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The lived experience of female factory workers in rural West Java

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Peter Hancock is Lecturer in International Development Studies at Deakin University, Geelong. His teaching and research focuses upon development theory, gender and development, and the cultural, social and political impacts of industrial development in Indonesia between 1900 and 2000.

This article focuses on the lived experiences of rural factory women in West Java. The women discussed currently work and have lived all their lives in Banjaran, a rapidly industrialising district of rural Java. The article explores the working conditions factory women face, the role of foreign managers and Westernised production methods, and the impacts of these upon the status of factory women in their villages and homes. The argument in the paper is based on the premise that; while exploitation of factory women by foreign factory managers, the Indonesian state and military, and the nature of global capitalism, is plainly evident; working women are not necessarily victims. Research suggests that, for a slim majority of the 323 women studied, factory work did not mean reduced status. Factory women in Banjaran had to fight, however, against the tide of extreme exploitation by management and the complicity and corruption of the Suharto regime.

Abbreviations

AAFM	average age at first marriage
ILO	International Labour Organization
LAIDS	Labour Association of Indonesia

This paper is the result of fieldwork conducted in 1996–97 in Banjaran, West Java. This region was undergoing rapid industrial development and, as a result, was absorbing tens of thousands of young women from traditional lifestyles into factory employment. 323 factory women—all of whom worked in sports shoe, textile, or garment factories—and their families were included in the study. The social, cultural and demographic impacts of rapid industrial development upon rural factory women was the major focus of the research, and data was collected to measure these impacts. The study found that, despite harsh and unnecessary exploitation by all factory sectors sampled (textiles, garments and sports shoes), factory women are extremely important to their household and nation; and without their loyalty to both, industrial development would not be successful in contemporary Indonesia. However, of the women sampled, only 40 per cent believed their status had improved as a result of factory work.

Methodology

An ethnographic study incorporating social surveys and questionnaires was used in this research to offset seemingly inaccurate census data and labour force surveys which, in Indonesia, are sometimes stigmatised as being too inaccurate to be useful (Bulmer 1993). Women eligible to become respondents in this research project were identified in a number of stages. The women had to be Sundanese (indigenous to West Java, with an estimated population of 38 million in 1999); they had to be living with their immediate family or in an equivalent

situation; and had to have worked in a textile, garment, or shoe factory for at least six months and still be employed in this position at the time they were surveyed. Participants in the interviews, Focus Groups, and observations, were selected from the questionnaire lists themselves. The women could be of any age, marital status, or educational level, in order to highlight these typical factors among factory women in Banjaran.

Women were chosen to be representative of the region's female factory workers in general. One-third of the women surveyed came from highland areas, and two-thirds were from the lowland villages; a ratio which was representative of the geographic distribution of the population as a whole. Distinct differences were evident from both areas. For example, the average age for highland factory women leaving school was 12 years, compared to 15.2 years for lowland women. This point highlights the great influence geography has upon women's status. Information was sought on education levels, marriage and fertility, household status, the relative status of the respondents' mothers, household income, and the influences on all of these resulting from new industrial development.

A major theoretical aspect of this study is the relationship between development research, local studies, and macro outcomes. This research assumes that, despite being a local study, its major findings are important, providing a contrast with the results of similar studies. For instance, industrialisation, as pursued recently by many developing governments, has resulted in the same forced structures imposed on the people

from above. These structures have tended to affect women and their households in similar ways. For example, a common outcome when women are drawn from more traditional lifestyles into factory work is conflict within the traditional patriarchy (Jamilah 1994; Mather 1988; Buang 1993; Hardjono 1993). I recorded similar conflict in Banjaran.

To arrange the sampling design for the questionnaire, population statistics were sourced from all *Lurah* (Village Heads) in Banjaran. They were asked for the approximate number of female factory workers living in their *Desa* (Village). Eleven *Desa* were targeted, representative of both highland and lowland villages. The number of women surveyed in each *Desa* was directly related to the total female working population in factories from that particular area. For example, in *Desa 7* there were 654 women working in factories. Of these, 38 were chosen for the questionnaire, five families for the in-depth interviews and eight women for the focus groups. Every *Desa* was sampled in this way, but random sampling was not considered crucial, because of the relatively homogenous nature of the population.

