



## **Behavioral and Social Interaction Patterns of Children From Female Migrant Workers in Bawang, Batang**

**Aryani Sari Natalia<sup>✉</sup>, Rusdarti, Arif Purnomo**

Universitas Negeri Semarang

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### **Abstract**

The high unemployment rate in Indonesia has led many women to choose to work as female migrant workers abroad to overcome their family's economic limitations. This decision not only leads to financial improvements but also brings social changes, especially in childcare. Children abandoned by mothers who work as migrant workers often have difficulty establishing social relationships and receiving adequate emotional support. This study aims to analyze the social behavior of junior high school students in Bawang Sub-district, Batang Regency, who were abandoned by their mothers who work as female migrant workers. The research method used a qualitative approach with a case study through in-depth interviews and observations of children from female migrant workers' families. The results showed that children from female migrant families often have difficulty establishing social relationships due to the lack of direct control and emotional attention from their mothers who work abroad. The study concluded that although the mother's departure helps economically, the challenges in the care and social development of the children were issues that need to be considered. This research contributed to understanding the social impact of the female migrant worker's departure phenomenon on children's behavior.

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<sup>✉</sup>Correspondence address:

Bantir, Bawang, Kec. Bawang, Kabupaten Batang, Jawa Tengah

E-mail: [aryaninatalia25@students.unnes.ac.id](mailto:aryaninatalia25@students.unnes.ac.id)

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's high unemployment rate significantly impacts the economy, family welfare, and individual mental health. Naja et al. (2024) mentioned that unemployment affects individuals who lose their jobs and the next generation, such as children who drop out of school or experience malnutrition due to family economic limitations. This situation forces many families to find solutions to maintain survival. One solution that many women choose is to work abroad as female migrant workers. This is common in areas like Bawang Sub-district, Batang Regency. In this area, limited skills and a lack of employment opportunities force many women to work as female migrant workers to increase family income (Adriyanto et al., 2020)

Women's work as migrant workers affects family roles and social dynamics. Initially, women's role in the household was limited to domestic affairs, but with increasing economic demands, they began to participate in economic activities by working abroad. The economic needs of each individual are different (Zulfa, 2019). This reality requires many Indonesians to seek employment abroad.

While this choice can help them to improve the economic condition of the family, the departure of mothers as female migrant workers has profound social repercussions, especially for their children, who are in a crucial phase of development. Children abandoned by their mothers often experience changes in their social behavior due to the lack of direct control and emotional support from their parents.

Previous research has highlighted some of the negative impacts of a mother's departure as a female migrant worker on children's growth. (Utamidewi et al., 2017) found that children abandoned by their mothers to work abroad often experience difficulties in managing emotions and tend to exhibit less adaptive behavior. This is aggravated by the need for parenting roles from other family members who take over while the mother works. In addition, Septiani et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of the parent's role in supporting children's social development, especially during adolescence, when children need guidance to develop good social skills.

John Bowlby (Herviana et al., 2019) highlights the importance of parent-child bonds for self-confidence and social skills. Children will likely experience difficulties developing their social skills when these bonds are disrupted or poorly formed. However, although there have been many studies on the effects of mothers' departure as female migrant workers on family dynamics, research that specifically examines the impacts on children's social behavior, especially at the junior high school level, is still scarce.

This research has the novelty of exploring how mothers' departure as female migrant workers affects the social behavior patterns of junior high school children in the Bawang Sub-district, Batang District. Most previous studies have focused on the economic impact of the family. In contrast, this study examines how children from female migrant workers' families develop social interaction patterns at school and in the social environment. In addition, this study will explore how these children's social environment at home and school affects their social behavior, which has yet to be widely discussed in previous studies.

Data from the Batang District Labour Office showed that in 2023, 281 female migrant workers from the Bawang Sub-district will work in various countries. Among these, the most popular countries were Hong Kong, with 79 people; Taiwan, 64 people; and Malaysia, with 54 people. Other countries that were destinations for female migrant workers from Bawang Sub-district were Saudi Arabia (25 people), Singapore (37 people), and South Korea (22 people). This data confirms that working as a migrant worker was the leading choice for many women in Bawang Sub-district to overcome family economic limitations.

