

WOMEN FACTORY WORKERS AND HOUSING CHOICE*

Case study: The experience of women factory workers in SIER, Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

This paper give the contribution to the characteristic of women factory workers in housing choice. The phenomena about women factory workers have low affordability in housing, was explored again by life story research approach. With qualitative methods, it was found that the cheap price is not the key factors that influencing them in housing choice. But their characteristic as young workers, migrant workers, and women workers showed the essential factors in housing choice.

Keywords: women factory workers, housing choice.

INTRODUCTION

At the UN Habitat II Conference in Istanbul, was circulated a document calling for the humanization of cities. The social dimension of urban development has been neglected. In the city with a high concentration of people, man is just as important as thing or machine. Women factory workers are part of people who work in industrial estates, but their existence in cities are no longer recognized as communities, but just as commodities.

Based on income, the factory workers are grouped as the lower income with low affordability (Moser, 1993; Lilananda, 1993; Gugler, 1992; Schneider, 1986). This study argues that low affordability of women factory workers cause them do not have any choice in housing rather than choose the cheapest rental rooms.

Most of women factory workers are migrants who came from village to the city looking for job and they have to face with the new style of life in city which is different with the life in village. As Lie and Lund (1994) studied in Malaysia, most of the women industrial workers are young and they tend to behave to modernity and have greater receptivity to change. This study postulates that the basic difficulty of women factory workers is to

manage the expenditure that make up the cost of urban living represent both the necessary costs of daily-life and consumptive things.

In addition, it was found that women factory workers in Thailand investing and share their income with their families in rural areas (Yap and Shresta, 1996; Porpora, et al., 1989). The similar findings in Hong Kong showed that daughters who work as industrial workers also support their family's income (Salaf, 1981). In other cases, women factory workers contribute to their sibling's education (Wieringa, 1995; Lie and Lund, 1994; Murray, 1992).

We know a great deal about the current demand and future preferences for one type of housing, but little about the way in which housing consumer exercise in making housing choice. Furthermore, we know a lot about the social and economic characteristics of people different choices, but little about the impact which common sense assumption about housing choice might have upon an individual's identity.

In short, questions about the shared everyday realities, routines and ideas which go together to create an understanding of what it means to be a renter of a dwelling remain neglected. The characteristics of young -migrant-women factory workers present the dichotomy situations between rural tradition and urban lifestyles. There are conflicts that affecting their

* This paper is part research when the author got the research fellowship from The Japanese Government Project on Regional Education and Development Program (REDP)

behavior in housing choice. This study makes a contribution by outlining the behavior of women factory workers as renters in choosing their houses.

BACKGROUND OF SURABAYA INDUSTRIAL ESTATE RUNGKUT (SIER) SURABAYA

Surabaya Industrial Estate Rungkut (SIER) is one of the industrial estates in Indonesia that built on 1974 and located in Surabaya. The development of suburban areas of Rungkut has led in population growth from all sub-districts in Surabaya. During the last decade 1980-1990, the population growth of Rungkut was 11.84 percent out of 2.06 percent the growth population of Surabaya (Table 1.1). Based on masterplan of Surabaya 2000, Rungkut has been planned as one of the urban centers within five other urban centers in Surabaya.

SIER is the industrial estate that is managed by the local authority of BUMN- Badan Usaha Milik Negara (state owned company), but owned by the municipality of Surabaya. It is placed on the area of 245ha, with more than 400 factories and since 1981, SIER has been expanded to the next town Sidoarjo with area of 87 ha, called Berbek.

The existence of SIER has caused the rapid growth of density at *kecamatan* (sub district) Rungkut. With an area of 45 sq.km, in 1970, the density of Rungkut was only 592 persons per sq.km, has increased almost three times in 1980, and became 1,582 persons per sq.km. The development of SIER has been making the sub district of Rungkut more attractive to people who are looking for job. In 1990 the population density of Rungkut rose to 4,844 persons per sq.km. Nowadays, SIER has employed more than 50,000 workers. Most of them are living at the surrounding of the SIER. The concentration of workers has created the needs of housing for living nearby.

