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# Turning Mothers into Freelancers: Is It Fit as Empowerment?

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Abstract: Women's empowerment has become a topic of discussion in efforts to improve the quality of women's welfare. This research explores the role of married women (or mothers) as freelancers in convection companies in South Tangerang. The main focus of this research is to provide an overview of the potential of family workers, especially women, in the context of freelance work. With a qualitative approach, researchers use interviews, observation, and documentation to obtain data. There were four informants, namely mothers who worked as freelancers. Meanwhile, the key informant in this research is the Human Resources Department, which acts as a freelancer recruiter. The questions asked adopted the Multicultural Psychological Empowerment Scale and were in the form of open questions. The analysis technique used is data triangulation. The research results show that empowering women who have families is a process that allows them to have control over their lives and destiny. The empowerment process involves increasing access to employment opportunities and financial independence. It is hoped that the results of this research will provide a comprehensive view of the benefits of women's empowerment for individuals, communities, and society.

**Keywords:** Women's Empowerment, Freelancer, Meaningfulness, Self-Efficacy, Self-Determination

Abstrak: Konsep pemberdayaan wanita telah menjadi bahasan dalam upaya meningkatkan kualitas kesejahteraan para wanita. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi peranan wanita berkeluarga (atau ibu-ibu) sebagai pekerja lepas pada perusahaan konveksi di Tangerang Selatan. Fokus utama penelitian ini adalah memberikan gambaran tentang potensi diri para pekerja keluarga, khususnya wanita, dalam konteks pekerjaan lepas. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif, peneliti menggunakan wawancara, observasi dan dokumentasi untuk mendapatkan data. Terdapat empat informan, yaitu ibu-ibu yang bekerja sebagai pekerja lepas. Sedangkan informan kunci pada penelitian ini ialah Departemen Sumber Daya Manusia, yang bertindak sebagai perekrut pekerja lepas. Pertanyaan-pertanyaan yang diajukan mengadopsi Multicultural Psychological Empowerment Scale dan berbentuk pertanyaan terbuka. Teknik analisis yang digunakan ialah triangulasi data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemberdayaan perempuan yang berkeluarga merupakan sebuah proses yang memungkinkan adanya kendali atas hidup dan nasibnya. Proses pemberdayaan melibatkan peningkatan akses terhadap peluang kerja serta peningkatan kemandirian finansial. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan pandangan yang komprehensif tentang manfaat pemberdayaan wanita bagi individu, komunitas dan masyarakat secara keseluruhan.

**Kata Kunci:** Pemberdayaan Perempuan, Pekerja Lepas, Kebermaknaan, Penentuan Nasib Sendiri

# Introduction

Women's empowerment is an important issue on the global stage today, encompassing the provision of resources and opportunities necessary for women to activate their rights, participate in decision-making processes, and control the direction of their lives (Reshi & Sudha, 2022). Often underestimated, women's empowerment is crucial in achieving life balance. Women often experience inequality regarding basic rights such as education, political participation, and economic access (Reshi & Sudha, 2022).

In addition, the recruitment process in the workplace often creates an imbalance in the job structure, which impacts women's chances of reaching the highest positions in the organization. Factors such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and social norms influence women's ability to make choices and negotiate in situations or relationships (Laszlo, Grantham, Oskay, & Zhang, 2020; Minkkinen, Auvinen, & Mauno, 2020).

Surveys by JobStreet.com and jobsDB show differences in career priorities between married and unmarried employees. Married employees prioritize job security and employee-oriented company values, while unmarried ones emphasize training, opportunities, and career development (Riyandi, 2018).

However, the recruitment of married women also comes with its challenges. They are often perceived to be at risk of "following their husbands," which can make companies hesitant to recruit them. Intense competition also makes it difficult, with companies tending to favor employees with higher qualifications and standards, sometimes with discriminatory tendencies towards married women (Nurhayati, Hidayah, Angriani, Izzat, & Norsari, 2021). Women's empowerment and support for work-family balance are crucial in this context. Companies must accommodate married women with inclusive policies and consider their needs in recruitment and employee development strategies (Riyandi, 2018).

Women's empowerment is a complex process that involves sociological, psychological, and economic aspects at various levels, whether individual, group, or community (Moubarak et al., 2022; Longwe, 1998). It is an important step in correcting gender inequalities that hinder women's advancement and is a prerequisite for sustainable societal stability (Vernia, 2017).

