

Gender Relations during Pandemic Era in Indonesia: Negotiation and Resistance of Urban Woman Workers at Work from Home (WFH) in Family

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Abstract: After the COVID-19 pandemic, a new condition (*New Normal*) affects a variety of human activities, especially the working conditions of urban women. Until now, women have been more than viewed as merely objects of domestication, worker exploitation, verbal or physical violence, and other forms of discrimination. This study aims to disclose an alternative perspective on women as subjects actively negotiating their domestic and public roles. This new condition introduces adjustments to women's work-at-home (work-from-home) and family responsibilities during the pandemic (approximately for two years). This research used a qualitative method with in-depth interviews through mapping a new condition of women who were able to negotiate and resist during the pandemic in their families. This study was conducted with working mothers in Surabaya, Sidoarjo, and Gresik. The findings of this study revealed that urban working women frequently negotiate and resist their roles, meaning that gender roles or relations are not static but are always in the process of being.

Keywords: gender relations; negotiations; resistance; urban woman workers; WFH

Abstrak: Setelah pandemi COVID-19, kondisi baru (*New Normal*) mempengaruhi berbagai aktivitas manusia, terutama kondisi kerja wanita perkotaan. Sampai saat ini, wanita telah dilihat lebih dari sekedar objek domestikasi, eksploitasi pekerja, kekerasan verbal atau fisik, dan bentuk-bentuk diskriminasi lainnya. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap perspektif alternatif tentang wanita sebagai subjek yang secara aktif negosiasi peran domestik dan publik mereka. Kondisi baru ini memperkenalkan penyesuaian terhadap tanggung jawab kerja-di-rumah wanita dan keluarga selama pandemi (sekitar 2 tahun). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan wawancara mendalam melalui memetakan kondisi baru wanita yang mampu bernegosiasi dan menentang selama pandemi di keluarga mereka. Penelitian ini dilakukan pada ibu yang bekerja di Surabaya, Sidoarjo, dan Gresik. Temuan dari penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa wanita yang bekerja di kota sering bernegosiasi dan menentang peran mereka, yang berarti bahwa peran atau hubungan gender tidak statis tetapi selalu dalam proses menjadi (*being*).

Kata Kunci: relasi gender; negosiasi; penolakan; perempuan pekerja urban; WFH

A. Introduction

A Report on Global Gender Gap released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed back progress in years toward gender equality. One area experiencing a decline is inequality in the workplace. In its report, WEF stated that although inequality had improved by 58%, achieving equality still took 267.6 years. In Indonesia, the current situation is better than in the past, but the changes are not too significant. Inequality in Indonesia ranked 101 out of 156 countries and ranked 99 in the dimensions of women's economic participation and opportunity on the Index based on the 2021 Global Gender Inequality Index.¹ This condition confirms that the discussion on the role of women in Indonesia is interesting and relevant.

The discussion on the role of women is still worthy of being used as a study amid the dominance of patriarchal culture. Warren said that this relationship is closely related to the construction of society formed by values, beliefs, education, and behavior that uses a patriarchal framework, where there is justification for the relationship of domination-subordination, and oppression of women by men.² This condition becomes relevant in the Indonesian context that patriarchal culture is still influential and alive. This condition often strengthens and even crystallizes when there is a societal crisis. The crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the conditions for women to face a new condition. In Indonesia, the crisis forced the government to set a policy of social restrictions.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Indonesia to implement a system of Large-Scale Social Restrictions to implement Restrictions on Community Activities. Several big cities, such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung, have implemented these restrictions to suppress the spread of COVID-19. However, these restrictions had a micro-to-macro impact. It was proven that the country's economy contracted by -5.32% in the second quarter, and only three sectors experienced an increase, namely agriculture (16.24%) and information and

¹ World Economic Forum, "Annual Report 2020-2021," [www.weforum.org](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Annual_Report_2020_21.pdf), 2021, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Annual_Report_2020_21.pdf.

² Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2000).

communication (3.44%). The deepest contraction of water supply (1.28%) was experienced by the transportation and warehousing sector (-29.22%).³

Besides, the release of data from the Ministry of Manpower as of May 1, 2020, explained that 1,032,960 formal workers were laid off, 375,165 formal sector workers were laid off (PHK), and 314,833 informal system workers were affected by COVID-19, the total number of formal and informal sector workers affected by COVID-19 was 1,722,958.⁴ Furthermore, those still working and not laid off or furloughed would experience a pay cut.⁵

On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed many orders in culture, politics, and religion. The occurrence of massive changes that caused a new condition was known as the new normal.⁶ In the conditions under the policy that required many activities to shift at home, there had been an economic decrease in income. The impact had implications for cases of domestic violence. As a result, there was increased stress in many families in Indonesia.⁷ In this condition, women often experienced violent acts and discrimination.