LIFE STORY RESEARCH WITH THE INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

Life story research is an exploratory study. It is logically consisted set of data collection and aimed to develop theory. That means it starts with individual cases, experiences and develops progressively more abstract conceptual

categories to synthesise, to explain and to understand the data and to identify patterned relationship within it (Charmaz, 1996; Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It is intended to explore the individuals meanings of lives as they are told in the narratives of participants (Plummer, 1996). Over past decade, it has been increasingly recognised in the socio sciences that story telling of life is a major research source (Burgess, 1994; Murray, 1992; Jellinek, 1991). The collaborative nature of life stories is considered as an experimental truth of the life (Plummer, 1996; Mann, 1992). Personal narratives are useful for bringing the hidden into view (Davies, 1992).

Life story transcend the socio-individual dichotomy by illustrating the process through which individuals are simultaneously their own and social creations. The individual social worlds of industrial worker are not separated from one another. Although the world is shaped within the individual, the way in which that world is shaped is influenced by the discursive processes through which it is constructed in relation to others' construction of their worlds (Burgess, 1995). The meanings of housing needs are both placed within the individual and discursively constructed and re-constructed by individuals in social interaction, which shared meanings are created (Gilbert, 1992; Patton, 1990). Bringing the individuality of industrial workers into conversation will facilitate the useful understanding of the realities of their lives. The stories are image of life as an industrial worker.

In life story research, the classical issues of sampling are not at stake. Plummer (1996) suggested two approaches: one is largely dependent upon chance, whereby the participant is not selected but emerges from some wider research. The other tries to establish the formal criteria with the major choice between the marginal person, ordinary person, and great person. A chance encounter, it seems the common ways of finding a participant in may life stories (Plummer, 1996; Bogdan, 1974). This study chooses participants by theoretical sampling, it means sampling for theory construction, not for representativeness of given population (Charmaz, 1996; Burgess, 1995; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Glaser, 1978), and it is guided by the researcher's developing theory (Neuman, 1997).

Life story research often applies interpretative methods as qualitative analysis. It is different from quantitative analysis that is

rigorous and systematic, most of the qualitative analysis were intuitive and impressionistic (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Further Charmaz (1996) suggested that fundamentally, the study aim to capture the worlds of people by describing their situations, thoughts, feelings, and actions, used to analyse with interpretive method.

Interpretive Method

The interpretive method is rooted in an emphatic understanding (“*verstehen*”) of every day lived experienced of people in specific settings. The interpretive method analyses the meaningful action through direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social words (Weber, 1981:159). If the positivist said that social science needs to study meaningful social action, Weber said that we must learn the personal reasons and motives that shape to act in particular ways (Neuman, 1997:68). The positivists assume that everyone shares the same meaning and that we all experience the world in the same way. By contrast, the interpretive sociologists assume that people may or may not experience social or physical reality in the same way. People have their own reason for their actions and researchers need to learn about them (Blaikie, 1993; Spradley, 1980).

This method is different from positivist, which is logically based on a deductive approach. Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated that the interpretive method is an inductive approach, which describes and interprets how people conduct their daily lives. It often uses participant observation and field surveys that require the researcher to spend many hours in direct personal contact with those are being studied. The researcher seeks to learn how the participants construct their experience through their actions, intentions, beliefs, and feelings (Charmaz, 1996).

Data Collection

This study specifically got the data from women factory workers, because the labor-intensive factories are dominated with women. The first step was collecting the general background of the industrial workers at SIER. An open questionnaire was distributed to the 200 industrial workers from vary of labor intensive factories, like cigarette, textile/garment,

footwear, cosmetic, shampoo and electronic. This was intended to get familiar with the factory workers’ life and grasp their preferences in housing choice. The second step was an active participant observation with 9 women factory workers in form of life story narratives. From this life story, the researcher grasped mentally the daily life of women factory workers as well as got a feel for something or to see the world as factory workers do. So in this case, the researcher placed her-self as an instrument of the researcher and enhanced the researcher’s ability.

