

UNIVERSITY WOMEN PERCEPTIONS ON MIGRATION (MERANTAU) AND WORKING OVERSEAS IN FACING ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

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Abstract

This descriptive study aims to explore university women' perceptions on migration (Merantau) and working overseas in facing Asean Economic Community. 300 participants were identified using accidental random sampling. A Survey was used in this study. The finding showed that 69.4%) of respondents perceived that women have important roles in empowering their family economy. Then, 76.3% of them acknowledged that working overseas have provided significant improvement of economy for their family in the village.). 61.3% of respondents stated that they went abroad to continue their study to Post graduate programme. Meanwhile, there were only 35.3% of respondents declared that they wanted to work in Indonesia. Other 3% of respondents acknowledged that they wanted to become household and their husband should fulfill their daily life expenses. It also found that 85% of Minangkabau women could compete in having

good career as compared with Women in ASEAN countries. 74.3% declared that they must improve their softskill capabilities. Finally, there 85.3% of respondents declared that they were ready to face Asean Economic community (AEC).

Keywords: *Percetion, Migration, the Empowerment of Family Economy, Asean Economic Community (AEC).*

Abstrak

Penelitian deskriptif bertujuan melihat persepsi mahasiswi Strata 1 Perguruan Tinggi Negeri kota Padang Propinsi Sumatera Barat tentang merantau ke luar negeri guna pemberdayaan ekonomi keluarga dan menjawab tantangan Masyarakat Ekonomi Asean (MEA). Sampel penelitian 300 orang mahasiswi yang diambil secara acak by accident. Jenis penelitian yaitu deskriptif dimana data penelitian dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan angket tertutup. Data diolah dengan menggunakan teknik persentase. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan sebagian besar (69,4%) responden berpersepsi perempuan memiliki peran dalam memberdayakan ekonomi keluarga. Merantau keluar negeri akan memberikan keuntungan ekonomi yang signifikan bagi keluarga di kampung (76,3%). Untuk itu 61,3% responden menyatakan akan melanjutkan kuliah sampai program magister dan doktoral di dalam atau keluar negeri. Sebagian kecil responden (35,3%) ingin langsung bekerja di wilayah Indonesia untuk dapat meningkatkan ekonomi keluarga. Hanya 3% yang ingin menikah atau menjadi ibu rumah tangga semata setamat kuliah dan ikut dengan suami karena kepatuhan pada orang tua dan calon suami. Masih ada 0,3% yang berpikir bahwa bekerja atau berkarir hanya kewajiban laki-laki sementara perempuan lebih baik dirumah. Sebagian besar responden; (1) optimis mampu bersaing sebagai gadis minang (85%) dalam MEA dan mengalahkan perempuan dari negara ASEAN lainnya (74,3%), (3) perlu meningkatkan softskill dan kreatifitas sebagai gadis minang (85,3%) dalam menjawab tantangan MEA.

Keywords: *Persepsi, Merantau, Pemberdayaan Ekonomi Keluarga, Masyarakat Ekonomi Asean (MEA).*

A. Introduction

Women in Minangkabau play important roles in maintaining their family economy. According to Amir (2003), there are three systems of matrilineal tradition in Minangkabau: (1) The descendent is from matrilineal lineage, (2) Marriage should be with other group, which is well-known as matrilineal exogamy. (3) Mother has central role in providing education, security, wealth and family welfare.

Gender issues on career, employment, and cultural factors become interesting topic if they are viewed from matrilineal tradition of Minangkabau that still remains matrilineal system. Comprehensive and authoritative study of the society, history, and traditions of this complex people. Studies of the Minangkabau since the middle of the nineteenth century have often indicated that matrilineality is giving way to a bilateral or even patrilineally inclined system¹. Matrilineal system is surviving, owing to Minangkabau mobility². Exploring matrilineality's evolution in response to changing times, he studied the reasons for the tradition's resilience. In his study, Kato also adopted an historical approach, claiming that a static analysis can capture only part - or seemingly contradictory parts - of a complex and changing culture. He also determined different types of migration that characterizes three distinct historical periods: village segmentation - a migration to establish new settlements - which took place up until the mid-nineteenth century; circulatory migration to small towns and markets by individual males, a distinguishing feature of the period in the late nineteenth century.

