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Work-Family Struggles of Lady Companions in the Informal Night Entertainment Sector in Mukomuko Regency, Bengkulu

Studi Kualitatif atas Perjuangan Kerja dan Keluarga (Work-Family Struggles) Lady Companion (LC) di Kabupaten Mukomuko, Provinsi Bengkulu

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Abstract

Women in the informal sector commonly carry a double burden of earning a living while remaining responsible for their families, and the burden weighs most heavily on Lady Companions (LCs), women who work in karaoke venues from late night until dawn while also raising their children as single mothers. Previous studies have largely portrayed LCs as vulnerable, controlled, and stigmatized workers, while the way they combine night work with family responsibilities has received little attention. This study therefore examines the work-family struggles of LCs at a karaoke venue in Mukomuko Regency, Bengkulu, through five dimensions, namely working hours, economic pressure, conflict between work and family roles, working conditions, and survival strategies. Data were collected through two weeks of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation between April and July 2026 with five informants selected purposively, consisting of two LCs who are single mothers, the karaoke manager, a neighbor, and a boarding-house owner, then analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with reference to the concept of work-family conflict and James Coleman's rational choice theory. The findings show long and irregular night working hours that shrink the time available for rest and childcare, economic pressure that keeps the LCs in the job, work-family conflict marked by guilt and the obligation to conceal the work, and vulnerable working conditions without employment protection. In facing these conditions, the LCs adjust their working hours, select customers, limit information about their work, and maintain a socially acceptable appearance outside the workplace. The study concludes that remaining in LC work is a constrained choice, in which the LCs weigh economic need and family responsibility against occupational risk within structural limits that include poverty, gender norms, and the narrow employment options open to women with low educational attainment in the region.

Keywords: *Lady Companion, informal sector, single mother, work-family struggle, women*

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Abstrak

Perempuan di sektor informal umumnya menanggung beban ganda mencari penghidupan sambil tetap memikul tanggung jawab keluarga, dan beban itu paling berat dialami Lady Companion (LC), perempuan yang bekerja di tempat karaoke dari malam hingga dini hari sekaligus membesarkan anaknya sebagai ibu tunggal. Studi-studi terdahulu cenderung memotret LC sebagai pekerja yang rentan, dikendalikan, dan distigma, sementara cara mereka merangkai kerja malam dengan tanggung jawab keluarga belum banyak dikaji. Penelitian ini karena itu mengkaji perjuangan kerja dan keluarga (work-family struggles) LC di sebuah tempat karaoke di Kabupaten Mukomuko, Provinsi Bengkulu melalui lima dimensi, yaitu jam kerja, tekanan ekonomi, konflik antara peran kerja dan peran keluarga, kondisi kerja, dan strategi bertahan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif selama dua minggu, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi pada April hingga Juli 2026 terhadap lima informan yang dipilih secara purposive, yaitu dua LC yang berstatus ibu tunggal, pengelola karaoke, tetangga, dan pemilik kos, lalu dianalisis melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan dengan bertumpu pada konsep konflik kerja-keluarga dan teori pilihan rasional James Coleman. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan jam kerja malam yang panjang dan tidak menentu sehingga menyempitkan waktu istirahat dan pengasuhan anak, tekanan ekonomi yang membuat LC bertahan dalam pekerjaan, konflik kerja-keluarga yang ditandai rasa bersalah dan kewajiban menutupi pekerjaan, serta kondisi kerja yang rentan tanpa perlindungan ketenagakerjaan. Dalam menghadapi kondisi tersebut, LC menyesuaikan jam kerja, menyeleksi pelanggan, membatasi informasi tentang pekerjaannya, dan menjaga penampilan yang dapat diterima secara sosial di luar tempat kerja. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa bertahan dalam pekerjaan LC merupakan pilihan yang dibatasi struktur, ketika LC menimbang kebutuhan ekonomi dan tanggung jawab keluarga terhadap risiko pekerjaan dalam kendala kemiskinan, norma gender, dan sempitnya pilihan pekerjaan bagi perempuan berpendidikan rendah di daerah.