Mothers' departure to work abroad causes changes in family dynamics, especially in childcare patterns (Sutiana et al., 2018). Children are often cared for by extended family like grandparents. In contrast, husbands who were abandoned behind were often unable to fulfill the role of caregiver optimally (Wahyuningsih & Jatningsih, 2019). Consequently, some children experience problems in social and behavioral adjustment, as revealed by the principal of a junior high school in Bawang Sub-district, Mr. Riswanto Indratmoko, in an interview

on 1 April 2024. He explained that some students from female migrant workers' families tend to withdraw and behave differently from other students their parents raised.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the social behavior patterns and interactions of junior high school students from female migrant workers in the Bawang Sub-district, Batang Regency. This research is expected to provide new insights into the challenges faced by children from TKW and how better support from families and educational institutions can help them overcome these challenges.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative case study method for in-depth analysis. This study aimed to explore more in-depth and specific knowledge about the social behavior of junior high school students from female migrant workers' families in Bawang Sub-district, Batang Regency. The data obtained in this study was qualitative, collected through interviews with relevant informants and direct observation to understand their social behavior patterns and interactions. The case study design was chosen because it provides flexibility in investigating complex and contextualized phenomena in depth (Yin, 2014). This approach allowed the researcher to holistically understand how junior high school students in Bawang Sub-district, whose mothers work as female migrant workers, interact and develop social behavior in the context of their family and environment. This study also considered contextual factors, such as parenting and habituation in the family, as well as the influence of the environment on their social development.

This study was conducted in two villages, Jlamprang and Candirejo, which were chosen based on different socio-economic characteristics. Jlamprang Village is more developed, with many of its residents working as employees. However, an economic gap still forces some women to become female migrant workers. Meanwhile, Candirejo village is dominated by working women who are migrant workers and domestic workers outside the city. These characteristics make both villages relevant locations for examining the influence of

mothers' departure as migrant workers on the social behavior of abandoned children.

The focus of this study covered three main aspects: firstly, the family habituation of children of female migrant workers, which includes parenting patterns, values instilled, and the social roles of parents; secondly, the social behavior of children of female migrant workers at junior high school student level, which is analyzed based on their acceptance of their upbringing and the influence social environment; and thirdly, their social interaction with family, peers, and society. This research also considered the influence of technology and social media on social interaction.

Primary data sources in this study were obtained from six children of female migrant workers studying at the junior high school level and their families who took care of them while their mothers worked abroad. Structure interview techniques were used to collect data on the children's behavioral patterns and social interactions. Interviews were conducted with questions designed in detail and uniformly to ensure data consistency. Participatory observations were also conducted to understand the children's direct interactions with their family and social environment. Secondary data was obtained from official documents, observation photos, and field notes that supported the primary data collection.

The number of informants in this study was 12 people, consisting of 6 children of female migrant workers who were studying in junior high school who were the main focus of the subjects studied. Six caregivers of migrant workers as additional informants to provide information on habituation, social behavior, and social interactions of the children they care for. The selection of informants was based on 1) children who were cared for by their father and both parents were still together; 2) children who were cared for by their father, but both parents were divorced; 3) children who were cared for by other families, even though the parents were still together; and 4) children who were cared by other families, but the parents were divorced.

The validity of the data in this study was maintained through source triangulation techniques. Triangulation was used to compare the information

obtained from various data sources, such as interviews, observations, and documentation, to ensure the research's validity (Moleong, 2017). The data collected was then analyzed using the interactive analysis methods, which include three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion (Sugiyono, 2022). Data were reduced by summarising and focusing on the critical aspects related to the research, then presented in narrative form to facilitate concluding the social behavior patterns of female migrant workers' children and the factors that influence them.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Overview of Research Sites

S Jlamprang Village and Candirejo Village, located in Bawang Sub-district, Batang Regency, have different characteristics but complement each other economically and socially. Jlamprang village consists of two hamlets, Jlamprang and Sikunir, with a population of 1.796 people across 12 neighborhood associations and 532 families. Educational facilities in the village are complete, with three kindergartens, one primary school, two high schools/vocational schools, two universities, and a Madrasah Diniyah that provides religious education to children. The economy in Jlamprang Village is primarily supported by the agricultural sector, especially the older population. However, more and more villagers, especially women, are choosing to migrate abroad as female migrant workers. The central destination countries for female migrant workers from this village include Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapura, and Malaysia. The number of female migrant workers in Jlamprang Village, based on the latest data, reached 16 people, who managed to improve their standard of living by building houses or buying vehicles after returning from abroad. Social and religious life in Jlamprang village is robust, with most of the population adhering to Islam. This village has two mosques and ten mushollas spread across each neighborhood, used for daily worship activities and religious events such as recitations and celebrations of Islamic holidays.

