Women and Children Workers Involved in The Rubber and Palm Oil Plantations: Motivations and Impact on Family Income in Jambi Province

Heriberta1, Sri Wachyunni2, Guspianto3
{eheriberta@yahoo.com1, sri.wachyunni@unj.ac.id2*}

Universitas Jambi, Jl. Raya Jambi-Ma. Bulian Km. 5 Mendalo Indah, Jambi, Indonesia123

Abstract. This paper reports on the authors’ ongoing research with women and children’s workers in the plantations. It is to study their motivation of the involvement in the rubber and palm oil plantation and its impact on family income. To meet these objectives the qualitative method was used comprising: observation, secondary data review, and interviews by employing open-ended questions, which used to generate a greater perspective on the experiences of women workers and children as laborers in rubber and palm oil plantations. The results of the study indicate that women participate in the rubber plantation is to support family income in fulfilling family’s daily needs. On the other hand, women's income from palm oil plantations is an additional income for saving or investment, because household expenses have already covered by the husband's income. For children's motivation to work in the rubber plantation is to help their parents to meet the daily needs and to support their education. There are no children workers found in palm oil plantations.

Keywords: Family income, rubber and palm oil plantation, women and children’s workers

1 Introduction

The role of women is still traditionally addressed as domestic workers (homemakers) and non-economic activities such as raising children and taking care of the household. Along with the development of an increasingly complex society, the role of women has been transformed into a male partner, not only taking care of the family and household activities, but women also play a role in economic activities. Several studies have revealed that women working in the public sector are often associated with household economic reasons and the problem of poverty which is a problem not only in big cities but also in villages (Tuwu, 2018; Sayogyo, 1993).

Rural women are generally intensively involved in agriculture, in addition to other roles in the development and transformation of rural communities such as health, family resilience, and so on. The facts show that rural women are not only determinants of farming traditions, but also as managers of family economic activities, especially when their husbands are not at home (Suratiyah, et al, 1996). Women who work in the public sector have an impact on increasing family income (Tuwu, 2018).

On the other hand, women (mothers) also have an important role as educators of children who provide the basics of education, attitudes, and skills such as character, manners, affection,
and instilling good habits that have a big influence on children's development. Mothers become the first school for children because children’s education starts from and within the family (Zahrok & Suarmini, 2018). Women are also spearheading in maintaining and improving the health of the family (Paramitha & Puspitasari, 2021). The role of women cannot be separated in maintaining the quality of family health such as maintaining reproductive health, nutritional intake for children, cleanliness of the house and environment, clean and healthy living behavior, and so on (Trubus. id, 2018).

Ladang Peris is one of the villages in Bajubang Subdistrict, Batanghari Regency, with a majority native Jambi population whose livelihood is dominated by the rubber and palm oil plantation sectors, either individually owned or community plantations. Only a small part of the Ladang Peris villager own rubber and palm oil plantations. Thus, generally Ladang Peris’ women work as laborers receiving planting wages, harvest wages, lawn moving wages, and fertilizer wages which are done on a wholesale basis or receive daily or monthly wages or profit-sharing. This condition illustrates that although Ladang Peris village has a large plantation area, it does not mean that the community has a good economic level.

Uncertain economic conditions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, where prices of necessities are increasing while family incomes tend to decline to result in disruption of family economic stability. This condition encourages women (housewives) to not only engage in the domestic household sector but also participate in supporting the family economy, by working in rubber plantations such as tapping rubber, selling rubber, hunting pests around rubber trees, and providing fertilizer. Whereas in palm oil plantations, they harvest the palm oil fruit, pick palm seed, spray the unwanted grass and fertilize the palm trees (Bissonnette, 2012; Li, 2015; Utomo, 2008).

As many as 1,014 women out of a total of 981 heads of households, meaning that all housewives or wives and adult daughters work on both rubber and palm oil plantations (Vos and Delabre, 2018). The involvement of children, both male, and female, has become a tradition for Indonesians, if the mother or female works, it is ensured that their children will help. This is in line with what was proven by Suyanto, 2010, Manurung, 1998 that children choose to work to help their parents to make money and prove that children's involvement in economic activities in the formal and informal sectors shows the potential for exploitation.