Meanwhile, the Indonesian economic crisis in 1997 had influenced the family system which is managed by women. It was caused by the increasing prices of daily demands, education,

¹Tsuyosi Kato, *Matrilineality and Migration* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

²*Ibid.*

health and safety. The increase in prices of these basic necessities is very burdensome for the household headed by women. One of the efforts to overcome economic crisis is by looking for a job overseas, which is well-known as *merantau* or migration. It is hoped that the income will be increased by working abroad. Working overseas provided significant economic benefits for families in the villages. Remittances sent to the village have improved the economic life of the family, although there were also families which can only help the domestic life of the mother who kept the children in the village.³

Previously, there were only men who migrated (*merantau*), but the activity of *merantau* or migration to overseas was also done by Minangkabau women.⁴ The study conducted by Machdaliza showed that the women who have divorced or leaved by their husband strongly eagered to work abroad.⁵

Based on Overseas Labor Recommendation Card, the statistics showed that there were 81 female Indonesian Migrant Workers and 11 Male Indonesian Migrant Workers originated from Minangkabau who worked overseas during September 2013. 84 of them worked in Malaysia, 3 people worked in Saudi Arabia, 3 people were assigned in Singapore, 1 person were placed in Russia, and 1 person was in Kuwait. Most of the Indonesian Migrant Workers worked as operator or tailor/ construction. According to data of January- December 2013, based on the education level, most of the Minangkabau women who worked overseas were high school graduates and few of them hold Diploma degree. None of them had bachelor degree.

³ Machdaliza, "Pemanfaatan Remitan Perantau Perempuan Kepala Rumah Tangga Bagi Keluarga di Daerah Asal (Studi Kasus Tenaga Kerja Perempuan Kepala Rumah Tangga Asal Sumatera Barat)," 2005.

⁴ Muarif, *Rabasia Sukses Orang Minang di Perantauan* (Yogyakarta: Pinus Book Publisher, 2009).

⁵ Machdaliza, "Pemanfaatan Remitan Perantau Perempuan Kepala Rumah Tangga Bagi Keluarga di Daerah Asal (Studi Kasus Tenaga Kerja Perempuan Kepala Rumah Tangga Asal Sumatera Barat)."

In fact, in general there has been an economic susceptibility suffered by women as a result of the minor jobs the women get that only have low income with no insurance, health issues, women reproduction issues, informal and exploitative. Most of women are exploited and tend to work at home. Housemaid, prostitute, free lancer, and home workers are some of the examples. As a matter of fact, there is no gap between male and female viewed from their education level. It means that from the equality perspective, partnership and justice, women should have an equal contribution with men in helping the economy especially family economy. Working women will indirectly contribute to the economic growth of Indonesia.

The fact showed that job and career are highly necessities in human life, including women. In reality, the increasing number of unemployment rate is still alarming. According to recent census data taken from BPS on August 2013, this rate reached 7.39 million as compared to 2012.⁶ The government policy on the monetarism in the acceptance of civil servants during the next 5-10 years becomes big concern in the career for the Indonesian young generation. Meanwhile, Indonesia has potential human resources, especially for productive age of population in ASEAN which is 38: 100. This means that for every 100 residents of ASEAN, 38 of them are Indonesian citizens.