Candirejo village, located in the highlands with three hamlets (Candirejo, Selomirah, and Balun), has a larger population of 2,695 people

spread across 17 neighborhoods and 1,232 families. Despite educational facilities in the village, such as three kindergartens, two primary schools, and three Madrasah Diniyah, many villagers, especially women, choose to work abroad as migrant workers or in big cities as domestic assistants. The central destination countries for female migrant workers from Candirejo village were Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia, with 26 female migrant workers working abroad. Working abroad is seen as a solution to improve the family's economic condition because income from the agricultural sector in the village was often insufficient. In this village, migrating abroad and to big cities has become commonplace, even for young residents. The social and religious situation of the Candirejo village is also very thick with Islamic nuances. This village has 17 places of worship, consisting of three mosques and fourteen mushollas, used for prayer and other religious activities such as recitation, commemoration of Islamic holidays, and religious education for children.

### Habituation in the Family

Habituation in the family plays an essential role in shaping children's behavior, especially for children whose parents work as female migrant workers. This habituation includes parenting patterns in the family, which gradually instill values and habits that become the foundation of children's behavior. According to (Utami, 2018), children tend to imitate what they often see and experience in their daily lives at home. Therefore, the habituation patterns applied in the family greatly influence how influenced children act and respond to their social environment (Marlin & Rusdarti, 2016). In female migrant workers, this habituation often shifts due to changes in the role of caregivers, where childcare duties are usually delegated to other family members such as grandparents or close relatives.

Rules in migrant families are vital for discipline and balance. An interview with Mr. Usman (21 July 2024) revealed that many families set strict rules for children, such as bedtimes, play rules, and school responsibilities. However, the effectiveness of these rules largely depends on how strict the caregiver is in enforcing them. With the mother's direct control, these rules are relaxed and even addressed. This condition creates new

challenges in maintaining stability in children's behavior. One respondent also mentioned that grandparent caregivers often give children more freedom because they could not optimally fulfill their primary caregiver role.

A significant challenge in the care of female migrant worker children was the absence of the mother in the child's daily life. Maternal absence deprives children of emotional attention, affecting behavior. According to an interview with Mr. Sukur (Head of Jlamprang Village, 18 July 2024), children who were cared for by grandparents often experienced difficulties in adjusting to their social environment due to a lack of adequate control. In addition, older caregivers tend not to be able to keep up with the dynamics of modern children's behavior, so these children often feel isolated or even rebel against existing rules. This challenge worsens if fathers are also absent due to work.

In the care of female migrant workers' children, the application of punishment and rewards was also an essential part of shaping their behavior. Caregivers may give harsher punishments for breaking the rules, but at the same time, they also receive rewards when they behave well (Widya Dewi Asy-seams & Eva Soraya Zulfa, 2022). As revealed by Mrs. Ariyah (27 March 2024), the grandmother of one of the children of female migrant workers in the Bawang sub-district, her grandchildren were often punished when they disobeyed the rules, such as the prohibition of playing late at night. In contrast, rewards were given as simple gifts such as food or small toys when the child showed good behavior. However, this pattern of punishment and reward was often unbalanced due to the caregiver's limited understanding of how to educate children appropriately.

The system of rewards and punishments applied in female migrant worker families often differs from that of other families due to differences in perceptions of what is considered necessary in parenting. Many female migrant workers' families used material rewards to make up for the lack of a mother's presence, such as giving gifts in the form of goods or money. However, this can also have adverse effects, with children growing up with the understanding that rewards are only material. Punishments are often inconsistent, based on the

caregiver's mood. This imbalance between punishment and reward can confuse children in understanding right and wrong, ultimately affecting their social behavior development (Utami, 2018).

