

# Jurnal Humaniora

**Vol. 10, No. 2 (2026) pp. 211 – 217**
**http://jurnal.abulyatama.ac.id/index.php/humaniora**
**p-ISSN: 2684-9275 e-ISSN: 2548-9585**

*Research Paper*

# The Role of Fishermen's Wives in Supporting the Family Economy in Meunasah Keudee Village, Mesjid Raya District, Aceh Besar

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https://doi.org/10.30601/humaniora.v10i2.8274

**Universitas Abulyatama**

*Article Info*
*Submitted:*
*21-10-2026*
*Revised:*
*25-10-2026*
*Accepted:*
*30-10-2026*
*Published:*
*30-10-2026*

**Abstract**

Fishermen's wives in Indonesia commonly earn income to offset the irregular earnings of their husbands, but existing studies seldom distinguish wage workers from own-account sellers or relate income to decision-making and constraints. This study describes the role of fishermen's wives in the family economy and the constraints they face in Meunasah Keudee Village, Mesjid Raya District, Aceh Besar. A qualitative descriptive design was used. Ten fishermen's wives, selected by availability, were interviewed on 13–16 August 2025; observation and documents complemented them. The role was examined through working time, income, involvement in the family business, economic contribution and participation in family decisions. Five informants are hired fish dryers, two sell anchovies, two sell snacks and one sells salt. They work 2 to about 15 hours per day and reported monthly incomes of Rp500,000–3,500,000, used mainly for household needs. Eight informants take part in a family business. Decisions are made jointly in six households, by the wife in three and by the husband in one. Limited capital, uncertain income, weather and season, and the absence of skills training are the main constraints. The wives' earnings are a regular part of household provisioning, although their share of household income could not be calculated.

**Keywords:** Fishermen's wives; Dual role; Family economy; Income contribution; Small-scale fisheries; Aceh Besar.

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## 1. Introduction

Women's work is a structural part of small-scale fisheries, although it is under-recorded. Globally, about 2.1 million women take part in small-scale marine fishing and catch roughly 2.9 million tonnes per year, and this estimate excludes their work in processing and marketing [1]. Research on women in fisheries has been conducted for at least four decades [2], yet 40% of twenty coastal livelihood projects evaluated in Indonesia were gender-blind in their design [3]. In Indonesia, 2.5 million households are involved in small-scale fisheries production [4], and the economic vulnerability of fishing families has been rated as high [5].

Indonesian case studies agree that fishermen's wives combine domestic work with paid work because the husband's income is irregular. Wives run stalls, sell cakes and fish, and process the catch in North Minahasa, Padang, Rembang and Nagekeo [6]–[9]. Their earnings vary widely: a mean of Rp400,000 per month in Rembang [8] and Rp304,054 per month, or 55% of household income, in South Central Timor [10]; in East Lombok the wives' income covered daily needs only [11]. Similar roles are reported from Jambi, Kutai Kartanegara and Bulukumba [12]–[14]. Women nevertheless remain the main persons responsible for household work [15], and low education, limited skills and lack of capital restrict what they can earn [6], [14].

Two gaps remain in this literature. First, most studies treat fishermen's wives as one group and report an average contribution, without separating wives who work for wages, such as hired fish dryers, from wives who trade on their own account. Second, income is rarely examined together with working time, involvement in the family business, participation in family decisions and the constraints that the women themselves report. None of the studies reviewed here concerns the coast of Aceh Besar. Meunasah Keudee, a coastal village in Mesjid Raya District with 1,395 inhabitants in four hamlets, is a suitable case because fishing is the main occupation and fish drying is a common source of women's work. This study aims to describe (1) the role of fishermen's wives in supporting the family economy and (2) the economic constraints they face in Meunasah Keudee Village, Mesjid Raya District, Aceh Besar.

## 2. Method

This study used a qualitative descriptive design, which describes a phenomenon in its own setting and stays close to the informants' accounts [16]. It was conducted in Meunasah Keudee Village, Mesjid Raya District, Aceh Besar Regency. The informants were ten fishermen's wives who were selected on the basis of their availability for in-depth interviews; they are identified by initials.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews and documentation. The interviews were held on 13–16 August 2025. Population and occupation data were obtained from the village head's (Keuchik) office. The role of the wives was examined with five indicators: working time, income earned, involvement in the family business, contribution to the family economy and participation in family decisions [17]. Constraints were examined in four areas that recur in studies of fishing households: capital, uncertainty of income, weather and season, and education and skills [6], [8], [14]. The data were analysed by data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing [18].

## 3. Results and Discussion

### Village and Informant Characteristics

Meunasah Keudee is a coastal village whose 1,395 inhabitants live in four hamlets: Phang Itam (368), Lampoh Raya (455), Tengku Mara (146) and Gampong Baro (426). The village has an elementary school or madrasah, a mosque, a community health centre, a police post and a post office. Of the 589 residents with a recorded occupation, 350 (59.4%) are fishers (Table 1).