Kata Kunci: *Lady Companion*, perempuan, sektor informal, work-family struggle, ibu tunggal

INTRODUCTION

Social change has carried women far beyond the boundaries of the domestic sphere. Women are no longer confined to household roles; they are increasingly present in public life, including the labor market. Yet this change has unfolded within a patriarchal culture that continues to position men as the dominant party, so that women's entry into the world of work is constantly colored by assumptions about where women 'belong' (Halizah & Faralita, 2023). Women's participation in the Indonesian labor force has indeed continued to rise: the female labor force participation rate reached 56.63 percent (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). Rising numbers, however, have not automatically dismantled inequality. Working women are still regarded as the party primarily responsible for childcare and housework (Nazwa & Dora, 2024), while patriarchal structural barriers continue to steer women toward occupations with weaker protection (Shintiya et al., 2025).

This inequality becomes sharper when women work in the informal sector, that is, economic activity run by individuals or groups without a legal entity, resting on trust and mutual agreement (JDIH Kementerian Keuangan, 2025) and operating with limited capital, labor, and skills (KBBI, n.d.). Female workers in this sector face difficulties in arranging their time between work and private life, which demands considerable management of energy and attention (Rukmana & Winarno, 2023). In 2023, 64.25 percent of Indonesian women worked in the informal sector, higher than the 55.81 percent of men (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024a). Bengkulu Province recorded an even higher figure

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of 67.77 percent, meaning that more than two-thirds of the province's labor force lives off informal work (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024b). Unstable earnings, long working hours, and the near absence of social security add to the burden of women who must work while also caring for their families (Putri et al., 2024). An analysis of the 2023 SAKERNAS data further shows that women with low education, those who are married, and those who live in rural areas face a greater likelihood of working in vulnerable informal employment (Padila & Arisetyawan, 2026).

One form of informal work expanding in the night entertainment industry is that of the Lady Companion (LC), the term used in Indonesia for women employed by karaoke venues to accompany customers, equivalent to the karaoke hostess or pemandu karaoke in earlier studies. The job involves accompanying customers as they sing, helping select songs, chatting, and serving customers' needs inside the karaoke room (Desi et al., 2022). It is a job generally performed by women, one that works through the imagery attached to femininity, such as beauty, charm, and attentiveness (Nawang S. & Sadewo, 2018). The work is relatively easy to enter because it demands no formal education, as what matters is the ability to communicate, a friendly manner, and an attractive appearance (Nawang et al., 2023). In Mukomuko Regency, Bengkulu, karaoke venues employing LCs are scattered from residential neighborhoods to tourist areas. An initial survey conducted before the main fieldwork found roughly twenty women working as LCs at one venue, which was then selected as the research site. Most existing studies of LCs have been conducted in cities such as Surabaya and Surakarta, whereas Mukomuko is a small regency in which a karaoke venue operates inside a residential area, so the social distance between the workplace, the LCs' homes, and the wider community is short and the social control around the work is immediate. The LCs generally begin work around 10:00 p.m. and return home in the early hours of the morning, with earnings that vary from night to night. Many of them are single mothers who must provide for their children and families on their own, so that night work runs parallel to domestic responsibilities during the day. This study focuses on LCs who are single mothers because the tension between night work and daytime caregiving is sharpest for them, and it treats this focus as a deliberate selection rather than a claim that all LCs at the venue share the same status, so the findings speak to the situation of the LCs studied and not automatically to all LCs in the regency.

A number of earlier studies have examined the lives of women LCs. Nanda (2024) shows that LCs occupy a vulnerable position within the power relations among managers, customers, and workers, such that their bodies and behavior are tightly controlled. Adiningtyas and Akbar (2023) find that the profession is entangled with what they describe as veiled prostitution, in which women's bodies become an economic instrument under the pressure of survival needs. Hasugian and Nida (2025) examine the coping strategies and safe-space regulation LCs use to avoid harassment. Across these studies the LC appears mainly as an object of social problems, a woman who is vulnerable, controlled, and stigmatized, and the analysis usually stops at the boundary of the workplace. What previous research has not examined is how LCs live through the other half of their day, that is, how they carry out night work while simultaneously performing their roles as mothers and family providers, and how the two roles shape each other in daily practice. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the work-family struggles of

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LCs who are single mothers through five analytical dimensions, namely working hours, economic pressure, work-family conflict, working conditions, and survival strategies, and by reading their decisions to remain in the work as constrained rational choices. In doing so, the article presents the LC not merely as a figure humiliated by stigma but as a struggling subject who actively manages work, family, and risk.

