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Gender Relationship Patterns in the Families of Female Farm Workers in Enrekang Regency: Sociological Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Background. Gender relations in farm laborer families are one important aspect that reflects the social and economic dynamics in rural Indonesia, especially in Enrekang Regency. Female farm laborers play dual roles, both in agricultural work and domestic responsibilities. However, their contributions are often not recognized equally in a society that is still patriarchal.

Purpose. This study aims to understand the form of gender relations in female farm laborer families in Baraka District, and to analyze its impact on family welfare.

Method. The method used in this study is a descriptive approach. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interview techniques with 101 female farm laborers, 61 husbands, 11 landowners, and 9 community leaders and local government officials, who were selected purposively. Participatory observation was also conducted to understand the daily dynamics of women in farm laborer families, especially related to the division of labor, access to resources, and decision making. In addition, document analysis was used to complement the information obtained from interviews and observations, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the social and economic context in Baraka District.

Results. The results of the study show that the division of labor is still dominated by patriarchal norms, where women have to play dual roles as workers in the fields and housekeepers. Women's access to resources, such as land and credit, is also very limited, hampering their ability to contribute optimally to agriculture. Strategic decisions in the family are generally made by men, while women are only involved in operational decisions. In addition, there is inequality in wages between female and male farm workers, even though the work done is the same.

Conclusion. The conclusion of this study is that unequal gender relations hinder the welfare of women and farm laborer families as a whole. However, there is hope for change through education and empowerment of women, as well as more inclusive policy support from the government. Collaborative efforts are needed to create better gender equality in the rural agricultural sector.

KEYWORDS

Empowerment, Family, Female Farm Workers, Gender Relations, Inequality, Patriarchy.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender relations in farm laborer families in Enrekang Regency show a significant pattern of inequality (Baada et al., 2023), where women, despite playing an important role in supporting the family economy through the agricultural sector (Ludvig et al., 2024), often do not receive proper and equal recognition with men. This inequality is mainly reflected in the division of roles between men and women in the family (Teklesilassie Yazew, 2024), where women have to bear a double burden: working in the fields or rice fields as farm laborers (Fonjong & Gyapong, 2021), while also taking care of the household without any fair division of responsibilities (Bal et al., 2023). This injustice is further exacerbated by patriarchal norms that are still strong in rural communities (Leder, 2022), which place men as the main decision makers in the family (Ishengoma, 2024), while women tend to be placed in subordinate positions (Valerio et al., 2024). Although women's contribution to the family economy is very large (Uddin & Barua, 2024), they are often not involved in economic decision-making, especially related to income management or allocation of family resources (Uddin & Barua, 2024). As a result, the gender relations that occur not only harm women individually, but also have a negative impact on the welfare of the family as a whole, because women's roles and contributions are not valued equally (Ishengoma, 2024).

Previous research shows that gender inequality in the agricultural sector is not a new phenomenon, both in Indonesia and in various other countries that also rely on the agricultural sector as an economic mainstay. (Leder et al., 2024) for example, noted that patriarchal norms in many rural Indonesian communities greatly influence the division of gender roles in farm laborer families. Women are often limited to domestic affairs even though they also participate in productive work outside the home. (Dhawan & Bhasin, 2024) added that the double burden faced by female farm laborers reinforces gender inequality, where women must carry out responsibilities in the agricultural sector while also shouldering domestic responsibilities without adequate support from male family members. (Pyburn et al., 2023) highlighted the broader impact of this gender inequality, which affects not only women's workload, but also their access to important resources such as education, health, and economic opportunities. This limited access, on friendship, the well-being of the family's overall socio-economic conditions, because marginalized women are unable to maximize their potential to improve family welfare.