According to the data taken from ASEAN Productivity Organization (APO), there are only 4.3% from 1000 Indonesian employers are skillful, while there are 8.3% for Philippine, 32.6% for Malaysia, and 34.7% for Singapore. Whereas, Asean Economic Community (AEC) will be enacted in 2015, in which there will be free flow of traffic of goods, services, investment, and capital as well as the movement of businesses and labor freedom among ASEAN countries.⁷

⁶“Badan Pusat Statistik,” accessed November 6, 2013, <http://www.bps.go.id/getfile.php?news=105>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

This condition requires the optimization of human empowerment, especially women through education as a process to assist individuals interacts with other life roles (Samuel T. Gladding, 2012: 404) . In addition, cultural factors which become one of the AEC demands is in line with the multicultural competitiveness that must be understood by people who wants to build his or her career.

Further investigation showed that Minangkabau women leave their hometown to work overseas not only for the hope to increase their economy status, but it also concerns with the courage and willingness in breaking the norms and rules in Minangkabau society, and to be able to adapt with new culture in foreign countries. Not to mention the need for fluent foreign language skill. So, when Minangkabau women migrate and work overseas there will be more complex issues occur if it is compared to men. Moreover, the AEC challenge and the increase of competition in looking for a job make the need to migrate and work overseas for Minangkabau women becomes high. In short, it can be concluded that migration for Minangkabau women has conflict potential and need to be addressed properly.

Based on the discussion above, the researchers are interested to conduct a research about educated women's perceptions (the students who study in universities in Padang) about the culture of merantau (migration) to foreign countries in raising the income of their family and to face the AEC challenge.

B. Discussion

1. Perception

a. The Definition of Perception

Perception as a cognitive process experienced by everyone in comprehending information about their environment through

their sight, hearing, comprehension, feeling and smelling.⁸ The key to understand the perception is to know that perception itself is a unique interpretation of a situation and not a definite record about the situation. In line with it, perception is a process to know or to identify an object or an event/ phenomenon with the help of the five senses. The most important thing from perception is the tendency to see an object as a constant thing even though there are variations in observing it.⁹

In short, Krech (1962) in Miftah Thoha concluded that perception is a complex cognitive process that produces a unique image about a fact which might be completely different from the fact itself.¹⁰ Duncan in Miftah Thoha described that perception becomes significant if it is viewed beyond the five senses and it will become an important element in adjusting the human's behavior.¹¹ The process of data perception includes adding or subtracting the real event or fact which is sensed by someone. Thus, perception is not merely what someone gets from the five senses, because it involves a cognitive process, biologic mechanism, past experience, prediction for a future and human's needs. For example, a worker might be considered good by a supervisor, yet he might be considered bad by another supervisor. That is a perception.

b. The Process of Perception

The process of perception starts from a selective observation. The first important sub process of perception is the stimulus or the surrounding environment. The beginning of perception starts when someone faces a situation or stimulus. The situation might come directly from the five senses or it might come from the socio-cultural environment.¹² The next

⁸ Thoha Miftah, *Prilaku Organisasi: Konsep Dasar dan Aplikasinya* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2005).

⁹ Chaplin C. P., *Kamus Psikologi* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 1993).

¹⁰ Thoha Miftah, *Prilaku Organisasi: Konsep Dasar dan Aplikasinya*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

sub process of perception is registration, interpretation and feedback.¹³ In the registration phase, perception will be affected by physical mechanisms which are hearing and seeing. It means that a person will hear or see information sent to him/her. Next he/she will register all of the information before he/she goes on to the next sub process called interpretation.

Interpretation is an important cognitive aspect of perception. The process of interpretation is based on the learning, motivation and attitude of a person. The learning, motivation and an attitude of one person will differ from another person. Because of that, interpretation of the same information will be different with one and another. This is how perception differs from interpretation in which interpretation is an important sub process of perception. The last sub process of perception is feedback. In this sub process, someone's perception about something will be affected by the feedback he/she gets.