The central concept of this study is the work-family struggle, understood as the condition in which a person must hold down a job while also meeting the needs and responsibilities of family life, so that both sides place continuing demands on the same limited time, energy, and emotions. High emotional and physical engagement in work carries the potential for conflict between the demands of the job and private life (Baumruk, 2006). A systematic review of working women shows that their work-life balance is shaped by organizational, psychological, and social factors (Aprilia et al., 2025). McDonald and Bradley (2005) argue that work-life balance concerns how a person divides time, involvement, and satisfaction between work and life outside it, while Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) explain that work-family conflict arises when the demands of one role make it difficult to perform another, through scarcity of time, strain within a role, and competing behavioral expectations. From these concepts and from the characteristics of women's informal employment, the study derives five analytical dimensions for reading the field data, namely workload and long or irregular working hours, economic pressure, conflict between work and family life, vulnerable and unprotected working conditions, and survival strategies. The five dimensions function as analytical lenses that guided the reading of the interviews and observations rather than as predetermined coding categories, and they are interrelated, since long hours heighten conflict with family roles, low earnings make leaving difficult, and weak protection raises the risks that the survival strategies must manage.

To understand the choices LCs make, this study draws on James S. Coleman's rational choice theory. In this theory, individual action is directed toward particular goals, and the actor weighs the resources at hand in choosing the course of action that promises the greatest benefit (Coleman, 1990). Rational choice holds that individuals decide logically in line with their goals and interests (Wirawan, 2012), with the actor and resources as its two central elements (Ritzer, 2024). Rational choice is appropriate for this study because the LCs continually face concrete decisions, whether to stay in or leave the work, which customers to accept, what to tell their families, and how to protect themselves, and each of these decisions involves a visible weighing of resources, costs, and risks. The theory complements the work-family perspective rather than competing with it, since work-family pressures and working conditions form the very situation the LC evaluates when she chooses a course of action. The study nevertheless reads rationality as constrained, because the options open to the LCs are narrowed by poverty, gender norms that assign caregiving to women, and a local labor market that offers women with low education only a small set of jobs.

On the basis of this framework, the study asks two questions. First, how do LCs who are single mothers in Mukomuko Regency experience and manage the struggle between night work and family responsibilities? Second, how can their decisions to remain in this work be understood through rational choice under structural constraint? By answering these questions at one karaoke venue, the study offers a detailed account of

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a setting that previous research has not covered and contributes a view of LCs as active subjects who weigh options and make choices within limits set by structure, rather than only as victims of stigma.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, because the aim was to describe in detail the experiences, daily routines, and strategies of a group whose working lives are hidden from public view, and a descriptive qualitative design is suitable for presenting social phenomena as a rich factual account (Creswell, 2010). The research site was a karaoke venue in Mukomuko Regency, Bengkulu Province. Participant observation was carried out for two weeks in April and May 2026, with the researcher present as an ordinary customer so that the normal routine of the venue would not be disturbed, while in-depth interviews were conducted in April, May, and July 2026. The interviews continued into July to follow up and clarify findings that had emerged during the earlier fieldwork and analysis. Observation was used to witness the LCs' working activities directly, from preparing their appearance and interacting with customers to working through the night (Hardani et al., 2020). Semi-structured interviews followed a guide that was prepared from the research questions, the five analytical dimensions, and the initial survey, and the guide was refined as new information emerged during fieldwork. Documentation in the form of photographs and field notes served as supporting data, with photographs limited to the working environment and the general atmosphere of accompaniment, taken with permission and free of identifying details.

