint but the women were hopeful of getting help from the government as evidenced by the fact that 96 percent of the women in Palembang's informal sector responded positively to the assistance offered by the government.

**Keywords:** barriers; women workers; informal sector

### **Introduction**

The informal sector is a flexible place to work, thereby, making women more interested in working. This type of work is not bound by time or location. Its labor rate is very high. Palembang city is one of the many places in Indonesia where the informal sector grows tremendously. The high rate of development progress makes this city inseparable from the growth of various economic sectors such as the informal sector. A good number of women are found in the informal sector. These women are involved in quite

a number of informal work sectors ranging from trading, selling services, and lots more (Soebyakto & Armansyah, 2016). Irrespective of these huge benefits associated with the informal sector, it's pretty unfortunate to note that its existence is still underestimated. There lots of inconsistencies associated with the informal sector workers, such as eviction, extortion or bribery (Sharma & Biswas, 2018), harassment (Sychareun et al., 2016), thuggery and so on. However, these acts are known as illegal none registered activities not reported and which are detrimental to the economy (Brambila Macias & Cazzavillan, 2010).

These various acts, marginalizes women involvement in the informal sector. Despite the various negative acts associated with the informal sector, it also has a good number of positive impacts. According to Hosier (1987), the informal sector is able to employ large number of people which usually consists of the poor and those living in the urban areas. Asides that, the informal sector provides income opportunities for many people.

In 2015, Palembang city was rated the city with the highest employment service sector absorption rate of 72.11 percent. The industrial sector was with a percentage rate of 22.76 percent, and the agricultural sector was with a percentage of 5.13 percent (BPS, 2017). As we know, the service sector is identical to informal work and owing to the fact that Indonesia is still classified as a developing country it is still not really possible for the formal service sector to grow.

The limitations associated with women working in the informal sector women include education, skills, management, etc., These listed limitations and more, makes it difficult for them to develop and grow (Armansyah & Kiki Aryaningrum, 2017). In this era of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and digital technology, government should support these women through policies, programs, and strategies in a bid to prepare them compete with the ever growing market. It has been widely expressed by the media, that when foreign workers (both skilled and unskilled) come into Indonesia, the take-up good jobs like managers to company workers whereas back home, these foreigners are farmers in the countryside. This is a huge threat to the Indonesian workers.

The informal sector does not have the right standards that would enable them produce, take proper health hygiene, package their goods, market and manage their services, amongst others. All activities and products are produced and done fast, with the interest of making money. Therefore, it is quite essential to give the informal sector workers the right training and technological knowledge to manufacture the right goods and to hold high managerial positions. At least they are taught how to do business appropriately with the expected consumer standards, thereby, providing a decent life for their future.

Nowadays, the informal sector has grown with highly educated informal workers similar to that of (Barsoum, 2016), and Brazil (Williams & Youssef, 2015). However, this condition tends to have some negative effects on educated informal workers, as most often, they are faced with the challenges of getting a job which makes them to switch to the informal sector in a bid to make ends needs (Williams & Youssef, 2015). The researcher, is interested in conducting a research study on "The various obstacles faced by women workers in the Informal Sector in Palembang City". The purpose of this study is explore the obstacles faced by informal sector workers in Palembang City.

## Literature Review

### Labor Force

The workforce is divided into two sub sections namely work and unemployment. The work workforce in Indonesia makes use of the current activity approach. This activity consists of performing activities at least 1 hour in a week. When a person works for at least 1 hour in a week, that person is called a worker. But if the one hour is divided amongst the days in a week, for example 10 minutes for Monday, 20 minutes for Tuesday, 30 minutes for Thursday, then that person cannot be called a worker. A worker is someone who works continuously for 1 hour for example 1 hour of work on Monday, Tuesday and so on (Tukiran, 2010).

#### Informal Sector

Hidayat (1998) and Lamba (2011), described some features associated with the informal sector. Some of these factors include 1) unorganized activity 2) lack of business license, 3) irregularities associated in carried out these activities, owing to location and working hours, 4) government intervention related to policies and capital assistance, 5) workers high mobilization rate with regards to informal sector activities, 6) simple methods and technology techniques used, 7) small financial capital 8) unskilled and uneducated workers 9) workers being family members or close acquaintances, 10) the sources of financial capital from individuals, families, acquaintances, or unofficial institutions, 11) the material produced for the middle and lower class consumption.