**Table 1. Residents of Meunasah Keudee Village by occupation**

| No. | Occupation | Number of persons |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Civil servant | 4 |
| 2 | Private employee | 40 |
| 3 | Military/police | 3 |
| 4 | Farmer | 40 |

| No. | Occupation | Number of persons |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | Fisher | 350 |
| 6 | Micro-enterprise | 52 |
| 7 | Other | 100 |
| | Total | 589 |

*Source: Village head's office of Meunasah Keudee (2025).*

The ten informants are aged 38–54 years (Table 2). Five work as hired fish dryers, two sell anchovies, two sell children's snacks and one sells salt. Two completed elementary school, two did not complete it, three completed junior high school, two completed senior high school and one did not complete senior high school. Seven informants have three children, two have two children and one has five.

**Table 2. Characteristics of the informants**

| No. | Informant | Age (years) | Occupation | Number of children |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Jn | 38 | Hired fish dryer | 3 |
| 2 | Md | 43 | Hired fish dryer | 3 |
| 3 | Mt | 45 | Snack seller | 2 |
| 4 | Jm | 45 | Anchovy seller | 3 |
| 5 | Ys | 45 | Anchovy seller | 3 |
| 6 | Zh | 49 | Hired fish dryer | 5 |
| 7 | Fd | 50 | Hired fish dryer | 3 |
| 8 | Rs | 50 | Hired fish dryer | 2 |
| 9 | Ks | 52 | Salt seller | 3 |
| 10 | Mn | 54 | Snack seller | 3 |

*Source: Primary data (processed, 2025).*

### Working Time and Income

The informants start work at about 08.00 and work from 2 to about 15 hours per day (Table 3). Hired fish dryers have irregular hours that lengthen when the catch is large, whereas work outside fish processing is more regular; the longest day was reported by a snack seller who keeps her stall open until 23.00. All informants also do the household work. Md, Jn and Ks do it alone, whereas Mt, Zh, Ys and Jm are helped by family members.

Earnings were stated per day, per week or per catch, and they fluctuate with the weather and the catch; on some days there is no income. Hired fish dryers reported Rp15,000–50,000 per day, paid per basket or after the fish is sold, and up to Rp1,000,000 per two days when fish is abundant. Md picks jamblang fruit for Rp8,000 per bamboo measure when there is no fish. Sellers reported larger and more variable amounts, which include the risk of unsold goods. Stated monthly income ranged from Rp500,000 to Rp3,500,000; the highest figure was reported by Jm, who also sells fish online.

**Table 3. Working hours and income reported by the informants**

| Informant | Occupation | Working hours | Earnings as stated | Monthly income (Rp) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Md | Hired fish dryer | 08.00–10.00; to 12.00–14.00 when the catch is large | Rp45,000/day (3 baskets × Rp15,000) | 1,000,000–1,500,000 |
| Jn | Hired fish dryer | 08.00–10.00; to 12.00–14.00 when the catch is large | Rp15,000–30,000/day; shared when working in pairs | 1,000,000–1,500,000 |
| Mt | Snack seller | 08.00–14.00 | Rp20,000/day | 800,000–1,600,000 |

| Informant | Occupation | Working hours | Earnings as stated | Monthly income (Rp) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Zh | Hired fish dryer | 08.00–14.00 | Rp30,000–50,000/day | 800,000–1,600,000 |
| Ys | Anchovy seller | 08.00–17.00 | Rp400,000/week (sells three times a week) | 800,000–1,600,000 |
| Jm | Anchovy seller | 08.00–12.00 | Rp300,000/day | About 3,500,000 |
| Ks | Salt seller | Irregular, up to about 8 hours | Rp180,000/day (3 packs × Rp60,000) | 700,000–800,000 |
| Fd | Hired fish dryer | 08.00–17.00 | Up to Rp1,000,000 per 2 days when fish is abundant | 500,000–3,000,000 |
| Rs | Hired fish dryer | 08.00–14.00 or 16.00 | Rp30,000/day, paid on Fridays after the fish is sold | 500,000–3,000,000 |
| Mn | Snack seller | 08.00–23.00 | Rp100,000–200,000/day | 500,000–3,000,000 |

*Source: Interviews, 13–16 August 2025. Monthly income was stated as a range for each interview group (Md–Jn; Mt–Zh–Ys; Fd–Rs–Mn).*

**Involvement in the Family Business, Contribution and Decision-Making**

Eight of the ten informants take part in a family business. Mt, Zh, Ys, Jm, Ks, Fd and Rs help to boil, dry and sell the fish landed by the household, and Mn runs a kiosk. Md and Jn are not involved in a family business and work for other owners. All informants gave the same reason for working: the husband's income is irregular and does not cover household needs; Jm added that she works to save for her children.