Informants were selected purposively, that is, on the researcher's judgment of the units most relevant to the research focus (Firmansyah & Dede, 2022). The key informants were the karaoke manager and two women LCs who had been married, had children, and were still working at the time of the research. The two LC informants were aged 30 and 39, had worked at the venue for one to three years, worked at night with schedules that followed the arrival of customers, and carried the main responsibility for raising their children after separating from their husbands. Additional informants were a neighbor who minds the child of one LC while she works and the owner of the boarding house where the other LC lives, and their accounts of the informants' daily lives were used to complete and verify the LCs' own narratives (Sugiyono, 2019). The interviews were conducted in Indonesian at places chosen by the informants, audio-recorded with their consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Informants were considered sufficient when the information they gave began to repeat across interviews and no new themes emerged from the data, an indication that data saturation had been reached. Data analysis followed the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Silalahi, 2012), with interview and observation materials coded and grouped according to the five analytical dimensions. The findings were then examined through triangulation of sources and techniques by comparing the accounts of the two LCs with each other, with the accounts of the supporting informants, and with the researcher's observation records and documentation. All informants were anonymized with initials, the karaoke venue is not named in order to protect privacy, the researcher disclosed her identity and research purpose to the informants and obtained their consent before the interviews, and the

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informants knew they could withdraw at any time. Throughout the research process, the comfort and safety of the informants were given priority, particularly because the work they do is socially sensitive.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Profile and Work System of Lady Companions in Mukomuko Regency

Table 1 shows the composition of the informants. The key informants are the karaoke manager (BJ) and two women LCs who are single mothers (TR and TW), while SW, the neighbor who minds TR's child while TR works, and M, the boarding-house owner who observes TW's daily life, serve as additional informants. TR (39) has worked as an LC for a year after previously being a housewife, and she works once or twice a week on a freelance basis. TW (30) has worked as an LC almost every night for three years while also singing with a wedding band during the day. Both became single mothers after separating from their husbands, both bear the full cost of raising three children, and both conceal this work from their extended families. The accounts of the two LC informants were cross-checked with the observation records at the venue and with the payment information they reported, and the accounts of the manager, the neighbor, and the boarding-house owner were used to verify and complete the picture.

Table 1. Informant Identities

No.	Initial	Age	Gender	Status	Description
1.	BJ	52	Male	Karaoke manager	Key informant
2.	TR	39	Female	Single mother	Key informant
3.	TW	30	Female	Single mother	Key informant
4.	SW	50	Female	Neighborhood resident	Additional informant
5.	M	53	Male	Boarding-house owner	Additional informant

Source: Researcher's interviews, 2026

The LC work system at the venue is freelance, without a permanent employment bond. Operating hours begin around 10:00 p.m. and end between 2:00 and 5:00 a.m. depending on the arrival of customers, and rainy weather, which reduces visits, also determines the night's income. The accompanying fee is Rp100,000 per hour, paid for the time a customer is accompanied, plus tips of uncertain amounts, so earnings fluctuate from night to night. According to the manager, there are no requirements regarding education, age, or physical criteria, and what is assessed is the ability to communicate, to sing, to present an attractive appearance, to adapt, and to be disciplined and honest. These arrangements are consistent with the character of informal employment, which is small in scale, easy to enter, reliant on skills learned outside the formal education system

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(Khairi & Marsoyo, 2022), and, like informal work generally, operates without employment protection (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024a). Irregular late-night shifts and earnings that depend on customer attendance leave the LCs with little control over their time and income, and the absence of an employment bond means that illness, quiet nights, or the loss of the job fall entirely on the LC herself, a condition that affects her physical well-being, her family responsibilities, and her economic security at the same time.

An LC's tasks include accompanying customers in song, chatting, serving food and drinks, and building a comfortable atmosphere (Desi et al., 2022). The pattern of interaction rests on communication that is friendly, polite, and easy to follow, so that customers feel appreciated. Appearance works as the LC's working capital in two senses. Inside the venue, dressing and putting on makeup to suit the karaoke setting is an occupational requirement of the job, while outside it the LCs keep a modest appearance to meet the gendered expectations of the surrounding community, so the appearance they manage at work must be balanced against the appearance they must maintain in social life. TR even insists that she wants to be known for her singing voice rather than her looks. Alongside accompanying customers in the karaoke room, there is also the practice of booking out, in which customers take an LC out after the session for an additional fee (Adiningtyas & Akbar, 2023). On this practice, the data require careful reading. The two LC informants insist that their work stops at accompaniment within professional boundaries, while the supporting informants and the payment records indicate that some LCs accept bookings when economic need becomes pressing. This study did not investigate what takes place outside the venue and makes no claim about it, and the difference in narratives is best read cautiously, as one plausible combination of impression management on one side and economic necessity on the other, rather than as a settled fact. The manager sets the entry requirements and the working arrangements but takes no protective role in the interactions between customers and LCs, so long as no disturbance occurs, which leaves the LCs to negotiate with customers on their own and to bear the risks themselves. Maintaining a modest appearance outside work is therefore also a way of negotiating the stigma attached to karaoke work, since the LCs live as neighbors, mothers, and community members while working in a venue that the community judges. Figures 1 and 2 show the LCs' working environment at the research site, with Figure 1 presenting the venue and its karaoke rooms where the LCs spend their nights and Figure 2 presenting the accompaniment interaction between LCs and customers that constitutes the core of the work.