Throughout 2020-2021, *Komnas Perempuan* (Indonesia National Women Committee) summarized various reports of personal relationship events between husband and wife, love affairs, and personal relationships in the community. The context of the report content was more related to the violence against women. Violence experienced can be in the form of physical or verbal violence. The data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child

³ Badan Pusat Statistik, "Berita Resmi Statistik: Pertumbuhan Ekonomi Indonesia Triwulan II-2020," www.bps.go.id, 2020, https://www.bps.go.id/website/materi_ind/materiBrsInd-20200805114633.pdf.

⁴ Retno Karunia Putri et al., "Efek Pandemi COVID 19: Dampak Lonjakan Angka PHK terhadap Penurunan Perekonomian di Indonesia," *Jurnal Bisnis Manajemen dan Akuntansi (BISMAK)* 1, no. 2 (2021): 72-77, <https://doi.org/10.47701/bismakv1i2.1206>.

⁵ Mohamad Anwar, "Dilema PHK dan Potong Gaji Pekerja di tengah COVID-19," *Adalah: Buletin Hukum & Keadilan* 4, no. 1 (2020): 173-78, <https://doi.org/10.15408/adalah.v4i1.15752>.

⁶ The term 'New Normal' was first used by Roger Mc Namee, "a technology investor," who reviewed it in an article by Polly La Barre entitled "The New Normal" in *Fast Company* magazine on April 30, 2003. According to Roger Mc Namee, who coined the term. The 'New Normal' is the time when it is likely to be given new rules for long term. In the "New Normal" it was more important to do things right than to give in the tyranny of urgency. See Roger McNamee and David Diamond, *The New Normal: Great Opportunities in a Time of Great Risk* (Alberta: Portfolio, 2004).

⁷ Theresia Vania Radhitya, Nunung Nurwati, and Maulana Irfan, "Dampak Pandemi COVID-19 terhadap Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga," *Jurnal Kolaborasi Resolusi Konflik* 2, no. 2 (2020): 111-19, <https://doi.org/10.24198/jkrkv2i2.29119>.

Protection noted that there were 4,696 cases of violence against women and children from January 1 to May 19, 2021. Of these, the majority or 2,742 cases of violence occurred in the household.⁸

The discussion of the data above was interesting to pay attention to the gender relation during the pandemic. The pattern of gender relations in the family was inseparable from the influence of the socio-cultural conditions of the community exist.⁹ The pattern of gender relations in a society that adhered to a patriarchal cultural system could be different from one that adhered to a matriarchal cultural system. While a patriarchal society places the husband or the man in the dominant position as a regulator and decision-maker in his family. On the other hand, the wife or woman was placed in the second position that did not have the authority to make the decisions

In the Javanese proverb, "*swargo nunut neroko katut*". In this context, public affairs or more comprehensive social affairs become the husband's authority. On the other hand, if the wife is involved in social affairs, it is only about matters relating to domestic affairs. A society that adheres to a matriarchal system is the opposite, placing a woman in a dominant position who is authorized to regulate and make decisions in the family and take care of all the affairs of the extended family. The Javanese tribal community widely adopts the patriarchal cultural system. Meanwhile, the matriarchal system is adopted by the Minangkabau tribal community.⁹

Violence and Discrimination against Women

In terms of gender relations during the pandemic, the conditions in which women experienced discrimination were illustrated. Saraswathi and Susrama, in their study, stated that during the pandemic, women played more roles in having the needs of children in terms of parenting, nutrition, psychology, and education.¹⁰ In line with Kamila, the policy of working from home required the

⁸ Cindy Mutia Annur, "Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan dan Anak Banyak Terjadi di Rumah," May 20, 2021, <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2021/05/20/kekerasan-terhadap-perempuan-dan-anak-banyak-terjadi-di-rumah>.

⁹ Stephen K. Sanderson, *Sosiologi Makro, Sebuah Pendekatan terhadap Realitas Sosial*, trans. S. Menno and Farid Wajidi (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 2003).

