



The Role of Women's Agricultural Workers and Household Economic Resilience

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ABSTRACT

The involvement of women in the agricultural sector can be viewed in various aspects of social, economic, political, cultural, and religious life. This article describes the role of women's agricultural workers concerning household economic resilience, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research also seeks to systematically reveal the factors that encourage women to choose to become agricultural workers compared to other sectors and the obstacles they face in efforts to increase household economic resilience. This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of case study. This study involved six informants who were selected using a purposive technique. Documentation techniques and in-depth interviews were carried out for data collection. The results showed that women had an essential contribution to the economic resilience of farmer households before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pattern of short-term farming ranging from 3-4 months is seen as needing to be more prospective to support the family's economy. Economic background, education background, low skills, and the perception of independent women are seen as factors causing women to work as agricultural workers to help with family finances. The role of women is significant in maintaining household economic resilience both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Urgent basic needs can be met even though most are at the minimum level of fulfillment. The expertise of women farm workers in managing and allocating income positively impacts aspects of family economic resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. INTRODUCTION

Case studies in several developing countries show that women contribute significantly to the agricultural sector (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2011). The productive role of women in the agricultural sector is a strategic role in increasing household economic resilience. In fact, women have a large share in family farming activities both pre and post harvest. Between the planting season and the harvest season, there are not a few of them who also involve themselves in activities as farm laborers. This additional activity is intended to obtain additional household income, and as a form of women's anticipation of the uncertainty in the price of agricultural products produced

Women play an important role in every field of agricultural activity, even women work harder and longer than men, and the most important thing is that they do more work than men, therefore women's involvement in agricultural practices should be economically and ecologically feasible (Satyavathi et al., 2010). The involvement of women in the agricultural sector has an impact on improving the welfare of farming families. Amalia et al., (2022) in their research revealed that female farm workers should get recognition for their abilities, and get the same rights as men in terms of wages. In fact, women are often marginalized, experience subordination, and earn lower wages than male workers, and in domestic areas the dual roles of women are often ignored by men.

Women make important contributions to agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries (Patil & Suresh Babus, 2018). In managing the household, the role of women farmers is very complex, their activities usually include participating in producing crops, raising livestock, processing and

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preparing food, and working to earn wages in agriculture or other rural enterprises. (Hujatulu, 2015) his research shows that the involvement of women has started from land preparation, planting, care, eradication of plant pests and diseases until harvest, post-harvest such as threshing, harvesting, cleaning of crops, transportation, sorting of crops, and marketing. Often such work does not count in agriculture (Doss et al., 2018). Moreover, women contribute to marketed agricultural products through their labor, even if the food produced is not always associated with them. This is especially true when they work as contributing family members or as wage laborers in other people's fields.

Like several other areas, the involvement of women in the agricultural sector in Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi Province is common. In general, in Enrekang Regency, working as a farmer is the dominant occupation of the population. Meanwhile, the involvement of women in the agricultural field can be seen in various forms, either from direct involvement in the production process of family farms with very limited land management, as well as offering services as farm laborers in various types of work as farm laborers or in their daily life they are more familiar with the term "*Mangkaryawan*". Although in the past, jobs as farm laborers were more often done by men, over time the increasing participation of women in the agricultural field has made the term "*Mangkaryawan*" more familiar among women who work as farm laborers. For women, additional work as farm laborers is one of the concrete steps that is considered quite effective in increasing household economic resilience.

Many related studies discuss the role of female farm workers in improving the economic welfare of the family, not only limited to how they are involved in the field of production to increase income, but also control over the management of family finances to meet the priority needs of the family. Women farmers have a lot of control in terms of managing household finances. The findings in the research of Akter et al., (2017) and Maligalig et al., (2019) reveal the fact that in Southeast Asian countries: Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines women have greater control over household income. The findings in the research of (Artih & Sulistiawati, 2019) showed several forms of control of women in farm labor families, including determinants related to family finances, planners of family activities, and even decision-makers related to education.

Based on these facts, the role of female farm workers in managing relatively small family incomes can have implications for the economic resilience of farmer households. This study aims to describe the role of female agricultural workers in maintaining household economic resilience. The difference with other studies lies in the analysis of the situation before, and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several important things that will be described in this research apart from the contribution of women farm workers to family income, also describe their perceptions of the choice to become farm laborers, as well as the obstacles faced in efforts to improve the family's economic welfare.