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Figure 1: Working Environment of the Lady Companion Venue (Source: Researcher's Observation, 2026)



Figure 2: Lady Companions (LCs) Accompanying Customers (Source: Researcher's Documentation, 2026)

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The Work-Family Struggles of Lady Companions

Workload and irregular night hours. Workload covers the amount of activity demanded of a worker together with the time that activity takes, and long or irregular hours are among the factors that disturb the balance between work and private life (Aprilia et al., 2025). For an LC, that burden does not end when the karaoke room closes. TR returns home between 2:00 and 3:00 a.m., falls asleep around three, and is up again at five to prepare breakfast, take her child to school and pick the child up, and take the child to Qur'an lessons in the afternoon. TW carries a heavier load still, since after accompanying karaoke into the early hours she sleeps a few hours, then works as a wedding-band singer at midday and prepares again for karaoke at night. Read side by side, the two tables quantify the burden. TR's paid night work lasts about five hours, but her unpaid domestic and care work stretches across the whole day, so that paid and unpaid labor together occupy nearly all her waking hours. TW's schedule adds about four hours of paid work as a wedding-band singer to roughly seven hours at karaoke, against only about four hours of rest between returning home in the morning and preparing for the next performance. The rest recorded in TR's table is not continuous sleep either, since the 12.00-15.30 block is shared with housework and childcare, so her sleep is short and broken across the early morning and midday. Although she works freelance, TR still feels exhausted, and TW has almost no days off at all. The physical consequences are plain, namely fatigue, a broken sleep pattern, and time for themselves that hardly exists, and these conditions form the first face of the work-family struggle, since the same hours that produce income also take time away from rest and from their children.

Because their daily activities differ markedly, the two informants' routines are presented in separate tables. Table 2 reconstructs the daily routine of TR, who juggles single motherhood with freelance night work, while Table 3 reconstructs the routine of TW, who combines karaoke work with daytime performances almost without a day off.

Table 2. Daily Activity Pattern of Informant TR

No.	Time	Activity
1.	06.00	Picking the child up from the neighbor's house
2.	06.30-08.00	Preparing breakfast and school needs, taking the child to school
3.	08.00-11.00	Cleaning the boarding room
4.	11.00-11.30	Picking the child up from school
5.	12.00-15.30	Resting
6.	15.30-16.00	Taking the child to Qur'an lessons
7.	16.00-17.00	Cooking dinner, bathing
8.	17.00-17.30	Picking the child up from Qur'an lessons
9.	17.30-19.00	Accompanying the child and helping with homework

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No.	Time	Activity
10.	19.00-21.00	Preparing for work
11.	21.00-21.30	Preparing the child's needs (milk, food, pocket money) and taking the child to the neighbor's house
12.	21.30-22.00	Leaving for the karaoke venue
13.	22.00-03.00 (varies)	Working as a Lady Companion (LC)
14.	04.00-04.30	Returning to the boarding room
15.	04.30-06.00	Resting

Source: Interviews and observation, 2026

Table 3. Daily Activity Pattern of Informant TW

No.	Time	Activity
1.	06.00	Returning home from work
2.	06.00-10.00	Resting
3.	10.00-12.00	Cleaning the boarding room, cooking, eating
4.	12.00-13.00	Preparing for work as a wedding-band singer
5.	13.00-14.00	Leaving for the wedding-band performance
6.	14.00-18.00	Working as a wedding-band singer
7.	18.00-19.00	Returning home
8.	19.00-21.30	Preparing for work as a Lady Companion (LC)
9.	21.30-22.00	Leaving for the karaoke venue
10.	22.00-05.00 (varies)	Working as a Lady Companion (LC)

