

# The Dual Role of Women in Employment in the Sinah Kasih Village Oil Palm Plantation

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**ABSTRACT**

Indonesia is one of the countries with the largest palm oil producer in the world. Oil palm plants are one of the plantation crops that produce vegetable oil, which has become Indonesia's main and superior agricultural commodity. In the division of labor on plantations, there is still an imbalance between men and women. Women spend a lot of time in the garden and have to divide their time into housework. The dual roles experienced by women are very influential in the division of labor. This study presents the division of labor according to Harvard's division of labor. Women also work like men in oil palm plantations and women also play the role of housewives who take care of their husbands, children, and home. Meanwhile, men only work in industry, do not want to contribute to taking care of children and other household work, women do not get the same salary as men.

**Keywords:** oil palm, plantation, women, dual role

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**ABSTRAK**

Indonesia sebagai salah satu negara dengan penghasil minyak kelapa sawit terbesar yang di dunia. Tanaman kelapa sawit merupakan salah satu tanaman perkebunan dalam penghasil minyak nabati yang telah menjadi komoditas pertanian utama dan unggulan di Indonesia. Dalam pembagian kerja di dalam perkebunan masih terjadi ketidakseimbangan antara laki-laki dan perempuan. Perempuan banyak menghabiskan waktu di kebun dan harus membagi waktu untuk pekerjaan rumah. Peran ganda yang dialami perempuan sangat berpengaruh dalam pembagian kerja. Dalam penelitian ini disajikan pembagian kerja menurut pembagian kerja Harvard. Perempuan juga bekerja seperti laki-laki di kebun sawit dan perempuan juga berperan sebagai ibu rumah tangga yang mengurus suami, anak, dan rumahnya. Sedangkan laki-laki hanya bekerja di industri saja, tidak mau berkontribusi dalam mengurus anak dan pekerjaan rumah tangga lainnya, perempuan tidak mendapatkan gaji yang sama dengan laki-laki.

**Kata kunci:** kelapa sawit, perkebunan, perempuan, peran ganda

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## INTRODUCTION

In the world, Indonesia is the largest producer of palm oil. In Indonesia, palm oil has developed into one of the main and leading agricultural commodities. Millions of farming families derive income from oil palm plantations. It is also a source of foreign exchange, a provider of employment, and a driver of the growth of palm oil-based downstream industries in Indonesia (Nu'man, M. 2009). The size of oil palm plantations in Indonesia encourages palm oil companies to employ women in the management of oil palm fruits to become palm oil. The large number of women working in

palm oil companies eventually led to a new phenomenon called the dual role of women in working as workers in the management of oil palm fruit.

Women have two roles: working to make money and looking after the home. These behaviors and social actions are expected to create harmony and prosperity in the family. Today, women's dual roles are very common; many housewives work to help their husbands meet household needs. Women should have an independent attitude and be given the freedom to develop as individuals according to their talents. (Nurdin, F. 2009).

According to Sugihastuti (2002), feminism is a theory that refers to equality between men and women in political, economic, and social terms, as well as organized activities that support women's rights and interests. According to Humm (Wiyatmi, 2012), feminism is the idea of social transformation that aims to create a better world for women. It consists of the idea of equal rights for women and movements organized to achieve women's human rights. Furthermore, Humm states that feminism is based on the belief that women experience inequality and injustice as a result of their gender. Based on the above opinions, it can be said that feminism is a movement that aims to demand justice and equality between men and women without changing the nature of women.

Gender is the social and cultural attributes attached to men and women. For example, women are considered meek, beautiful, sentimental, or maternal, while men are considered strong, rational, virile, and mighty. The traits themselves are interchangeable. All female and male traits are interchangeable, which change over time and differ from class to class (Fakih, M. 1999).

Gender experiences differences in society due to different norms, customs, beliefs, and habits of society. For example, women are considered inappropriate to be masons, but in Bali, it is common for women to be masons or painters. Most farmers work in gardens, but in some Papuan communities, gardening is the main occupation of women because hunting is the main occupation of men (Mubarak, W, I. 2009).

One industry that plays an important role in the Indonesian economy is palm oil. This industry employs many people, including women. Women who work in oil palm plantations usually do two jobs, namely working as workers and looking after the house. The palm oil industry has a dual role as a natural resource that can provide economic and social benefits. Women working in oil palm plantations have an important role in increasing plantation productivity and also contribute to improving the family economy. This dual role poses both challenges and opportunities.

Women working in oil palm plantations face problems in dividing their time between work and household duties. This is due to inflexible working hours and the long distance between home and work. In addition, women working in oil palm plantations are vulnerable to discrimination and violence. This violence and discrimination is caused by the patriarchal culture that is still strong in the community. Although it has challenges, the role of women in oil palm plantations also has opportunities. One of them is improving family harmony and welfare. In addition, the role of women in oil palm plantations can also be an agent of social change. Women who work there can be role models for other women to be more involved in development.

Women's involvement in social roles or behaviors is expected to result in harmony and well-being in the family. Due to household needs, mothers perform two tasks. Women who work in oil palm plantations must divide their time between taking care of the household and working. This can pose special challenges for women working in oil palm plantations. Although it is the husband's responsibility to earn a living regularly, wives can work to supplement the family income and of course to maintain the family's level of prosperity. To become a human being worthy of their talents, women must have the ability to be independent.