This research provides a different perspective from most of the related research that is used as a reference. The role of women agricultural workers and the economic resilience of farm households are inseparable parts of the perspective. Rather it is an acknowledgment of the existence of women as productive workers in the agricultural sector. The results of this research can be used as a reference for studies related to gender in the development of the agricultural sector, and become the basis for the relevant government in formulating programs that are in accordance with the socio-economic conditions of women working in the agricultural sector.

2. METHOD

This research was conducted in Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi Province in 2021. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study type. The subjects in this study have fairly homogeneous characteristics, although the women involved in working as farm laborers are not only those who are married but also women in their teens, so researchers only need to focus on women agricultural workers who are married. Researchers set inclusion criteria for informants including; female farm workers who are married, have family dependents, have experience working as farm laborers for at least 2 years, and educational background at least graduated from elementary school. Researchers did not exclude differences in husband's occupation.

We also clarify the context of the women agricultural workers in this study as women who decide to work as farm laborers, even though they have a background as farmers who own limited agricultural land and are often directly involved in family farming activities. This means that the women in this study are not purely agricultural laborers, but also have a production style as poor farmers. While the object that is the focus of this research is the contribution of women in increasing household income, and their ability to manage this income to maintain household economic resilience, as well as various obstacles faced before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the data collection process, we involved 2 local enumerators who were willing to help communicate with women agricultural workers, especially those who were not very fluent in Indonesian.

We chose this method to maintain the convenience of communicating with informants. We selected 6 female farm labor informants who are married. Researchers used in-depth interviews with each informant. We selected 6 female farm labor informants using a purposive technique. We assume that the adequacy, suitability of information, and saturation of the data obtained will be achieved in the 6th informant. It is called saturated, that is, if the next informant has provided the same information as the previous informant, no new information is obtained (Gentles et al., 2015). In carrying out the interview process, we use a question guide that has been made simple and easy to understand. The main questions have a probing dimension that allows for a more fluid and in-depth discussion. Data analysis was done by case study analysis procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2012).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Researchers focused on deepening information from 6 informants who matched the criteria and were willing to be interviewed. Of the 6 informants in this study, 2 of them were interviewed at work locations, while 4 other informants were interviewed at their respective homes by first scheduling a meeting so that allow none of their activities to be interrupted by the required interview time. The researcher deliberately disguised the informant's name to maintain the informant's privacy. In addition, to avoid reader misunderstanding, the researcher describes the results descriptively the data and facts that have been reduced without the need to attach transcripts/interview quotes in the discussion. Table 1 contains a description of the informants interviewed in this study.

Table 1. Research informant profile

No	Other Name	Age (years)	Village	Agricultural Workers Experience (Years)	Number of Family Members (people)	Husband Work
1	Informant A	55	Taulo	5	5	Farmer
2	Informant B	43	Taulo	+/- 5	6	Farmer
3	Informant C	46	Bolang	+/- 6	4	Driver
4	Informant D	42	Mata Allo	5	5	Farmer
5	Informant E	44	Bolang	3	4	Farmer
6	Informant F	41	Mata Allo	4	5	Farmer

Source: Primary data (2021)

Based on the informant's data in Table 1 above, shows that on average the women observed in this study have 4-5 years of experience working as farm laborers. This means that they have had sufficient experience to compare their socioeconomic conditions Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Women who are involved in agricultural labor activities in this area are recognized as having dual activities in the agricultural sector. During the planting and harvesting seasons, they are also involved in family farming managed by their husbands, but in their spare time, they use that time to engage as farm laborers to earn additional family income. Although one of the informants' husbands works as a car driver, they admit that they manage a small area to grow crops in their spare time. Families of women agricultural workers on average have 4-6 family dependents. While the main job of the head of the family is a farmer. Usually, the main job as a horticultural farmer relies on short-term crops (3-4 months) such as large and small chilies, beans, and other green vegetables, with relatively narrow agricultural land. This type of agricultural production tends to rely on seasons and highly volatile market prices.

Women's Decision to Work as Agricultural Workers

Informants acknowledged the limitations of the results obtained from short-term agriculture. Sometimes if the price is friendly, they get a profit that can be inserted for daily needs and the need for the next planting. However, it is not uncommon for them to find prices that are only able to return the capital they spent during the planting to the harvesting process. So relying on this work to meet the daily needs of the family is seen as very difficult and limited. This situation tends to encourage women to work as agricultural workers. Based on the results of interviews with informants obtained several factors that influence women's decisions to work as farm laborers, these factors are broadly divided into two factors:

The family's economic background is the main factor that causes women to work as agricultural workers to help finance their families. The desire to send their children to a higher level, and the fulfillment of daily household needs, on the one hand, are the limiting factors of the household economy.