Source: Interviews and observation, 2026

Economic pressure as the reason for staying. Economic factors are the main reason both informants remain in this work, in line with findings that the earnings of women informal workers play an important role in sustaining poor households (Haryanto, 2008). The two cases, however, show different forms of economic pressure. TR earns Rp300,000 to Rp400,000 in a night, but because she works only once or twice a week, that income cannot be relied on monthly, while she pays Rp500,000 in monthly rent and supports three children, two of whom attend school out of town, so her problem is the irregularity of the income itself. TW earns Rp5 to Rp6 million a month from two jobs, but

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the amount is absorbed by the children entrusted to relatives elsewhere and by installments of the marital debt left in her name, so her problem is not small income but obligations that match and exceed it. When the karaoke venue once closed for forty days, both lost their income, and TW looked for additional wedding performances so her children's needs could still be met. This sequence of events indicates that the LCs enter and stay in this risky night work primarily because their needs are pressing, while the narrow range of alternative jobs open to women of their background leaves them little room to choose otherwise (Putri et al., 2024). Economic necessity is therefore the strongest single weight in the LCs' calculations, and it is the weight that makes the other dimensions of the struggle harder to escape.

Conflict between work and family life. Role conflict emerges when the demands of work make it difficult to carry out family roles (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and the experiences of the two informants display the three forms of that conflict the theory distinguishes. TR's guilt every time she asks her child's forgiveness before leaving the child with a neighbor is strain-based conflict, in which the tension carried from night work drains her performance of the mother role, and her late-night hours set against the child's school and Qur'an schedule are time-based conflict. TW's case turns on behavior-based conflict, since she hides the karaoke work behind an identity as a wedding-band singer, a role whose required conduct would collapse if the karaoke work were known. TW keeps up daily telephone contact with her children and parents, but her parents once reacted furiously, even threatening not to let her come home when they suspected her work was improper. TR is aware that her children will gradually come to understand what she does, so she plans to look for other work before that happens. Stigma also shadows the future, since TW fears she will not be accepted by a prospective partner if the work is discovered. The concealment, the guilt, and the fear show that the struggle extends beyond working hours into a social and emotional cost that the LCs carry continuously, a burden that sits on top of the workload and the economic pressure already described.

Vulnerable and unprotected working conditions. The LC stands at the weak end of the power relations among workers, managers, and customers (Nanda, 2024). At the venue studied, no rule specifically protects the LCs, since the manager only supervises smooth operations and whatever happens between a customer and an LC is treated as private business so long as it does not cause a disturbance. Both informants often have to accompany customers drinking alcohol and smoking, and they occasionally face customers who overstep the line, situations the informants described in the interviews and whose setting the researcher observed directly during fieldwork. Working freelance, TR is aware that no party will bear her risk, so she screens her customers, asks for a room near the attendant's desk, and refuses tactfully by feigning a trip to the restroom or fetching a drink so the situation does not escalate. The manager's hands-off position weakens the LCs' bargaining power, because the venue does not back them against customers, while refusing a customer may cost the fee from that night. The lack of contracts, safety guarantees, and grievance mechanisms is thus a consequence of the informal arrangement of this employment rather than a separate fact about the venue, and it transfers the entire burden of protection onto the LCs themselves, which is why self-protection appears as a survival strategy in its own right.

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Survival strategies. Coping has two broad forms, one emotion-focused, which manages the feelings produced by a stressful situation, and one problem-focused, which changes the situation itself (Hasugian & Nida, 2025). Both forms appear in this study. On the emotional side, the LCs manage themselves to stay calm and professional when facing disrespectful customers, keep a modest appearance outside work, and join the women's Qur'an study circles in their neighborhood to protect their standing in the community. On the problem side, TR limits her working nights to once or twice a week, selects customers she already knows, and draws on SW's help to mind her child, while TW adds income through a second job. Both also restrict information about their work to certain circles to avoid stigma. Read through rational choice, each strategy is a calculation that trades a portion of income or freedom for a reduction in risk, since working fewer nights lowers exposure to troublesome customers, selecting known customers lowers the risk of harassment, keeping the work hidden lowers the risk of family conflict and social sanction, and the second job lowers dependence on the venue's unpredictable nights. These are not passive acts of endurance but active arrangements of a life under constraint, and they show the agency the LCs retain within a narrow set of options.