Meghir, Narita, & Robin (2015) beamed that the informal sector is considered as one of the jobs that do not comply with labor market laws. According to Alter Chen & Vanek (2013), all informal works related to the informal sector has provided encouragement and initiative to various individuals. This has made them to become entrepreneurs. Timofeyev (2013), beams that informal entrepreneurs focus in urban development activities, given the high absorption of employment. Roever (2016), stated that based on workers opinions, the concept of informal sector is usually referred to the type of work carried out by individuals on unregistered operational processes. The criteria used to select informal sector workers in this study include; 1) unregistered work, 2) location/work place not permanent, 3) no employment contract, 4) no fixed wages.

### Obstacles Experienced by the Informal Sector Worker

According to Alter Chen & Vanek (2013), majority of the informal workers are poor. The general problem associated with the informal sector workers according to (Ramdan, 2012) include:

"People with low income generally have problems with financial difficulties. they are usually poorly educated or without education. They live in slums, lack social amenities (such as electricity, clean water, sanitation, education, health and road access) ".

The informal sector is made up of poor social and economic conditions, such as poverty, bad working conditions, exploitation, discrimination, child labor, social rejection, and lack of education (Wilson et al., 2006; Medina, 2000) and (Aparcana, 2017). A similar opinion was also expressed by B. B. Soebyakto & Saputra (2015). They stated that workers in the informal sector are those who have low education and limited skills, as well as those suffering from low understanding, those working for companies with no occupational safety and health, no health insurance, not officially registered, no compensation in terms of accidents associated with the workplace, occupational diseases and lots more. In addition to this, Ramdan (2012) beamed that the informal sector workers also various types of crimes such as selling on highways, road bodies, sidewalks and other public places. Therefore, they are often expelled or evicted by officers. An instance is the DKI Jakarta incident, where DKI *Trantip* officers chased away pedicab drivers and street vendors with the reason that they were disrupting the city order and cleanliness (Wauran, 2012).

According to Ramdan, the reason for this low occupational protection and safety is the lack of income informal sector workers. The factors associated with child labor is usually as a result of family pressure usually in the form of poverty, lack of educational skills and opportunities, and high school fees (ILO, 2004). According to Rukmana (2009) and Chirisa (2014), the informal sector often create problems in urban areas owing to the forms of activities in environments and the fact that they use public facilities to disrupt traffic, and the beauty of the city (Bappenas, 2009). This led the government into accommodating informal sector activities in the form of urban planning. Rukmana (2009) and (Chirisa, 2014) also stated that the authorities forcefully displaced informal sector activities in the name of urban order and cleanliness.

## **Research Methods**

### **The Scope of Research**

The research study, uses the quantitative design in the survey method, some survey variables used include; those interested in working, the type of work desired, the barriers to work, effort associated with increasing businesses, and the government assistance. The methodology adopted is also used to explore information about the number of women interested in working in the city of Palembang, especially those interested in informal employment. The qualitative method was then used to further collect data through in-depth interviews. This method was used to obtain more information related to women informal sector workers in the city of Palembang. Qualitative research method is a descriptive research used to analyze data in the form of words, field notes, photos, documents and the likes (Pitoyo, Eddy, Pande, & Sumini, 2017). According to Creswell (2016), one of the objectives of the qualitative method is to investigate an issue related to the activities / conditions of certain individuals along with the population used and the limited area.

The population of women working in the informal sector in Palembang city is based on data (BPS, 2016) and listed in the Table 1.

**Table 1. Number of Formal and Informal Workers by Gender**

| The Main Job Status | Gender  |               | Result  |
|---------------------|---------|---------------|---------|
|                     | Male    | Female        |         |
| Formal              | 264.726 | 163.004       | 427.730 |
| <b>Informal</b>     | 138.491 | <b>97.094</b> | 235.585 |

Source: BPS, Palembang City in 2016

Based on the table above, it is found that the female population of informal sector workers in Palembang City is 97,094 people. The researcher surveyed and selected 300 female informal sector workers (respondents) which was made up of 16 sub-districts in Palembang City. The data source sample or informant selected by the researcher was made up of 10 people, consisting of 6 main informants, and 4 key informants. The selection was based on the criteria for female sex who have worked in the informal sector for at least 1 year irrespective of their marital status

### Data Analysis Technique

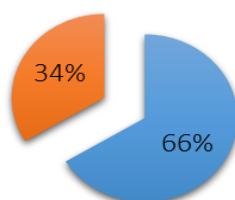
Data was collected using questionnaires interviews, and by documentation. The data was collected from the results obtained from the questionnaire after which it was analyzed using descriptive statistics frequencies. It was further proceed using interview data in stages by reduction, display and conclusion. Data presentation made use of several pie charts obtained from statistical data processing using SPSS. The presentation technique of the results is similar to the triangular strategy design, which is a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. It also combined the presentation, interpretation and discussion processes (Sugiyono, 2016)

## Discussion

### Interests and Types of Work Wanted by Women in Palembang City

According to BB Soebyakto, Sukmaniar, & Saputra (2016) a person's social status can be better with education. Women with formal education can be self-actualized with the benefit of providing the needs of their families.