¹⁰ Putu Sekarwangi Saraswati and I. Nengah Susrama, "Peran Perempuan dalam Keluarga untuk Melindungi serta Pemenuhan Hak Anak di Masa Pandemi COVID-19," in *Prosiding*

women to maintain effective children's learning motivation.¹¹ Ahmad et al showed that women need to balance office work and household work since the fact is that when women work at home, the working hours would be longer (unlimited).¹² It added three times the burden on women, especially for career women. Sari and Zufar explained the level of difficulty of women as breadwinners during the pandemic.¹³ Haekal et al. studied the dual role of women working from home¹⁴, and Mc Laren et al. photographed the triple workload of women during the pandemic in Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Australia.¹⁵

In addition to the increased workload, women also often experienced violence. Collins et al. explain the existence of government policies that are still gender biased and turn a blind eye to the gap in domestic work between men and women.¹⁶ Akuoko et al. proved that women working from home are faced with difficult and conflicting roles that put more pressure on women during the pandemic. Meanwhile, women unable to access social support continue to be stressed and burdened to combine family, parenting, and career roles that ultimately affect their overall well-being.¹⁷ Solórzano et al. emphasized the

Webinar Nasional Peranan Perempuan/Ibu dalam Pemberdayaan Remaja di Masa Pandemi COVID-19 (Denpasar: Universitas Mahasaraswati Press, 2020), 131–38.

¹¹ Aisyatin Kamila, "Peran Perempuan sebagai Garda Terdepan dalam Keluarga dalam Meningkatkan Motivasi Belajar Anak ditengah Pandemi COVID 19," *Jurnal Konseling Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 2 (2020): 75–83, <https://doi.org/10.32806/jkpi.v1i2.21>.

¹² Tanveer Kaur and Preeti Sharma, "A Study on Working Women and Work from Home amid Coronavirus Pandemic," *Journal of Xi'an University of Architecture & Technology* 12, no. 5 (2020): 1400–1408.

¹³ Eka Kartika Sari and Biko NabihFikri Zufar, "Perempuan Pencari Nafkah selama Pandemi COVID-19," *Al-Mada: Jurnal Agama, Sosial, dan Budaya* 4, no. 1 (2021): 13–29, <https://doi.org/10.31538/almada.v4i1.1106>.

¹⁴ Muhammad Haekal and Ainal Fitri, "Dilema Peran Ganda Dosen Perempuan selama pandemi COVID-19 di Indonesia," *JAS-PT (Jurnal Analisis Sistem Pendidikan Tinggi Indonesia)* 4, no. 2 (2020): 171, <https://doi.org/10.36339/jaspt.v4i2.366>.

¹⁵ Helen Jaqueline McLaren et al., "COVID-19 and Women's Triple Burden: Vignettes from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam and Australia," *Social Sciences* 9, no. 5 (2020): 87, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9050087>.

¹⁶ Caitlyn Collins et al., "COVID-19 and the Gender Gap in Work Hours," *Gender, Work & Organization* 28, no. S1 (2021): 101–12, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12506>.

¹⁷ Philpa Birago Akuoko, Vincent Aggrey, and Jennifer Dokbila Mengba, "Mothering with a Career during a Pandemic; the Case of the Ghanaian Woman," *Gender, Work & Organization* 28, no. S2 (2021): 277–88, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12711>.

existence of a quarantine policy at home, or working from home for husbands and wives; then, the house is present to show its paradoxical function by becoming a new room for violence against women. Solórzano et al. revealed that Ecuador has the highest violence against women.¹⁸

Mc Laren et al. revealed that of the four countries, namely Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Australia, that were sampled in their study, it showed the triple burden of women, Malaysia occupied the most extreme country.¹⁹ Considering Malaysia is a country with a strongly patriarchal culture, the role of women is more centered at home, regardless of their position as housewives or career women. The government only allows the head of the family (male) to leave the house, for example, to buy the necessities of life. Meanwhile, a woman with a job, such as a health worker, must spend the days at risk. It could get fines or lawsuits from the security forces who oversee the quarantine policy of the region.²⁰ Of course, this policy negatively impacts individual woman and their families. Also, in his study at the Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Center, Muhammad specifically pointed to the existence of a single factor causing violence against women, namely because of socio-cultural factors or the imbalance of power relations that led to women's subordination.²¹

Many studies explained that women often experienced discrimination and violence during the pandemic. Women in a social context were positioned as passive objects, whereas the prevailing social situation and structure always left room for resistance and negotiation. This study proved this. It meant many results of a survey of the position of women during the pandemic. This study showed new results regarding women's active and dominant role in gender relations during the pandemic. This study was conducted in Surabaya, Gresik and Sidoarjo. The reasons for conducting a study in these three areas were the implementation of large-scale social restrictions and the implementation of level 4 Community Activity Restrictions. On this basis, explaining gender relations in

¹⁸ David Alejandro Navarrete Solórzano, María Rodríguez Gamez, and Osvaldo Jiménez Pérez de Corcho, "Gender Violence on Pandemic of COVID-19," *International Journal of Health Sciences* 4, no. 2 (2020): 10–18, <https://doi.org/10.29332/ijhs.v4n2.437>.