The nine life stories as case studies were examined in detailed and an attempt will be made to illustrate the behavior of women factory workers. However before turning to these case studies, understanding the background characteristic of women factory workers in SIER may be advanced by briefly description from questionnaire.

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTIC OF WOMEN FACTORY WORKERS IN SIER

Most of the women factory workers are young, single and low educated. From field survey, it was revealed that 146 workers of 200 respondents are in the group of young adult workers between age 19 to 25 years old. And 159 workers are single, 40 workers have married and 1 divorced. While 96 of them have graduated from high school, 90 workers finished their junior school and 13 workers have their primary school.

The majority of workers in SIER are rural migrants, only 3 workers are born in Surabaya. There are many reasons why they go to the city looking for job. 116 respondents said that they were going because of their own decision with various reasons. 52 workers said that they are willing to help their parent’s economy; 46 workers said that they want to be independent because they are big already, and 18 of them said that they want to get a better life than in rural area. The other 84 respondents said, bored to go to school (14 workers), influenced by their friend that working in city is nice (48 workers) and asked by their parents to help their sibling’s school (4), followed their brother or sister (5) and run away because of married forced (13 workers).

The regional minimum wage of factory workers in Surabaya is 110,000 rupiah in 1994 (1 US\$ = 2,100 rupiah). The factory workers earn

their wage biweekly. Their total income is consisted of based wage and overload wage. From field survey, the most range income is between 100,000 to 200,000 rupiah (126 workers), and 56 workers in the range of 200,001 to 300,000 rupiah, while 14 workers in the range 300,001 to 400,000 rupiah. There are 3 workers get the salary more than 400,000 rupiah and 1 worker get less than 100,000 rupiah. It was detected from the total income pattern that the higher of the total income of the factory workers because of they take a lot of overtime, so they get a large of overload wage.

The cost of rental room is various between 30,000 – 60,000 rupiah per room. But most of women factory workers do not sleep alone in one room, they share for two (97 workers) or three persons (57 workers) and even four persons (6 workers) in one room. Some said to save their money, the other said to be safe than sleep alone, and some other said it is nice to sleep with other friends so that they can chat and do not feel lonely. The women factory workers who are willing to sleep alone (26 workers) said that it is better to stay alone, because they can have privacy and manage their room as they like.

Half of the respondents remit their money to their home village (101 workers) and 99 respondents do not remit their money. Most of them join the 'arisan' as traditional saving in factory or kampung. The range of *arisan* is around 5,000 to 25,000 rupiah one a week and they will get it during six month or one year according to the rotation number of each member who join the *arisan*.

With all background of women factory workers that have grasped, the type of participants was decided 6 single and 3 married women workers who are migrant workers.

BEHAVIOR OF WOMEN FACTORY WORKERS IN SIER IN HOUSING CHOICE: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Based on the characteristic of women factory workers in chapter two, this study looks at three main characteristics as young workers, migrant workers, and as women workers.

As Young Worker

From nine women factory workers reflected the same experiences as young factory workers. Being young individual workers who far from their families give them new experience of

freedom. This chance of freedom gives impact of feeling enjoy and fear concurrently. They are enjoying as independent individuals. Instead of they can buy anything as they want to have it, they also feel free to take pleasure from urban leisure facilities, like shopping, dining out, chatting with boyfriend and some of them like seeing movie.

But on the same time, they have also feeling of fear as being alone in the city. They choose their recent housing not just because of cheap but because of their friend and characters of the owners. But most of all depend on friend from same village at the first time and later on when they have closed friend in the same factory they will move again. They pretended the owners as their parents, to whom they can feel a family environment.

Some of the participants express their feeling,

"*Mbak*, I felt so scared when I came for the first time to Surabaya. So, I choose the *rumah kost* that only for women and the *ibu kost* who strict and always remind us, the *anak-anak kost* to be at home before nine o'clock evening. Moreover, there is no guest allowed inside the room. I feel that the *ibukost* is just like my mother in village", told Tatiek.