All informants stated that their income is spent on household needs, namely food, children's schooling and health; a small part is used for personal needs or saved. Md and Jn, who have worked since before the 2004 tsunami, said that household needs would be difficult to meet without their earnings. Participation in family decisions differs between households. Decisions on spending, schooling and health are made jointly with the husband in six households (Jn, Jm, Ks, Fd, Rs and Mn), mainly by the wife in three (Md, Mt and Zh) and mainly by the husband in one (Ys).

**Economic Constraints**

Four constraints were reported. The first is capital. Mt, Ys and Rs find it difficult to obtain business capital, Jm when there is no catch and Mn at times; Zh had this difficulty in the past, whereas Ks and Fd reported none. Rs avoids loans because she fears being unable to repay them. The second is uncertainty of income: all informants stated that the husband's income depends on the weather and the catch and that there is no income when he does not go to sea. The third is weather and season, which reduce both fishing and fish drying. The fourth is skills: most informants have never received training, and several said that training was offered in the past but is no longer provided. Fresh and processed fish sent outside the area is at times sold below the expected price, which adds a marketing risk.

**Discussion**

The kinds of work found in Meunasah Keudee match those reported from other fishing communities, where wives dry and sell fish or run small stalls [6]–[9], and the motive is the same: the husband's income is insufficient and seasonal [6], [9]. The stated monthly incomes of Rp500,000–3,500,000 are nominally higher than the Rp400,000 reported in Rembang [8] and the Rp304,054 reported in South Central Timor [10], but those figures date from 2017 and 2022 and from different local economies. As in East Lombok [11], the income is spent on daily needs and little is saved.

The comparison within the village is more informative than the comparison between regions. Hired fish dryers, half of the informants, reported the lowest and least predictable daily earnings because they are paid per basket and only when fish is landed, whereas own-account sellers reported higher amounts and carry the risk of unsold goods. Studies that report one average for all fishermen's wives conceal this difference between wage work and own-account trade. The working day of up to 15 hours, added to household work that three informants do alone, is consistent with the finding that women remain primarily responsible for domestic tasks when they earn income [15].

Earning income is accompanied by a voice in household decisions: nine of the ten informants decide jointly with the husband or take the main decisions themselves. This study cannot establish whether income causes that role, because it did not include wives without income. The constraints agree with earlier studies that identify lack of capital, limited skills and seasonality [6], [8], [14]. The absence of training in the village corresponds to the evaluation finding that many coastal livelihood projects in Indonesia did not address women's roles [3]. Because financial management has a positive effect on the resilience of fishing families [5], simple household bookkeeping is a low-cost complement to capital and training.

This study has limitations. The ten informants were selected by availability, so the findings describe these women and cannot be generalised to all fishermen's wives in the village. Income figures are self-reported; daily and monthly figures were stated separately, monthly figures were given as ranges for groups of informants, and working days per month were not recorded, so the two sets of figures cannot be reconciled. Husbands' incomes were not collected, which prevents calculation of the wives' share of household income. Husbands and employers were not interviewed, and the interviews took place during four days in one season.

## 4. Conclusion

Fishermen's wives in Meunasah Keudee Village combine household work with paid work as hired fish dryers and as sellers of anchovies, snacks and salt. They work from 2 to about 15 hours per day and reported monthly incomes of Rp500,000–3,500,000, which are spent mainly on food, schooling and health. Eight of the ten informants take part in a family business, and nine decide jointly with the husband or take the main household decisions. Limited capital, uncertain income, weather and season, and the absence of skills training constrain their work; hired fish dryers have the lowest and least predictable earnings.

Fishermen's wives are advised to develop fish-processing skills that raise product value and to keep simple records of household income and spending. The village and district governments are advised to provide accessible capital, for example through a cooperative, and to resume training in fish processing and online marketing. Future studies should include more informants, record the income of both spouses over a full year, and compare hired dryers with own-account sellers.

## Acknowledgement

The authors thank the fishermen's wives who took part in this study and the village head's office of Meunasah Keudee for providing village data.

## Authors' contributions and responsibilities

Huswatun Hasanah: conceptualization, investigation, data curation, writing – original draft. Ruaida: methodology, supervision. Raihani: validation, writing – review & editing. Amrusi: supervision, writing – review & editing. Nana Suraiya: validation, writing – review & editing. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

**Funding**

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

**Availability of data and materials**

The interview notes and village data that support the findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, in a form that does not identify the informants.

**Competing interests**

The authors declare no competing interests.

**Ethical approval**

Institutional ethical clearance was not required for this study, since it consisted of interviews with adult women about their work and household economy and did not involve minors or sensitive personal data. Informants were told the aim of the study beforehand and consented to participate voluntarily. They are referred to by initials only, and no full names are disclosed.

**Declaration of generative AI use**

In the original draft, the authors used an AI tool to draw a diagram of the informants' education; that diagram is not included in this version. In preparing this version, generative AI assisted with translation from Indonesian into English, condensation of the text, cross-checking of figures between tables and narrative, and identification of references. The interpretation of the interviews and the conclusions are the authors' own, and the authors accept responsibility for the published text.

**Additional information**

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Huswatun Hasanah.

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