

# Information Asymmetry and Gender Inequality among Indonesian Female Migrant Workers (IFMW) in East Java Province

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## Abstract

*Migration is a complex decision and involves many goals and expectations that may conflict with each other. The challenge often faced by migrants in migrating is the information received, which can be used as a basis for making decisions. This information asymmetry can trigger the opportunity cost that must be accepted which may be heavier than the predetermined goal. Migrants perceive that migration to rich countries can improve their economy. But from the perspective of happiness, migration motivated by the prospect of economic gain alone tends to trigger problems. This study aims to determine the impact of Information Asymmetry on gender disparity among IFMW in East Java Province while working overseas and to develop a restricted rationality model for IFMW overseas migration decision-making. This research's empirical phenomenological paradigm has been implemented using qualitative research methods. To examine information, triangulation is employed. The raw data were gathered via in-depth interviews with former migrant workers. Government authorities then verify the information. The information is then analysed to develop a model. The irrational behaviour of migrant workers is caused by the limited resources they have and the involvement of social institutions. The study results reveal that international migration decision-making for women in Jember Regency is considered a limited rationale, influenced by the availability of information, motivation and the idea of chain migration. On the other hand, simple heuristics on PMW in decision-making tend to direct their decisions to information that has been proven to be true based on personal experience or the experiences of others. Information asymmetry triggers gender inequality in Indonesian female Migrant Workers (IFMW).*

**Keywords:** Information asymmetry, gender inequality and Indonesian female migrant workers (IFMW)

## Introduction

Every Indonesian has the right to work and to get employment. This, however, is not consistent with the current state of affairs. There is a great deal of unemployment and poverty due to the country's lack of job prospects, which pushes individuals to become Indonesian Migrant Workers (IFMW). The invitation to become an IFMW has never ceased. This is due to several factors, including the potential for IFMW to be enticed by agents/brokers' promises of a higher salary in the destination country, the difficulty of obtaining employment in the country of origin, and other factors relating to the personal problems of the prospective migrant worker. Nonetheless, many IFMWs face economic, physical, and social prejudice, even to the extent of Human Trafficking perpetrated by unscrupulous service distribution agencies or employers unaware of IFMW. Due to the high number of unlawfully departing sending migrant workers, the World Bank cannot guarantee the authenticity of problem statistics about Indonesian migrant workers (Purnamasari, 2017).

The heavy burden of living that migrants must bear is a significant factor in migration. Prospective emigrants identify migrating as the action that is sensible and most likely to satisfy

their preferences. (Kusdarini et al., 2021). The advent of the COVID-19 epidemic has resulted in a drop in revenue for several Indonesian migrant workers who are still working as migrants owing to salary cuts and no additional income for their additional working hours. These conditions have negatively affected the livelihood of Indonesian migrant workers and their families in their home countries, primarily due to a 10.28% decrease in remittances during the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the circumstances of the families of migrant workers whose remittances have decreased (Noveria & Romdiati, 2022).

Migration is a complex decision and involves many goals and expectations that may conflict with each other. Individuals confronted with the complexity and unpredictability of the sources of information that can serve as a basis for decision-making may experience difficulty (Huriani & Annibras, 2020). The amount of information uncertainty can cause the opportunity cost that must be accepted to be heavier than the predetermined goal (Agustina, 2021). Individuals perceive that migration to rich countries can improve their economy. However, from the standpoint of enjoyment, migration motivated solely by the promise of economic gain tends to cause issues (Bartram, 2013). IFMW is a job that is vulnerable to the risk of experiencing physical, psychological and verbal violence in their work while they are migrant workers abroad. Discrimination against women

workers is related to the low social class of the jobs they receive. (Udasromo & Setiadi, 2021).