In conclusion, perception starts with a stimulus which is an event, then it is processed by the five senses of an individual. Next, all of the information processed will be registered, interpreted and given feedback. Interpretation is an important part because it is a cognitive process which will vary due to the uniqueness of an individual's motivation, attitude and learning.

c. Factors Influencing the Perception

Generally, the development of someone's perception will be influenced by his/her psychology, family and culture as well as social environment which include attitude and value. The intrinsic factors of an individual that will affect the perception are learning, motivation, and personality. Meanwhile the external factor will be intensity, measurement, repetition, movement, and any new things for the existing stimulus.¹⁴

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

2. The Term Merantau for Minangkabau Women

The term *merantau*, in Minangkabau society, means working in the foreign regions and abroad.¹⁵ According to Mochtar Naim there are some basic elements of *merantau* distinguished from the term *migration*; (a) leaving hometown, (b) by their own decision, (c) either for a long period or not, (d) to make a living, studying or looking for experiences, (e) usually with the intention of returning home, and (f) become entrenched as one of the social value in Minangkabau.¹⁶ Migration, in compare, means the movement of people from one place to another, not necessarily intend to return to their hometown. *Perantau* usually come home with prosperity, authority, innovative prestige, and also some new ideas and knowledge from the outside world.¹⁷

The indicator of Minangkabau women working abroad is a growing phenomenon since the 80s along with the open opportunities for women to work other than doing the household. Based on the data from the Padang Labor Department office, in 1997/1998 72 workers had been sent abroad consist of 34 men and 38 women. In 1998/1999 the number of the workers increased to 632 people: 357 female workers and 275 male workers.

This phenomenon is increasing because of the increasing number of the labor services (recruitment agency) for working abroad in Padang. At first, *merantau* abroad is only monopolized by men. Although there are women who live overseas, but they are originally follow their husbands. The husbands who lived overseas and have succeeded then will bring their wives to live with them.

For men *merantau* are the cultural demands. As for women, *merantau* is part of the dynamics of family life. The courage of

¹⁵ Muarif, *Rahasia Sukses Orang Minang di Perantauan*.

¹⁶ Naim Mohtar, *Merantau: Minangkabau Voluntary Migration* (Yogyakarta: Gajah Mada Press, 1984), p. 3.

¹⁷ Tsuyosi Kato, *Matriliney and Migration*.

the women left their homeland to work abroad is not purely because of the economic interests, but also about courage in breaking the rules and norms prevailing in Minangkabau. Therefore, when women do *merantau* and work abroad, the emerging problems will be more complex compared to men.

3. The Role of Minangkabau Women in Economic Empowerment of the Family

Minangkabau women hold a central role in education, pacification and fortune, and family welfare.¹⁸ Fachrina discovered about *Social Networking Pattern in Fishing Communities during the Famine in Pesisir Selatan*. It explained the important role of the wives in creating social network to cope with the difficulties during the famine. The phenomenon showed that working women are not violating social values or norms in Minangkabau.¹⁹ Their responsibility as the successor to the clan gives encouragement for Minangkabau women to act and work to save their lineage if the economic condition turns bad. Thus women have every right to work, despite of where and what kind of job they do, in raising children and family.

4. The ASEAN Economic Community (AEC)

ASEAN Economics Community (AEC) is one of the three pillars of ASEAN community among the other two: ASEAN Security Community (ASC) and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC). Historically, at the beginning of the commitment, the ASEAN leaders signed the ASEAN Vision 2020 in Kuala Lumpur in 1997. Then, on the 12th ASEAN SUMMIT in Cebu, Philippines, on January 2007, the committee promotes ASEAN Vision 2020 into 2015 by signing

¹⁸ Amir M.S., *Adat Minangkabau: Oola dan Tujuan Hidup Orang Minang, t.tp.*: (Mutiara Sumber Widya, 2003).

¹⁹ Fachrina, "Pola Jaringan Sosial dalam Masyarakat Nelayan Pada Musim Paceklik" (UNAND, 2004).

“Cebu Declaration on the Acceleration of the Establishment of an ASEAN Community by 2015”.

