

The Role of Used Clothing Women Traders on The Socioeconomic Conditions of Households in Pasar Melati Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of women who sell used clothing on the socioeconomic conditions of households at Melati Market in Medan. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study strategy. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation from nine informants selected using snowball sampling. The results show that these women engage in trade due to the instability of their husbands' income as well as their desire to earn an independent income. Their economic contribution is significant, accounting for 30–100% of family income, with the primary priority being to meet their children's educational needs. In juggling their dual roles as vendors and homemakers, they employ adaptive time-management strategies and advocate for a more equitable division of domestic tasks with their husbands. In addition to improving family well-being, economic independence also strengthens women's position in decision-making, boosts their self-confidence, and fosters solidarity among the vendors. This study confirms that women who sell used clothing are key agents in sustaining their families' socioeconomic well-being.

Keywords: *Women Traders; Used Clothing; Dual Roles; Household Socioeconomic; Informal Sector*

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INTRODUCTION

Melati Market, located in Tanjung Selamat Village, Medan Tuntungan Subdistrict, Medan City, is a hub of community economic activity with distinctive characteristics, particularly in the trade of imported used clothing—known as “monza.” The market has grown rapidly since the early 2000s and is now one of the largest markets in North Sumatra, serving as an economic lifeline for thousands of families. The majority of vendors at Melati Market are women, and most of them are homemakers who juggle dual roles: managing the household while also serving as economic actors who contribute to their families' well-being.

The phenomenon of women's involvement in trade activities at Melati Market reflects significant changes in the socio-economic structure of the community. Women are no longer confined solely to domestic roles but also play an active part in productive economic activities aimed at improving family well-being. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency, the female labor force participation rate in Indonesia stands at 55.04 percent, reflecting women's growing role in national economic activities (Central Statistics Agency, 2023). Factors that encourage women to work include increasing

household needs, low spousal income, and the desire to achieve greater well-being (Mincer, 2025). This is consistent with the household economics theory proposed by Becker (1965), which states that a woman's decision to work is the result of a rational trade-off between the economic benefits gained from working and the opportunity cost of the time spent caring for the family.

One of the sectors that employs the most women is the informal sector, as it offers flexible hours, easy access, and relatively low capital requirements. The informal sector encompasses various economic activities that lack a formal organizational structure and are often carried out independently (International Labor Organization, 2018). In the context of women, this sector serves as a strategic economic space because it allows them to continue fulfilling their domestic roles while simultaneously participating in productive economic activities. Dirgahayu and Fatmariza (2021), in their study of female vendors at Pasar Baru in Pesisir Selatan Regency, found that the income earned by these vendors is used to meet needs for clothing, food, children's education expenses, medical costs, and family social activities. While this study emphasizes the economic contributions and the factors that support or hinder trading, it has not yet explored in depth the adaptation strategies women employ to balance their dual roles.

One form of economic activity in the rapidly growing informal sector in the city of Medan is the trade in imported used clothing, which is part of a global economic chain involving the export of used clothing from developed countries to developing countries, including Indonesia (Norris, 2012). This activity provides new economic opportunities for low- to middle-income communities, particularly for women with limited education and access to formal employment. In her study on the dual roles of female vendors at Beringharjo Market in Yogyakarta, Bimono (2017) found that the impact of these dual roles on female vendors includes physical complaints, psychological stress, and reduced time for family. While this study makes an important contribution to understanding the psychological and physical impacts of dual roles, it does not sufficiently explore the concrete strategies women use to manage these role conflicts or how they build resilience in the face of economic challenges.