Quantitative data was collected via a questionnaire. Two thirds of the questions in the questionnaire required purely quantitative answers, while the remaining questions were open to qualitative answers. The questionnaire was initially tested on 15 women, and obvious flaws were rectified. Further, a questionnaire was given to all 17 Village Heads (*Lurah*) in Banjaran. This questionnaire sought census data and also incorporated open-ended questions relating

to the relationship between factory management and public officers in the organisation of female labour. The questionnaire also sought information from the *Lurahs* about the positive and negative outcomes of industrial employment for women in their *Desa*.

The dominant language in the research site is Bahasa Sunda, or the traditional Sundanese language. This language is extremely complex and difficult to master, and is used with great pride by the Sundanese people, because it provides a strong link with their past. Bahasa Sunda is unrelated to any other language used today in the Indonesian archipelago. In Banjaran, however, a hybrid combination of Bahasa Sunda and Bahasa Indonesia is spoken in public for ease of communication, because central Banjaran has recently become a very busy market town with increasing numbers of outsiders doing business there. The further one goes from central Banjaran into the highland villages, the stronger and more frequent the use of Bahasa Sunda becomes. The researcher was fluent in Bahasa Indonesia and augmented a lack of knowledge of Bahasa Sunda using back translation and local research assistants.

All respondents were coded according to their geographic distance from central Banjaran. Significant differences in education levels, marriage age, and household decision making processes—and hence the status of women—was noticeable as distance increased from central Banjaran. Geography was vitally important in the final methodology chosen, and was later to provide a significant comparative analysis, because the culture and status of women in

densely settled, low lying central Banjaran was markedly different from that of the less 'developed' highland areas.

Hanson and Pratt (1995) conducted research in Worcester and Massachusetts relating to gender, geography, and industrial employment, and their findings are extremely useful to this research. They found that geography and distance were key elements in isolating women from employment—limiting their employment to strict regions—and in denying women political power (1995:10). In short they found that, in terms of distances travelled to work, distances which posed no problems to men were problematic for women. These same key elements of geography isolate women in rural Java and, at the same time, concentrate tens of thousands of women in geographic areas close to their homes. Factories have been deliberately sited in regions like Banjaran for just this reason. They are close to a source of rural female labour which, as a result of geographic and cultural factors, will remain constant. Domestic stereotypes confine both groups of women to the home area, limiting their choices. The fact that Sundanese factory workers are positioned in low-paying jobs with little chance for future promotion is testament not only to the international division of labour, but also to the local factors of gender and geography. Not only do employers reserve better jobs for men, but the restrictions on geographic movement for women also cause problems.

Historical analysis was important to this study in a variety of ways. Oral histories were obtained from focus groups and interviews with mothers and older members

of the community. The oral histories focused on recent history and were designed to contrast the economic position of mothers to that of daughters who were working in modern factories. Oral histories from mothers and other community members were crucial in one conclusion of this research relating to Sundanese culture and demography. In the recent past, women have had very little role to play in the economy outside the home. They rarely earned an income, and, if they did work in agriculture, it was casually and in the shadow of their fathers or husbands. Further, the informal economy, which is discussed in the literature as a domain where women in traditional societies usually become involved in economic trading or producing, has no real relevance to Banjaran. Women were significantly restrained from working in either the formal or informal economy. They were idealised as housewives (*Ibu Rumah Tangga*), and young unmarried women would be confined to the household area until married, whereafter they would immediately become mothers and houseworkers, possibly occasionally working outside the home. This applied to over 80 per cent of those surveyed. Younger factory workers are therefore a part of a new history in Banjaran, and comparisons between their lifestyle and that of their mothers are striking and poignant.

The unique history of the Sundanese and the region (central West Java), which was controlled by Javanese kings and later the Dutch colonial forces for most of its history, adds to the people's cultural homogeneity and has stimulated the development of very different roles and status for local women

compared to those of Javanese women. The Sundanese embraced Islam more strongly than the Javanese—perhaps as a defensive mechanism against dominance by the Javanese and the Dutch—and this is reflected in the economic and social status of their women.

Similar studies

There are very few similar studies of the impact of rural industrialisation on women in Java. Even fewer concentrate on Sundanese West Java, and fewer still focus on village households, women, and industrial development. The most similar study to this research was carried out in rural Central Java by Diane Wolf (1992), who focused on the impacts of rural industrialisation on young women drawn from village areas into nearby factories. Wolf's study focused on household strategies, patriarchy, proletarianisation, gender relations, life cycles, and the impacts of factory work on agrarian society.

