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## SOCIAL NETWORKS: THE SURVIVAL STRATEGY OF INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS IN HONG KONG

### *Abstract*

*Transnational migration performed by Indonesian women today is a social transformation in labor participation. This phenomenon is also encountered in the lives of women who decide to become Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong. This research aims to analyze and identify the self-actualized survival ability of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong. In addition, this research also investigates the social capital practiced by Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong. The descriptive qualitative method was employed as the research method by using an interpretive approach. Data collection in this research utilized purposive sampling on nine Indonesian women migrant workers which was conducted in May 2019 and located in Tsim Tsa Shui, Kowloon district, Hong Kong. By applying the concept of social capital from Fukuyama, research results discovered that the existence of migrant workers network is established in the circle of relatives and families, which becomes the formation basis of social capital. Social capital possessed by Indonesian migrant workers is admitted to be composed of three main elements, firstly, trust in the form of social security to support the continuity of existence of women as migrant workers in Hong Kong, specifically when facing problems. The second element is reciprocal, which is based on the economic shortages experienced and the common feeling and experience of being a migrant worker in Hong Kong. The last element is social interaction, which prioritizes practical and economic interactions by choosing the closest district to where they live and using social media to communicate with each other.*

**Keywords:** *Hong Kong, Social Capital, Women, Indonesian Migrant Workers*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Transnational migration or population movement including cross-cultural boundaries is a social phenomenon that is increasingly being carried out. This phenomenon is also experienced by women in Indonesia who have begun to encounter shifts in attitudes and roles in the structure of contemporary

society. Indonesian women, who have been constructed with weaknesses and underdevelopment, are able to show their qualities in various ways such as entering the public sector or actively participating in various aspects, thus, this strengthens their identity as successful and strong women.

The involvement of women in work participation undergoes a transformation as part of economic empowerment in the family. In connection with the 3End agenda echoed by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA), the reality in East Java Province in general shows that currently, wives do not completely rely on their husbands financially and socially to fulfil their daily needs, however, they participate in meeting the family needs as a concern to support their family lives (Kodir, I. 2019). This phenomenon is also found in the lives of women who decide to become migrant workers in Hong Kong as their destination country.

According to data obtained from BP2MI (Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency) up to July 2020, the professions performed by Indonesian women who decide to become Indonesian Migrant Workers were: Domestic Workers amounted 21,809 women, Caregiver or Nurse for children or the elderly as many as 10,647 women, and Operators amounted 7,386 women. Referring to these “promising” conditions of employment, it shows that women are

more acceptable in the labor market in neighboring countries. Meanwhile, the destination countries for Indonesian migrant workers until 2020 are Hong Kong, Malaysia and Taiwan ([https://bp2mi.go.id/uploads/statistik/ima-ges/data\\_28-08-2020](https://bp2mi.go.id/uploads/statistik/ima-ges/data_28-08-2020)).

This condition confirms the occurrence of globalization, which is interpreted as a social transformation characterized by the intensification of social interactions occurred in society and the social interactions that arise are heterogeneous without prioritizing the socio-cultural aspects, the origin of Ethnic, Race, Religion, and Inter-group formed, and its nationality and citizenship (Appadurai, 2002). The current globalization has a major influence on several levels of human life which are primary. This condition also reinforces the importance of material life and the financial structures in society has a substantial position in determining decision making (Strange, S. 2015).

Related to the phenomenon of international migration performed by Indonesian migrant workers, the occurrence of globalization has further strengthened the capacity for Indonesian

citizens to continue their lives and survive in the destination countries that are considered capable of influencing these primary levels of human life (Anggaunitakiranantika, 2016). Moreover, with the occurrence of globalization, the number of destination countries that the migrant workers will select will likely be more numerous and varied, which certainly will be adjusted to how strong the community's ability to survive while in the destination country (Sukesi, K., & Rosalinda, H. 2017).

Meanwhile, the rationality of society which focuses on economic factors also increases to improve the quality of life. The current international migration flows are different from the previous migration patterns in Indonesia, which are only local and regional (Mashud, M. 2010). International migration is seen as an admirable symbol of modernity and will give young people a valuable social status (Hamidi, 2017).

Based on preliminary studies and also the results of previous research, it was discovered that migrants who were in urban areas or other countries would be bound to a profound cohesiveness and were accustomed to instilling social

relationships and interactions by helping each other (Evers, HD, & Korff, R. 2002). In general, Indonesian migrant workers have strong social cohesion ties among them. This is created due to the feeling of being in the same state, namely these women must be able to survive and complete their work contracts in other countries (Anggaunitakiranantika, 2017).