■ Interested    ■ Not interested

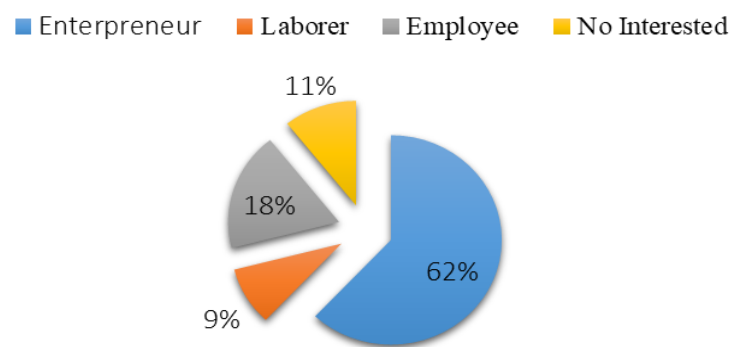


**Figure 1. Interest in Women in Palembang City to Work**

Based on research conducted in the Palembang city, it can be seen that women have huge interest in working. In an analysis conducted, over 66 percent of women said they were interested carrying out a job that generated income.

The result also proved that 34 percent of women are not interested in working. Palembang City offers a variety of economic activities that make it possible for both men and women to earn some level of income. In addition to this, several factors can be said to cause women to be really interested in working for the benefit of their family. Some of these include inadequate economic conditions include low husband's income, husband staying out of job, rising prices of basic commodities and lots more (Soebyakto & Armansyah, 2016).

However, women usually consider when to decide to work especially for women who are married and have children. The following is an excerpt from the interview conducted with I\_It-05. "I really want to work, but I have to take care of a child who is still small,"—the desire to work is postponed. According to Wulantari & Armansyah (2018), working women must be able to manage time well between working and taking care of the household. This seems to be common in the city of Palembang, where most women in the city carve for entrepreneurial work or self-employment such as trading food, clothing, selling credit, drinks, and others.



**Figure 2.** *Types of Work Attracted by Women in Palembang City*

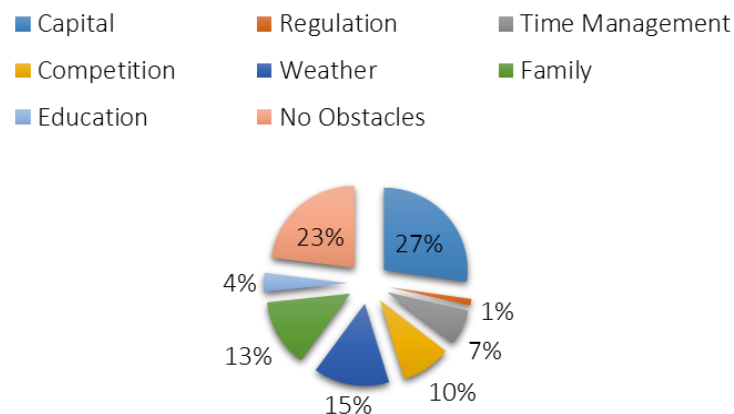
The women in Palembang City prefer entrepreneurial work because they feel they will have a lot of free time to attend to family needs. The following is an excerpt from the interview with I\_Jk-04. "If I work I will choose to open my own business like trading". A similar opinion was expressed by I\_Ys-02, "I want to trade, because by trading, I can still look after my children at home". According to I\_Jk-04 and I\_Ys-02, they can run their business anytime and anywhere without having to be regulated. It's different from working as a laborer or employee who is bound by the rules of the company or the place of employment.

### **Obstacles Faced by Women Workers in the Informal Sector in Palembang City**

According to Soebyakto & Armansyah (2016) one of the characteristics of the informal sector is its high flexibility level and the fact that it is not bound by rules. This makes women more interested in carrying out informal sector jobs. The high entrepreneurship interest rate of women leaving in Palembang city is similar to the data recorded by BPS in 2016 with regards to the state of employment in the Province of South Sumatra. It

was analyzed that 60.7 percent of the women population worked in the informal sector in 2016 and 62.4 percent in 2017. This means that a 1.69 percentage of the population worked in the informal sector. The type of informal work which experienced highest increase was that of self-employment. This analysis was same as that analyzed by Roever (2016) which states that half or more informal workers in most areas are small-scale entrepreneurs.