Wolf's findings present several contrasts with this study. For example, most of the women in her research freely chose to work in a factory. Sundanese women in Banjaran have not had that freedom. Further, Wolf claimed that her 'factory daughters' had a lot of social autonomy and tended to be a financial burden to their parents, even when working. This was definitely not apparent with Sundanese women. In fact, Wolf noted that Javanese women tended to withdraw from parental control at every opportunity (1992:5)—the complete opposite of the majority of Sundanese women I surveyed. Finally, in Wolf's research the financial support offered by the wages of the factory

women was not found to be significant. For example, Wolf's data found that families had to support their daughter's work financially, in the form of food and transport costs (reimbursements), because their daily wages were too low (1992:179). As a result, Wolf claims that these families are actually supporting industrial capitalism through their support of factory daughters. By contrast, my research found that the factory women in Banjaran were generally not a burden on their parents. In fact, the majority were an asset and provided crucial financial support to their families.

Mather (1988) carried out research amongst a group of villages recently incorporated into industrial development in an area of West Java adjacent to Jakarta. In her research she found that Islamic leaders and Village Heads responded to industrial expansion by recruiting primarily uneducated women and enforcing the harsh conditions insisted upon by investors. These same leaders solved work disputes through their mere presence at the factories and, through their traditional ability to subordinate women, were able to provide a cheap, docile, and compliant workforce for the new factories. At the same time, these leaders gained increased social and economic status through their ability to organise labour. Village Heads and Islamic leaders in Banjaran do fit the general framework provided by Mather.

The privately funded survey by the Labour Association of Indonesia (LAIDS), *A Picture of Labour in Java* (1996), provides another example of a similar study. This survey was carried out in all major industrial regions of Java, including Bandung-

Banjaran. The survey of over 170,000 male and female factory workers collected data on wages and working conditions, and information about the factories themselves. In contrast to my study, the LAIDS survey found that, despite their wages, many of the female factory workers relied on support from their families to afford the necessities of life (1996:33). It also pointed to the extreme exploitation of labour in this region.

According to the ILO (1993) and the Indonesian Government (1994), women are provided special protection when employed in the formal labour market. Major 'protections' include the legal requirement that women only work a 40 hour week and are paid the minimum wage. Data collected in Banjaran, however, clearly show that the stated 'protections' are not enforced or adhered to.

The ILO (1993) has documented 36 Indonesian laws which specifically protect female workers. They range from menstruation, pregnancy and lactation leave to equal rights in employment, promotion, and pay and many other supportive policies. However, the ILO found that these 'protections' are commonly ignored and in fact lead to further discrimination against women (1993). For example, a case study from West Java found that women work an average of 47 hours per week in factories, not including daily overtime which is compulsory depending upon orders. Moreover, those who claim maternity leave are commonly sacked. The majority of female workers are employed as daily casuals or piecemeal workers with no real rights. When a factory does open or expand,

the essential criterion for employment is that new female workers have no previous factory experience (Braadbaart 1992). Similar and more disturbing findings are revealed by this research. At the same time, there are a number of positive outcomes which should not be ignored.

Women and work

Twenty years ago, women, especially unmarried women, rarely left their village area and were forbidden to leave the Banjaran area alone. They were forced to leave school at 11 years of age—the age of womanhood in Sundanese culture—and were married soon after. Today, thousands of young women travel daily to factories; some travel long distances (18kms) from their homes—journeys their mothers rarely took. This change is due to economic development, but has not necessarily meant the emancipation of Sundanese women.

The Sundanese women interviewed in 1997 had fixed views toward work. They saw it as a way to improve the education and life chances of their children or younger siblings. They were prepared to work hard if it meant improved living standards compared with those of their mothers' era. Factory employment has acted as a catalyst, and most women saw the opportunity it provided them compared to very limited opportunities in the agricultural or trading sectors. Women have been provided with relatively long term and stable employment which has impacted upon their work ethic (the average working life of the 323 women sampled was 3.4 years).