Furthermore, as a form of social capital, it is important for Indonesian migrant workers, who mostly come from villages, to strengthen themselves to establish migrant worker villages (*Desbumi*) that are able to issue alternative policies for social protection. *Desbumi* will be formed after going through an assessment process and a series of discussions and interactions involving village officials and their officials, former migrant workers, families of migrant workers, and community leaders. This is crucial as reinforcement for commitment and perceptions regarding the understanding of the importance of *Desbumi* as social capital in society (Wulan, T. R., et.al. 2017). This is intended to maintain sustainability, both in terms of communication and social interaction

between migrant workers who have left Indonesia and their regions of origin. In addition, another research found that building overall community awareness is also needed as a stakeholder interest to protect the migrant workers and their families (Rahayu, D. 2018).

In line with the above mentioned, the form of power or self-autonomy as women carried out by Indonesian migrant workers is by joining communities that are limited among themselves, namely religious community, associations of migrant workers who have the same origin in Indonesia, and social gathering community which aims to binding sisterhood and a sense of kinship (Kiranantika, A. 2020). Based on the preliminary study conducted, this occurs because the women who become migrant workers are still relatives or even close relatives. Accordingly, they hope that even though they cannot get together in Indonesia, they can still gather when they migrate.

This research is conducted to analyze and identify women's self-actualized survival ability as migrant workers in Hong Kong. In addition, an analysis of social capital will also be

carried out to find out how Indonesian migrant workers support their ability to survive as the basic capital that becomes the foundation for social interaction in Hong Kong.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative methodology is a research method emphasizing the thick and detailed aspects of understanding of a problem. This methodology aims to understand social phenomena, which is more seeing the world from what it is following the existing reality, and not conditioned. The type of research used was phenomenology by emphasizing awareness as a source of knowledge. This is based on the awareness possessed by each individual that will encourage the birth of a social phenomenon (Poloma, 2010).

The phenomenology in this research was understood through the interpretivism owned by each individual who had experience as an Indonesian migrant worker in Hong Kong. By applying the theory of social capital, which is defined as values and norms

informally owned by individuals in social groups, it is potential to have cooperation between one another (Francis Fukuyama, 2002: xii).

Conducting qualitative-based research requires appropriate data collection. Accordingly, data collection in this research employed a purposive sampling technique which was carried out on workers who had employment contracts in Hong Kong for more than three years. Moreover, since the gender of Indonesian migrant workers working in Hong Kong were mostly women, the subjects in this research were women. The subjects in this research focused on nine Indonesian women migrant workers who had different experiences and communities while in Hong Kong. In addition, to add data diversity and variation in research results, research subjects who worked in different areas or districts in Hong Kong were selected.

This research was conducted in May 2019, in the time when the migrant workers performed their activities outside their employer's house, such as when shopping at the market or after completing their duties to take their employer's child to school. Besides, the

researcher also participated in the activities of migrant workers to gather and meet other migrant workers in their various existing and participated communities, certainly with their permission. The location of this research was carried out around the Kowloon mosque, a melting pot in the Tsim Tsa Shui area in the Kowloon district, Hong Kong, which is currently also a meeting place for migrant workers from Indonesia other than the Causeway Bay and Mong Kok area, Hong Kong. The Indonesian migrant workers explained that with the expanding network of migrant workers from several countries in Asia in Hong Kong, they had to be more selective in finding a place to gather comfortably at the end of the week, namely Saturdays and Sundays.

Data collection was divided into three types, namely in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation as support (Cresswell, 2014). Data collection on observations was conducted by making a confirmation based on the social phenomena studied and also on the social experiences of research subjects in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, documentation was carried out during the research by



recording, photographing, and videotaping activities performed by the research subjects related to social phenomena regarding the survival efforts made by Indonesian women migrant workers in Hong Kong.

Data analysis was done based on the collection of data obtained until the data were saturated and the information obtained from the research subjects became repetitive and monotonous (Creswell, 2014). Triangulations in this research were the source and theory triangulation to calibrate various phenomena found in the field on different research subjects in different time frames as a representation of the data credibility. Furthermore, the components undertaken in analyzing the data were a reduction of the data, presentation of the data, and conclusion drawing from the research.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Women who decide to become Indonesian migrant workers migrating to Hong Kong indeed have already had social networks formed in the family, neighbors, relatives, and friends while in their home regions in Indonesia. The social network established is basically

based on the relationships created by individuals or groups in society. This relationship can take place in an informal or formal form. Social relations are based on reflections on cooperation and coordination which are tied to active and reciprocal norms (Damsar, 2015).

The way to construct social capital is by building networks among migrant workers. These networks are formed based on the place or country where they work. Having these networks among migrant workers means a lot to them. These networks are not only among migrant workers but also among the families or associations of migrant workers in Indonesia. The social capital in the form of networks owned by migrant workers is the main capital in social interaction and communication (Anggaunitakiranantika, 2016; Rahayu, 2018).