Based on this discussion, the phenomenon of the dual roles of women selling used clothing at Melati Market in Medan is worth examining because there has been little research specifically addressing their roles and contributions to the socioeconomic conditions of their households. Previous studies have tended to separate the analysis of economic and social aspects and have focused more on traditional market trade in general without capturing the complexity of the dual roles undertaken by women selling used clothing. This study is also relevant to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda, particularly Goal 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as Goal 8 on decent work and economic growth. Therefore, this study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the roles played by women who sell used clothing at Medan's Melati Market in their households' socioeconomic activities, including their motivations and economic contributions, how they balance their domestic and public roles, and the social impact of their trading activities on their family lives.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive methods and a case study strategy (Creswell, 2014). This approach was chosen because the focus of the study

is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and social conditions of women who sell used clothing at Melati Market in Medan, particularly regarding their role in household socioeconomic life. The researcher served as the primary instrument for collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data directly in the field through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation.

This study was conducted at Medan's Melati Market, located on Bunga Sakura Street, Tanjung Selamat Village, Medan Tuntungan Subdistrict, Medan City, North Sumatra Province. Melati Market is known as one of the largest centers for secondhand clothing trade in North Sumatra, with the majority of its vendors being women who play dual roles as homemakers and economic actors in the informal sector. Research informants were selected using snowball sampling, starting with one initial informant who then recommended other informants with similar characteristics or experiences. This process continued until the collected data was deemed to have reached saturation. The total number of informants in this study was nine, consisting of one key informant (the market manager), who provided a structural and contextual overview of the trade dynamics at Melati Market; six primary informants—women who sell used clothing and whose husbands work in other sectors—to understand the dynamics of the division of economic roles within households; and two additional informants—husbands or family members of vendors and regular customers—to broaden the perspective on the economic and social impacts of trading activities on family life.

The data collection techniques used included semi-structured in-depth interviews as the primary method, participatory observation to directly observe trading activities and the informants' daily lives, as well as documentation in the form of photographs of activities, statistical data from the Central Statistics Agency, and other supporting documents. The interview guidelines covered topics such as the background and motivation for selling, daily trading activities, strategies for balancing domestic and public roles, economic contributions to the household, socioeconomic impacts on family well-being, and challenges faced in carrying out. The interview guidelines covered topics such as background and motivation for selling, daily trading activities, strategies for balancing domestic and public roles, economic contributions to the household, socioeconomic impacts on family well-being, and challenges faced in juggling dual roles. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results across informants, interview results with observation results, and interview and observation results with documentary data to ensure the validity and credibility of the findings.

Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach following the interactive model by Miles and Huberman (as cited in Sugiyono, 2019), which consists of three stages. First, data reduction—the process of compiling and selecting key points relevant to the research focus. Second, data presentation—organizing the reduced information into a narrative form to facilitate drawing conclusions. Third, drawing conclusions—interpreting the data, which is continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure its accuracy in relation to the research focus.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

RESEARCH RESULT

1. Geographic Location of the Research Site

Melati Traditional Market is located on Bunga Sakura Street, Tanjung Selamat Village, Medan Tuntungan Subdistrict, Medan City, North Sumatra Province. According to Google Maps, the market's coordinates are approximately 3.5420937 North Latitude and 98.5988845 East Longitude, with the code GJR3+JVM. Geographically, the Melati Traditional Market is situated in the southwest of Medan City and is part of a developing suburban area. The Melati Traditional Market is surrounded by residential areas and small streets, with the main access route being Bunga Sakura Street, which connects to other local roads such as Flamboyan Raya Street. The topography of this area is fairly flat, which facilitates commercial activities and the movement of people. With its easily accessible location and integration into the surrounding environment, this market serves as a strategic site for field research activities.

2. History of the Development of the Research Site.

According to an article in *Pelayanan Publik*, Melati Market—known to the public as Pajak Melati or Pamela—was originally a rice field that was later purchased and converted by residents into market stalls. Over time, it has grown into one of the largest traditional trading centers in Medan, renowned as a hub for the sale of imported used clothing (*monza*). This market offers a wide variety of goods—such as clothing, shoes, bags, and other used items still in good condition—at relatively low prices, attracting shoppers from all walks of life, including college students and those seeking high-quality items at affordable prices. The term “*monza*” itself originates from “*Mongonsidi Plaza*,” the largest secondhand clothing market in Medan during the 1990s, and has since been adopted by the public to refer to the imported secondhand goods sold at Melati Market. From its inception to the present day, Melati Market has remained a bustling traditional marketplace, particularly on Tuesdays, Fridays, and weekends when the “*Monza*” stalls are fully open and draw large crowds of shoppers seeking quality goods at affordable prices.