In the Focus Groups and interviews, all the young women were asked about their attitudes towards agrarian employment. The majority stated that agricultural work, apart from being unavailable, was too dirty, too hot, and made their skin black, which is socially unacceptable in this culture. Having black skin is considered most unattractive owing to the low status of agricultural work, and a female with very black skin is not only perceived as a lowly agrarian labourer, but also as 'black sweet' (local slang), a phrase which holds connotations of sexual impropriety. In addition, women commonly stated that factory work was their hobby (*hobi*) and that working in *Sawah* could never be a hobby. The use of the word hobby to describe work reveals an interesting female attitude towards factory employment. It is seen in this context as 'game like' and reflects the fact that the employment of Sundanese women in the formal sector is a new phenomenon. In some regards, the women saw factory work as fun, a relief from their tedious life in the villages, and a far better alternative to outside work. The fact that they commonly and continually referred to factory work as their hobby reveals certain social perceptions still prevalent among the Sundanese. Owing to ideologies which promote the man as breadwinner, the traditional perception is that women's work is just for fun, and the women probably used the term hobby for this reason. These ideologies and perceptions are directly contradicted by the harsh working conditions these women face and the important financial contributions these women make to their families.

Status

Generalising about female status at the household level is highly problematic. It is even more difficult to measure improvements in gender relations in a region over a short period of time. Quantitative and qualitative data provide a general insight into the impacts of industrial employment on household status, but exact facts and figures are not going to provide any real insights into this phenomenon. To measure and analyse household status this study relied on only basic analysis of quantitative data and the words of those interviewed or present in discussion groups, especially the mothers of factory women. How the women defined status was particularly important because it raised the point of gender relationships and also provided new ways in which to measure women's status.

In gross terms, 40 per cent of the women questioned said they felt their status had increased as a result of factory work. The remaining 60 per cent believed that their household status had not changed. Of the women who claimed to see a positive improvement in their status, roughly 45 per cent stated that this was predominantly due to their new wage contributions to their family. The remaining 55 per cent claimed it was due to the fact that they were not in the home all the time and, therefore, not confined to household duties and constant parental control. There was a common theme present among those who claimed their status had increased due to their contributions. These women were usually from the poorest of families and in most cases their wages were the mainstay of the

family. The most common social factor evident among the cohort who claimed increased status as a result of dislocation from their home was that these women tended to come from areas where traditional confinement to the house and the village was more strictly adhered to—highland villages.

At this point it is easy to see why the status of young Sundanese factory women has greater potential for improvement than did the status of their mothers. This study collected data on the employment patterns of all the mothers of factory women. The small minority of mothers who did work were predominantly confined to two sectors—agriculture or household servitude. The average monthly income for house servants in Banjaran was Rupiah (Rp) 40,000 per month, and agricultural wages for women averaged Rp 50,000 per month. The average income of factory women was Rp 142,000 per month. Rp 142,000 per month is, in itself, a small amount for hard work, but when this is compared to the vastly inferior average incomes of their mothers, factory women have significantly more potential to improve their status through financial means.

It was surprising that, of the women who claimed increased status, only 45 per cent referred to their new incomes (and resulting contributions) as an explanation for improved status. On the other hand, 55 per cent were adamant that their status had changed for the better, because they had the ability to travel far from their village to factories and spent more time away from home than actually in their home. Because they were often away from home, the factory

women did not experience the constant reinforcement of patriarchy at the household and village levels. To a certain extent, they were immune to state policies in contrast to women who remained in the village. They were relieved of the boredom of having to stay at home and were not constantly being watched by other members of their communities.

Apart from wages and dislocation, women usually measured their status by the degree to which they were included in family decision making processes, their ability to make independent social and economic decisions, and their ability to solve family problems. That is, by being away from their homes and their village and experiencing new and complex happenings in the factories; including Western notions of production and culture, foreign managers, buyers and investors; they gained valuable and high status experience which allowed them the ability to solve problems in their households. Many parents in the Focus Groups and interviews claimed they were surprised by their daughters' maturity and intelligence when they were asked to participate in problem solving after they had experienced factory work. Moreover, factory wages had a complementary impact on these worldly experiences. Experience and wages were the key to improving the status of factory women in the home.

A sub-sample of the women who claimed their status had not increased at all as a result of new factory work were later re-questioned. They had retained their view that factory work had not positively affected their status. These young women either came from a stricter traditional background,

or were less likely to seek improved household status associated with the rapid changes common when women begin factory work. The remainder of these women did not want to be different from their mothers; they did not want the freedom Western women have, nor did they want the responsibility (or expense) of increased status and the decision making this involved.

The words of the women themselves, taken from the Focus Groups and interviews (August 1997), highlight this condition.