The formulation of the problem under study is as follows:
a. What are the characteristics of women and children working on plantations?
b. What are the factors behind the decision of women and children to work on plantations?

2 Literature Review

A child is a person under the age of 18 as stated in Article 1 of Law no. 13 of 2003. Working children or child laborers are residents who work under the age of 18 years can be
connoted exploiting children, children work for smaller salaries without considering their personality development, security, health, and prospects. The type of work that is difficult to detect is categorized by UNICEF as exploitation of child labor is a domestic help. Children who work as domestic helpers are the most vulnerable and difficult to protect child workers (Andri, 2005).

In microeconomics, it is explained that supply and demand are shown from the background of factors that influence the community to provide child labor for work, while from the demand side, factors that support entrepreneurs decide to use child labor as a production factor (Hardius, 2004). Child labor arises because of poverty from the family, poor families encourage children to work for additional income or as a way to survive (Baihaqi, 1999).

So, child labor makes poor family’s immortal because these poor families can go down and down, economic growth and social development become sluggish. Poverty is one of the drivers of children working in the labor market because parents urge their children to work and generate household income (Hardius, 2004). But not all poor people let their children work in the labor market, meaning that there are social, cultural, demographic, and environmental factors. Often in the culture of a society that requires girls to work at home, in addition to poverty can threaten the family and the peace of the nation (Sumijati, 2001).

Women who devote their time to work in palm oil plantations and rubber plantations do not require special education and skills requirements, but in general women workers in these areas do not have high education level. The roles of women are divided into two categories, namely role as wives and housewives with activities focused on housework including taking care of children, cooking, washing, and accompanying husbands. Second, the role of women in addition to working in the household sector is also to work to increase family income (public sector) such as trading, labor/farm / non-agricultural workers (Mardinto, 1990).

Mardiana, 2005 explains that the division of roles and status between men and women has been known since ancient times. The sexual division of labor persists and is embedded in people's lives, so people believe that women who go looking for work are women who violate their nature. Men have obligations and responsibilities to fulfill household needs. Differences in roles, status, and obligations result in differences in the movements of women and men. Women's movements are limited to staying at home doing domestic roles (macak, masak, and manak also known as dressing up, cooking, and reproduce), while men have a wider work area than women.

3 Research Methodology

Types of research

The type of research used is descriptive research with a qualitative approach. It is intended to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perception, motivation, and action. Bogdon and Taylor (Moleong, 2000) define qualitative methods as research procedures that produce descriptive in the form of written or spoken words from observable informants. The researchers try to explore and explain the women and children’s motivations who work in rubber and palm oil plantations in the research site.

Research site

The site of this study is the place chosen as the research subject. The data used comes from a region or area that is unique, namely living in the area, but does not own the place of
residence because it only uses an empty place, and some are rented. The place or area of research is Ladang Peris Village, Bajubang District, Batanghari Regency. Researchers describe married women, widows, and women over the age of 18 and children, both girls and boys who work in palm oil and rubber plantations.

**Unit of Analysis**

Units of analysis are things that are the subject of research or elements that are the focus of research (Bungin, 2007). In this research, the unit of analysis is women and children who work in palm oil plantations and rubber plantations.

**Informant**

Informants are subjects who understand the problems in research or as actors who understand problems in research (Bungin, 2007). Informants are key informants and supporting informants. The key informant was the women who were married, widowed and unmarried respectively as one informant, boys and girls who work in the rubber plantations and palm oil respectively as one informant. The age of unmarried women is 18 years and the age of children under 18 years has never been married. The age of women over 18 years who work in Palm Oil plantations is 22 years, the age of married women is 49 years, and the age of widows is 45 years.