Work-Family Struggles as Rational Choice

In Coleman's (1990) framework, an action is explained by the actor's goals, the resources at her command, and the weighing of costs and benefits between alternatives. Read this way, the LCs' goals are clear, namely meeting the needs of their children and families. Their resources are also used consciously, since TR arranges her freelance hours so she can still care for her child and turns a neighbor's trust into working support, while TW combines two jobs with her singing ability to enlarge her income (Ritzer, 2024). Each observed decision carries the shape of a calculation. Staying in LC work brings higher hourly earnings than the alternatives available to them, at the cost of night hours, fatigue, and stigma. Screening customers and choosing rooms near the attendant's desk reduces the risk of harassment at the price of occasionally lost fees. Concealing the work from the family protects the relationships that matter most to them at the price of continuous vigilance (Wirawan, 2012). The survival strategies described above follow the same logic, since each trades income or convenience for a reduction in a specific risk.

Yet reading their choices as rational does not mean those choices are free, and it is here that the study's use of rational choice must be qualified. The LCs' room for choice is formed by a lopsided structure, a patriarchal culture that assigns caregiving to women (Halizah & Faralita, 2023), structural barriers that narrow women's employment (Shintiya et al., 2025), and an informal labor market that absorbs the largest share of low-educated female workers (Padila & Arisetyawan, 2026). Theirs are constrained choices, made inside limits the LCs themselves did not set, so the rationality lies in how they manage those limits rather than in a free selection among real alternatives. This is also where the study's contribution lies. The vulnerability of LCs within power relations (Nanda, 2024), the commodification of women's bodies under economic pressure (Adiningtyas & Akbar, 2023), and the coping strategies of LCs (Hasugian & Nida, 2025) have all been studied, but the specific position of the LC who is a single mother, holding night work and sole

family responsibility at the same time, has not been analyzed as such, and it is precisely this double role that makes the LC not merely a vulnerable worker but the mainstay of her family. The findings also point to implications that follow from them directly. Because economic need is the reason the LCs stay, economic empowerment and skills training that open alternative sources of income are the most direct response. Because the work carries no protection, social protection schemes need to reach women informal workers whose work they are likely to hide. Because stigma is what the LCs manage daily, the conditions that lead women into night entertainment work deserve a response of policy rather than of judgment.

CONCLUSION

The work-family struggles of women Lady Companions (LCs) in Mukomuko Regency appear in four interrelated conditions. First, long and irregular night working hours shrink the time available for rest and for their families. Second, economic pressure is the main reason they choose and hold on to this work, since other available jobs cannot cover the needs of their children and families. Third, conflict between work and family roles breeds guilt, the obligation to conceal the work from children and extended family, and fear of stigma. Fourth, vulnerable and unprotected working conditions force the LCs to protect themselves entirely by their own means. Facing these four conditions, the LCs develop survival strategies, adjusting their working hours, screening customers, adding side jobs, maintaining their social image, and limiting information about their work. The central contribution of this study lies in showing the intersection of night work, single motherhood, and family responsibility, a position in which the same woman works through the night and carries the family's livelihood alone, a combination that earlier studies of LCs have not examined.

Rational choice theory helps explain how the LCs navigate this position, since their decisions to stay, to screen customers, and to conceal the work are weighings of goals, resources, and risk, yet those weighings occur inside constraints of poverty, gender norms, and narrow local employment that the LCs did not choose. The rationality of the LCs therefore lies in how they manage constraint, not in freedom of choice, and this reading is the study's theoretical contribution. Because the findings locate the cause of the struggle in economic need and its shape in the absence of protection, the recommendations follow directly from them. Regional governments need to provide economic empowerment programs, skills training, and social protection designed for women informal workers whose work tends to remain hidden, and society needs to replace stigma with an understanding of the conditions that lead women to work in the night entertainment industry. Future research can examine the mental health of LCs, their family relations over time, and the long-term impacts of night work on their lives.

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