3. General Information About the Informant

The informants in this study fall into three main categories: key informants, primary informants, and supplementary informants. Informants were selected using the snowball sampling technique, which began with an initial informant who then recommended other informants with characteristics and experiences relevant to the focus of the study.

a. Key Informants

The key informant in this study was the manager or coordinator of Medan's Melati Market, a total of one person. This individual was selected because of their comprehensive knowledge of the market's organizational structure, the number and characteristics of female vendors, and the dynamics of the secondhand clothing trade at Melati Market. In general, the key informant is responsible for the market's operational management, has at least three years of work experience at Pasar Melati, has access to vendor data and information, and interacts regularly with vendors, including female secondhand clothing vendors. The key informant typically has at least a high school education and a good understanding of the socioeconomic dynamics within the market environment. Through these key informants, researchers

can gain structural and contextual perspectives that serve as the foundation for a deeper understanding of the conditions and roles of female vendors at Melati Market.

b. Primary Informant

The main informants in this study consisted of six women who sell used clothing and whose husbands work in other sectors. This number was chosen to provide depth of data and ensure data saturation was achieved. They are characterized as women who sell used clothing while their husbands work in different sectors, such as agriculture, construction, transportation, services, or other informal sectors. Demographically, the key informants ranged in age from 25 to 60 years old and had varying levels of education. They had generally been selling used clothing for at least two years, maintained a permanent kiosk or stall at Melati Market, and conducted business on a regular basis. The primary informants' economic contribution to household income varies between 30–60%, depending on their husbands' earnings from other sectors. Income from trading greatly helps meet the family's daily needs such as children's education expenses, healthcare, and other household necessities and provides economic stability when the husband's income is unpredictable.

c. Additional Informants

Additional informants consisted of several parties who provided complementary perspectives to the primary research data, totaling approximately two people. First, one husband or family member of the female traders provided information regarding the economic and social impacts of trading activities on family life, the division of domestic roles in the household, and their views on the economic contribution of wives or mothers. Second, one regular customer, a regular customer of the female traders, provided perspectives on service quality, social relationships with the traders, and their reasons for choosing to shop at Melati Market. Thus, the total number of informants in this study was nine people, consisting of a key informant (one market manager), main informants (six female traders whose husbands work in other sectors), and two additional informants. This number was considered sufficient to achieve data saturation in qualitative research, where the information obtained was sufficiently in-depth and comprehensive to answer all research problem formulations.

d. Condition of Facilities and Infrastructure at the Research Location.

Melati Market in Medan offers a variety of facilities to support daily buying and selling activities. Based on observations, the condition of the facilities at this research location can be described as follows:

- 1) Trading Facilities: Medan's fairly extensive Melati Market encompasses hundreds of kiosks and semi-permanent stalls. These stalls generally range in size from 2x3 meters to 3x4 meters and are constructed of semi-permanent structures made of iron or wooden frames with zinc roofs. Each vendor has a permanent stall or stall, either inherited from their family or rented from the market management. Inside the stalls, female vendors display used clothing hung on rails, arranged in baskets or on display tables to facilitate customer selection.
- 2) Access and Transportation Facilities: Melati Market, located on Jalan Bunga Sakura, Medan Tuntungan District, is accessible by various public transportation

routes and private vehicles. There is parking for motorcycles and cars around the market, although it is often insufficient on peak days like Tuesdays, Fridays, and Sundays. The road to the market is generally in good condition, but traffic jams often occur during peak hours due to the high number of shoppers coming from various areas of Medan and the surrounding area.