Existing migration research reveals the knowledge asymmetry of Indonesian female migrant workers in several aspects of the international migration decision-making process (Alfajri M.A & Maulidia, 2019). Utilizes an effective cost-benefit analysis to determine the destination country of migrants. Borjas (1989) and O'Reilly (2009). According to Davies P, Greenwood M (2001), the concept of social capital influences migration decisions. Henry S, Boyle P (2003); R, (1989) indicate that climate and environment affect migration considerations. White CM and Koehler.DJ (2004); Jhonson RD, (1985) indicate that a migrant who lacks information about the country of migration destination will focus on the average data about that country. According to . Kranz DH (2007), preferences play a crucial role in information search, selection, and processing. The presence of Indonesian migrant workers can improve the well-being of their families and the communities in which they reside. However, the state's assistance to Indonesian migrant laborers is still subpar. (Barid et al., 2022); (Marpi, 2021).

## Literature Review

### Effect of Asymmetric Information on Migration Decision Making

In economic theory, information asymmetry is referred to as information failure in the study of transactional decision-making, which arises when one party possesses more or better material information than the other. This might lead to a power imbalance in transactions. Information asymmetry research on principle agent problems, where they are the primary source of disinformation, is crucial to any communication process. These circumstances can result in negative externalities, such as (1) moral hazard, (2) monopoly of knowledge, (3) market failure, (4) chaos and issues, and (5) disproportionate risk (Copeland, T dan Galai, 1983). According to the adverse selection model, parties who lack information about transaction performance when negotiating are less likely to be able to punish for violations of agreements or agreements to their detriment.

Imperfect information can occur in the labor market working in an environment where there is asymmetric information in making employment contracts, making migration decisions, migrant productivity, climate, working environmental conditions,

wages and others. This asymmetric information occurs due to the fact that migrants are young, inexperienced, have low education, limited costs and time and the fact that there is no exchange of information between the labor market cannot be perfectly accepted by migrants. Asymmetric information is very important for migrants to make better decisions. Information asymmetry theory is closely related to the optimization of benefits and risks that must be accepted by economic transaction actors. (Katz and E., 1986). Meanwhile, face-to-face information is the process of receiving information by means of face-to-face contact with another person.

There are two concepts of information asymmetry, namely; (1) adverse selection, indicating that service users know more about environmental conditions, migrant workers' rights, and jobs than prospective migrant workers, so that it can cause injustice to migrant workers, (2) Moral Hazard, service users can take advantage of the ignorance of prospective workers migrants to violate inappropriate contracts, ethics, morals and norms by service users. Andrew Bloomenthal's concept of information asymmetry states that the superiority of the concept of information asymmetry does not mean that it is bad. In fact, information asymmetry can lead to higher quality market economy activities, as workers strive to become increasingly more productive and more effective. As a result, it can increase the added value for these workers. One alternative to information asymmetry for workers is to be able to develop their ability to learn jobs that they did not previously understand. Another alternative to information asymmetry is to provide sufficient and inexpensive information through the internet and other sources of information. ((Boyle MJ, 2020); (Crémer, Jacques; Khalil, Fahad; Rochet, 1998)).

(Stiglitz, 2000) and (Spence, 1973) state that parties who are less informed and those who get a lot of information, each will try to maximize actions to achieve the desired goals. other parties. Meanwhile, the uninformed party can improve the results through the act of filtering information for decision making in determining quality. (Akerlof, 1970) states that the information asymmetry possessed by unscrupulous actors can falsify products or information for the satisfaction of their own interests. The development of an intermediary market organization called Counteracting is one of the strategies that can be utilized to alleviate information asymmetry. This institution can give guarantees in the form of additional time for both parties to acquire appropriate information prior to reaching a transaction decision as shown in Figure 1.