¹⁹ McLaren et al., "COVID-19 and Women's Triple Burden: Vignettes from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam and Australia."

²⁰ McLaren et al.

²¹ Muhammad Rifa'at Adiakarti Farid, "Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan dalam Ketimpangan Relasi Kuasa: Studi Kasus di Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Center," *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender* 14, no. 2 (2019): 175–90, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sav.14i2.4062>.

the family when work-at-home policies were implemented in several areas in East Java became relevant and exciting.

The Power of Urban Working Women

Angela Mc. Robbie said that women in the era must have the courage to choose their life and that individuals must now select the kind of life they want,²² in line with Mc. Robbie, Butler said there should be no reason for women to be afraid to vote because no regime has the full power to say something is wrong or deviant. Butler said, "I opposed those regimes of truth that stipulated that certain gendered expressions were found to be false or derivatives, and the others, true and original."²³

Butler's opinion can be a foothold that women can choose to be themselves or live how they want. Not only because the social construction has given them a particular identity but not because they are objects that are monitored to always act as should women "should". Working from home for women creates new relationships in the family; urban women can find a middle ground that allows them to be who they want to be.

According to phenomenological research on the meaning of employment for women entrepreneurs, there are three meanings when women work. First as a type of worship to be a woman while maintaining the family's financial situation, second as a means of achieving wealth, and third as a means of striving for material independence, whether by sustaining themselves independently or without the husband's help. Meanwhile, the meaning of work is defined as a set of values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations that people have for work.²⁴

Aisyah claims that every theory, including structural-functional, conflict, and feminist theories, acknowledges that socio-cultural construction substantially impacts the divisional roles performed by men (husbands) and women (wives) in the family structure. It means that socio-cultural development plays a vital role in creating contributing relationships between men and women

²² Angela McRobbie, "Postfeminism and Popular Culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime," in *Interrogating Postfeminism*, ed. Yvonne Tasker and Lynn Spigel Diane Negra (New York: Duke University Press, 2020), 27–39, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822390411-003>.

²³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

²⁴ Hugo Gaggiotti, "Going from Spain and Latin America to Central Asia: Decision-Making of Expatriation and Meaning of Work," *The Central Asia Business Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 8–22.

in the institutional family, or inequality occurs.²⁵ It means that they are both active subjects.

Sih Natalia Sukmi, in her study “Narrative of the Power of online business woman” discusses the power theory of Michel Foucault and Gramsci’s approach to understanding how women use power in their interactions with technology and the patriarchal as the more comprehensive socio-cultural system. The results of his study show that women have control over technology. He gets practical advantages such as generating income, being more valued, and interacting with the outside environment. However, it is faced with the patriarchal system, and the more comprehensive social system, and women are, in fact, powerless. She is hegemonized with her female status by calling herself “not a worker”, only “adding to her husband’s income.” She remains a double burden to balance the domestic and public spheres.²⁶

B. Method

This study used a qualitative method with the phenomenological approach based on the subjective or phenomenological experience of the individual. It focused on human subjective experiences and stories and the interpretation of the implementation in the world.²⁷

The subjects in this study were urban woman workers in Surabaya, Gresik, and Sidoarjo, who have taken purposively identifying them. From the basic data, 15 informants were determined who, in their explanations, showed the relationships tended to be equal or dominant to their partners (see Table 1). The selection of the three regions was based on restrictive policies and patterns of work-from-home and workplace institutions, especially in urban areas. In addition, the Gender Development Index (IPG) in 2020 in East Java has decreased from 90.91 to 90.07 where there are two regions (Surabaya and Gresik have decreased). Meanwhile, the specific criteria for informants in this study were women who worked formally and applied to work from home.

²⁵ Nur Aisyah, “Relasi Gender dalam Institusi Keluarga (Pandangan Teori Sosial dan Feminis),” *Muwazah* 5, no. 2 (2014): 203–24, <https://doi.org/10.28918/muwazah.v5i2.346>.

²⁶ Sih Natalia Sukmi, “Narasi Kuasa Perempuan Pekerja Bisnis Online,” *Jurnal Sosiologi Pendidikan Humanis* 3, no. 1 (2019): 55–66, <https://doi.org/10.17977/um021v3i1p55-66>.