- 3) **Hygiene and Sanitation Facilities:** Melati Market is equipped with public restrooms for vendors and visitors. In addition, trash bins are located at several strategic points throughout the market area to maintain cleanliness. However, upon observation, the market's cleanliness still needs improvement, particularly in the often narrow and crowded aisles between stalls. Waste management is a major challenge, especially on busy days when the number of vendors and shoppers increases significantly.
- 4) **Security Facilities:** The security of the Melati Market area is maintained by security guards on duty during market hours. In addition, security is provided by local community leaders. Female vendors generally feel quite safe trading in this market due to the solidarity and mutual care among vendors. However, on busy days, the large number of visitors requires additional supervision to prevent potential crimes such as pickpocketing.
- 5) **Electrical and Lighting Facilities:** Every stall at Melati Market is equipped with an electrical connection for lighting. Adequate lighting is crucial for secondhand clothing vendors so that buyers can clearly see the condition and quality of the goods before deciding to purchase. Some vendors also utilize additional lighting to illuminate their stalls to make them appear more attractive and professional. Overall, the lighting conditions at Melati Market are adequate to support trading activities, although some of the narrower aisles may be dim.
- 6) **Other Supporting Facilities:** Within and around Melati Market, there are various supporting facilities such as food and beverage stalls that meet the needs of vendors while selling, prayer rooms for vendors and visitors, and several kiosks that provide goods delivery services. The existence of these supporting facilities is very helpful in providing comfort and supporting the continuity of trading activities at Melati Market, while also forming a mutually beneficial microeconomic ecosystem for various parties involved in the market. Overall, the facilities and infrastructure at Medan's Melati Market can be considered adequate to support the buying and selling of used clothing, although there are several elements that still need improvement, especially related to cleanliness, the number of parking spaces, and the comfort of the market's paths. This situation directly affects the selling experience of female vendors and ultimately impacts their production results and income to support the economic well-being of their families.

DISCUSSION

1. Women's Motivation and Access in the Informal Sector

The research findings indicate that women's motivations for entering the secondhand clothing trade are multi-layered and can be understood through two layers of analysis: external, structural, and internal, agentic. External motivations include the husband's unstable or insufficient income, the family's pressing economic needs, and limited access to formal employment. For example, informants OS and MH began

trading due to the instability of their husband's job as a construction worker, while informant EH was forced into the informal sector in an emergency when her husband was laid off.

"I have four children! My husband works as a construction worker, and he only gets paid *when* there's a project. If the project is closed or the weather is bad, there's no income. When my third child started school, that was the turning point. I thought I couldn't continue like this; I had to have something I could control myself." (Informant MH).

This phenomenon reflects what Kabeer (1994) calls reactive agency, namely women's actions triggered by structural constraints but still containing dimensions of choice and courage. At the more agentic level of internal motivation, the cases of informants RK and DS stand out. RK, with a bachelor's degree and a relatively stable family economy, chose to trade not because of acute economic pressure, but because of a strong desire to have a source of income that she could control herself. This finding aligns with the International Labour Organization's (2018) view that the informal sector is a strategic economic space for women because it allows flexibility in balancing domestic and productive roles. In terms of accessibility, Pasar Melati serves as socioeconomic infrastructure that lowers barriers to entry for women who want to start a business, as the market's established reputation means new traders don't have to start from scratch to build a customer base.

2. Economic Contribution to Family Welfare

The informants' economic contributions to their households were significant and, in some cases, the primary source of income for the family, ranging from 30 to 100 percent of total household income. Informant OS reported that when her husband was unemployed, his trading income covered all family needs, accounting for 100 percent of total household expenses, compared to 60 to 70 percent under normal circumstances.

"When my husband's projects are quiet, I handle it 100 percent, Sis. Everything comes from the sales. If my husband is working, I probably take 60-70 percent of the total household expenses," (Informant OS).