Indeed, the implementation of AEC is to promote ASEAN countries. AEC will create a *single-market* with more stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integrated production base with effective regulations for trading and investment that consist of free-flow traffic of the goods, services, investments, stocks and also by providing the rights of freedom for every employer and their employees. The implementation of AEC 2015 will focus on 12 priority sectors, consist of seven in goods sectors (agriculture, electronic, automotive, fisheries, rubber-based industry, woodcraft industries, and textiles) and five in services sectors (air transportation, health services, tourism, logistics, and e-ASEAN).

Unavoidably, Indonesia has to accept ASEAN global challenge of AEC for AEC already brings up the challenge and an opportunity for Indonesia to show the world that Indonesia is able to compete with dignity.²⁰

Indonesia, as the mere fact, has great opportunities to compete in AEC. Chairil et al, (2014) stated that Indonesia is a potential market place for having the largest area and the biggest population (around 40% of ASEAN's total population). This condition could provide Indonesia to be a dynamically productive country in economic aspect. It would also bring Indonesia to become one potential ASEAN leader in economic aspect for the highest the opportunity of market domination and investment.

However, AEC will not be that beneficial if Indonesia does not improve the quality of its human resources. A brief record from the ASEAN Productivity Organization (APO) shows that from 1000 Indonesian employees, there is only around 4.3%

²⁰ Suwarsih Madya, “<http://febuny.wordpress.com/2014/04/28/seminar-Page-International-Fe-Face-Acc-015/>,” accessed April 15, 2014, <https://febuny.wordpress.com/2014/04/28/seminar%20page-international-fe-face-aec-015>.

qualified as skillful employees, in compare with The Philippines (8.3%), Malaysia (32.6%) and Singapore (34.7%).²¹

5. Research Objectives

In general the purpose of this research is to uncover; the perception of unmarried Minangkabau women who have got their undergraduate (S1) degree in various universities in Padang, West Sumatra, and worked abroad to empower the family and participating in AEC challenge.

Specifically the purposes of the research are;

- a. The perception of the formally educated women in Minangkabau for their role in empowering economy of the family by working abroad.
- b. The contrivance of the formally educated women in Minangkabau about working abroad.
- c. The perception of the formally educated women in Minangkabau about AEC.

6. Research Method

This research is a survey-based research. The population of the research was the single/unmarried Minangkabau women (distinguish by the West Sumatran birthplaces and Minangkabau ethnic group) registered as the 7th and above semester students in various universities in Padang.

The samples consist of 300 students from three universities in Padang: Padang State University (UNP), Islamic State Institute (IAIN) Imam Bonjol Padang, and Andalas University (UNAND). There are 100 students sample collected from each University. The sample students are randomly selected from various faculties/departments; English, Science, Engineering, and Economics.

²¹ Chairil, "Peluang dan Tantangan Indonesia Menyambut AEC 2015," accessed June 4, 2014, http://www.setneg.go.id/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7911.

The data derived from the questioner sheets provided with four options (A, B, C, or D) about career plans and a series of *Yes*, *No* and *Unsure* options for the premises about *Merantau* in Minangkabau. The final result is presented in a percentage based.

7. Results and Discussion

a. The Perception of the Formally Educated Women in Minangkabau for Their Role in Empowering Economy of the Family by Working Abroad

The research found that most respondents stated that; (1) women in Minangkabau have the important role in family economically by working and should have started working as a single women (69.4%), (2) working abroad will significantly provide more economic benefits for their families (76,3%).

These positive perceptions of the formally educated women in Minangkabau is in accordance with Indonesian principles of sustainable development which emphasizes 3 things in a comprehensive manner, i.e. economic, social and environmental aspects, stated in 17 Agendas, specifically in; (1) nullifying the poverty and hunger, (2) encouraging economic growth and having decent jobs.

8. The Contrivance of the Formally Educated Women in Minangkabau About Working Abroad

The results showed that 61.3% respondents said that they will continue to get their doctoral and master's degree abroad. 35.3% participants want to work abroad right away after graduate. And only 3% of the participants who wanted to marry or become a mere housewife. It turns out that there's about 0.3% of the participants plan to stay unemployed.