Interestingly, (Dumauli, 2023) revealed that more women work in informal jobs than men in Indonesia. BPS data in 2021, around 66.36% of women are informal workers and the remaining

33.64% are formal workers. In contrast, for male workers, there is only a small difference between the number of formal and informal workers (53.68% working informally vs. 46.32% working formally). Compared to men, women are not only more likely to hold lower-qualified jobs with lower average hourly wages, but many of them are also unpaid family workers. This is because women in Indonesia, both in the formal and informal sectors, emphasize work flexibility that is compatible with their role as mothers as the dominant factor in determining their level of job satisfaction. Therefore, it is necessary to match the work with their role (Hamzah, Mulyana, & Faisal, 2023).

What is more, if the woman has efforts to become an entrepreneur. Noor et al., (2021) found that female entrepreneurs have strong decision-making power, face fewer mobility problems, have autonomy, have financial independence, and are empowered. So, that is the model of women's empowerment that is proposed (Ramadhanty, Sebastian, Muttaqien, & Alfarisi, 2020). However, such a model is quite difficult to implement, considering that women also have roles as wives, mothers, and (not least) organizers of household life. There is not much time that can be exploited to become an entrepreneur. So, the best choice is to become an employee, with certainty of working hours (Puspanindita et al., 2023) and income (Dutse et al., 2013), 2013).

In contrast to several previous studies that empowered mothers to work freelance online (Rawoof et al., 2021; Alam & Zuma, 2023), this research is more revealing that women's empowerment in the convection industry not only includes their involvement in the production process, but also involves improving their skills, welfare, and role in decision-making (Moubarak et al., 2022) The presence of female freelancers in the convection sector opens up opportunities to develop local potential, create new jobs, and boost the overall economic growth of the community (Retnoningsih & Purwaningsih, 2024). Therefore, this research wants to reveal the strategy for implementing this program. The Multicultural Psychological Empowerment Scale is novel in this research, considering that this scale has not been confirmed qualitatively, and Kariri et al. (2023) have stated that this scale is valid and reliable in measuring measurable areas of sustainability.

# **Methods**

Table 1. Questions Structure Sample

| Dimensions     | Questions  |
|----------------|--|
| Meaningfulness | How do you understand the value of your duties or work while working?  |
|                | How have you realized the impact of achieving your goals in various areas of your life, such as as a freelancer? |
|                | How much do you understand that your participation is needed in working as a freelancer?                         |
|                | How do you utilize every opportunity to develop your potential   |

### or personality?

### **Impact**

Do the things you do (at work) influence the people around you?

How are you able to help your fellow employees? This is in the social context.

How do you convince people around you in various situations during work?

How do you contribute to creating a positive and moral atmosphere around you?

How do you convey your thoughts to your colleagues while working?

Have you been an advocate for the rights of others during your work?

How do you decide on solutions to your life's problems? One of them might be when working as a freelancer.

How do you make a moral and positive difference in various ways during work?

How do you use your strengths when a colleague needs your help?

How do you build good communication alliances with your colleagues?

### **Self-efficacy**

How do you control your behavior in the work environment?

How have you invested in empowerment opportunities, especially as a freelancer?

How do you deal with new situations, such as adapting to working here?

How do you find solutions if problems are experienced while working through freelancers? Is the information accurate enough?

How do you manage all your time while being a mum who takes care of the family and also a freelancer?

How do you contribute to achieving your goals?

# Selfdetermination

How do you take the initiative during your work?

How do you make decisions when you are going freelance?

What is the background to your desire to work as a freelancer?

Were you used to making choices before?

### How did you decide to become a freelancer here?

This research uses qualitative methods. Sudaryono (2017) states that qualitative research is research conducted to analyze social life by describing the social world from the perspective of the interpretation of individuals (informants) in a natural setting. The author explores and understands the meaning that several individuals or groups of people ascribe to social or humanitarian problems.

According to Sugiyono (2017) qualitative research methods are still classified as new methods, with their popularity not yet as famous as quantitative. This method processes with art-like properties (less patterned). It is called an interpretive method because the research data is more about interpreting the data found in the field.