²⁷ Lexy J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, Revised Ed (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 2018).

Determining the informant, the researcher can focus on resistance practice and negotiation. In that context, researchers use Butler's theory.

The data from in-depth interviews with informants are more accurate and valid because it corresponds directly to the phenomenon experienced. The researcher serves as the primary device, sampling data sources was carried out purposively, snowballs, collection techniques by triangulation (combined), data analysis was inductive or qualitative, and the results of qualitative research emphasized the meaning or findings of the phenomenon. The process of inductive data analysis started from specific themes to general themes and interpreted the meaning of the data.

Table 1
The Research Informants

No	Name	Age	Address	Profession
1	ENL	33 years	Surabaya	Teacher
2	NW	30 years	Surabaya	Nurse
3	R	38 years	Gresik	Government employees
4	FNL	45 years	Sidoarjo	Lecturer
5	NS	39 years	Surabaya	Government employees
6	SB	35 years	Gresik	Factory worker
7	RT	40 years	Sidoarjo	Government employees
8	DK	30 years	Sidoarjo	Labor
9	SL	36 years	Gresik	Entrepreneur
10	ES	37 years	Surabaya	Factory worker
11	HN	29 years	Surabaya	Private employees
12	Y	34 years	Sidoarjo	Teacher
13	IM	31 years	Gresik	Teacher
14	VR	30 years	Surabaya	Lecturer
15	SI	38 years	Surabaya	Labor

C. Results and Discussion

Gender Relations during Work from Home (WFH)

In the initial observation process through a questionnaire, 50 informants filled out the form. From these informants, it was finally identified that 35 people often experienced discriminatory actions and could not act actively. The informant emphasized that women often experienced discriminatory actions during the pandemic, both from family and office policies. Discriminatory actions

can take the form of additional office burdens, unfair policies, to acts of symbolic or physical violence. It was illustrated that the 35 informants above were the same as many studies described above. The women often experienced unequal and unfair actions.

While on the other hand, 15 women tend to be active and even dominant in family relationships. These 15 informants were the focus of this study. This study described the interesting findings about gender relations during a pandemic. Women were not passive subjects and tended to surrender to the domination of patriarchal culture. From the initial questionnaire, three typologies of women workers were mapped during the pandemic. The informants can be categorized into 3 types: 1) dominated, 2) active, and 3) dominant. The dominated woman type is still considered and held a patriarchal Javanese tradition. In addition, there was religious authority understood in a patriarchal way.

Meanwhile, the Active type was a woman who tried to adapt their roles and negotiate culture. Especially in the relationship with men/husbands, the dominant type was a woman who played a very strong position and could get out of the shackles of patriarchy. Therefore, at this level, as Foucault said, power would always give birth to anti-power. "Surveillance can be turned to counter-surveillance,"²⁸. The 15 women in this study illustrated this point. In detail, several active and dominant roles during the pandemic are described.

Conceptually, this active role was reflected in its relations in the areas of childcare relations, adaptation to new jobs, and family decisions on health and education. In this context, women tend to be active and dominant in determining and advising their partners.

For example, 12 informants actively share roles with their husbands regarding the childcare process. Pandemic conditions tend to make parenting patterns conducted by the family itself. The reason was the activities' limitation and concern over environmental conditions due to the high number of COVID-19 transmissions. Under these conditions, childcare hours were regulated. One example occurred in informants NN and HW. She and her husband arranged a babysitting schedule. They considered that their child had just started elementary school and needed assistance. Then the hour set was programmed to accompany the child. In the morning, she was guarded by her, and in the

²⁸ Hille Koskela, "Cam Era' — the Contemporary Urban Panopticon," *Surveillance & Society* 1, no. 3 (2002): 292–313, <https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v1i3.3342>.

afternoon, while attending the reciting Qur'an, her husband had a turn to look after. The 12 informants above, based on the results of the interviews, had an agreement on time in parenting. Of course, this differed from other informants who handled caring for their children as babysitters and household assistants.

The previous study explained that the meeting needed parenting, health, nutrition, and psychological care for children. They were also concerned that it could be essential to be cared for by their parents, especially mothers (women).²⁹ It meant that for working mothers (career women) that is undoubtedly an additional job that must be completed at home to make children's learning effective at home so that the two go hand in hand.³⁰ Women's workload would have tripled if it were quantified, including earning a living.³¹ However, it was not the case for the 12 informants in this study. They were active subjects that tried to negotiate with their husbands. The division of roles was unlike the traditional Indonesian family division of labor, which allowed for gender. The women did domestic work, and the men did not. The data from one of the informants; below is evidence of the expression regarding the division of work roles.