This means that women who work in Palm Oil plantations are of productive age. While the age of women over 18 years old is 20 years old, married women are 35 years old and the age of widowed women who work in the rubber plantation sector is 55 years old. The age of the widowed woman working in rubber plantations is 31 years. Likewise, children, both boys and girls, who work in rubber plantations are around 16 years old.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Informant Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3.1 Data collection technique**

The data collection technique used in this research is to use primary data and secondary data:

**Primary Data Collection Techniques**

Primary data collection is data obtained directly from informants through observation and in-depth interviews.

**Observation**

Observation is a data collection method used to collect research data through observation and sensing (Bungin, 2007). The direct observation method is carried out by observing the symptoms according to reality. Observation is data collection, which indicates an essence between researchers and informants, more sensitive and more able to adjust to a lot of sharpening of the factors behind the decision of women and boys and girls to work in the
rubber plantations and palm oil. The qualitative approach is closer to the meaning, reasoning, more emphasis on things related to everyday life.

**In-Depth Interview**

An in-depth interview or oral questionnaire is a dialogue conducted by researchers to research informants. This dialogue was conducted to find out more in-depth, more complete, and detailed information about research problems from the informants. Interviews were conducted by giving specific questions to informants with an interview guide (Bungin, 2007).

**Secondary Data Collection Techniques**

Data obtained from a second source or other parties related to research problems; The secondary data used in this study came from the Badan Pusat Statistik (Central Bureau of Statistics) of Jambi Province, the Office of Population Control, Family Planning, Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Batanghari Regency, and research reports related to research topics that are considered relevant and valid to the problem being studied.

**Data Interpretation**

In qualitative research, researchers collect data through research instruments, such as observation sheet, interview protocol, and documentation. The data come from notes in the field, so it needs to be selected to find accurate and correct data by choosing the right method. The type of the method chosen and used in data collection must of course be under the nature and characteristics (Arikunto, 2006). The resulting data can be in the form of numbers and facts that are used as information material.

Thus Moleong (2007) explained that the data obtained were organized, then in analyzing the data, the data were arranged, sorted, grouped, coded, and categorized. Based on the concept, the data and facts that have been obtained in the study concluded about the involvement of women and children working in the palm oil and rubber plantation sector in the Ladang Peris Village, Bajubang District, Batanghari Regency.

### 4 Results and Discussion

**4.1 Region Description**

The research was carried out in palm oil and rubber plantations in the Ladang Peris Village (see figure1). The distance between the village of Ladang Peris and the capital city is 1.5 km for the district, 17 km for the district, and 50 km for the city of Jambi. Judging from the demographic position of the Ladang Peris Village, it is bordered by:

North: Panerokan and Bajubang Villages  
South: Mulya Jaya Village, Sumber mulya, and Markanding  
West: Water Pump and Sungkai Village  
East: Panerokan Village and Tanjung Pauh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Population in Ladang Peris Village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most of the plantation owned by rubber plantation owners is ± 50 percent of the rubber plantation are replanting into palm oil because the price of rubber is lower than the price of palm oil. As a result, many rubber trees were cut down and turned the place into a palm oil plantation.

Fig 1. Ladang Peris Map (Regional Development Planning Agency, Research and Development (BAPEDA) of Jambi Province)

4.2 Women and children’s income of working in palm oil and rubber plantations

Household income is the husband's income plus the wife's income. The household income, both children and married women, widows, and girls over the age of 18, received an average of IDR 3,000,000 – IDR 4,000,000.00. This means that women and children who work in palm oil and rubber plantations categorized as poor family. According to government regulations people who earn under IDR 5,000,000,- per month deserve to get PKH (Family Hope Program) or BLT (Direct Financial Aids).

The monthly income of women in palm oil plantations is IDR 3,000,000 - IDR 4,000,000.00. The types of work done by these workers are spraying pets, cleaning up the terrain, harvesting the palm oil fruit, arranging the midrib, and drifting. For part timer, female students who are over 18 years earn around IDR. 800,000, - per month. They collect the palm oil fruit to be ready to be transported by using a rickshaw. Widows receive the same monthly income as married women, it can be even higher, namely IDR. 4,000,000 - IDR. 5,000,000,- because they have more working hours. They clean up the terrain, spray the pets, harvest the fruit, release, and arrange more fronds.