The informants admit that the wages they get from working as farm laborers are very grateful and are seen as helping to meet their daily needs. Although most of them felt that the results of their work as agricultural workers were sufficient, this was not the case as felt by "Informant E" who admitted that the

results obtained were not sufficient to meet the needs of the family. "Informant E" has 2 children who are already at the university level, one of whom was forced to stop studying in the third semester due to the inability of his parents to finance both of them from the work of his husband as a farmer and his wife as an agricultural worker.

Educational background and low skills are one of the social factors that influence women's decisions to work as an agricultural workers. They realize that jobs that are better than today require special skills and certain jobs require a higher diploma. So there is no easier choice of work with the limited skills they have other than being an agricultural worker. Most women's agricultural workers have an educational background of elementary-high school graduation.

Research conducted by (Chayal et al., 2013) revealed that low levels of education, family income, and skills were one of the main factors influencing women's involvement in making decisions in the agricultural sector. These findings are also consistent with the results of research (Roy et al., 2017) that there is a positive relationship between the education level of women and the decision to work in the agricultural sector. In a general study of the relationship between education and the decision to work in agriculture, there is a close relationship between the two. The findings in a study conducted by (Putri et al., 2022) stated that the lower the education level of workers who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, the more workers decided to work in the agricultural sector. The agricultural sector is considered as a job option that does not require special skills.

The social environment also plays a role in building women's awareness to be actively involved in working to help their household economy. It is common to find many women who are involved as farm laborers as a motivating factor for other women. Work as farm laborers are not only carried out by those who are already married but many of their daughters are also found to be actively involved as farm laborers in the absence of school/college activities. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning activities automatically increase the chances of high school-college-age children to be involved in working as farm laborers, although with a lower intensity than those who make farm labor their daily work.

The perception of "Independent Women", is a perspective that is widely developed among women agricultural workers. Some of them think that independent women are women who do not fully rely on the results of their husbands' work, working women are women who want a better life, and understanding women are women who can help their husbands work. This independent woman's perspective can be seen from 4 informants while 2 other informants are more interested in saying "taking advantage of opportunities" to get additional income other than the husband's income.

Bertham et al., (2011) in their research revealed several factors that influence the decision of women to work as agricultural workers driven by the family burden factor. Seeking experienced and shared responsibilities is another reason for women to work in agricultural activities. The findings in this study also corroborate the findings in a study conducted by Musallamah, (2017a) revealing several factors that influence women's decisions to work as agricultural workers including; there are factors of opportunity to get additional income, environmental factors such as a sense of comfort and support from the family, while economic factors are driven by the desire to help husbands earn a living, as well as the desire to send their children to a higher level.

In a general perspective, a woman's decision to participate in the workforce also depends on factors related to the household she is a part of that influence the benefits and opportunity costs of making this decision. For example, the presence of children or older household members can increase the opportunity cost of employment (Chakraborty et al., 2018). While modern studies on women's participation identify marital status, age, number and age of children, husband's income, and potential wages and education levels as the main factors influencing the decision to participate (Humphries & Sarasu, 2012).

Household Economic Resilience, Pre and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a direct impact on the economic resilience of women agricultural workers. During the pandemic, the number of work requests from various surrounding areas decreased drastically. Part of it is due to restrictions on interaction between regions in anticipating the spread of COVID-19, which causes the need for agricultural workers from other regions to decrease. In addition, the number of traders entering this area to look for commodities such as shallots and other spices has decreased. Usually, the intensity of work as an agricultural worker has increased, one of which is due to the demand of traders for certain commodities which require that the harvesting and cleaning process must be carried out quickly and requires a large number of workers to complete according to the target time given by the traders.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for agricultural worker services between villages, both within the same sub-district and across sub-districts was very high, and the number of traders who entered was also very high, thus affecting the amount of use of farm laborers by land owners. Many have taken

advantage of this opportunity to get involved as farm laborers to increase their household income, but after the trend of COVID transmission increased in this area, restrictions resulted in a decrease in demand for the number and working days of farm workers. Meanwhile, in terms of wages earned before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no change.