I (private teacher) and my husband (private teacher) had been undergoing WFH since July 2020 with children (elementary school age) together who were studying from home. I usually put in daycare when I was at work, but now I have to accompany the children home because daycare is closed. As a result, my routine was tighter because I had to attend my children to school and study longer than I would teach. Then it was followed by cooking and usual home activities. It was exhausting because the work was endless. However, that's all we can handle because we shared the schedule with our husbands. Not infrequently, the husband also cooked; we took turns. Sometimes, I also bought gallons from *Indomaret* minimarket as long as this walk was fine.³²

JW, a mother who works in a private hospital in Surabaya, also expressed this. She has to share the role with her husband, who works as a lecturer. Regarding the division of roles, he mentioned the percentage of work roles.

²⁹ Saraswati and Susrama, "Peran Perempuan dalam Keluarga untuk Melindungi serta Pemenuhan Hak Anak di Masa Pandemi COVID-19."

³⁰ Aisyatin Kamila, "Peran Perempuan sebagai Garda Terdepan dalam Keluarga dalam Meningkatkan Motivasi Belajar Anak ditengah Pandemi COVID 19."

³¹ Sari and Zufar, "Perempuan Pencari Nafkah selama Pandemi COVID-19."

³² NN, interview.

During WFH, I divided some household chores between my husband and I; the portion was approximately 50:50. So that I could finish my work, my husband could work quietly.³³

The description confirmed that there was an effort with their partner to start adapting themselves to the conditions of working at home. There was a bargaining process in dividing roles in resolving household affairs. It meant there was a dynamic process of gender relations in the family. The gender relationships in this context were the concept of social relations between men and women based on quality, skills, roles, and functions in social conventions that were dynamic, following social conditions that are always evolving.³⁴

Apart from children's care, one of the problems families often faced during a pandemic was the issue of adapting to a new job. Work usually done in the office had now shifted significantly to home. Five informants confirmed that the shift from work to home made them more dominant. They considered that the house had been their dominant area. When the husband moved into the house, the husband was obliged to follow the rules. ER, one of the informants, explained that the pandemic period made him play many roles related to family matters. The pandemic has reduced economic income. Since there was a reduction in salary from both offices related to this, it was illustrated that women were more dominant and had better adaptations.

The reduction in salary from the office made me think hard about additional income. I sold online, and the results were good for an additional family.³⁵

The same was also conveyed by family, a private employee at a company in Gresik. He had a side business during the pandemic. Her ability to make cakes and other snacks was used to increase her income.

"During the pandemic, I made a snack market. The process of making it is on Saturday and Sunday. Therefore, I made a pre-order. The results were quite helpful for the family economy."³⁶

The description above confirmed that women's adaptation to new jobs tends to be better. It was in line with the study results of LPEM FEB UI with

³³ JW, interview.

³⁴ Aisyah, "Relasi Gender dalam Institusi Keluarga (Pandangan Teori Sosial dan Feminis)."

³⁵ ER, interview.

³⁶ RT, interview.

Tokopedia. The study explained that women showed sensitivity and responsiveness in overcoming problems during a pandemic. Even though the data showed that 5% of women lost their jobs during the pandemic, compared to 3.9% of men, during the pandemic, in this emergency, women were quicker to respond and provide solutions in the business sector. More women started businesses than men during the pandemic.

Another description that made the women very dominant is that women were often said to be subordinated because of the double workload. Especially when it came to poverty, that a house was a place to study and work at certain hours to no-limited time was certainly a more complicated issue for couples still living in a big family house. Especially if they were in a family position that was not too well off where the house is limited in small space, they had difficulty finding a private room that could be used for work.³⁷ The problem of poverty was indeed vulnerable for women. However, from the description of the informants above, it can be seen that women can become dominant and actively negotiate their roles with their partners.

From this description, women became very dominant. The work area division was no longer absolute in the hands of men. The implication of the above was related to determining education and family health issues. For health issues during the pandemic, women became the subjects that actively protested against family health. YG, one of the informants, explained that all his family members had to take vitamins. He expressed this directly and did not hesitate to reprimand his entire family if he forgot to take the vitamin.

My family's health matters are rather strict. All I have to do is live clean and diligently take vitamins.³⁸

HS informants did the same thing. Apart from health issues, education is also one thing to consider. She often discusses with her husband regarding her child's education fate. It happened because her first child was entering junior high school. There are often disputes between couples regarding the choice of school.