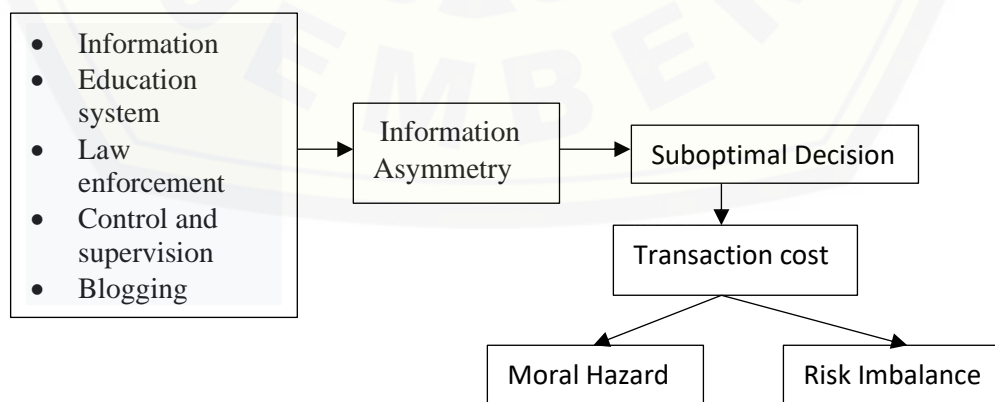


Figure 1. Concept and impact of asimetri Information pada pekerja migran.  
Sumber: (Stiglitz, 2000); (Copeland, T dan Galai, 1983); (Akerlof, 1970)) Modified

Figure 1. explains that the asymmetry of information received by migrating workers happens when the employer/employer prefers to control information more than the migrant worker; this can encourage the entrepreneur/employer to conceal some crucial information that the migrant worker is unaware of. This affords the employer the chance to promote his own interests. The cost of information asymmetry results from the unequal access and ownership of information between two parties. This scenario can promote the establishment of moral hazard on the part of employers toward employees. Differences in information ownership may cause migrant workers with less information than their employers to assume higher risk.

Factors that influence information asymmetry in society include (1) the available information media, (2) the education system, the high cost of education can cause a gap between the poor and the rich, (3) existing legal and organizational actions, (4) supervision of some information that should be received by the public. community, (5) The effect of blogging on the website as a means of reducing asymmetric information. ((Saxton, Gregory; Anker, 2013) and (Schmidt, Jens; Keil, 2013) state that more public participation in blog sites from credible individuals can reduce information asymmetry between economic actors. According to (Facchici G, Madya AM, 2017) explained that media exposure significantly affects the consideration of prospective individuals for illegal migration (Noor, N. M., & Shaker, 2017) stated that there are two important things that can affect the results of workers' decisions in taking action, namely; first incomplete information and Limited mental capacity. Both aspects can cause transaction costs in decision making. Transaction Fees are divided into two namely; First, transaction costs that arise prior to the occurrence of the contract, namely the costs incurred in establishing a system. Second, transaction costs that occur after the contract is established, namely costs in carrying out evaluation and monitoring, costs for solving problems/constraints and others. The occurrence of information asymmetry in workers working abroad has the consequence of creating transaction costs that occur during pre-placement, placement and post-placement.

Williams A., (2012) explained that the factors that cause transaction costs are (1) Bounded rationality; namely the condition where the community is faced with the problem of information asymmetry in decision making. The limitations of rationality will have an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the actions to be taken, (2) Opportunism, if there is a conflict between the wishes and the approval of the other party, they will act according to their wishes as long as there is a high enough cost for the other party to know their behavior. Transaction costs are divided into three main things, namely; information seeking costs, negotiation and decision costs as well as monitoring costs or implementation costs. (Yustika, n.d.)

## Worker Rationality Theory in Migration Decision Making

Weber divides the action of rationality into 5 (five) forms. First, instrumental rational action is an action that is directed rationally in achieving the desired goal. The second is value rational action, which is rational action determined by considerations based on their beliefs, aesthetics, ethics and religion. The third is emotional action, namely all a person's actions that are influenced by feelings and emotions. Fourth is traditional action, which is action based on existing traditions or customs. The fifth is the act of juridical rationality, namely rational action based on concepts in the applicable legal and

bureaucratic fields. (Scott AJ, 2010). Currently, the international migration of Indonesian women represents a societal shift in terms of labor force participation. This phenomenon can also be observed in the lives of women who choose to become migrant laborers. (Anggaunitakiranantika, 2021)

## Research Method

This study employs qualitative research techniques in accordance with an empirical phenomenological paradigm. This study follows the participant observational case study approach, which emphasizes the ability of researchers to collect empirical data from informants using observational methodologies (Sugiyono, 2008). This case was selected to demonstrate the empirical phenomena of the influence of information asymmetry on the level of rationality of Indonesian female migrant workers when opting to work overseas in order to achieve a work-life balance.