Although various studies have highlighted gender inequality in the agricultural sector, this study is novel in its more specific focus on the local context of Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi. In previous studies, studies on gender relations in the agricultural sector have generally been general and have not emphasized the unique local characteristics of each region (Ayanaw & Alewond, 2024). This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how local cultural and customary factors in Enrekang play a role in reinforcing or even perpetuating patterns of gender inequality. In Enrekang, strong cultural norms still place women in a more subordinate position in the family, even though they contribute significantly economically as farm laborers. Another novelty of this study is the attention to signs of change that are beginning to emerge amidst existing inequality. Agricultural modernization and better access to education have opened up opportunities for women to be more involved in family decision-making. This process, although slow and facing resistance from conservative social structures (Ayanaw & Alewond, 2024), indicates the potential for change towards better gender equality in the future (Ojwala et al., 2024).

The main objective of the research is to deeply understand the forms of gender relations that occur in the families of female farm laborers in Enrekang Regency, with a focus on how the division of roles and responsibilities between men and women is constructed and practiced in everyday life (Donoso et al., 2024). This research also seeks to analyze the impact of gender

inequality on family welfare, especially in terms of the distribution of workload, access to resources such as education and health services (Hidrobo et al., 2024), and women's economic contributions that are often not recognized equally (Teklesilassie Yazew, 2024). In addition, this research aims to identify the challenges faced by female farm laborers in fighting for their positions, as well as to examine the potential for changes in gender relations that can support equality and empowerment of women in the agricultural sector (Quisumbing et al., 2022). Thus, this research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of gender relations in the families of female farm laborers in Enrekang Regency, as well as provide insight into the real impact of gender inequality on family welfare (Liang, 2024). The results of this research are also expected to identify the obstacles faced by women in fighting for a more equal role in the family and agrarian society. In addition, these findings can be an important basis for formulating more inclusive policies that support gender equality and women's empowerment in the agricultural sector (Devi et al., 2024), thereby improving the welfare of families and rural communities as a whole.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to explore gender relations that occur in the families of female farm laborers in Enrekang Regency. This approach was chosen because this study seeks to deeply understand the phenomenon of gender relations in the context of the social life of rural communities, especially in farm laborer families. According to Creswell, qualitative methods are suitable for use in research that aims to understand the meaning given by individuals or groups to certain social problems (Creswell, J.W., & Poth, C.N. 2018).

The study was conducted in Enrekang Regency, with the main participants being female farm laborers, husbands, landowners, and relevant community leaders. The research informants consisted of 101 female farm laborers operating in the area, 61 husbands of farm laborers, 11 landowners, 9 government officials at the sub-district and village levels, and 20 community leaders. The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling, where informants were selected based on their relevance and ability to provide in-depth information about gender relations in farm laborer families.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were used to explore the experiences and perspectives of informants regarding their roles in the household and agricultural sector. Observations were conducted by following the daily activities of female farm laborers, especially in terms of the division of domestic and productive labor. Document analysis included reports from related agencies and local records that could support the results of interviews and observations (Braun, V., & Clarke, V. 2019).

Data analysis used a thematic analysis approach, with stages of coding, grouping themes, and drawing conclusions from patterns that emerged in the data. Researchers also used data triangulation to ensure the validity of the results, by comparing information from various sources and methods used. In addition, the member check technique was applied to confirm the findings with informants to avoid misinterpretation (Patton, M.Q. 2020).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that gender relations in female farm laborer families in Enrekang Regency are still dominated by inequality, even though women's role in supporting the family economy is very significant. First, the division of labor between men and women in farm laborer families shows that women bear a double burden as breadwinners and housekeepers.

Informants reported that they work for 14-15 hours a day, consisting of 7-8 hours working in the fields and the rest of the time spent taking care of the household. This condition shows that the workload experienced by women is very heavy and unbalanced when compared to the role of men, who generally focus more on work in the fields only (Vitellosi & Claudia Giannelli, 2024). This inequality illustrates how gender relations at the family level are still dominated by patriarchal norms that marginalize women in the division of roles (Strelnyk et al., 2024).