Based on the results of research, it is found that the social networks formed due to social relations of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong originate from the circle of migrant workers who have been considered successful, namely those who achieve more than 2 times contracts to work in Hong Kong.

Therefore, migrant workers who work first in Hong Kong can share their various experiences, knowledge about tips and tricks to survive and overcome barriers in language, adjustments to habits carried out by employers in Hong Kong, and how to deal with agents so as not to get into debt and contractual employment fraud on migrant workers who still work for 1-time contract in Hong Kong. The minimum contract of employment that must be completed by Indonesian migrant workers who work in Hong Kong is 3 years.

Further, trust and social capital also exist in a social network. Trust is what supports social capital which is useful as a strong bond in the continuity of community groups to support each other and be effective in collaborating. Social capital is an ability that emerges completely from the existence of general belief held by the community or social groups that are part of it (Putnam, 2001). In line with this, an understanding of the essence of social capital is increasingly accepted by society, either as a new theoretical approach in understanding various social phenomena and social change in society or as a tool used to help

improve the economic sector, especially in people in developing countries. (Syahra, R. 2003). Social capital can also be institutionalized into small and basic social groups in society. It can also be applied to large community groups such as the country and various group elements in it (Fukuyama, 2001). Indonesian migrant workers residing in Hong Kong also utilize social relations in their closest social groups, namely relatives and/or relatives who have been invited to migrate together or friends who have the same origin, region or province as primary access in implementing Social Capital.

Moreover, what must be understood in the concept of social capital are the three main elements of the social capital builder, namely trust, reciprocal, and social interaction (Fukuyama, 2002). Trust will stimulate a person to make social relations in the form of cooperation to base collective action or productive activities. Trust is the result of important social norms and creates social capital in society (Field, 2010). In the lives of Indonesian women migrant workers who work in Hong Kong, the main elements of



social capital used to defend themselves as women migrant workers are:

- a. Trust. Trust will support the position of individuals in social groups and the existence of strong social ties as matters that are difficult to release considering that they have known each other since they were in Indonesia. This is employed to support the continuity and survival of women migrant workers, especially when facing problems while in Hong Kong. Due to limited or even no capital and the limited networks in Hong Kong apart from Indonesians, migrant workers are greatly aware that their space to develop is arduous and minimal. Consequently, dependence or interdependence on fellow workers cannot be ignored. Through intense communication, they share, discuss, and express their grievances with each other and seek solutions if there are

problems with one another. With this principle, occasionally secret matters in the lives of fellow migrant workers are better known by trusted friends or relatives than by families in Indonesia.

- b. Reciprocal <sup>2</sup>experienced by Indonesian women migrant workers who work in Hong Kong. The waning of social cohesion power with the family circles in Indonesia increasingly makes the cohesion power or social ties smaller and narrower to a circle of friends who are considered family while they are overseas. This is because they feel that they are in the same boat to keep their spirits up. Reciprocity or social exchange that occurs among them is based on the economic shortages experienced during their time in Hong Kong. This shows the fact that not a few migrant workers are still able to survive despite their limitations, even leaving the

economic situation that shackles them. The economic crises experienced by migrant workers are usually saved by debts among Indonesian migrant workers.

In their daily lives, the main way that women migrant workers do to survive is by diversifying their work activities and minimizing social activities outside the main work that cost money. Based on the research results, an interesting finding related to survival mechanisms and other solutions that are usually carried out by these women is that they work more at less cost so that sometimes some of the Indonesian migrant workers do not eat or fast to save expenses if the food from their employers has run out.

- c. Social interactions, which can be seen in the lives of working women while in Hong Kong. The Indonesian migrant workers limit their participation in associations in

Causeway Bay District and Wan Chai District since to go to these districts for social interaction with fellow workers, they have to spend more money on the MRT. Accordingly, they do the social interaction in the closest district around where they live, namely Tsim Tsa Shui in Kowloon. Interestingly, based on the results of the research, some Indonesian migrant workers are willing not to take their vacation time in order to get paid leave as compensation from their employers, which is further allocated to buy credits to communicate by phone or social media to carry out social interactions with fellow Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong as well as with family and relatives in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the involvement and participation in certain communities or social groups are often considered burdensome on the economic aspect for Indonesian migrant workers, especially if

they are subject to withdrawals for donations and various other social obligations that are considered binding, such as using dress codes or certain attributes. The Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong sometimes find it difficult financially since they do not always have money or savings that are used for these needs in organizations or associations. Money owned by migrant workers is more often used for fulfilling the family needs in Indonesia and is sent as remittances as it is the initial purpose of deciding to work in Hong Kong.