Traditionally, the father was like a king in the home and the women had to follow his orders. However, because we work away from home and earn a wage we have greater status from our mothers and grandmothers. We know this when we are asked to help make decisions or are asked for our advice. Our mothers were not in this position. They were never in this position, they were a burden. (Un-married worker)

If a young woman can show that she is responsible by working for a long period of time in the factory, she will usually be asked to help solve problems, and her wage gives her the ability to do this. If our sisters stay at home and never work they will have status just like their mothers, it is their traditional position in the family. If we married now and our husbands wanted to be like men from the past, there is nothing we can do, we must accept this, but it would not be good. (Mother of an un-married worker)

If any man wants to act like a raja we cannot argue with him, but it doesn't mean we have to like him. (Recently married woman)

Automatic trust and freedom were not forthcoming to many of the young women in the study. Many of the parents I spoke with studied their daughters' monthly pay slips to check they were not lying. Many claimed their daughters had to be watched more closely now they were factory workers, and their reputation needed to be safeguarded more than ever because of the dangers they faced. Specifically, dangers meant damage to their reputation through sexually oriented gossip. Further, many of the mothers in the Focus Groups stated that they sometimes placed pressure on their daughters to earn more through overtime. Despite this, the majority of parents claimed that respect for parents and religion were more important than wages or experience. The daughters agreed with their parents in these situations but really had no choice. The reality of a stable income each month, however, was beginning to erode these traditional beliefs. The case studies and quotes below provide an insight into the conflict which commonly occurs when a young woman starts to work in a large factory. It must be remembered, however, that many were from a lifestyle where they had rarely left the household area other than to attend school, which in itself is an extension of the village arena and not a real threat to the young women's reputations.

We don't want to be free like Western women, having sex every day and having no respect. We do want to be free from gossip as Western women are, that would be good. We are happy to obey our parents or husbands, because that is our culture and our responsibility. Our family and our culture is surrounding us, we are educated by our families to be obedient, and at

school the same thing happens. We cannot escape from this, it is too powerful, and if we did not have it we would be lost. (Unmarried worker)

Gossip is only used against women and is usually created by men. Men are not the victims of gossip like us so they can say what they like to their parents, but we must obey, or gossip will ruin our chance to marry or even walk outside our home. (Unmarried worker) Focus Group October 1997.

Marriage

Marriage is the only significant rite of passage for Sundanese women. Menarche is not celebrated among the Sundanese as it is among Javanese women (Koentjaraningrat 1985) leaving marriage and childbirth as the only real celebration of female culture. Thirty nine percent of the women sampled were married. Their ages ranged from 14 years to 39 years, and the average age of married women surveyed was 25.5 years (see Table 1). Of the married women sampled, 49 per cent lived alone with their husbands in nuclear households. Their income earning capacity was very high. This was because factory work, despite being exploitative, was a year round job with minimal seasonal breaks or low periods, whereas most men in the region worked only spasmodically. Of the married women surveyed, 57 per cent earned equal to or more than their husbands or fathers. Of the 49 per cent of the married cohort living in a purely nuclear household, 73 per cent earned equal to or more than their husbands on a monthly basis. Further, 2 per cent had very unusual arrangements where the women worked and the husband stayed at

home caring for children. These husbands were questioned and felt ashamed of their position, but stated it was the best way to organise their small households and avoid the interference of their parents, who wanted the wife to stop working and stay at home. This would have led to abject poverty—an option the young couples refused to entertain.

According to the women themselves, apart from employment and dislocation, increasing average age at first marriage (AAFM) and choice of husband are the most significant catalysts to social change and increased status among young women. More than 90 per cent of the women surveyed stated that they had the right to marry the man they loved as long as their parents agreed; a considerable change from the commonly arranged and very young marriages of their mothers. All stated that marrying under the age of 20 years was bad for women and that having more than two children was detrimental to women's health and economic wellbeing. Contemporary women have access to information their mothers never had. The young women were well informed about government family planning programs and adhered to them in private and in practice. The quantitative reality of marriage ages among the young women surveyed, however, revealed a slightly different, though improving, demographic situation.

The AAFM of the married factory women was 17.2 years. The overall average age of these women was 25.5 years, compared to an average age of 19.4 years for the cohort of unmarried factory women. The combined average age of married and unmarried factory women was 22 years. This difference

in average ages indicates that the cohort of married factory workers represented an older generation. The AAFM of the married factory women (17.2 years) is still quite low and conflicts with the claims of Focus Group and interview respondents that 20 years of age was the best age to get married (see Table 1). On the other hand, the fact that the average age of the unmarried cohort of factory women was 19.4 years indicates that marriage ages are dramatically increasing among the Sundanese, especially amongst women who work in factories. A highland / lowland comparison reveals very different average marriage ages amongst the cohort of married factory women. In the highland areas the AAFM of factory women was 15.8 years compared to 18.2 years for lowland areas (see Table 1). These areas are very close geographically; thus, their very different marriage ages are strong evidence of continuing traditional and geographic influences in the highlands.