The income allocation patterns identified reflect a hierarchy of values held firmly by all informants: children's education consistently ranked as the first and undisputed priority, followed by daily food needs, routine bill payments, and finally savings or additional business capital. Informant DS's achievement in successfully sending two of her four children to college is concrete evidence that informal commerce can be an effective engine of social mobility for families with irregular incomes. This finding reinforces the research of Dirgahayu and Fatmariza (2021), who found that women traders' income contributes to meeting the needs of clothing, food, children's education, medical expenses, and social activities. The case of informant EH, whose family experienced a severe economic crisis when her husband was laid off, illustrates the vital role of the informal sector as a safety net for families without access to formal social protection, in line with the views of the International Labour Organization (2018).

3. Women's Dual Roles: Negotiation and Adaptation

None of the informants completely abandoned their domestic responsibilities for trading activities. Instead, they developed adaptive time management and task allocation systems, continually negotiating them dynamically over time. The informants' daily routines illustrated a heavy workload: almost all of them began their day before or just before dawn to do domestic chores before going to the market, and returned to the rest of the household chores after returning from trading until evening.

"I wake up at five-thirty in the morning, Sis. I immediately cook, clean the house, and prepare breakfast for the kids. [...] I'm at the market until around six in the evening, sometimes until seven when it's busy. When I get home, I still have laundry to do and dinner to cook" (Informant OS).

This situation reflects the triple burden concept identified by Moser (1993), where women in developing countries often simultaneously fulfill productive, reproductive, and community roles. However, the findings of this study also reveal a more complex dynamic: women's involvement in productive economic activities gradually leads to a renegotiation of the division of domestic labor within the household. All informants reported husbands' involvement in domestic work, albeit to varying degrees and forms. This renegotiation in all cases occurred not through confrontation or explicit agreement, but rather through a gradual process of adaptation guided by practical needs and mutual understanding between partners, in line with Becker's (1965) theory of household economics.

4. Social Impact: Empowerment and Transformation of Gender Relations

Women's involvement in productive economic activities has social impacts that extend far beyond the material dimension. The most prominent social impact is a shift in power relations within the household toward greater equality, manifested in three main dimensions: increased decision-making power, strengthened self-esteem and self-confidence, and a change in how children view their mother figures.

"Previously, when my mother made suggestions at home, my husband sometimes didn't really listen, perhaps because I didn't have my own income. Now, he always asks for my opinion first when making decisions about finances or the children," (Informant OS).

This finding is relevant to Sen's (1999) concept of capability, which asserts that economic independence directly expands an individual's ability to actively participate in decision-making that affects their lives. Furthermore, trading activities also foster a broad and meaningful social network among fellow traders, which serves as a functional economic resource for sharing information on prices, sales strategies, and moral support, as Putnam (2000) proposed regarding social capital. The most significant social impact from a long-term perspective is the change in the informants' children, who reportedly grew to appreciate hard work more and were more motivated to achieve after witnessing their mother's struggles, in line with the socialization and educational functions of the family as proposed by Goode (1991).

CONCLUSION

Female secondhand clothing traders at Medan's Melati Market play a central, complex, and multidimensional role in their household's socio-economic life, encompassing three interrelated dimensions: productive, reproductive, and social. Their motivations for entering this sector are multi-layered, reflecting a combination of structural compulsion due to their husbands' income instability and a rational choice to have financial autonomy. Within the productive dimension, their economic contribution is significant, and in many cases, vital to the family's economic survival, with income prioritized for children's education. Within the reproductive dimension, female traders maintain domestic responsibilities alongside their trading activities through adaptive time management strategies, which gradually encourage a renegotiation of the gender division of labor within the household toward a more equal one. Within the social and community dimension, women's involvement in productive economic activities produces positive impacts at the individual, family, and community levels, ranging from increased self-confidence and bargaining power in family decision-making to the formation of solidarity networks among traders. Overall, this study confirms that women secondhand clothing traders at Medan's Melati Market are not merely marginal economic actors in the informal sector, but rather active agents of family development who demonstrate agency, resilience, and adaptability amidst structural limitations.

Further research is recommended to comparatively explore the adaptation strategies of female traders' dual roles in other types of informal commodities, as well as examine the digital adaptation strategies of traditional market traders in facing competition with increasingly massive online trading platforms.

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