Based on the wages given, female laborers get lower wages than male laborers, indicating that female laborers work to increase their household income to meet their needs. The reason for the different wages comes from the different types of work between female and male laborers. Apart from the workplace, women who take care of the household are often burdened with household responsibilities, such as cleaning the house, taking care of the husband, taking care of the children,

and providing for the family. All this shows that women want to create harmony and prosperity for their families (Sania, L. 2022).

The doubling of women working in oil palm plantations has diverse impacts, including both positive and negative impacts. Women can have positive effects, such as increasing family income and improving their social status. Conversely, they can experience physical and mental exhaustion, and experience role conflict between their roles as workers and homemakers.

## **METHOD**

In this study, researchers used a qualitative research model with a case study approach. The qualitative research method is an approach to exploring and understanding a symptom by conducting interviews with sources (Creswell 2008). Qualitative research methods are research methods that are carried out directly in actual circumstances, data collection techniques with triangulation, and qualitative data analysis. This research also uses the Harvard model gender analysis technique to see how men and women divide work roles in the oil palm plantation sector.

This research was conducted in one of the villages as a place of research and this case study was raised. The location of this research was Sinah Kasih Village, Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra Province. The reason this research was conducted in Sinah Kasih Village is that gender practices related to the dual role of women working in oil palm plantations are still very strong. This is also related to the theme raised, namely the dual role of women and gender issues between male and female workers in palm oil plantations.

## **THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN OIL PALM PLANTATIONS**

The existence of oil palm companies makes the community very helpful in finding work and making a living for their families, the reason why women also participate in working in productive activities to help the family economy is because the husband's income is still not enough to fulfill family life which continues to grow from day to day. The community often considers the work done by women to be heavy work, the education level of women laborers who work in oil palm plantations is relatively low, almost 80% of women only graduated from elementary school.

Women who work in oil palm plantations as laborers have a very heavy role besides working as laborers to help their husbands to earn additional income, women also carry out the role of housewives or wives. In the domestic sector, the role of women is seen to be higher than men, because in the household women carry out tasks that should be done. Meanwhile, in the public sector as a breadwinner, it should be done by men, but due to economic factors, women are also involved in working in oil palm plantations. A wife must always wake up early to do household chores such as washing, cleaning, and cooking for her family. On the other hand, women also work as laborers in oil palm plantations to help increase their family's income. There is a stigma that considers women physically weak, women who work in oil palm plantations are very vulnerable to health problems due to exposure to pesticides and other chemicals. Sawit Watch reported that in some cases, women workers who are pregnant and breastfeeding are employed as sprayers, which is certainly very dangerous for the health of the fetus and newborn baby.

In family life, women are responsible for all household duties, especially childcare. In a general sense, women's studies refers to all research that focuses on women, e.g. research on women's history, on factors affecting the position of women in different societies, on how women are reflected in literature or art, as well as how femininity is created and subjectivity is formed, this can be classified as women's studies. Historically, women have realized a growing awareness of gendered privileged relationships.

Since the 21st century, women have been asked to have an independent attitude and given the freedom to develop as a person according to their talents. Today, Indonesian women are described as facing a dilemma. On the one hand, Indonesian women are asked to participate in various fields, but on the other hand, there is a demand for women not to forget their nature. The

phenomenon related to women working outside the home is something new to Indonesian society, so there are many views that women who work outside the home are considered inappropriate based on the values that they have been practicing.

## **WOMEN'S DIVISION OF LABOR IN OIL PALM PLANTATIONS IN SINAH KASIH VILLAGE**

Plantations in Indonesia are dominated by plantations consisting of perennials such as oil palm, rubber, coffee, tobacco, cocoa, coconut, tea, cashew, patchouli, and several other spice plants. The large potential of plantations is influenced by the good growth rate of plantations in Indonesia. The involvement of women in the advancement of plantations in Indonesia cannot be separated. The assumption that male workers play a major role in the increasing production of oil palm plantations is not entirely true. Not only men work on oil palm plantations, but women are also involved in various oil palm plantation activities. Some jobs designated for women usually fall into three categories: reproductive, productive, and social work. Each of these types of work shows the role of women in maintaining the community in oil palm plantations.

Work-related to reproductive functions, such as cooking, cleaning the house, washing clothes, taking care of children, and so on, or what is commonly referred to as household chores. Almost all household chores are done by women. Work that can generate money and income to help family life is known as productive work. Activities related to community life are called social work. These work activities take place in a wider public environment than the home environment. Unless there are special circumstances and needs, there is very little likelihood of women engaging in this work. In most cases, men are responsible for these activities.