The comparatively low AAFM of the mothers of the factory women provides an insight into the recent history of Sundanese women. The AAFM of surveyed mothers was 14.3 years compared to 17.2 years for their daughters. When these figures are broken into a highland / lowland distinction, significant patterns emerge. The AAFM of the mothers in lowland areas was 15.6 years compared to 13.3 years in highland areas (see Table 1). This distinction between married and unmarried factory women, combined with the highland / lowland distinction provides an interesting insight into the differences operating between the more traditional highland areas and lowland Banjaran. The highland areas are less affected by industrial development and modernisation and, more importantly, people in these areas lack proper access to education beyond the primary school level.

Table 1 Age, education, and marriage data

	Married cohort	Unmarried cohort	Combined cohort	Mothers cohort	Highland mothers	Lowland mothers
Average age (years)	25.5	19.4	22	na	na	na
AAFM (years)	17.2	na	17.2	14.7	13.3	15.6
Highland AAFM	15.8	na	15.8	na	13.3	na
Lowland AAFM	18.2	na	18.2	na	15.6	na
No completed education (per cent)	5	3	na	34	49	28
SD education or lower (per cent)	53	29	na	74	97	69
Highland (per cent)			70			
Lowland (per cent)			30			
Completed SMP or SMA (per cent)	47	71	na	26	3	31
Highland (per cent)			26			
Lowland (per cent)			70			

Note: SD signifies primary level, SMP signifies junior secondary level, SMA signifies senior secondary level

Money

On average, the Sundanese women sampled contributed 38 per cent of their incomes to their family every month, and their average monthly income was 142,000 Rp. Only the equivalent of 17 per cent of the women's average monthly income was reimbursed to them by their mothers (or parents and husbands) to support their working costs. Working costs greater than the 17 per cent reimbursement average were usually paid for by the women themselves with the remainder of their wages. Sundanese women strive, and at the same time are heavily acculturated into easing the burden on their families (Women were commonly perceived, and commonly portrayed themselves, as a financial and cultural burden on their families or husbands). In Indonesia, factory women are commonly reimbursed monies they contribute to their families as a type of budgeting mechanism to cope with high transport and food costs relative to their low wages. Wolf (1992) found these average reimbursement costs were higher than the average contributions factory women made to their families, and concluded that families supported industrialisation by paying for their daughters' working costs.

Contrary to Diane Wolf's famous 1992 study of factory women in Central Java, which found that the majority of factory women cost their families more than they earned, of the 323 women surveyed in this study, only two were costing their families more than they were contributing. Sundanese families are, however, supporting industrialism in other ways. Allowing their daughters to work—despite

a patriarchal culture unused to such phenomena—and maintaining strict control over their wages to ensure they remain employed are the most noteworthy ways in which this occurs. Families must help their daughters cope with the harsh transition to factory work and the constant pressure they face. These are crucial aspects of family support, without which industrialisation could not function successfully in Banjarn. By the same token, working gives women a sense of security and a wide array of new experiences. This has promoted social change, successfully nullifying notions that women are a burden, incapable of contributing substantially to society unless it is in the form of childbearing and rearing or housework.

Inside a factory

According to the respondents, the majority of factories surveyed were reasonably clean, but most were poorly ventilated and extremely noisy. The shoe factory discussed below is a South Korean joint venture enterprise and is a typical factory in the region. The local partner is Sino-Indonesian and relies heavily on foreign management techniques. 2,500 local people are employed in this factory, and 80 per cent of these are women. The shoes are assembled in Banjarn, and all the materials are imported from Japan or South Korea. The cost of production, including labour costs, of the highest quality shoes in this factory was \$US7 per pair in 1997. The shoes are sold in Jakarta, for example, for \$US60 and much more by the time they reach America or Japan. The women normally work eight hour shifts, but are also required to do

excessive overtime with large daily quotas when production orders are high. The shoes are assembled by women who work in lines of 60. Each line is expected to produce 4,000 pairs of shoes per day. Workers here claimed that South Korean management was the worst in Banjaran. Local male workers commonly had verbal arguments with management which in some instances led to low level violence. There were strong feelings of resentment among workers toward such managers. The workers believed that the management viewed them as lower class humans or servants (*Pembantu*). Inside the factory, the management feels much safer forcing harsh or illegal conditions of employment on groups of women than men. If they attempted to impose such conditions on a workforce dominated by Sundanese men, the result would be violent.