Recognition of farm workers who are still working intensely during the COVID-19 pandemic stated that there was no change in terms of wages earned by farm workers before and during COVID-19. The wages earned are in the range of 60,000-70,000 IDR, depending on the type of work, and the number of hours worked. Usually, farm workers use 8 hours of work with a normal wage of 60,000 IDR for work such as pulling onions, tying onions, and cleaning caterpillars. Meanwhile, if they clean the grass, they usually get a higher wage of 70,000 IDR. Meanwhile, if the work is only half a day (until 13.00) you only get 50,000 IDR. If the working hours are added 1 hour or get overtime hours, the wages are usually added 10,000 IDR / hour.

Based on the results of interviews with informants, information was obtained that there was no difference in wages earned before and during COVID 19, but based on the confessions of 4 informants related to the work intensity of agricultural workers during COVID 19, it was still quite high with an intensity of 3-4 working days a week even before COVID 19. almost every day. Meanwhile, 2 other informants admitted that their work intensity was lower than before COVID 19.

In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic, farm workers also admit that the seasonal factor is one of the factors that play a fairly high role in the demand for the services of female farm workers. During the planting and harvesting seasons, the number of workers used increases, even some land owners have to order farm labor days a few days before the work is carried out. This is due to the limited number of workers who are ready to work on the same day, while land work for planting, harvesting and cleaning needs is carried out in groups and takes turns from one field to another.

Despite all the limitations they have, the existence of women's agricultural workers has shown their role in maintaining the economic resilience of their households, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study indicate the general recognition of informants that what they get from their work as day laborers makes a positive contribution to family finances.

To previous information, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the average length of time women agricultural workers worked was quite varied, working 5-6 days a week, with wages ranging from 60,000-70,000 IDR / day. So if they are accumulated, on average, they get an additional gross income of around 300,000-420,000 IDR / week, depending on the length of the working day and the type of work. This additional income is considered sufficient for additional daily needs. All of the informants were hesitant to confirm the average monthly income from working as agricultural workers because this kind of work is usually highly dependent on uncertain demand.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the wage rate of women's agricultural workers did not change, but the intensity of working days decreased. As a result, additional income for the family, in general, has decreased. However, female farm workers still admit that their basic daily needs during the COVID-19 pandemic can still be met. This study did not specifically question the possibility of social assistance they received during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The aspect of household economic resilience is not only seen in how much income the whole family earns, but how capable the household's financial management is to be able to meet priority needs for the family. Meanwhile, Amalia et al., (2022b) also revealed that an increase in family income will indirectly increase the family economy. Income results must be managed properly so that they can be used for household needs. Such as basic needs, children's school needs, the need to repair a house or build a house, and others. In this regard Prayitno et al., (2021) emphasize that building economic resilience at the family level is the main task, savings must be made, and financial management needs to be more careful, by prioritizing basic needs first. At least meet the basic needs that need to be pursued, such as food needs for daily life.

The results of the interview with informants showed that the assessment of the condition of household economic resilience of women's agricultural workers before and during the COVID-19 pandemic in the aspect of meeting basic needs such as the need for food was still considered safe and fulfilled. Family members can still eat at least 2 times a day, there are no arrears in electricity costs, and there are no family members who suffer from malnutrition.

Meanwhile, the needs of children's schools, especially for children aged 9 years, Primary School-Junior High School level (SD-SMP) are still considered safe. According to this informant, this is not a significant problem, because the local government still applies the concept of free education for this level, as well as at the High School level (SMA / SMK / Equivalent) which is the domain of the South Sulawesi provincial government. However, at this level of education, it is also recognized that there are costs that

must still be incurred, such as transportation and accommodation costs for school children, notebooks, and other school supplies.

Unlike the case with higher education, the informants considered it very difficult to meet their financing needs. Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the work intensity of some female farm workers has decreased. The informant also explained that the financing of higher education is not only in terms of direct costs, but also indirect costs such as daily living costs, transportation costs, house rent costs, and the cost of buying books that support studies. All these types of costs were considered by the informants to be very difficult to meet even though both of their parents had worked in the agricultural sector.

Women's agricultural workers do not deny that what they get from short-term agricultural products done by their husbands can be the main income for the family, but to meet the needs of the family, in general, is not enough. Research conducted by Nurmagfirah et al., (2021) also found the same fact that one of the main factors that encourage women to work as farm laborers is to increase family income which is considered insufficient. A study conducted by Akter et al., (2017) revealed that labor wages are an important part of their income and are used to cover shortfalls during the growing season to harvest. This income is in most cases supplemented by income from wages for labor on other farms.