³⁷ Haekal and Fitri, "Dilema Peran Ganda Dosen Perempuan selama Pandemi COVID-19 di Indonesia."

³⁸ YG, interview.

At first, his father wanted his son to attend a public school. But I refused. I am more comfortable in Islamic private schools since there is religious content. After discussion, the husband finally agreed to go to a religious school.³⁹

In addition to the two informants above, seven informants were similar in determining the health and education of their children. They described how active they were in gender relations. In the family context, women were not only complementary, such as the Javanese creed (wells, mattresses, kitchens). They were active and essential to determining the family's fate. Equal and active relationships were depicted in the lives of the informants above. It was certainly in line with Parsons; the family was like a warm-blooded animal that can maintain its body temperature to remain constant even though environmental conditions change. It did not mean that the family was always static and could not change, but that it constantly adapted smoothly to the environment or, in Parson's language, that was called dynamic equilibrium.⁴⁰ Moreover, the position of the informants as working women that their ability to generate money for family income was one of the tools of women's power in influencing the interaction patterns of women and men in family relationships to provide space for negotiation and resistance to gender relations with husbands in the family. Since husbands whose wives could generate their income were more appreciative of their wives.⁴¹

Women's Negotiation and Resistance

Discriminatory practices occurred among some women workers, but some women were able to build relationships differently. The practice of negotiation and role resistance often happens, and the study showed that gender roles or relations are not static but are always in the process of being. Most informants stated that they did domestic work more dominantly than their husbands, but they admitted that they still had a good relationship with their partners.

However, several other informants in the management of his household stated that while working at home, there was a division of labor roles between partners. They did the household chores with a 50:50 portion. The informants

³⁹ GH, interview.

⁴⁰ Aisyah, "Relasi Gender dalam Institusi Keluarga (Pandangan Teori Sosial dan Feminis)."

⁴¹ Sukmi, "Narasi Kuasa Perempuan Pekerja Bisnis Online."

who stated that there was a shift in gender relations in their households during the pandemic were those with an average monthly wage of 2-3 million in the formal sector, followed by other informants under 2 million. It meant that the condition that female urban workers with a wage position equal to or slightly greater than their husbands (men) indicated the existence of women's bargaining power in negotiating and their resistance in family relations with their husbands. Therefore, women's independence and economic power impact their ability to organize equal power relations with their partners.

In other conditions, informants who stated that their husbands were affected by the pandemic through termination of employment (PHK) and salary reductions admitted that there was a transfer process (transition) of domestic tasks from wives (urban women workers) to husbands.

My husband had to switch jobs to online motorcycle taxis (*gojek*) due to termination of employment (PHK), so the freer portion of his time ended up being done by his husband so that I could still work for the family's economic income.⁴²

In addition, in the negotiation process on gender relations during the pandemic, Michelet explained that now the practice of consumption and choosing certain products can be a politics of product. Since "every product was embedded in a political context".⁴³ This practice showed that the women were able to regulate how women were dominant in choosing vitamins and food products for the family. There was a new rule for renegotiating household affairs. It was managed initially by women but is distributed to men now. Economic affairs were one of the main triggers that changed the gender relations in the household, especially during the pandemic. In this study, this was referred to as the practice of negotiation in the family.

In addition, this study also described how women could get out of the shackles of patriarchy. Foucault said that power would always give birth to anti-power. Some things that were trying to be opposed are social structures that tend to place domesticated women to do domestic stuff at home. In addition, previous data also explained that it was not only men who determined the essential matters related to the family's fate. Several informants described how they were

⁴² HK, interview.

⁴³ Michele Micheletti, "Shopping with and for Virtues," in *Political Virtue and Shopping* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2003), 149–68, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403973764_5.

able to resist the existing patriarchal culture. There were efforts to build equal relations between men and women during the pandemic. This study also tried to show it during the pandemic. The women were powerless and often experienced discrimination that was not entirely true. Informants in this study indicated that they could resist the existing social conditions.

