

MIGRATION OF FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS (TKW): A STUDY OF THEIR MULTI-ROLES AND CHILDREN IDENTITY FORMATION

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Abstract

The migration of female migrant workers (TKW) has had complex implications for family structure, caregiving systems, and the identity of left-behind children. This study explores the dual role of TKW as both breadwinners and educators of their children, as well as its impact on children's identity formation. Using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, this research analyzes previous studies on female migrant workers and long-distance caregiving strategies. The findings reveal that children from migrant families experience changes in intergenerational family relationships and face challenges in developing their social, cultural, and emotional identities. Although left-behind children exhibit higher resilience levels than those from non-migrant households, they often experience a caregiving deficit and a decline in psychological well-being. Additionally, gender-based caregiving patterns have undergone transformation due to mothers assuming the primary breadwinner role. This study highlights the importance of incorporating children's perspectives into migration policies and family welfare programs to create a more sustainable migration strategy.

Keywords: Female Migrant Workers, Long-Distance Caregiving, Child Identity, Dual Roles, Transnational Families.

Abstrak

Migrasi tenaga kerja wanita (TKW) telah membawa implikasi kompleks terhadap struktur keluarga, sistem pengasuhan, dan identitas anak yang ditinggalkan. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran ganda TKW sebagai pencari nafkah sekaligus pendidik anak, serta dampaknya terhadap pembentukan identitas anak. Menggunakan metode Systematic Literature Review (SLR), penelitian ini menganalisis studi-studi sebelumnya terkait peran perempuan pekerja migran dan strategi pengasuhan jarak jauh. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa anak-anak dari keluarga migran mengalami perubahan dalam hubungan keluarga lintas generasi, serta menghadapi tantangan dalam membangun identitas sosial, budaya, dan emosional mereka. Meskipun tingkat resiliensi anak yang ditinggalkan lebih tinggi dibandingkan dengan anak dari keluarga non-migran, mereka sering mengalami defisit pengasuhan dan penurunan kesejahteraan psikologis. Selain itu, pola pengasuhan berbasis gender mengalami transformasi akibat peran ibu yang bergeser sebagai pencari nafkah utama. Studi ini menyoroti pentingnya perspektif anak dalam

kebijakan migrasi dan program kesejahteraan keluarga untuk menciptakan strategi migrasi yang lebih berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: *Tenaga Kerja Wanita, Pengasuhan Jarak Jauh, Identitas Anak, Peran Ganda, Keluarga Transnasional.*

INTRODUCTION

Women, as integral members of society, are entitled to participate actively in making decisions that affect their lives. According to Shimei (2024), women's agency manifests in three primary forms: participation in family and community life, partnership as equal contributors, and shared caregiving responsibilities. The more autonomy women exercise across these domains, the more actively they shape their own life paths. Women's roles are expanding beyond traditional boundaries—historically limited to motherhood and domestic responsibilities—to include transitional roles in the labor force, reflecting larger shifts in cultural, social, and economic values (Wibowo, 2011). However, this transformation is often constrained by entrenched societal expectations and gender norms. Owens-Schill et al. (2025) and Hafez et al. (2023) show how women are socially expected to balance being good wives, mothers, and workers, often under the pressure of religious, cultural, and patriarchal values.

In Indonesia, structural constraints such as limited job qualifications, age restrictions, and low wages lead many women to seek employment abroad, particularly as domestic workers in informal sectors. These overseas roles—while often precarious—promise higher income and fewer employment barriers, attracting many Indonesian women to become migrant workers (Rodriguez & Maria, 2009). Yet, their decision to migrate carries emotional and relational consequences. As Affrida (2017) notes, female migrant workers must leave behind their families and children, assuming dual roles as both economic providers and moral caregivers. To compensate for their absence, many adopt alternative caregiving arrangements, entrusting their children to grandparents, partners, or third-party caregivers, which becomes more complex when children are in their formative years (Guerrero et al., 2000).