The results of this study reject the justification of women as the main breadwinner of the family. The results of interviews with all informants explored the views of female farm workers on the concept of work to help the family economy. Meanwhile, they continue to emphasize that living is the husband's main duty. Even though they can independently find a source of income, they refuse to call themselves breadwinners. Women agricultural workers realize that their desire to work is purely from their awareness to help ease their husband's main job, and their dream to live a prosperous life.

The findings in this study corroborate the findings in a study conducted by Musallamah, (2017b) in his research which revealed that a wife does not only act as a wife and mother for their children. On the other hand, a wife can also act as a breadwinner even though in this case not as the main breadwinner in the family because it is the husband who is in charge of making the main living in the family. The income earned by a working wife greatly helps the family's economy

Behind the economic resilience of farmer households, some women are capable of helping, and managing family finances carefully. Women in the family are the husband's partners, and collaboration between the two is needed to maintain family resilience. Alie & Elanda, (2020) in their research revealed that family economic resilience can be strong if there is cooperation among family members. So that the division of roles in the family is actually to strengthen family resilience in various aspects. Women have contributed greatly to the growth and development of agriculture through their involvement in horticultural crop production, animal husbandry, fisheries, natural resource management, labor supply, etc. they constitute a large percentage of the population who are economically active in agriculture (Patil & Suresh Babus, 2018).

The Challenge of Women's Agricultural Workers

In general, the obstacles for Women agricultural workers to improve their household economy are technical barriers, including weather, transportation, and working hours. Meanwhile, non-technical barriers such as work culture and job opportunities that differentiate between men and women are not prominent in the field.

The obstacle for Women agricultural workers that is directly related to their work is the problem of the hot sun while working, this was recognized by all informants as a pretty tough challenge because they had to keep working under the scorching sun, sometimes making their heads hurt. Many of them brought spare clothes to be tied around their heads as heat protection for both their heads and faces, while some used hats as protection.

When it rains, they are forced to stop their work and wait until the rain stops then continue their work. For them, the rain hinders them more than the sun. When it rains in the morning, this condition makes it more difficult for their fieldwork because the unpredictable weather makes it uncertain for them to work at that time. In some cases they arrived at the site and only started work for a moment and then it started raining, this condition prevented the owner from counting their working days. In some cases, they also admit that usually their working day in such conditions is counted as half a day.

The next obstacle is transportation. They admit that sometimes they find locations that are difficult to reach by public transportation, which they have been using in groups to go to work. For such a location, sometimes they have to walk quite a distance to get to work. Sometimes they are also constrained because they do not have a motorized vehicle that they can use every day so they are very dependent on public transportation. Not a few of them sometimes choose not to participate when the location is difficult to reach by public transportation.

Another technical obstacle is the time to go home from work, sometimes due to technical problems in the field such as rain, overtime because the work owner is targeting working hours, as well as access to remote locations that make them late to get home. This delay can be the cause of neglecting household chores that usually become routine (cooking and taking care of family members), but this case is rarely encountered because female farm workers usually have anticipated this condition by providing household needs at dawn before they go to work.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The involvement of women working as agricultural workers has a strengthens the resilience of the household economy. The direct impact that can be observed is on the aspect of increasing family income in general, which in the end has an impact on the family's food stock being fulfilled. Urgent basic needs can be met even though most of them are at the minimum level of fulfillment. Family economic background, education, and low skills are the main factors for women deciding to work as farm laborers. The perception of "independent women" that is widely developed in social circles also encourages women to be confident in being involved in working as laborers in the agricultural sector. The role of women is very important in maintaining household economic resilience both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are differences in work intensity conditions before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has a negative impact on the income of female farm workers. Restrictions on social interaction and regional isolation during the COVID-19 Pandemic have hampered opportunities to increase family income, but in general, the expertise of Women's agricultural workers in managing and allocating income has a positive impact on aspects of family economic resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. One aspect of the economic resilience of the families of Women agricultural workers which is recognized as difficult to fulfill is the fulfillment of the financing needs of children to continue their studies in higher education. This socio-economic problem is expected to be one of the important concerns of the government of Enrekang Regency so it is targeted to provide higher education scholarships for the families of Women's agricultural workers.

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