In this research, the questions given to informants were adopted from the Multicultural Psychological Empowerment Scale belonging to Moubarak et al. (2022). This scale divides women's empowerment into several dimensions, namely, meaningfulness, impact, self-efficacy, and self-determination. The researchers changed these dimensions into open questions (examples as in Table 1) without reducing their original meaning. Before asking the informants, the key informant verified the questions to be deemed appropriate and allowed to be asked.

Through the efforts of preparing this study, the researcher has tried to make its best contribution but realizes that there are several limitations in the results of this study. These include weaknesses in the methods used as well as subjectivity in the interpretation of qualitative data. In addition, limitations in case selection are also a factor, where the sample selected may not fully reflect the variety or diversity of the phenomenon under study.

While recognizing the limitations, it is hoped that the preparation of this study will contribute to future research. Awareness of these shortcomings is expected to help future researchers to refine the methodology and obtain more accurate results.

| Role        | Age     | Work in                     | Length of |
|-------------|---------|-----------------------------|-----------|
| Key         | 29 y.o. | HRD                         | 2 years   |
| Informant   | 0.0     | 0 1 1                       | _         |
| Informant 1 | 32 y.o. | Overlock<br>sewing          | 5 years   |
| Informant 2 | 30 y.o. | Finishing                   | 7 years   |
| Informant 3 | 25 y.o. | Finishing                   | 8 years   |
| Informant 4 | 37 y.o. | Embroidery<br>Sales Support | 20 year   |

Table 2. Background of the key informant and informants

This research only pays attention to one point of view: empowering married women through freelancing at a convection company in South Tangerang. The limited number of informants interviewed, namely only four people, is also a policy the HR Manager imposes (see Table 2). No sample size is indicated in almost all qualitative research because this is correlated with cultural factors, implying a subjective nature of sample size in qualitative studies Moubarak et al. (2022).

### **Results and Discussion**

The results of this research are the result of the researcher's interpretation of various answers to the questions given to the informants. This interpretation is then confronted with the theory used, women's empowerment, from a multicultural psychology perspective. Based on the analysis results, the strategy of empowering married women through freelancing is described per dimension.

# Meaningfulness

According to Ruggeri et al. (2020), a sense of meaningfulness is sought after (especially by workers). Because it is related to self-will in maintaining health and helps them cope better with stressful working conditions, it will improve well-being. Well-being in employees can be described by the statement of Ruggeri et al. (2020), more specifically, if well-being is associated with a lack of income or unemployment, which will most likely lead to an increase in inequality. So, not being unemployed can be considered a blessing, a representative form of well-being (Muslimah, Audea, Manalu, & Berlianti, 2024).

All informants have understood what they will receive and the impact of what they do as freelancers. This means that informants can interpret the meaningfulness of work. Moubarak et al. (2022) explain the importance of values and roles, duties, and goals in life for women, especially having additional work as a freelance daily worker (Aminah, 2017).

This means that women, as freelancers, can understand what the company expects. So that companies do not hesitate to compensate female freelancers. Moreover, empowering women economically positively impacts their families and communities (Reshi & Sudha, 2022). As Informant 1 stated:

"I understand my job, which is my job desk as an ironer."

Informants 2, 3, and 4 also recognized the following:

"Yes, I understand my job (job desk) in the finishing section; it is very necessary, and of course, I do it with a sense of responsibility."

"Yes, I generally work my duties; God willing, I will be responsible and do my best."

"Especially for me in the border section, it is quite important because, under me, there are still other people, so if there is an error in the border, I must be the one who is asked; the one who is responsible is me."

Then, the key informant responded to the answers of the informants as follows:

"Providing an understanding of the value of their respective tasks ... we tell every employee who enters what the job desk is, and every division has its PIC-PIC or supervisor or manager. Well, that is usually responsible for what, directing them to work on ABCDEFGD and also we, here is some training for them so ..."

The informants understand that being a family woman who also plays a dual role as a freelancer has meaning and impact both physically and mentally and affects the informant's life. In this case, it is by the interviews delivered by the informants that dividing time between work and taking care of the family is often a matter that is quite spotlighted. This is autonomy and balance (Younger & Oliveira, 2017), also described by the informant, a freelancer mother with three children. Autonomy is described as flexibility and choice. Meanwhile, balance is directed at enjoying work apart from achievement (Prasetyo, Musta'in, & Ikhwani, 2020).