Meanwhile, for boys and girls, their job is to wait for the ward or harvest palm oil (picking up the fallen fruits that are loose from the stump) with a wage of IDR 20,000 – IDR. 30,000.00 per 2 weeks or IDR. 40,000, - to IDR. 60,000,-. Meanwhile, women who work in rubber plantations earn IDR. 2,200,000 – IDR. 4,000,000. Their jobs are tapping, weeding weeds, spraying liquid fertilizer and pets as well as clean the environment around the rubber trees.

The number of dependents of women and children both women and men who work in rubber and palm oil plantations is 4-6 people. The selected children’s informants were only limited on junior high school or equivalent high school and did not want to continue their education because they felt a pity for their parents for the costs of school fees they had to pay. It is specifically for the girls. The monthly expenses are considered not enough to meet the daily needs if the income is IDR 4,000,000,- whereas the monthly expenditure is more than IDR 5,000,000.
The educational background of boys and girls who work in palm oil and rubber plantations is that they graduated from junior high school and do not want to continue their education to the higher level of education. The educational background of married and widowed women who work in palm oil and rubber plantations is junior high school, while the education of women over 18 years old who work in palm oil plantations is currently pursuing a bachelor's education, so work in palm oil plantations is a side job. The education of women over 18 years old who work in rubber plantations is high school graduation because their parents' income is very small and they have an older sister who is still in college, this woman has given up not continuing her education to go to college.

In the health sector, female household members and children working in rubber and palm oil plantations have no history of congenital and infectious diseases. The female household members who work on the plantation occasionally feel dizzy and sometimes have a fever. When they get a cough or flu, scrapings on the body is one of the ways to recover. In addition, drinking herbal concoctions is also useful for relieving the other minor ailments. As a mother, women worker also plays a crucial role in caring of the family members when they get sick by preparing nutritious healthy food and giving medicine as a reflection of attention and affection. Mothers also accompany sick family members to visit nurse, doctors or health care centers.

This is in line with the opinion of Zahrok and Suarmini (2017) that mothers play a role as a nurse who cares the most of family health and mothers also play a role in providing protection and emotional encouragement to sick family members. Women who work will continue to cook or prepare food for the family to consume, wash clothes and household utensils and clean the home environment even though it is not intense because they do not have enough time. Women as mothers in the household are responsible for all domestic affairs, such as cooking, cleaning and managing the house, raising children and educating children as stated by Fitriani (2016).

4.3 Factors behind the decisions of women and children to work in palm oil and rubber plantations

Economic Factor

Palm oil and rubber plantations in Ladang Peris are one of the job opportunities for the local community as well as for the surrounding community. Working is the responsibility of men as the head of the family to meet the economic needs of the family. Such stigma has been inherent in people's lives since ancient times. Duties and responsibilities to meet the economic needs of the family-owned by the man/husband. But over time, women have the same opportunities in carrying out work outside the home/in public spaces. This means that gender equality does not mean that men and the International Labor Organization or ILO (2015) put forward the principle of gender equality in the workplace related to the fulfillment of equal rights and opportunities, and fair treatment between men and women. Although a domestic task, it also remains the responsibility of women in the household.

Being a worker on palm oil and rubber plantations is an alternative that is done to help the family's economy which is increasing to fill the void of time in the morning until noon, where women as other family members, husbands work, and children go to school. Working on rubber and Palm Oil plantations is a choice for women in helping to provide for the family's economy, besides being difficult to find other jobs, the most important thing is that they have the husband's approval.

Women's work in Palm Oil plantations is different from those in rubber plantations, when it comes to Palm Oil plantations, namely: fertilizing, spraying, mowing grass, cleaning up the
terrain, harvesting, arranging fronds, ngelangsir. Meanwhile, women's jobs in rubber plantations are spraying, trimming/slashing grass, planting seeds, extracting, and collecting results. Work on Palm Oil plantations is carried out from 8:00 to 17:00, bringing provisions from home including food and drinking water as well as prayer utensils. The work in the rubber plantations, from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. is carried out every day except on rainy days while collecting sap from 7:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. every day.