The role of digital communication has become increasingly vital in these arrangements. Williams Veazey (2022a) highlights how mobile technology enables mothers to maintain emotional ties and educational involvement from afar. Nevertheless, the distance still affects the psychosocial development of left-behind children. Research shows these children experience both early independence and emotional vulnerability (Tadesse et al., 2025; Martinkėnė & Kraniauskienė, 2023). Other studies emphasize how the changing structure of caregiving influences family rhythms and identity formation. Yeoh et al. (2020) and Barglowski (2023) underscore the gendered dynamics of transnational parenting, where caregiving responsibilities are renegotiated under the pressures of migration and capitalist demands (Rani & Chaudhary, 2024). Moreover, issues such as instability in marital relationships, changing family values, and children's identity struggles emerge as common themes (Anshori, 2018; Rosiana, n.d.). These multidimensional pressures require female migrant workers to juggle personal agency, economic needs, and familial responsibilities—often without adequate structural or emotional support (Hamilton & Suthersan, 2021; Hanisch, 2020).

While existing studies have extensively discussed the economic motivations behind female migration and the psychological impact on left-behind children, few have addressed how female migrant workers simultaneously perform dual roles as breadwinners and caregivers, particularly in relation to how these roles influence the identity formation of their children. Most literature treats caregiving and economic provision as separate domains, rather than examining their intersection. Moreover, children's voices and perspectives remain underexplored, especially regarding how they internalize and reinterpret motherhood and identity in transnational settings. Therefore, this research seeks to fill that gap by examining how the dual roles of migrant mothers shape not only family dynamics but also children's evolving self-concepts, using the lens of long-distance caregiving mediated by digital technology.

RESEARCH METHODS

Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is the method in this research which aims to synthesize previous research findings by sorting, analyzing, and interpreting the dual roles of Indonesian women workers abroad, and the implications for the formation of their children's identities (Purssell & McCrae, 2020). The SLR method is carried out systematically, making it possible to identify empirical evidence on previous findings, so that bias can be minimized (Snyder, 2019a). Additionally, this method is useful in identifying gaps in research and engaging in theory development (Snyder, 2019b).

This research tries to explore the dual role of women who try to balance the economy and play a role in long-distance caregiving, which will then have implications for the formation of their children's identities. Research data was obtained by exploring previous research in the Publish or Perish application with the Scopus and Google Scholar channel selection categories. Researchers input keywords tailored to the research focus using Boolean logic techniques to broaden the scope of the search, namely "Multiple Roles of Female Migrant Workers" and "Children's Identity Formation"; "Female Migrant Worker" and "Children Nurturing"; "Women Workers" and "Children's Identity Formation".

The research search time range is from 2020 to early 2025 (the last five years) to match the findings of the latest phenomena and be relevant to the latest trend conditions. The initial raw data results found were 525 articles which were then filtered based on the year of research, content, and research abstract that closest to the focus and context regarding the dual role of female migrant workers and the formation of children's identities. This filtering stage was carried out independently by the researcher with an iterative inspection process to ensure the validity and reliability of the discussion results. Data-based applications are involved to help filter study results based on research years, trends, research gaps, and theoretical and practical contributions to previous research. In this way, deep insight into the focus of this research is found.

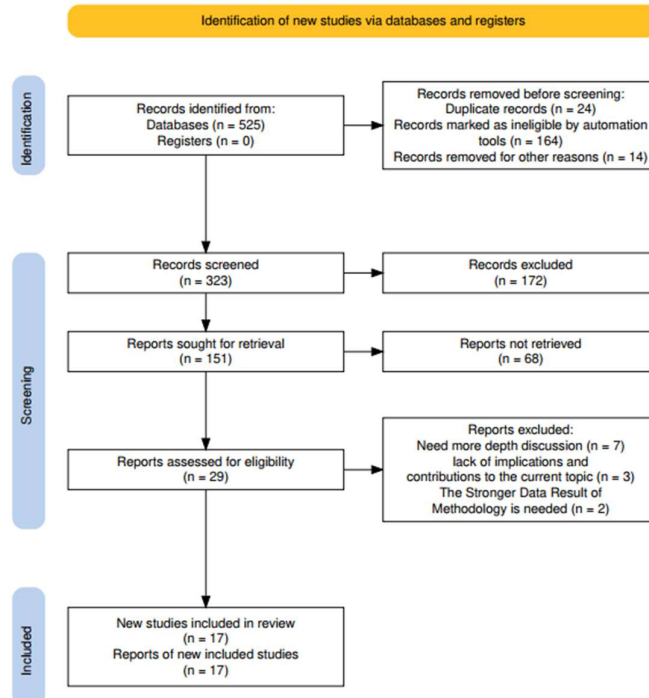


Figure 1. Literature Data Filtering Results

1. Identification Section

The total number of articles is 525, by filtering based on the same research focus or duplication in several article titles, the same data is cleaned, then 24 articles are obtained which have the same research focus or are duplicates. Following filtering, 164 articles were removed from the category due to inconsistency or relevance with metadata or format, and 14 articles were removed due to technical errors such as unavailability of URL, DOI, or ISSN or inappropriate characters and format, and not having a direct connection to the research. From the initial screening stage, 323 articles remained.