### **Social Behavior of Children of Female Migrant Workers**

The mother's absence in daily life often influenced the social behavior of the children of female migrant workers. The absence of the mother, who was usually the primary caregiving figure, creates different dynamics in the family relationship (Wulan et al., 2018). These children have to adjust to the role of other caregivers, such as fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers, or relatives who take over caregiving responsibilities. Children's views of mothers generally develop through their interactions with their social environment and limited communication with their mothers who work abroad. In this context, children build social constructions of mothers as solid and hardworking, even though they sometimes feel emotionally neglected. For example, Keke, a child of a migrant worker, said, 'Mum is great. Mum is a strong person. Because mum struggles on her own. Moreover, my father has let go of my hand' (interview, 20 July 2024). In Keke's case, she sees her mother as a strong figure, even though they are emotionally distant due to her mother's departure to work abroad.

Children's perceptions of their mothers are often influenced by family caregivers who try to maintain an emotional connection between the child and the mother. In many families, especially those where the mother was abandoned to work as a migrant worker, the mother's role as an economic provider becomes very central, while the direct and emotional interaction between mother and child is reduced. This was in contrast to children with a mother at home, who tended to receive full emotional and physical support from both parents. Children of migrant workers often develop a perception that their mothers have to work hard for the welfare of the family, but they also feel a void in terms of daily interactions. For example, Galang, a child of a migrant worker, said, 'I think my mum is a hard worker, but she does not care about me. I asked her to come home, but she said it was hard for me to stay home and not continue working' (interview, 19 July 2024). This statement showed

that children could feel emotionally de-prioritized, even if they understand the reasons behind their mother's absence.

The role of caregivers in migrant worker families was crucial in shaping children's social behavior. Caregivers, be they fathers, grandfathers, grandmothers, or relatives, were not only responsible for meeting the child's basic needs, such as food and shelter, but also for providing crucial emotional support. However, the biggest challenge for caregivers was replacing the mother's role in providing continuous attention and affection. Caregivers also managed remittances from mothers working abroad, which were used for the child's daily needs. For example, Nahla, a child of a migrant worker in Jlamprang village, receives a monthly remittance of IDR 2,000,000 from her mother, who works in Taiwan. Her caregiver, Mrs. Diyah, managed the money and ensured that Nahla's needs were met, even though her father no longer contributed financially (interview, 19 July 2024). In this case, the caregiver acts as a liaison who looks after the child's welfare materially and emotionally. However, although the child's financial needs were met, the emotional connection between mother and child remained limited.

The biggest problem that children of migrant workers often face is how they resolve emotional problems without their mothers at home. Many children of migrant workers prefer to suppress their feelings and not share them with others, especially with caregivers or other family members. This can be due to various factors, including not wanting to burden the caregiver's family or fear of being perceived as weak by peers. Nahla, for example, said that she preferred to keep her feelings to herself, 'I never told anyone. I prefer to keep it to myself' (interview, 19 July 2024). This behavior was indicative of the emotionally withdrawn tendencies that often emerge in children who have to deal with the absence of a mother figure in their daily lives. They often feel they need to be emotionally independent, even though this can hurt their development.

However, some caregivers are sensitive to changes in children's behavior and try to approach and encourage them to open up. For example, Mrs. Diyah, Nahla's caregiver, tried to ask Nahla when

she came home from school with a sullen face, "She rarely expresses her problems. When she comes home from school, she is sullen, then I ask her, 'Neng, why is she sullen?' Sometimes, she stays quiet. Then, when I got home, I did not invite her to sit together so that she could tell me" (interview, 19 July 2024). Mrs. Diyah's approach showed the importance of open communication between caregivers and children. Although migrant worker children tend to keep their feelings to themselves, the presence of a caregiver who understands behavioral changes can help children better deal with their problems.

On the other hand, some children, such as Galang, prefer to keep their problems to themselves because of previous experiences where their mothers told their problems to other family members, who then responded with anger. 'Nothing, just keep it to myself. I used to tell my mother, but my mother would say to my uncle. My uncle then got angry' (interview, 19 July 2024). This situation showed that children of migrant workers, despite having caregivers, often felt they did not have a safe place to share their feelings, which ultimately led them to bear the emotional burden independently.