One characteristic of informal sector work is that it is not registered and it is outside government regulation (Hart, 1973). These features, makes it vulnerable to lots of inconsistencies such as low paid rates, harassment, no insurance services, poor health management ), bribery, eviction, and confiscation of goods (Sharma & Biswas, 2018 ) These obstacles were also experienced by women workers in the informal sector in the city of Palembang.



**Figure 3.** *Obstacles Experienced by Women Workers in the Informal Sector in Palembang City*

In Figure 3, it can be seen that 27 percent of women workers in the informal sector, do not have the capital to start a business. The following is an excerpt from the interview with I\_Rs-01, "The obstacle I face in running a business is capital. When trading, sometimes the capital used is not returned I, thereby, making it difficult to buy new stocks of goods". Following this excerpt is another interview excerpt which was carried out with I\_Jk-04. In this interview, the respondent beamed that the barriers she faces with trading are often that of no or limited amount of buyers. She further explained that during the rainy season, school holidays or college season, sales are usually poor because many boarding children are on holiday. About 23 percent of women in the informal sector said that they did not experience any problems in running their business. According of them informal sector jobs are very free and cheap. They do not require any kind of capital to work as their energy is alone is enough. They tend to be laundry workers, onion skin peelers, chilli pickers, and so on. These led the researcher into using his services for the work. Informal activities such as cleaning car windows (wiping glass), selling gum, mirrors, bottled water, pictures, books also often done in Mexico (Canclini, 2018).

About 15 percent of women working in the informal sector have stated that the weather is one of the obstacles when working. Whenever it rains, they will find it difficult to carry out their activities because of the distance. The following is an excerpt



from an interview with I\_Ys-02 who works as an ice seller. According to her "The barrier associated with Ice sales is the rainy season. During the rainy season sales decrease, and savings run out while during summer, sales increase". Ice sellers will complain during the rainy season because their sales level dropped drastically. Sometimes they complain about the heat, dust conditions of the road that affect the condition of goods they sell.

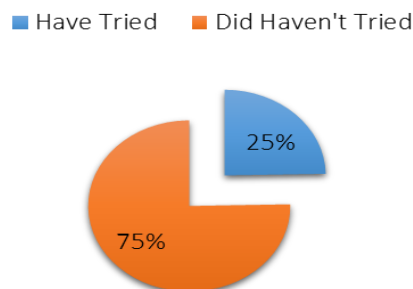
13 percent of women in the informal sector workers beamed that family is an obstacle for them to work in the informal sector. According to one of them, "I don't work because I have to take care of my family, if I work, I'm afraid that no one will take care of my family." Their responsibility is to take care of the household, children and husband needs. In an interview, majority were of the opinion that they would love to work, but their husband and family does not approve of it.

According to Wauran (2012) the City of Jakarta, drives away its informal sector workers such as pedicab drivers and street vendors with reasons that they create an untidy environment and disrupt the city's activities. 10 percent of women in the informal sector workers also complain about competition between workers. The following is an excerpt from an interview with I\_Sa-03. According to her, "As a food seller, my income is dependent on the number of buyers. This is because there are so competitors and sometimes I don't make sales". Women who work as food vendors often suffer losses due to the lack of buyers and as a result of the large number of traders who sell the same merchandise. They find it difficult to make good sales and extract their capital often forcing them to owe their family or close friends.

The employment agreement between women workers in the informal sector and the employer requires them to comply with the rules. About 7 percent of the informal sector workers say time management is one of the obstacles they encounter in carrying out work in the informal sector. With regards to education, about 4 percent of female informal sector workers are of the opinion that education is one of the obstacles in working in the informal sector. They have repeatedly tried to submit applications to factories or companies, but because of their level of education they never get to be employed by these companies and factories.

### Business Development Efforts

According to Ritonga & Sari (2015), limited education, capital, access to banking and the fact that these companies are not registered are some of the reasons why the informal sector workers fail to develop or improve their businesses. However, about 25 percent of women in the informal sector have tried to increase their businesses.