Sources of knowledge collected from multiple informants who are believed to know and comprehend the topic being studied in East Java province during July to November 2022. Through out direct observation in four districts in East Java; the Region of Ngawi as the western border to Midle Java province and Banyuwangi region as the border of Eastern border with Bali province. In the middle of the East Java province we took the information from Jember and Bondowso regions. The consideration on choosing the four cities is to draw the mapping of the characteristics of IFMW in the research area which most of them are living in the villages, not in the mid of city.

Former IMFW who will either return to work as migrant workers again or will not return to work as migrant workers again are the primary informants. The determination of informants is based on the variety of primary occupations and the destination country of migration. Non-probability sample approaches or purposive and snowball procedures are used to determine which informants to interview. appropriate to the aims of the research. The collection of data/information will continue to evolve throughout the research process (Sugiyono, 2008). There are multiple steps involved in data collection, including (1) establishing the scope of the study, (2) collecting data, and (3) regularly documenting information. Considering that the required information is derived from multiple distinct sources and methodical stages, data collection is conducted in accordance with the norms of triangulation, i.e., by merging multiple procedures and data sources in a single data gathering activity.

The process of validity and reliability testing in this study was using a triangulation method, namely by conducting interviews with three groups of informants to cross-check each other. The first parties to be used as informants were IFMW alumni in 4 cities in East Java, namely 3 alumni from the city of Ngawi, 6 people from Jember, 2 people from Bondowoso and 4 people from Banyuwangi. Information was collected from PMW alumni through in-depth interviews regarding motivation, job satisfaction, family harmony, and problems related to personal and work life balance (WLB). In each of the 4 cities the research team followed up with Focus Group Discussion (FGD) by replaying the recorded documents and conducting the analysis.

The second group interviewed were representatives of the Jember Regency Ministry of Labour Office, in this case represented by the staff who handle migrant workers, especially IFMW. The staff is very familiar with the applicable laws and regulations. The Ministerial Decree on Migrant Workers, namely Kepmenakertrans No. Per.14/Men/X/2010 concerning Implementation of Placement and Protection of Workers

Overseas. Permenaker No 9 of 2019 concerning procedures for placing Indonesian migrant workers. The third group that is the source of information is academics who are experts in the field of human resource economics and international business. The aim is to confirm the findings of the first and second phase informants from a theoretical and developmental perspective.

## Results

The first finding is about the characteristics of IFMW in East Java which was found in the field of observation can be described in two clusters. The western and eastern bank of East Java province were dominated by Javanese ethnic while the middle were Maduranese domination ethnic. Both clusters have different motivation on being IFMW based upon the information recorded during in depth interview.

The next findings of the study found that the prospective IFMW in East Java had only completed elementary and junior high school. The low level of education of employees will effect the lack of labor absorption in the country and the significant number of Indonesian female migrant workers employed as domestic workers and child/elder caretakers. This condition will cause salary and employment discrimination. Low education engenders limited rationality in decision-making.

Bounded rationality supported by information asymmetry among Indonesian female migrant workers in East Java has an impact on the occurrence of suboptimal decisions that can trigger negative external transaction costs in their actions. Spillover effects caused by information asymmetry in PMW are:

The occurrence of inequality in the bargaining position in PMW is mostly due to the weak mastery of skills, language, culture and education and the absence of strong regulations issued by the government to protect these migrant workers.

Information asymmetry about negotiations and employment contracts at PMWs can lead to high transaction costs that must be accepted by migration actors

With Bounded Rationality, PMW determines their decision to migrate based on heuristics with the aim of getting the highest net lifetime earnings from their work in order to meet the current needs and support the family's economic independence in the future (Entrepreneurship pattern).

First, the selection of employment service agencies by potential female migrant workers is based solely on the agency's experience in dispatching female migrant workers without regard to the legality of the brokers/sponsors who despatched them. The legitimacy of the agent will impact the success of potential female migrant workers seeking employment overseas.