Thus, the social behavior of migrant worker children was strongly influenced by factors such as their social construction of mothers, the role of caregivers, the fulfillment of daily needs, and the way they resolve emotional problems. Children see their mothers as strong and hardworking figures but also feel the emotional void caused by her absence. The role of the caregiver was crucial in maintaining the child's well-being, materially and emotionally, but often could not fully replace the mother's role. Meanwhile, the ability of migrant worker children to solve their problems reflects a high level of independence. However, they were also vulnerable to emotional isolation due to the lack of direct parental support.

### **Social Interaction**

The social interactions of children from the families of female migrant workers in the village were often influenced by their different family backgrounds from other children. According to Bimo Walgito (in Rahayu, 2018), social interaction is a dynamic social relationship between individuals and human groups. In the context of female migrant

workers' children, these dynamics involved adaptation to the absence of mothers working abroad, so these children had to learn to manage relationships with other family members who became their caregivers, as well as friends and the surrounding community. Social interaction occurs when individuals influence the behavior of other individuals (Musyaroh & Purnomo, 2023; Romulus et al., 2022), which means that the interaction patterns of migrant worker children in the community were also influenced by how their social environment treated them. The presence of a distant working mother affects not only the child's emotional relationship with the family but also their interaction patterns with friends and the wider community.

The relationship of migrant worker children with their families, especially with caregivers, was a determining factor in their social development (Syamsudin, 2017). As mothers were physically absent, children were usually cared for by fathers, grandmothers, or other relatives. Relationships with family carers could vary greatly. Some children establish close relationships with their caregivers and feel supported in every activity. For example, Keke, a child of a female migrant worker who lives with her grandmother and aunt, feels that her family cares about her and always supports her: 'My father has given up on me, but my mother still sends money, and my family was always there' (interview, 20 July 2024). In these cases, family caregivers provided the security and affection the child needed to feel connected to the mother despite the distance. However, in some cases, the relationship between the child and the caregiver could have been more harmonious, which led to the child feeling less cared for or losing discipline, especially if there were no clear rules at home.

In the school environment, children of migrant workers also experience challenges in building social relationships with peers (Nadia & Suhaili, 2023). Some children may feel alienated due to their family circumstances, especially if their peers at school are not in the same situation. However, in some cases, children of migrant workers could show good social adaptation and still do well in school. Nahla, for example, comes from Jlamprang Village, and she feels that she was not

discriminated against at school because of her family background. 'I am happy. I have good friends at school, and I join the basketball extracurricular too,' she said (interview, 19 July 2024). Support from friends and teachers at school helps female migrant worker children like Nahla feel accepted in their social environment, even though they have to face emotional challenges due to their mother's absence.

Female migrant workers' relationships with peers outside of school also play an essential role in their social development (Rahmaningrum & Fauziah, 2020). Sometimes, these children tend to be more selective in choosing friends. They may prefer to be friends with children who have similar experiences or with relatives who live nearby. Galang, for example, interacts more often with relatives who live near his house than with other children in the neighborhood. 'Mostly with my brother, who is the same age, male, playing together,' he explained (interview, 19 July 2024). Strong relationships with friends or siblings around the house can provide significant emotional support for children of migrant workers, especially when they feel a lack of support from parents working abroad.

In the community, children of migrant workers also have to navigate broader social relationships. Village communities often have different views on children raised without a mother. On the one hand, the community may see them as resilient and independent children; on the other hand, some see them as children who lack attention. However, in a supportive community, children of migrant workers can easily integrate and participate in social activities, such as community service or village meetings. 'Often there were village activities, like community service, I usually participated,' said Ibnu, a child of a migrant worker from Candirejo village (interview, 23 July 2024). Participation in community activities such as these provides opportunities for children of migrant workers to stay connected to their communities, strengthen social capital, and develop social skills necessary for their future.

## CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the departure of mothers as female migrant workers affects the

development of children's social behavior in Bawang Sub-district, Batang Regency, especially in junior high school-aged children. This influence was reflected in their social interactions with family, peers, and the community, which were influenced by alternative care patterns by caregivers such as grandmothers or relatives, as well as the absence of mothers in daily life. Mothers' migration helps economically but hinders social adjustment, particularly in establishing healthy relationships at school and in the neighborhood. The research also showed Supportive environments make children more adaptable, while those who lack emotional support face difficulties developing their social skills.

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*Keluarga TKW Luar Negeri di Desa Cranggang  
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