

Employment Patterns of Older Women in Indonesia

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LIFE OF OLDER PERSONS

It is a very hot day in an overly-crowded and polluted street in Jakarta. When the traffic light turns red, out of nowhere a group of people emerge and start approaching the cars and motorcycles, begging for money. This group includes some older men and women who have resorted to begging so as to make ends meet. In Singapore, another big city in Southeast Asia, older men and women do “odd jobs” such as cleaning dirty tables at hawker centres... Is this the kind of employment older people are expected to take on in some parts of Southeast Asia?

In contrast, there are many older men and women in Indonesia who do not do “anything”. They live in beautiful houses; they travel a lot for leisure; and they have rich children to support them. One older man works for a family business run by his son; he enjoys the work, not because of the money, but because of the nature of the job and also because it keeps him occupied. He also partakes in the profit from this business. Moreover his wife enjoys her leisure; she pursues her time exercising, visiting friends, meeting her children, children-in-law, and grand children. A question arises regarding the kind of activities one would expect older persons to engage in. We could also ask if an older person who engages in wage work is better off than someone who does not. In essence, what kind of life should older persons be leading?

This chapter represents a preliminary attempt to provide the first and important step as answering that question, by analysing the employment patterns of older women in Indonesia. It provides information on what the older persons, particularly older women, do within and outside the labour market. The analysis relies on a national data set collected in 2007.

Therefore, readers need to be careful when generalizing the finding in the chapter beyond 2007.

The discussion here is an extension of the research conducted by Arifin and Ananta (2009) which examined employment patterns of older persons in some countries and regions within Southeast Asia. They found a similarity between employment patterns of older persons in Southeast Asia and those in industrialized countries. Older persons were more

likely to work in more flexible working arrangement. Being self-employed or working as unpaid workers seemed to be more suitable for older persons. Older persons were more likely to work as skilled agricultural and fishery workers. Moreover, they tended to work in agricultural or service sectors. Arifin and Ananta (2009) also concluded that this pattern may reflect the current labour market situation and the human capital of the older persons because advances in technology and social innovations, coupled with enhanced human capital of the older persons, produce completely different employment patterns among older persons, including that of older women, in the future.

In this chapter, the employment patterns of older women is discussed in the context of sources of support for older persons. Another feature of this chapter is the comparison between the sexes and across age groups to examine whether the patterns arising among older women are unique to them.

The published data from the 2007 National Labour Force Survey (Sakernas), collected by the Indonesian statistical agency (Statistics- Indonesia 2007) provide the main source of analysis in this chapter. The publication of the results of the survey, however, does not include tabulation of occupation by age group and, as a result, this chapter does not examine the occupational patterns of older women.\

This chapter starts off with a discussion on employment as one, out of many, support mechanisms for older persons. It then examines the empirical conditions of older women's employment in Indonesia in 2007. The analysis examines the gender disaggregated data related to labour force participation, including the difference in employment patterns between younger and older persons; the participation of older women in the labour force; compared with older men and younger workers; the number of work hours older women and men put in; as well as the employment sector older persons engage in and the status of older women and men. Before ending with conclusions, the chapter discusses the educational attainment of older persons by gender. It also shows the projected higher educational attainment for the future older persons by gender.

CONCLUSIONS

Table 10.20 shows that the number of Indonesian older persons has been growing more rapidly (2.01 percent) than that of the overall working-age population in 1998-2007, implying an increasingly ageing population in the country. However, the growth rate of the old labour force

(1.28 percent) is much smaller than that of the overall labour force (1.71 percent), suggesting that when people become old, they are more likely to be out of the labour force. However, it should be noted that, from these statistics alone, it is not easy to conclude whether lower labour force participation is a good or bad thing for the older persons.

Table 10. 20. Annual Growth Rates of Working-Age Population, Labour Force, and Not in Labour Force: Indonesia, 1998-2007

	Working age population 1998-2007	Labour Force 1998-2007	Not in LF 1998-2007
Male			
total	1.93	2.00	1.60
older persons	2.05	1.59	2.95
Female			
total	1.59	1.23	1.96
older persons	1.98	0.70	2.66
Total			
total	1.76	1.71	1.87
older persons	2.01	1.28	2.75

Source: calculated from Badan Pusat Statistik (1999) and Statistics Indonesia (2007)

This pattern is seen in both genders but with a difference looking at labour force participation rates. Among the male older persons, the difference between rates of growth of labour force and working population is only 0.46 percentage point ($=2.05 - 1.59$) -- much smaller than 1.28 percentage point ($=1.98 - 0.70$) among female older persons. This implies that older women were more likely not in the labour force.

The gender segregation was even seen among older persons who were not in the labour force. The older women tended to do household work, if they were not in the labour force. However, it is not clear what the older men did when they were not in the labour force. These older men were more likely to engage in "others". The statistics is not clear on what "others" includes, except that it does not include studying and doing household work.

The lower labour force participation rate among women, including older women, may be attributable to several factors, two of which include social norms and education. The existing social norms posit that women bear the bulk of household work while men are expected to play the role of "rice winners". This social norm may have resulted in stronger gender segregation during their younger days. The older women accumulated significant experience in household work, while the older men accumulated experience in the labour market. Nevertheless, as their health and skills deteriorated, the older men could not earn as much as they did when they were young. At the same time, the older women were also not as strong in doing household work as when they were younger.

Undoubtedly education plays a critical role in empowering women, including older women. If there is no significant change in education (or re-education) of women age 35 years and above in Indonesia today, it can be expected that future generations of older women will lag behind older men in their ability to be financially independent through labour force participation, and older men will still remain dependent on their wives for managing their households, at least until 2031. However, we cannot significantly change the educational attainment of the future cohorts (2027 and 2032, respectively) since older persons are already here today and they have already finished their educational years. Educational policies that start now with the effect of changing the gender affect the educational attainment of the older persons in 2061, assuming that formal education starts at 5 years old. Therefore, empowering future cohorts of older women in the labour market requires policies beyond raising educational attainment rates among women.

Nevertheless, everything can change with advancement of technology, including modes of communication, transportation, and work environment. The advancement in technology, coupled with higher education among the older persons, will make gender segregation in jobs increasingly blurred. In this case, older women, and men, may retain and enhance their human capital, and we can expect a greater demand for older persons in the future labour market.

Furthermore, if there is an improvement in social insurance, particularly related to health, the more educated older female labour force (as well older male labour force and the younger generation) will have better choices when they have to decide whether to work (for money) or to engage in “leisure”. They may do voluntary work to help the younger generation develop the economy and by contributing to society in this way, there will be less of a “clash” between generations as the older generations will be perceived to be valuable rather than a burden. This situation may be similar to what Haider and Loughran (2001) found among the most educated, richest, and healthiest Americans, that is, that older persons were more likely to work for “leisure” than for economic necessity.

Finally, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, a more fundamental question should be raised on the kind of life we expect older persons to lead. While it is certain that the answers to this question will be useful toward formulating more effective policies concerning older women and men, any attempt to answer this question in its entirety is a complex undertaking, and one that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

REFERENCES

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