The limited rationality of female migrant workers in selecting a destination country is based not only on distance and cultural equality, but also on a more significant factor, namely selecting a destination country with laws and regulations that can better guarantee the safety and security of migrant workers and countries with high wage standards.

## Discussion

The problem of limited information received by parties who will carry out work transactions will have an impact on the loss of market value for those who obtain less information. In reality,

decision making by a person generally will not collect and examine all possible solutions. They are more likely to direct their decisions on information that has been proven to be true based on personal experience or the experiences of others (Thomas, 2007; Brettell, C., Hollifield, 2000; Massey DS, Arango J, Hugo G, Kouaouac, A, 1993).

The rationality of an idea or action is related to the suitability, accuracy of action with norms and the level of religiosity that is believed to be true. Disobedience to norms and the level of religiosity will cause the perpetrator to bear both material and spiritual losses (Holden R, 2015). The weakness of this rational action is that one often determines the reasoning shortcuts that can lead to suboptimal actions. This theory developed because of the opposition to the concept of rationality which says that humans generally act rationally based on their preferences. This theory of limited rationality assumes that each person's cognition is limited and imperfect. A person's low cognition can trigger a failure to act in accordance with the principle of utility maximization. Make reasoning to reach decisions that can produce optimal thoughts and actions (Baláz V., 2016; Pita J, Jain M, Tambe M, Ordóñez F, 2010).

In general, the departure of PMW candidates to work overseas is primarily motivated by economic logic, i.e. the desire for a more established and secure economic existence to support their families in the future. Meanwhile, psychological and social considerations are rarely considered. Making these decisions requires wisdom, firmness and courage in order to achieve the predetermined goals. The decision to become PMW is a big decision so it must be taken wisely and not only for personal interests but must consider the interests of the family. In accordance with the concept of Coleman's theory of rational choice, it explains that every worker will use economic principles in carrying out their activities (Sara R. Curran and Abigail C., 2001; Maceira, 2017; Nasrah, S. M., & Menon, 1997).

Prospective migrants must get the right information especially about the procedures and requirements to become a migrant worker. More and more prospective migrant workers have information, can influence and increase their knowledge. With this knowledge, it is hoped that it can raise a person's awareness so that they will behave in accordance with the knowledge they have.

Stiglitz (2000) and Spence (1973) state that parties who get information and those who lack information can each maximize their economic transaction activities. In general, prospective migrant workers get their information from learning, experience and instruction from other sources. Limited information is influenced by several things, including limited resources, limited time and limited intelligence. A worker who has limited rationale will still choose a place and type of work that can provide the greatest value of efficiency and level of satisfaction or a place of work that produces maximum benefit value with a certain combination of costs and risks (Katz and E., 1986)

Factors that influence information asymmetry in society include; (1) the available information media, (2) the education system, the high cost of education can cause a gap between the poor and the rich, (3) existing legal and organizational actions, (4) supervision of some information that should be received by the public. community, (5) The influence of blogging as a method of minimizing asymmetric information on the website. There are both positive and bad effects of blogging on economic actors and on society. If blogging is conducted on a negative website, it can create an informational imbalance in the community. A positive blogging site, on the other hand, can result in knowledge asymmetry that is detrimental to economic actors and society.

Blogging can also prevent irresponsible individuals from hiding crucial information from transaction parties and the wider public. Compared to conventional media, blogs can provide a convenient venue for individuals to obtain information (Schmidt, Jens; Keil, 2013).

According to Stiglitz, parties who are weak in obtaining information will try to ask for help from other parties to disclose the information they need. The existence of information asymmetry causes unscrupulous employers/entrepreneurs to

commit violations against workers. ((Copeland, T dan Galai, 1983); (Saxton, Gregory; Anker, 2013)). Asymmetry theory is closely related to the optimization of the benefits and risks that must be accepted by the perpetrators of economic transactions. (Katz and E., 1986).

Based on the research findings and discussion, the idea of constructing the theoretical enrichments is drawn in the following Figure 2.