From Vulnerable to Resistant: The Position of Working Women amid the COVID Pandemic

This study's description of negotiations and resistance related to gender relations during the pandemic explained how women were not passive subjects. Some respondents could negotiate the division of domestic tasks and meet the economic needs of the household. The concept of vulnerability, as opposed to passive victimization, explained how women could turn vulnerability into part of the resistance effort.⁴⁴ This concept explained how our relationship with the environment opened up opportunities for vulnerability to become a space that could respond and accept existing conditions by mobilizing vulnerability and becoming a base of power. Therefore, the vulnerability did not need the effort to overcome them. However, it was assumed that he was in the same position, with a different shape, and modified the form of an attitude of resistance. Based on Butler's reconceptualization, the result showed that the resistance did not need the conflict with vulnerability.⁴⁵

Traditionally, the vulnerability had been addressed to women associated with the job gives the responsibility to "take care" (both in the household, children, and formal employment). The division of paid and unpaid work exacerbated this responsibility. In the world of work, they were represented as those who carried the image of being more caring, a figure of protector for others, and similar unpaid household work.⁴⁶ Therefore, it was supported by the current pandemic conditions, the jobs assigned to these women was becoming more real.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

⁴⁵ Lea Katharina Reiss, Andrew Kozhevnikov, and Sara Louise Muhr, "Between Vulnerability and Resistance: How a Woman Copes with Dramatic Implications of COVID-19 in Russia," *Gender, Work & Organization* 28, no. S2 (2021): 574–86, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12695>.

⁴⁶ Bobbi Thomason and Inmaculada Macias-Alonso, "COVID-19 and Raising the Value of Care," *Gender, Work & Organization* 27, no. 5 (2020): 705–8,

The image of the responsibility to “care more, be more nurturing” imposed on women became a powerful way to provide agency space and strengthen the justification for this task.⁴⁷ According to Collins, the task of nurturing women’s work is an important reason for creating political institutions.⁴⁸ It was the answer to the dilemma of vulnerability to women embodied in the core of the nurturing ethic.

Care work cannot be ignored or shunted into the private realm. Instead, it is a central fact of the human condition and one of the primary reasons human beings create political institutions. Responses to vulnerability enacted in responsibility forms are considered the core of care ethics.⁴⁹

The women’s position in the existing data meant a form of ethics to improve or even create a better life, both from a social and economic perspective. According to Tronto, caring is an action comprised of everything people do to maintain, continue, and repair their “world” (including our bodies, ourselves, and our environment) to live in it as well as possible.⁵⁰

Women, in many studies, were in a vulnerable position, especially during the pandemic. This study showed that women could be active subjects in a pandemic era. They were able to negotiate and even resist the patriarchal social construction. Women could build equal relations and were often very dominant in specific contexts. Working at home became a new space for women to actualize themselves in the family’s social structure.

D. Conclusion

There are three types of power relations between urban women workers working at home in the family: 1) dominated, 2) active, and 3) dominant. From

<https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12461>; Reiss, Kozhevnikov, and Muhr, “Between Vulnerability and Resistance: How a Woman Copes with Dramatic Implications of COVID-19 in Russia.”

⁴⁷ Daniel Engster, “Care Ethics, Dependency, and Vulnerability,” *Ethics and Social Welfare* 13, no. 2 (2019): 100–114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2018.1533029>; Reiss, Kozhevnikov, and Muhr, “Between Vulnerability and Resistance: How a Woman Copes with Dramatic Implications of COVID-19 in Russia.”

⁴⁸ Reiss, Kozhevnikov, and Muhr, “Between Vulnerability and Resistance: How a Woman Copes with Dramatic Implications of COVID-19 in Russia.”

⁴⁹ Collins et al., “COVID-19 and the Gender Gap in Work Hours.”

⁵⁰ Joan C Tronto, “Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12, no. 4 (1987): 644–63, <https://doi.org/10.1086/494360>; Joan C. Tronto, “Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care,” in *An Ethic of Care* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1993).

the 50 informants who were used as study subjects, it was identified that 35 people often experienced discriminatory actions and could not act actively. The informant emphasized that women often experienced discriminatory actions during the pandemic, both from family and office policies. Discriminatory actions can take the form of additional office burdens, unfair policies to acts of symbolic or physical violence.

It is called dominated, and there are 15 which represent the active and dominant types. The discussion in this study focuses on 15 types of active and dominant women. This study illustrates how women become active and dominant when working at home. It relates to child-rearing, adaptation to new ways of working, and health and education decisions within the family.

This study describes how women can practice resistance and negotiation over the existing patriarchal culture. There are efforts to build equal relations between men and women during the pandemic. The findings of this study show that women are active subjects in contrast to many previous studies. Working at home during the pandemic has become a new space for women to actualize themselves in the family's social structure, which seeks to build equal and non-discriminatory relations.

This study even further shows how the vulnerability embedded in a woman's image as a worker in the domestic and formal sectors became a power base to do such resistance. As a worker who acts as the sole breadwinner, the woman has a space to strengthen her role to "nurture" and fulfill her and her kid's needs as a form of ethics and create political institutions simultaneously.[s]

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