2. The advanced screening stage is carried out based on initial criteria of relevance, such as:

- There is relevance of the research topic and closeness of the research theme
- Screening was carried out again with criteria based on the year of research, namely between 2020 and 2025. Of the remaining results of the screening, there were 104 articles conducted outside the specified research time range. Then, proceed with the document type filter (other than research articles), and

the results obtained were 151 documents, namely books, conference results, and others. From this filtering category, 172 articles were cleaned. In this way, the remaining filtering results were 68 articles.

- c) Next is the article filtering stage based on article availability and article access restrictions. A total of 22 articles still have restricted access and have not been presented in full-text format. From the results of this filter, 29 articles were obtained.
- d) The next filtering stage is the stage of checking the substance of the article with indicators: 1) closeness and relevance to the research topic; 2) practical implications and contribution of previous research results to the current topic; 3) Exposure of research methodology that is not emphasized enough in the article will also be excluded. Of the remaining 29 articles, there are 12 articles that do not meet the three indicators above, with details:
- There are 7 articles lacking engagement and in-depth relevance to the current research topic, so further discussion is needed.
 - A total of 3 articles, the research results of which were deemed to provide less implications and contributions to current research topics.
 - There were 2 articles considered to be less narrow in methodology
- e) From the overall results of the filtering above, there are 17 articles that have substance that is most appropriate to the research topic regarding the dual role of female migrant workers and its implications for the formation of children's identities, and have complete data required in the discussion.

There are two Research Questions (RQ) in this study, namely:

RQ 1: What is the analysis of the multiple roles of working women (TKW) in family dynamics and child development?

RQ 2: How is the relationship between the role of the mother who plays multiple roles on the formation of the child's identity related to the child's gender, emotions, social and cognitive abilities?

An in-depth empirical social study of this phenomenon can open further insight into the analysis of the multi-role of working women, which will later have implications for the formation of children's identities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women as mothers who decide to work as female workers abroad often use cooperative strategies with their families by handing over caregiving duties to family or third parties and also play a role in encouraging self-sufficiency during their absence due to work commitments (Affrida, 2017). Previous studies (Guerrero & et al., 2000) stated that children who had to be abandoned by their mothers migrated to work, showing good independence in their personal and social development.

Although the modern era has changed the perception of the roles of women and men who have to share family and work responsibilities, women's self-concept is more strongly associated with motherhood (Każmierczak & Karasiewicz, 2019). In traditional society, women are placed in domestic positions in the household. As time goes by, women have taken on further roles in the long-term sustainability of the family. The large number of women who migrate abroad in order to be involved in the field of Women's Labor (TKW) shows that there is an increase in the role of women in various labor sectors. (Maria J & Rodriguez-Shadow, 2008). Their decision to work across countries enabled them to overcome adversity and take steps to develop their resilience (Stephenson et al., 2025).

In the midst of increasingly complex roles, women are still required to instill an understanding of identity, a sense of belonging and security in meeting children's priorities and needs, as well as a family-oriented approach (Bärnighausen et al., 2024). The dynamics of long-distance marriage are closely related to efforts to maintain the relationship between husband and wife which involves crucial communication and emotional strategies (Acedera & Yeoh, 2019). The move of parents also greatly influences the dynamics of family life. Even though there are economic needs to be met, there are material and social sacrifices that must be made. Apart from that, there are changes in family structure due to changes in

parenting patterns based on whose role is replaced (Bryceson, 2019). This factor is one of the causes of the formation and development of gender roles in the family.

In addition, female labor migration abroad is prone to creating ongoing moral dilemmas both in terms of women's safety and sexuality in the destination country (Platt, 2018). The temporal modalities of care for left-behind children intersect with gendered geometries of power in animating transnational family politics around care. Noting the structuring effect of rhythms on social life, routinized caregiving built around the mother as caregiver has a normalizing and naturalizing effect on social life behavior and general understanding of family well-being. Furthermore, it is necessary to recognize the potential rupture in parenting rhythms triggered by the migration of mothers who become breadwinners and the extent to which gendered parenting habits are perpetuated, reshaped, or disrupted in everyday parenting patterns and practices. Studies regarding gender role-based parenting processes also need to be studied if they have returned from overseas (Yeoh et al., 2020).