The division of labor roles between men and women can be seen significantly. The division of labor roles in the field of work and households often experience injustice or what we know as inequality. In analyzing the division of labor between men and women carried out in Sinah Kasih Village, the author uses the Harvard Gender Analysis Technique. This analysis model was chosen by the researcher because it was considered appropriate to be used in analyzing gaps in gender at the individual and family levels who are workers on oil palm plantations in Sinah Kasih Village. According to (March et.al 1999), this Gender analysis technique is used by collecting data on a micro-scale or household and community scale. This framework is contained in three elements, namely:

1. Profiles of productive, reproductive, and social activities or activities based on the gender division of labor.
2. In the activity profile, the question to be answered is who will do what activity.
3. The activity profile also emphasizes the allocation of time done by women and men on roles and work.

Domestic or reproductive work in this study is a daily activity carried out by husband and wife couples in managing household affairs. Based on the research data obtained and then processed, the results are obtained in the form of an average allocation of domestic or reproductive work time in married couples.

Table 1. Homework Activities of Spouses in Sinah Kasih Village Oil Palm Plantation

No	Activity	Male/Husband	Female/Wife
1	Wake up early	06.00	05.00
	Preparing Breakfast		*
	Cleaning the House		*
	Taking Care of Children		*
	Washing Clothes		*
	Taking the kids to school	*	
2	Afternoon		
	Preparing food		*
	Taking care of children		*
	Preparing clothes		*
	Taking care of the house		*
	Taking care of pets	*	
3	Evening		
	Preparing dinner		*
	preparing tomorrow's meals	*	*
	Looking after the children	*	*
	Preparing the bed		*

Source: Author, 2023

In other discussions, there is a division of labor in the domestic field and also a division in terms of work in the garden. Based on the findings, the work between men and women is different. Women tend to be categorized as casual daily laborers (BHL), while men are counted as permanent employees. This is because of the difference between the needs required in the plantation. The average woman there is a daily laborer who is paid based on the number of days they work and gets a wage calculated every month. Whereas men are counted as employees, the salary earned at the end of the month is not based on the number of days they work.

Table 2. Work Activities of Husband and Wife in the Sinah Kasih Village Oil Palm Plantation

No	Activity	Male/Husband	Female/Wife
1	Planting seeds	*	*
2	Caring for seeds	*	*
3	Clearing weeds	*	*
4	Applying fertilizer	*	*
5	Caring for small/large trees	*	*
6	Weeding plants	*	*
7	Cleaning the disk	*	*
8	Spraying pesticides	*	*
9	Picking fruit	*	
10	Picking up loose palm fruits		*
11	Stacking the harvest	*	
12	Delivering the harvest	*	
13	Weighing the harvest	*	
14	Recording harvest weighing results	*	*
15	Receiving wages	*	*

Source: Author, 2023

It can be seen that the division of labor in women's gardens also has a big role. In addition to their work at home, women must also be able to divide their time for work in the garden. In social roles, husbands and wives tend to take the same role. In several social activities such as Arisan, counseling, cooperation, and recitation, husband and wife couples enter into the same realm. These social activities do not consume a lot of time because generally, these social activities are a place to maintain kinship between each other, so almost the entire series of activities is filled with

conversations, as well as exchanging ideas. In addition, relatively many people also attend recitations as a form of religious responsibility and also to establish friendships between fellow communities.

In the second table, it is clear that women work more in productive activities than in reproductive activities. Due to the patriarchal culture that dominates the order of life, double work for women is considered a natural task. This is related to the special position that men have in a patriarchal culture, which causes the idea that as husbands, engaging in reproductive activities with women is not appropriate. Within the family, men in the husband role are considered to have a higher status than women in the wife role. This leads to women acting as wives and serving their husbands. So, in an oil palm farming family, the husband can enjoy a cup of coffee leisurely in front of the house before working in the field. However, there is a difference with the woman, who from the moment she wakes up will be occupied with various unrelenting household tasks.

Over the years, society has maintained the concept of domestication of women who are mothers and take care of the household, and women in oil palm farming families experience unfair treatment. This inequality leads to efforts to marginalize women in the management of oil palm plantations, which involve many women. Efforts to marginalize women in the management of oil palm plantations can be seen in the fact that women do not have sufficient access to participate in human resource improvement activities.

The reality is that women's roles in the plantation sector are often seen as subordinate and undervalued due to the patriarchal culture that exists in the community. If they are widowed oil palm farmers, their contribution to household income can reach one hundred percent. This is because widowed women have to make an effort to provide for themselves and their families. Thus, it can be considered that women's significant contribution is not just additional income but is already the main source of family income.

Women in Sinah Kasih village are not only farmers or farm laborers in oil palm plantations, but also perform other plantation tasks, such as farming, selling crops, participating in the planting process, and others. This is done almost in a row with various other activities that are busy every day, both public and domestic activities that are reproductive.

## CONCLUSION

Women are often field workers, household leaders, and sometimes entrepreneurs. Although they make important contributions to the palm oil industry, women often face challenges such as gender inequality and limited access to resources. Women work in the Sinah Kasih Village Oil Palm Plantation just as much as men. In addition, women also carry out productive domestic tasks at home such as taking care of their husbands, children, and homes. Meanwhile, men or their husbands only work in the oil palm plantation industry and do not want to help with household chores. As a result, there is a double burden in the work that occurs for women palm oil workers in Sinah Kasih Village, Serdang Bedagai Regency, North Sumatra Province.

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