Then, the statement from key informants also that they had provided an understanding of the value of the duties. This is the enjoyment of work experienced by the informants. Each employee, as explained at the job desk for each employee, depends on the division (Larasati & Sunartiningsih, 2020). Each division has a PIC or what is usually called a supervisor and manager, who supervises them. They are responsible for providing direction from the tasks carried out to each employee, including daily casual employees.

### **Impact**

Moubarak et al. (2022) stated that a woman's existence could strategically influence her family, social circle, and perseverance in difficult situations. This is reflected in the informants' answers, where women freelancers affect their families and communities. Interestingly, these women have high cohesiveness. The strength of the informants is to mobilize their colleagues to form alliances and communicate (Darmayanti & Budarsa, 2021). Even though it all needs family approval and does not violate existing regulations, this illustrates the characteristics of Eastern culture, where women are considered completely subservient to men before and after marriage, just like inanimate objects and personal property (Imran & Ismail, 2022).

Here is the statement from Informant 1:

"Open and honest communication is important. Hmm... so we know what our colleagues are thinking, and we can also find solutions. If there is something, we can talk about it".

Moreover, agreed by other informants.

"I believe that building this work process requires open communication ..., trust, and mutual understanding, so we... I try to listen well and understand other people's perspectives so that we are both comfortable".

"Of course, the easiest thing is to talk about it. So let us talk about it nicely so that it feels good to find a solution. So, we also feel comfortable as friends."

"Usually, we like to chat, which sometimes likes to be unclear too, but if the name is also a coworker, yes... Anything is sometimes unclear. So, it is just fun to work like that."

Then, the key informant responded to the informants' answers as follows:

"If, for example they are difficult to adapt, we first call the person and ask where is the difficulty? Suppose, for example, the difficulty is in terms of the environment. In that case, we usually explain first like maybe the character of person A is like this, character B is like this, but if the difficulty is in terms of work, we usually use the example of the sewing team. Well, there is usually a PIC to look after him, so it is like the supervisor gives the PIC to the new employee, and later, the PIC will supervise him while working, how is the sewing like? Are there any difficulties or not? If there are difficulties, they will be taught by the PIC."

So, all informants understand that communication and alliance can build a positive and dynamic work atmosphere. Likewise, with effective communication, the company is very open to every statement and question given by each employee, discussions are also often carried out by each division, and criticism and suggestions are also realized directly by key informants; it is very helpful to build the company even better in the future, this has been described directly by key informants (Nurani, Runtiko, & Novianti, 2023).

However, on the other hand, problems within the family can potentially arise, which also needs to be paid attention to their children's difficulties from a social and psychological perspective. Lack of time to care for children creates a mental gap between children and working mothers. So empowering women through freelancing can be a solution. Although, of course, it goes back to the dynamics of the mother in spending time with her child (Sudrajat, Saliman, Supardi, & Wibowo, 2023).

## Self-Efficacy

The informants were able to contribute to the company. Work can be managed well. However, the difficulty is when dealing with work and caring for the family. Based on the data obtained from the interviews, all informants agree that after deciding to start a family, managing time is quite challenging but can still be resolved well, thanks to support, cooperation, and good communication with their spouses.

Some informants also stated that they could find solutions to every problem they faced; this shows that informants can do their job well. Thus, what is described by (Moubarak et al., 2022) is the extent to which women can perform various tasks skillfully and show confidence in their

ability to control their behavior. However, there is still unrest in managing their social environment, especially the family aspect. This is also experienced by many companies that run social responsibility programs (Barrientos, 2023). As stated by informant 1:

"Maybe look for positive (like-minded) colleagues with the same goals so we can move forward together."

This was also agreed by informants 2, 3, and 4 in the following statements:

"It can be from contributing to creating a comfortable atmosphere, which is certainly a positive one. I usually listen to my colleagues' opinions, too. I also give support if they need it."

"Like, okay, inviting friends to joke around, then it is just fun to make them laugh, right? If, for example, we are chatting funny, they laugh, it makes us feel good too. So, it is fun, even though it is a long way there, they also reply with jokes like that."

"Mostly participating in activities. For example, it does not have to be the workplace in this environment. Yes, we have to, for example there is a recitation or something, just participate in social gatherings as much as possible."

Next, the key informant responded to the informants' answers as follows:

"... We are very open. So, hmm... Several managers like to ask the staff here what is going on to find out what problems there are; then the managerial team will be... What are the discussions related to criticism and suggestions? Because criticism and suggestions can also help us to build the company even better, there must be."