"Mr. And Mrs Djoko are very kind to me. I used to play with their daughter, Rurin, even I learn a lot from her, I was graduated from primary school in my village, but Rurin, *mbak*, she just 8 years old and in the grade two, and sometimes I can't understand her homework. I like to read the story for Rurin. She has many tales stories. And sometimes, in the evening, I watch the television with them together in their living room", shared Tri.

"I like to stay here, because Mrs. Marjono is very kind to the tenants. She used to call us, *anak-anak kost*. I used to help her to sweep the backyard and help her cooking. She sells *singkong goreng* (fried cassava) in her *warung* (grocery). After washing the plates, usually I take two *singkong*, or sometimes when I don't have enough money for dinner, I just buy one instant noodle in her *warung*, and just with 300 rupiah, I can cook my noodle by my self in her kitchen and asking a free plate of rice", said Nem with happily.

The participants expressed their willingness to have an intimate relationship with their boy friends. No one of the participants thinks about housing. They are still considering how to get a good boy friend to become their husband. Young factory workers like to have closed friends, with whom they can have a chat each other about their experience in factory or about their relationship with their boy friends.

Thus, young workers do not hesitate to spend their money to treat their friend in eating together during evening to have a closed friendship. The popular word among them is *andog*, means eating together on the street trader usually near night traditional market.

"I am happy working in city because I can have many friends, I can buy whatever I want, I can go shopping with my friend. And all these things make me forgot that I am an orphan girl. I like to go outside in the evening with my friends for *andog* together, sometimes I pay for her or she pays for me. I do not mind to spend my money for my best friend as long as I have friend, I will feel happy. So that why every month I just can save my money around 20,000 rupiah, but it is okay I do not care. No one care of me instead of my friends", told Eva.

The glamour advertisements in city through mass media and television have induced young workers to be a consumptive young people. They eager to buy the cloth which is similar with the one that wore by their favorite movie - star, or cosmetic that advertised by popular singer. The young workers feel happy and enjoy the urban life style. Further, they said that they feel so proud when they are going home to the village by wearing a nice cloth with gold jewelry.

"I like so much living in city, because we can buy anything we desire it. In village, we do not have many choices; there is no department store. See, I can have three colour lipsticks, *mbak*. So when I wear an orange cloth, I use the orange lipstick, and when I wear the pink cloth, I can use also the rose lipstick. I have also many kinds of hairpins and ribbons to tight my hair", told Nem with smiling.

"I am so happy live in the city. I like to work in city because people who work in city more rich than people who work in village. And when I come home to the village with

nice cloth and wearing jewelry, they will appreciate me, said Mudji.

As migrant workers

The participants who come from rural areas showed their willingness to have closed relationship with friends from same village. This reality is an impact as being far from their families' environment in the village. In the absence of meaningful relationship that they have it in the village, they try to maintain their relationship with the same origin village in the city. But this willingness in reality will change gradually with friends from same factories. This transition can be understood as they have intensity to meet their friends in factory than in their rental rooms.

"When the first time I came in Surabaya, *mbak*, I was so scared because far from my parents. I was still 15 years old and I worked as a housemaid, I was afraid be punished by my boss. But after several months, I felt enjoy because I have many friends. And last year, my friend asked to work as factory workers. Actually my mother did not like me worked as factory workers, but my friends said to me that as factory workers is more free than as a housemaid, because we can go outside every evening (Tri, 1997)

Migrant workers from rural areas will still have their relationship with their families in rural areas. For the participant like Tatiek who have married, she has responsibility every month to sent her money for her son who live with her mother-in law. For Mudjiatin, remittance is an obligation to help her parents in her sister's school. But for Umi, she will remit whenever she wants to give her mother, although sometimes her mother wants to take it and sometimes she does not want to receive it. She prefers to save her money for her wedding preparation

"Now, I often take the overtime to collect more money. We plan to have a wedding party on next year, September 1998. I save my money by following *arisan* in the factory, 20,000 rupiahs a week and by six months I will get five hundred thousand rupiahs. But I hope I will have money around one million rupiahs for my wedding party in my village. Anyway if my money is

not enough, I will ask my brother and sister to help me", said Umi with shy.