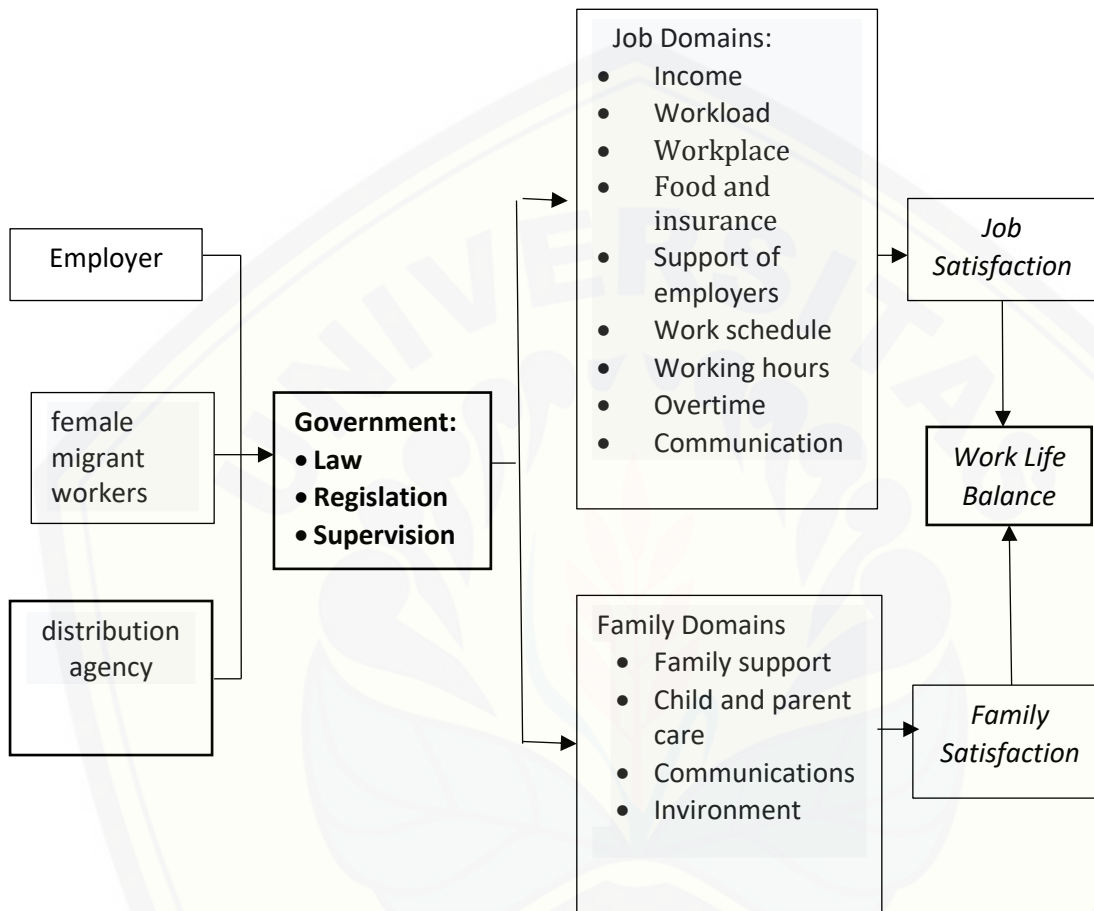


Figure 2. model of work-life balance in IFMW

Figure 2 explains that WLB in IFMW depends on satisfaction in the work domain and family domain they receive. satisfaction that occurs in both domains is influenced by the optimality of the synergy between the government, distribution agencies, IFMW and employers

## Conclusion

On the basis of the results of the research conducted, it can be concluded:

1. Bounded Rationality that happens in every economic transaction carried out by female migrant workers can cause decisions made by female migrant workers in negotiating and determining contracts to result in transaction costs that must be incurred by the parties carrying out the transaction..

2. Sources of information asymmetry that occur in migrant workers are caused by; (1) media that provides information that is not in accordance with the reality that occurs in society, (2) imbalance of information caused by low skills and education of workers, (3) moral hazard that occurs in transaction actors who try to cover information justification, ( 4) the influence of blogging as a reducing tool for retaining the truth of information.

3. Information asymmetry happens in economics when one party to a transaction has more and better information than the other.

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