For respondents who stated that they will continue their education and for the work-preference despondences revealed that they have more plans for their careers in accordance with

their background education for a better life (78%). Meanwhile, 1% of the participants actually have not yet thought about it at all. Working for the government in accordance with their education is a 55.7% path they want to pursue. 16% of the participants want to be the entrepreneur in accordance with the educational background while the other 20% are not really concerned with their educational background as long as they get the well-paid jobs. Related to the factors that determine the career goals, 77.3% of the participants expressed their interest of conformity, capability, talent and personality with the type of work. About 3% of the participants give the possibility to bend their desire with advises from their parents and other family members.

Most of the respondents (39.7%) have not yet decided where will they work in the future, they will depend on the available opportunities. 31.3% of the respondents wanted to work in Indonesia or in their hometown. 14.7% wanted to work in various ASEAN countries. 12.3% wanted to go further i.e. Europe. The determinations of the place of work are based on: a) their personal preferences (59%), b) income (22.7%) and c) their consideration of parents, families and communities (11.3%). However, there are still 5% of the participants who have not yet decided their desirable work places.

The interesting thing is 83.3% of respondents who stated that they will not work or do not proceed to higher education is because of they have to follow their parents and/or their prospective husbands' decisions. Yet, 0.3% of the participants think that working is only obligated to men for women are supposed to the housewives and do the household.

This data shows that there are still formally educated Minangkabau women who have the wrong perceptions about gender equality in getting jobs. Women are still identified with the household and mean to be housewives. The condition varies according to the region and it also interprets differently

according to the inherent gender construction (of female and male) in the certain region. The condition simultaneously attached to the certain commodity (Hunga, 2013). Parents and community as well as the cultural factors will certainly be the cause of this occurrence. Thus, formal education should be able to change the perception of the formally educated Minangkabau women in pursuing their career.

a. The Perception of the Formally Educated Women in Minangkabau About AEC

The perception of the majority of the respondents about going abroad and participating in AEC 2015 is generally positive. It is revealed from; (1) their proper understanding about AEC (87,7%), (2) their optimism as Minangkabau women (85%) and their willingness in hosting global AEC and also the ability to overpass other ASEAN countries women (74,3%), (3) their willingness to improve their creativities as Minangkabau women (85,3%), (4) for not losing interest to work abroad because of the widespread violence cases on women workers abroad (60.7%).

Nevertheless there are still a negatives thought about working abroad for the term *merantau* only acceptable for men (26.3%), violating the social values and norms in Minangkabau (30,7%), the thought that their families will not approve (25.7%).

According to the respondents, to go abroad as Minangkabau women means that they should be ready to: 1) accept the worldwide challenge and disobeying some custom and religion doctrines which prohibits women leaving their families themselves (69,3%), 2) adapt and to protect themselves not to do promiscuous intercourse (81,3%). They also demand 1) to get proper knowledge from college about living abroad (79.3%), 2) professional counselors and individual face to face counseling

to discuss about their future career (58,3%), and 3) to uncover their potential and preparation to live overseas (78,7%).

The results of this research show that most of Minangkabau culture agreed that it is acceptable for Minangkabau women to work abroad. It will also give them chances to participate in AEC 2015. Therefore, they must be provided with multicultural career counseling. Means, career counseling in college needs to be implemented, especially for the senior students.

C. Conclusion

The research concluded that most of Minangkabau culture agreed that women *merantau* or working abroad to improve family welfare is a positive thing, especially in facing Asean Economic Community. Minangkabau women, generalized by sororities participated in the interview, admitted that going abroad caused by the economic matter, education, and the temptation to live independently and away from their families. Whilst various obstacles come to surface, it is important for them to have proper career counseling and proper knowledge about foreign cultures, especially for the senior students in university.

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