In addition, this study also found that women's access to productive resources, such as agricultural land, fertilizer, and credit, is very limited. Around 30% of female farm laborers have direct access to agricultural land, but most women only have access rights, not formal ownership of the land. This prevents them from optimizing agricultural output, which in turn worsens the family's economic conditions (Sardo et al., 2024). On the other hand, men still dominate land ownership and control over resources (Ghimire et al., 2024), reinforcing gender inequality in economic aspects (Clinton et al., 2024). Limited access to these resources hinders women's ability to contribute more to family welfare (Ingutia & Sumelius, 2024), while reinforcing their subordinate position in the family and society (Elgoibar et al., 2024).

In terms of decision-making, although women are often involved in discussions related to agriculture and household economy, important strategic decisions are still dominated by men. This study found that 70% of important decisions in the family are taken by men, while women only participate in 30% of operational decisions, such as managing daily expenses and household needs. This indicates a pattern of unequal power relations where women do not have enough influence in strategic decisions that affect their lives (Castro et al., 2023). This inequality reinforces women's subordination and shows that equal gender relations are still difficult to achieve in the social structure of farm laborer families (Gamlin, 2020).

This study also found a striking difference in wages between female and male farm laborers. Despite doing the same work, women receive lower wages, ranging from IDR 50,000 to IDR 80,000 per day, while men earn up to IDR 100,000. This inequality in the wage system shows the existence of gender-based discrimination in the agricultural sector (Antón & de Bustillo, 2015), where women's contributions are considered less valuable than men's (Teklesilassie Yazew, 2024). This condition not only affects women's economic well-being, but also strengthens their subordinate position in the work and family environment (Teklesilassie Yazew, 2024).

When compared to previous studies, these findings are in line with what has been expressed by Leder et al. (2024) and Dhawan & Bhasin (2024) who also noted that female farm laborers in Indonesia face a double workload and limited access to economic resources. However, this study offers a new contribution by showing how local norms and customs in Enrekang Regency help reinforce this pattern of gender inequality. In previous studies, cultural factors are often discussed in general, while in this study, local factors in Enrekang are an important focus. This study is also in line with the theory of gender inequality put forward by (Mueller-Hirth et al., 2023) and the theory of power by Foucault (2017), which explains how male dominance in the family and control over strategic decisions are reflections of the patriarchal power structure rooted in agrarian societies.

The meaning of these findings shows that gender inequality in the agricultural sector not only impacts the distribution of workloads, but also affects women's access to resources that are crucial to improving their economic conditions (Pérez-Sánchez et al., 2024). This inequality worsens the social and economic conditions of families, as marginalized women do not have the full capacity to maximize their economic potential (O'Meara et al., 2024). In addition, gender inequality also hinders women in decision-making, which contributes to their marginalization in family life and society (Puja et al., 2024).

Recommendations for further research are to further explore efforts that can be made to improve women's access to productive resources in the agricultural sector, as well as how policies and programs for women's empowerment can be optimized to create greater equality in gender relations. Future research can also focus on longitudinal analysis to see changes in gender relations along with policy interventions or programs that focus on women's empowerment in rural areas. In addition, further studies are needed to examine the role of education in reducing gender inequality in the agricultural sector and its impact on family welfare in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that gender relations in the families of female farm laborers in Enrekang Regency are still dominated by deep inequality. Although women play a significant role in the agricultural sector and the family economy, they face an unbalanced double workload and have limited access to productive resources such as land and credit. Female farm laborers are also in a subordinate position in strategic family decision-making, where important decisions are still dominated by men. This inequality is exacerbated by inequality in the wage system, where women receive lower wages even though they do the same work as men. All of these factors have a direct impact on the welfare of women and their families, worsening their social and economic conditions.

This study also highlights that patriarchal norms and local culture contribute to strengthening patterns of gender inequality in the agrarian community in Enrekang. However, behind these challenges, there is hope for change through women's education and empowerment, which can open up opportunities for women to improve their position in the family and society. Inclusive policy support and sustainable empowerment programs are needed to address this inequality and create fairer gender equality in the agricultural sector.

Overall, this study confirms the importance of interventions that support gender equality and women's empowerment in rural areas, not only to improve the well-being of individual women, but also to improve the well-being of families and communities as a whole.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

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