**Figure 4.** Percentage of Informal Sector Workers Who Have Been Developing

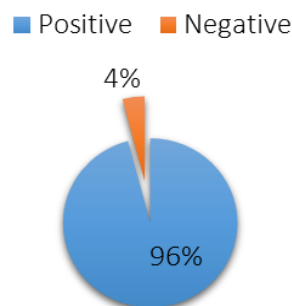
Buyer's trust depends on the services provided by the informal sector workers along with the cleanliness and neatness of the goods being sold. However, not all informal sector workers are working on development. Some have tried, but have woefully failed. The following are the results of interviews conducted in a bid to understand some of the challenges faced by these women. According to I\_Rs-01, "I can develop a business, but my constrain is capital. Finally, I have returned to trading as usual".

According to I\_Rs-01, capital is essential for developing businesses. Usually she would try sourcing for capital, and without success, she would return trading as usual. Developing a business cannot be done instantly, it takes a long time. This was done by one of the informal workers in Palembang City. The following are results of an interview with I\_Ys-02. "Developing a business becomes the intention of every worker. Everyone would want to go forward, but there must be a learning process".

Most informal women workers have never made an effort to increase their work because of limited capital, education and competitive fear. They are unprepared to face competition. Furthermore, the low quality of the goods they sell makes them unable to meet the needs of certain group of people.

### Response to Government Assistance

This expectation is evident from 96 percent of women workers in the informal sector who responded positively to government assistance with only 4 percent giving a negative response. This negative response also arose because of these women in the informal sector weren't aware of the assistance provided by the government.



**Figure 5.** Percentage of responses from female informal sector workers to Government assistance

Women workers in the informal sector have beamed that they would really agree for more assistance from the government. However, they are very grateful for the ones assistance provided. The following is an excerpt from an interview with I\_Rs-01. According to the respondent, "Help from the government makes us feel happy, through help we can improve our effort acquire more knowledge". I\_Rs-01 further explained the little government assistance provided by the government was very helpful to them. In addition, women workers in the informal sector are motivated to try to improve their business owing to the concern by the government. For those who have already been helped, the various activities along with the money they received from the government, really was pretty helpful. The following is an excerpt from the interview with I\_Sa-03. In

this interview, the respondent thanked God ] from the training activities provided by the government, beaming that she acquired knowledge and items that she didn't own previously owned. I\_Sa-03 explained that she had attended training provided by the government.

According to Armansyah; Kiki Aryaningrum (2018) the better the skills possessed, the greater the chances of getting a better job. However, not all women in the informal sector have equal opportunities. Those who were not informed and who weren't opportune to get help from the government said that they were hoping the government assist them, but so far they are disappointment because there has been no government assistance. The following is an excerpt from the interview conducted on I\_Jk-04, which says "The desire to get help from the government exists, but casting lots of hope in the government often leaves us disappointed".

According to I\_Jk-04, she has never received or gained any form of assistance from the government. Therefore, she feels that if she hopes on the government, she will be disappoint. Furthermore, another respondent beamed that "The aid should not only be distributed to large shops, because small-scale workers on the roadside should also be helped". According to I\_Ys-02, the assistance has already been given more to large shops, leaving small scale traders behind.

The explanation given by some informal sector women workers above, we can deduce that getting assistance from the government is very essential. Assistance in the form of training activities, and capital will greatly help them to improve their skills and business scale. Government assistance helps increase these women effort and also motivates them Most often, these women are not properly informed and, therefore, do not join in the obtaining the assistance issued by the government. As a result of this, they feel that the government do not care about their needs. In distributing these activities, the government should endeavor to choose officers who are truly committed and consistent to help small scale business owners so that the assistance provided is not only focused on large shops.

## **Conclusion**

Most women workers, are interested is self-employment or entrepreneurship. Their reason being that it is flexible and gives them adequate time between working and taking care of their household. The obstacle faced by many women workers in the informal sector in running their businesses is on the availability of capital. Furthermore, weather conditions and competition are also some of the causes of the low income as they find it difficult to make enough sales to return the capital they have spent. A small percentage of women in the informal sector workers have tried business development, but failed because of the limited capital. Therefore, 96 percent of women workers in the informal sector in the Palembang city really hope that the government would assist them in the form of money or training. To them, assistance from the government is a form of attention which can motivate them to develop their businesses.

## Suggestion

The government should provide assistance equipped with the use of technology, marketing management, funds and training. The government should also plan to provide an appropriate location for women workers in informal sector. This effort is not intended to maintain informal sector workers but to motivate and help improve their businesses. The government should involve students, NGOs, universities, the private sectors, creative industries to assist informal sector workers. Informal sector workers have a huge labor percentage, therefore, the government should be concerned about the informal sector which is part of the economic activities of urban communities.

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