The increasing feminization of women's transnational labor migration, such as the sectorization of domestic divisions, as well as the risk of abuse against women, have raised concerns about the potential for a care crisis at home, and the resulting care deficit for children left behind in their countries of origin. Left-behind children from Indonesia and the Philippines understand, engage, and react to changes in their daily lives in their parents' absence. Involving children in efforts to maintain family integrity also has a good effect as a family control system, as well as improving the welfare of children and families, and making migration a sustainable strategy for all (Lam & Yeoh, 2019).

Additionally, care arrangements for children who are left behind and understanding how children respond to changes in intimate family relationships caused by reconfigurations of their care. Analysis of the impact on children who are left behind in resistance strategies, as well as their resilience in social life with peers and other adults, illustrates their role as social actors who are aware of the need for security and are the role of agents of their own development due to limited parental protection (Hoang et al., 2015).

Long-distance family relationships between parents and children certainly influence the way children build their identities and navigate the closeness between them. Various strategies are needed to overcome separation, such as long-distance communication, family rituals, and support mechanisms from families living in the country of origin. In this way, the dual role of parents greatly influences emotional relationships within the family and acts as a role model in determining their social identity.

The transnational movement of people across countries and continents certainly not only impacts migrant workers but also their children. This reflects the importance of understanding children's identity formation, family relationships across boundaries, and the need for more research in this area. If analyzed in depth, women's migration has an impact on families and children, including: 1) Changes in family structure, namely children experience changes in family relationships across generations due to the migration of their parents. Involving grandparents and third parties is an option often used by female workers; 2) Formation of children's social and cultural identity, namely the development of a mindset towards a portrait of self-identity formation related to gender, social, cultural and emotional, and cognitive development (Alipio et al., 2015). This identity formation is very essential because it is closely related to the way they control themselves to assess and determine their gender role in the future. Thus, the chain of care needs to be conceptualized in a more complex way that recognizes the multiple forms and circulations of care (Dwyer, 2018). It can be predicted that children's psychological well-being decreases compared to children from non-migrant households (Graham & Jordan, 2011). The level of resilience of children whose parents work remotely is higher than those who don't, but in terms of children's happiness levels, the opposite applies. (Jordan & Graham, 2012).

Although migration creates emotional displacement for migrants and their children, it also opens up opportunities for children's independence and freedom (Asis, 2006). Conventional concepts consider childhood to be a period of protection and education. This certainly attracts women to not be able to escape their responsibility as a source of comfort and security for their children.

As time goes by, children will experience changes towards thinking maturity due to situational conditions and pressures. In the future, children will also have a role in influencing their parents to be able to organize a harmonious family sustainability strategy in accordance with their expectations. One way is by influencing migration decisions made over many years to return to their homeland to carry out roles in accordance with the individual's self-identity. The formation of this identity is greatly influenced by how children identify themselves and use figures outside themselves as examples in playing gender roles in life. Cultural, social, and cognitive behavior (maturity of thinking) is a whole package in carrying out one's life which is formed through phenomena and one's perception of everything.

CONCLUSION

Women's labor migration has had complex implications for family structures, care systems, and the identity of children left behind. Migrant women (TKW) who work as workers face big challenges in the multi-roles they play. Their migration across continents shows the increasing role of women in an increasingly diverse workforce sector. In addition, this migration creates moral dilemmas regarding their safety there, challenges in family construction and gender roles, and intergenerational relationship dynamics that impact identity, sense of belonging, and emotional security.

Children who are left behind need strong strategies to navigate every obstacle and challenge in the midst of a changing care system due to the migration of their working mothers. The dynamics and rhythms of parenting have undergone a transformation since the migration of mothers as breadwinners. The long-term impact that can be felt is a higher level of resilience in children who are left to work, but in terms of satisfaction with parental love, the opposite is true. However, they can also play an active role in navigating the expected family structure, namely by influencing their mother's decision to stay abroad or return to receive complete love and maintain social identity in accordance with gender roles that are considered normative.

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