Both male and female workers were asked about general factory operations and how these conditions effected them. The results revealed both exploitation and opportunity. Breakdowns of machinery were common and when they occurred the daily quota could not be achieved. The workers—mainly women—suffered as a result. Management either made them go home without pay or they were forced to make up their quota in unpaid overtime at a later date when the machines were fixed. In some instances, the women's pay was docked at the end of the month. Essentially, management blamed women workers for breakdowns in machinery. By the same token, if the factory was behind in an order, the workers were forced to work long hours

of overtime; sometimes for days on end without adequate rest or sleep. They would not be compensated with a bonus after this exhausting work as they believed they should be. By ensuring that production problems were blamed on the workers, who were in turn made to suffer unfair hardships as a result, management avoided problems with passive resistance, a common phenomenon in developing economic systems in poor nations, as highlighted by Jamilah (1994) and Scott (1985). In corresponding Malaysian factories, women resisted potential exploitation through the destruction of microchips, work slow methods, and 'spirit possession' (Escobar 1993:142). In Banjaran such resistance was successfully crushed through harsher treatment of female workers in the manner described above.

Working wages

In theory, female wages are identical to male wages if they do exactly the same work. In reality very few men do exactly the same work as women, but those who do were paid equally in Banjaran. All women in the Focus Groups said that women's work in the factory was naturally slower than men's but was more accurate. Statements like the following were common (Focus Group, September 1997)

The men can work very fast and do hard jobs with machines but they are not as caring as we are. If women try to work as hard and fast as men there are many mistakes and the quality is not good. (Married worker, all in group agreed strongly)

Women would never dare to protest for a higher wage in Banjaran, but the men do. The company knows that women are too weak to insist on a higher wage or better conditions, but when men strike or protest the company will listen because the men can cause much trouble. (Mother of married worker)

The higher wages for men who work as supervisors or machine operators are fair because they work faster and harder than women. Men are also responsible for their families' welfare and must get a higher wage. (Recently married worker)

It was rare to find a male production worker earning more than a female production worker if they worked the same hours in the same position. In the higher echelons of production, which were dominated by men, wages were vastly higher. This explains the massive discrepancies highlighted by quantitative and macro data in female / male wage ratios in the manufacturing sector in Indonesia.

The women who participated in this research provided reasons for the factory management's preference for female factory workers in the production line. They were also aware that foreign managers were wary of upsetting local men who had previously asserted their local power over management on issues relating to the unfair dismissal of Sundanese men. The management, however, was not concerned about upsetting women. One woman appropriately summed up the issue by stating

In our factory, women and men get the same basic wage, however, men receive an additional income called 'Post Money'

because men have to do different work at certain times of the year. In reality, I think this is to stop the men causing trouble because we usually work longer hours than they do and don't get any extra money. (Un-married worker)

Despite the discussion above, there is no evidence to support the notion that all women who work in factories are unhappy or feel personally exploited. 55 per cent of the women felt they were being exploited by the management, while the other women did not express this view. The majority of those who felt exploited came from the most problematic factories, or factories which exhibited poorer working conditions. Those women who were unhappy with factory work or felt exploited expressed their views in a Focus Group in December 1997.

I often want to leave the job especially when I have problems at work, but then I think what will I do at home, I will be bored and open to gossip and who will support my little sister to finish school. (Un-married worker)

I want to leave the factory because the shift work makes me feel unhealthy, so I am looking for a better factory job somewhere else. (14 year old worker, un-married)

We both want to leave next year because we feel tired and have nothing to show from our work. All our money is gone before the next month and we are still as poor as when we started working. (Two un-married workers, sisters)

I will leave when I am married because my boyfriend hates the factories. (Un-married worker)

My wage is always cut for transport payments, food and tax, and this makes me so angry I want to leave. I asked my father to complain about it but he is too scared. (Un-married worker)

On the other hand, many women provided positive comments, such as

I have many new friends in the factory that I would not have if I worked in my Kampung. I enjoy mixing with men and women freely without the chance of gossip being spread about me. (Un-married worker)

Without my factory wage my father would have died long ago. My money can buy him medicine and make his life better, because I can afford to buy batteries for his hearing aid. When I did not work my father could never hear anything because we could not afford batteries. (Un-married worker)

The cohort who believed women were exploited generally attributed this to the low level of education of female workers. Further, they commonly stated that the 'situation' (*keadaan*) of their daily lives makes it very hard to complain or do anything. One woman worked out of desperation and, before accepting work at a Taiwanese factory, had to sign an illegal 'agreement' stating she would not ask for a transportation allowance. She was desperate for employment and had been waiting for two years without success. Her 'situation'—lack of education and experience (poverty)—forced her to accept illegal enterprise bargaining arrangements. In reality, she would have accepted any conditions in order to obtain employment. Many women from a variety of different factories had similar stories to tell.