The other participants, usually they remit their money to their parents but not as an obligation too, like the case of Tri,

"Last year, my mom came and asking three hundred thousand rupiah for house reparation. I do not have enough money, so I borrow from Mrs. Djoko. And now, every month I have to pay interest one thousand rupiah. I do not know exactly how to calculate *mbak*. Whenever I got the money from *arisan*, I give to Mrs. Djoko, I trust her like my mother also", told Tri.

As women workers

The all participants showed their perception about housing need was based on the cultures in the village. The tradition about patriarchy makes the single industrial workers ignore about how to own a house. They just think about where do they live and with whom. They have perceived that thinking to own house is not their responsibility but is the responsibility husband.

The transmission values from serial television and its advertisements have an impact on their knowledge about relationship between women and men. Some of them said that after married they would stop working as industrial workers as their husband wants it. But, some of them, like Mrs. Wiyati, Mrs. Mudji, Mrs. Tatiek said they go to work to help the income of the household, especially for children school. Here, what they said,

"In our village *mbak*, the tradition is young women should be married before 15 years old. My father said married is just symbol that you are a pretty and good girl, and later on if you are not happy, you can get divorce, it is okay. But my mother said differently, girl has to marry soon is just because to reduce family expenditures. Because the tradition whenever the girl gets married, she will leave the house and stay with her husband. If the boy has not worked yet then she will live in the house of the boy's parents (Wiyati, 1998)

"Before we married, we have decided that everything we will do together. So, now we work together in city to collect the money, so that we can buy a piece of farm in my husband village (Tatiek, 1998)

DISCUSSION

In economic term, housing choice is most frequently perceived as a result of a rational decision making process, in which the individual evaluates perceived costs and benefits of one house to another. The decision to choose a particular house is made when the benefits are deemed to outweigh to costs. Generally, in housing choice, the nature issue of costs and benefits are to be taken as high consideration, because housing is seen as a commodity. Affordability is commonly associated with the percentage of income. This study suggests that is better if the question for women factory workers not how much is their affordability in housing? but it is more relevant if we ask, how much they allocate their money for housing?

Women factory workers perceive their housing as part of their life. Housing is not a commodity, but is a valuable place in city, in where they can express their feeling of scary and joy. Likewise, the needs for a group (belonging and participation), the needs for security, feeling if trust and predictability (in contrast to fear and uncertainty) strongly motivate their behavior. Consequently, a reliance on its cost-benefit may outweigh many economically rational option of affordability in housing. For instance, a move to a house with somewhat better personal relationship than priced reason.

Yet, there is another consideration to housing choice when the expenditure pattern is taken into account of affordability. Looking at expenditure pattern may give the valuable explanation about their behavior in housing choice too. Their affordability in housing is not too low, but the transmission of new life style as young workers has lead them to spend more of their money in eating as a leisure and their desire in cloth and cosmetic.

This study concludes how the limitation of income has been manipulating the character of women factory workers as young, migrant and women workers. The personal characteristics and cultural background lead to the specific pattern in housing choice, accompanied by the social interaction that induce them to be consumptive persons.

The attempt of this study has been to ground the evidence and findings bearing on the integrated view by life story research, the variety of 'answer' obtained will give a fuller understanding to the housing choice of women factory workers.

Glossary

<i>Rumah kost</i>	rental room, usually the owner lives nearby.
<i>Pondok Boro</i>	municipal housing project that intended for industrial workers.
<i>Arisan</i>	rotating credit, the way to save money among neighbourhood or community.
<i>Mbak</i>	called name for sister in Java language.
<i>Andog</i>	eating together on the street vendor
<i>Idulfitri</i>	the celebration day after fasting month.
<i>Kampung</i>	neighbourhood that appeared informally whether in center of the city or sub urban areas.
<i>Rumah sangat sederhana</i>	A Very Simple House, housing project with small size around 21 sq.m on the 60 sq.m land, that promoted by government for low income people.
<i>Perumnas</i>	National Housing Corporation

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