It means self-efficacy is an important indicator to consider, as women have to empower themselves because empowerment is essentially a bottom-up process and not a top-down one. So, empowering family women is more than just changes in laws, strategies, and policies to change unjust practices (Moubarak et al., 2022).

### Self-Determination

Some informants stated that they had often taken the initiative during their work and were used to deciding what was best for them, in this case, for example, deciding to start working. One of the aspects considered was economic problems and the desire to have a career and activities outside the home.

Based on the data obtained from interviews, it can be seen that informants 2, 3, and 4 were used to choosing and making decisions for themselves before starting a family. So, according to Moubarak et al. (2022), determining one's destiny and having personal competence can reduce isolation and allow married women to develop a sense of belonging and involvement in social and economic decision-making (Reyhan et al., 2019).

According to Tabassum et al. (2019), women's empowerment refers to decision-making power in life's social, economic, and political spheres. So, self-determination in women's

empowerment is crucial for sustainable development. This is as explained by informants 1, 2, and 4:

"At that time, because a friend offered to work here, it was not bad to fill my spare time, and it was also not bad to add to help the family, so I considered that"

"Well, that seems like a really easy question; the name of the person deciding to work is because of necessity, especially yes ... even though many people say, "Why are you working again? You are already your husband's responsibility" ... like that. However, the name is our needs or plans for the future that require coffers or we, especially me, as a wife, decided to work because besides for my needs, I also help my husband."

"When I started working, I was single, still unmarried. So, the thought was that you have to work to earn money to help your parents, one of them, and so that you can buy snacks. Now that I am married, I have a choice. Either we want to stay at home or keep working, but Mbak T, here with her husband's permission, chooses to keep working with the aim or with the hope of helping the family economy, that is it".

Informant 3 also had the following similar answer:

"At first, I worked in Jakarta. Well, I did not feel at home at that time; I wanted to go home. I talked to my elder sister, I talked to my mother too, and my mother said, try asking my elder sister, who knows if there are vacancies? I asked my mum, who said there were none, so that I would ask her later. Well, then a few days later. T said, "There are vacancies, but you must come here today, right?" So, I decided to go to work and until now".

Then, the key informant responded to the informants' answers as follows:

"Yes, it is true because, as explained earlier, there are a lot of Ibu PKK (Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga or empowering family welfare) programs that are not running smoothly around here, so we recruit them, and also, instead of them being unemployed, sorry, they might only depend on their husbands, so we better recruit them to help our company."

Self-determination is very important for all informants, as financial independence, and support from a married woman to help the economy in her family. Deciding to return to work to be financially independent is one of the outcomes of this family woman empowerment. This was also conveyed by the key informant regarding one of the reasons for recruiting is to help empower married women so that they are not financially dependent on their families or husbands.

Here, you can see how it turns out that women can fulfill their potential even though they are only freelancers. When referring to the Freelancer Value Proposition approach (Nawaz et al., 2020), which is described with the freelancer approach in Indonesia by (Arifianto et al., 2023), there are similarities in which economic, autonomy, social, development, and work-life balance (WLB) values emerge. When mothers can fulfill their economic needs, their social value is raised, and their autonomy is inherent. In terms of development itself, the company supports their freelance work by providing training that impacts their ability to work. The most important thing,

of course, is that the WLB can be fulfilled. There can be a balance between work and caring for the family amid busy work. This makes the informants feel at home and loyal to the company.

### Conclusion

Empowerment of women within families refers to a process that enables women to take control of their lives and destinies by providing them access to job opportunities and determining their fate and financial independence. This ongoing process involves eliminating structural and cultural barriers that hinder women from reaching their full potential. Women's empowerment has numerous benefits for individuals, communities, and society. This research indicates that when women are empowered, it positively impacts women's economic empowerment, enhances financial independence, and broadens professional horizons. Empowered women also tend to have greater political representation, thus contributing to more inclusive and fair policies, as evidenced by indicators of "Impact," where women boldly express their opinions and advocate for the rights of others, especially in the workplace.

Therefore, the conclusion of this research emphasizes the importance of continuously developing and enhancing strategies for empowering women within families, including through freelance work, considering the context of the garment industry. Recommendations are provided for companies and corporate policies that support the creation of inclusive work environments and support the balance between work and family life for women with families. These conclusions will provide valuable insights for companies and further research in this field.

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