The cohort who were unhappy about their low wages and exploitation stated that the factory should pay them more, because they spend the whole day at work and give up their family life and 'playing with their friends'. For example, none of the women participating in a Focus Group conducted in a highland village (October 1997) received a transportation allowance. They were usually away for 13 hours a day because of the isolation of their village. These women were paid Rp 27,000 per week, but have to spend Rp 13,000 on transport and food each week, leaving very little money at the end of the day. This situation was put in perspective by a local village leader, who said that women working in the factory are better off than women in the field where they are paid very low wages, or none at all, and become 'very black' from the sun.

The women in this Focus Group provided their own interpretations of what exploitation meant to them.

The supervisors and managers are very rude and abusive, and if the factory has no work for the women we are sent home, but must make up the lost hours in unpaid overtime later. If we fail to meet daily targets our wages are cut and it is common to be paid without an official pay slip. Many do not eat the factory food because it makes them sick, but they are still charged for the food (Two un-married Women).

Women are exploited because they are denied job satisfaction and the sharing in the company's success. Women who are retrained and reskilled in the factory and promoted to a new position are not paid an increased wage. This is exploitation. (Mother of two un-married workers)

Usually once in every week I have to work almost 24 hour shifts to make up for the stupid managers. They blame us if orders are behind. When this happens, I will work from 8 AM to 4 PM and go home until 7 PM and then return to work until 7 AM the next day. This happens all the time but the management say it is only when orders are behind. (Un-married worker)

When I started working in the factory my training wage was paid for 7 months and not three as our government says. I was paid at half rates for 7 months as were most of my friends who started work with me. We were too scared to complain but knew we were being cheated. (Un-married worker)

The cohort who stated that no exploitation existed held this belief because men and women were treated on an equal basis in the factory. This differs greatly from the agricultural work of their mothers' era, where women were rarely paid at all. This perceived equality of the sexes was in contrast to the privileged position of men in traditional Sundanese culture. Many do not feel that they are being exploited by the factory system, because they get the same treatment as men. They have choices now and power to make decisions, and can also come and go from the house free from the peering eyes of the *Kampung*.

The women studied who did not believe they were being exploited universally made statements like; 'without our jobs our families would be very poor'. They believed they were working within the rules stipulated by the national government. Realistically, if there were no factories in Banjaran, they would have few alternatives.

The poorest women had the lowest education levels and the lowest social status. This low status was reinforced when these women were recruited into the worst factories, accepting, in their ignorance or desperation, illegal working conditions.

Conclusion

This paper is based on local research among rural factory women in West Java. Of the 323 women surveyed, only 40 per cent claimed their status had increased due to factory work. The remaining 60 per cent either did not seek increased status, lived in more traditional villages which inhibited improvements in status, or worked in highly exploitative factories which denied their ability to improve status through long hours away from home for little pay. The key findings of this research, however, are in the way in which the women define increased household status as a result of factory work. Increased household status was reflected in a range of expanded opportunities for women

- the ability to make their own decisions
- the ability to solve problems in the home
- the ability to use wages to help other family members
- increased control over their income and themselves as a human resource.

There was a distinct difference in responses between highland and lowland women in this research. Highland women who worked in factories were younger (on average), less educated, and married at younger ages than their lowland counterparts, despite the fact that these groups lived only 9 kilometres apart.

Highland women contributed less money to their family, worked longer hours, and their mothers married (on average) at very young ages and rarely worked. The AAFM of highland factory workers was 15.8 years and their mothers' AAFM was 13.2 years, which highlights the significant problems of continuing tradition among highland factory women. Geography is an important influence on women's ability to improve status, work, and create a new life for themselves, in a new era of economic development and globalisation in Indonesia. In many instances, local geography determined these opportunities, rather than grand theories or generalisations about the impacts of industrial development on Third World women.

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