The factors behind the decision of women and children to work in Palm Oil and rubber plantations are the fulfillment of economic needs. Fulfilling daily economic needs also want to get a decent life, finally, women work outside the home as workers in rubber and Palm Oil plantations. This proves that not only can women do work in the domestic sphere, but women also enter the public sphere just like men and help fulfill household economic needs.

The point is that economic reasons are the basis for women to be allowed by their husbands to work outside the home because the husband's income or income cannot meet the needs of family life (Hadith narrated by Abu Daud meaning from ibn Umar RA said, "I saw a woman coming to the Messenger of Allah and asking: O Messenger of Allah, what are the rights of a husband over his wife? The Messenger of Allah replied: the right of a husband over his wife is that one is not allowed to leave his house except with the permission of the husband. If you do it, you will be cursed by the angel Rahmat and the Angel Gadob (angry until you want to repent).

Time Factor

Women workers in Palm Oil plantations start at 8.00 until 17.00 in the afternoon, bringing provisions from home including food and drinking water as well as prayer utensils. Women workers in palm oil plantations do household chores from sweeping, cooking, and preparing luggage for themselves and their husbands starting at 4.00 or 4.30 preparing for the dawn prayer – 7.30. Then at 17.00 go home to shower and pray until 18.30, rest at 18.30 - 20.00 and continue to sleep. So women working in Palm Oil plantations need 11-12 hours at home (t home), 8 hours working time (t market), and 3-4 hours rest time (t lease). The work in the rubber plantations, in the river, starts at 7.00 to 10.00, is carried out every day except on rainy days, while collecting sap from 7.00 to 10.00, is carried out every day except on rainy days, while collecting sap from 7.00 to 10.00, is carried out every day except on rainy days.

Women workers in rubber plantations do household chores from sweeping, cooking, and preparing luggage for their husbands starting at 4.00 or 4.30 preparing for the dawn prayer – 6.30. Then at 10.00 go home, rest at 10.00 - 20.00 and continue to sleep. Therefore, that women work in rubber plantations if the village takes 11-12 hours at home (t home), work time (t market) 3 hours, and rest time (t lease) 9-10 hours. But his job as a collector requires 11-12 hours at home (t home), 6-7 hours of work (t market), and 6-7 hours of rest (t-leisure) 00 or 4.30 preparation for the morning prayer – 6.30. Then at 10.00 go home, rest at 10.00 - 20.00 and continue to sleep.

5 Conclusions and Suggestions

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that besides acting as housewives (domestic role) women also play a role as a breadwinner who participate in making a living for the fulfillment of their family's needs. The role of women workers to meet the economic needs of the family summarize as follows:
a. The reasons of married women working in palm oil and rubber plantations is because of the demands of the family's economic needs. Considering the amount of income of husbands or men is not sufficient to meet the needs of family life result in they have to work in the plantations. In addition, the women work not only to earn money for a living but also for saving and investment. On the other hand, the motivation of children working in the plantation is to generate household income and also to pay the school fees. 

b. Women who work in rubber plantations allocate more of their time in the domestic space than in the public-sector. While women work in palm oil plantations dedicate more time in the public sector than domestic. Besides, household women who work in the plantations still have another important role in maintaining family health.

5.2 Suggestions

a. Women who work on plantations need to know the factual conditions in society between the social relations of men and women which are still patterned in the patriarchal system which still has many shortcomings because it tends to place women in discriminatory conditions. So, socialization about gender equality in society as a whole is important to build a new perspective in a gender-sensitive society.

b. Men should be more tolerant of women so that there is an increase in cooperation between women and men in work and married life, especially in the division of household tasks. The free time that men have as husbands should be used to help women as wives in doing household chores.

References