Following the results of the research, as one of the efforts to defend themselves and continue living, social capital is also very much needed as the cooperation carried out by Indonesian migrant workers who work in Hong Kong through various accesses to meet their needs, for example owing to friends, relatives even to employers for those who have lived in Hong Kong for a long time (Silvey, R., & Elmhirst, R. 2003). Social capital is also useful for analyzing why women migrant workers choose to survive in Hong Kong with their limitations by holding meetings every week with members of various

communities of Indonesian migrant workers in public areas such as the MRT station area in Tsim Tsa Shui, around the Kowloon mosque, and along the Avenue Road in the Kowloon district. This is parallel with the application of social capital theory, which is defined as a set of rules, although informally, they are found in members of community groups as a condition for cooperation among individuals within it (Fukuyama, 2002). The latest research also showed that families in Java, Indonesia build their networking in order to mechanism survival in many ways. They tried to loan money from local moneylender or credit union, by doing home gardening and sell the yields for fulfilling family needs and builds a social networking among society surrounds (Haryanti, N. 2020).

Another research finding related to the social capital owned by women migrant workers is that while in Hong Kong, they developed self-actualization by diversifying their jobs. With their creativity, Indonesian migrant workers not only work and carry out their duties in the informal sector following all orders of the employers but also initiate several additional jobs such as selling local

specialties in Indonesia online to fellow migrant workers and residents or by putting it in a market stall in Hong Kong. In addition, some provide services such as sewing clothes or providing massage services or muscle massage to relieve fatigue and spa services to refresh the body after carrying out activities that are only opened for women. The Indonesian migrant workers disseminate information about these businesses by using their social media such as Instagram, WhatsApp, LINE or Facebook. In line with that, latest study shows that networking in social media reckoned to community solidarity strength. Even the community facing the bad situation, they will come up with social relations from inter-household. These solidarity is created from value of community engagement in which social relation, norms and beliefs in community has a meaning for people. Also, the trust in other actors is formed for strengthening solidarity among people (Irwan, I., Kolopaking, L.M., Muljono, P. and Yonvitner, Y., 2019).

Referring to the concept of social capital, what the women migrant workers undertake aims to increase the trust, both

among Indonesian migrant workers and residents in Hong Kong, thus, the presence of migrant workers from Indonesia can be well received. If the community adheres to or has a set of adequate and equal moral values, then this is used as a precursor to developing good and honest behavior. The continuation and survival of good and basic organizations and institutions especially in terms of economics depend on the strength of a healthy and dynamic civil society and is based on habits, morality, and the high will of the people. Another contributing factor is the awareness of the public to respect their own culture (Fukuyama, 2001; Syahra, 2003). This is also emphasized by Coleman (2009: 145) that the continuation of the trust from each party involved will determine the transactional, both socially and economically, which is carried out by individuals or groups in society. As a result, the length of this social relationship will be determined by the trust of the parties involved in it.

This context can be understood with the rationality that the success achieved by women deciding to work in Hong Kong is a highly prestigious matter

for them reviewed from the aspect of social capital. Becoming a migrant worker is currently seen as the most sensible and quickest alternative employment to change one's destiny. Accordingly, this pattern has begun to form in society in Indonesia, especially in women. By participating in the world of work and becoming a migrant worker, the existence in the destination country, namely Hong Kong, will consistently be maintained by the existence of social capital that has been created and owned as support formed in the community or social associations and organizations.

## CONCLUSION

Social networks that are established owing to the social relations of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong emerge from the circle of migrant workers who have been deemed successful. These networks are the basis for the formation of social capital. The social capital owned by Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong is recognized to be composed of three main elements, firstly trust, which is social security to support the continuity of

existence for Indonesian women migrant workers who are in Hong Kong, especially when they face problems. The third element is social interaction, which is carried out by choosing the social interactions that are more practical and economical, namely by gathering with fellow migrant workers in the nearest districts or communicating via social media. This is performed without essentially reducing the benefits of the social interactions that Indonesian migrant workers carry out in Hong Kong. The notable point is that Indonesian migrant workers are able to construct an effort to survive and continue their lives while abroad, namely in Hong Kong.

Having creativity, Indonesian migrant workers are competent to develop job diversification while in Hong Kong by selling Indonesian specialties to enhance trust as a moral value assembled in social interactions which further improve the reciprocal relations or feelings of mutual need, both for fellow Indonesian migrant workers or with residents of Hong Kong.

## Recommendation

The concept that can be developed in the future in providing social protection for Indonesian migrant workers is to pay attention to the social capital approach which aims to change behavior and increase the full participation of the community. Besides, integrated cooperation from various elements of society is required to realize strategic solutions for reducing various problems related to Indonesian migrant workers in the future.



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