



DOI: 10.6936/NIJHSS.202106_3(1).0002

Nusantara: An International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences

Vol. 3, No. 1 (2021) pp. 15–35

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Gender and Economics: ‘The Power of *Emak-emak*’ in Work–Family Connections Among *Opak* Small Business Owners in Banten Province, Indonesia

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Abstract

After the crisis of 1997–1998, Indonesia has continued to show the highest rates of unemployment in Southeast Asia. Female unemployment rates have been particularly high, and Indonesian women therefore have extra motivation to create a better work situation for themselves by operating a small business to sustain themselves and their families. Many economically active Indonesian women find themselves working in the informal sector. In Banten Province, *emak-emak* (an indigenous term for ‘mother’, though often used more broadly to refer to married middle-aged Indonesian women) dominate the *opak* (cassava cracker) industry. Integrating work and family is an indisputably challenging part of business viability, both for women and men.

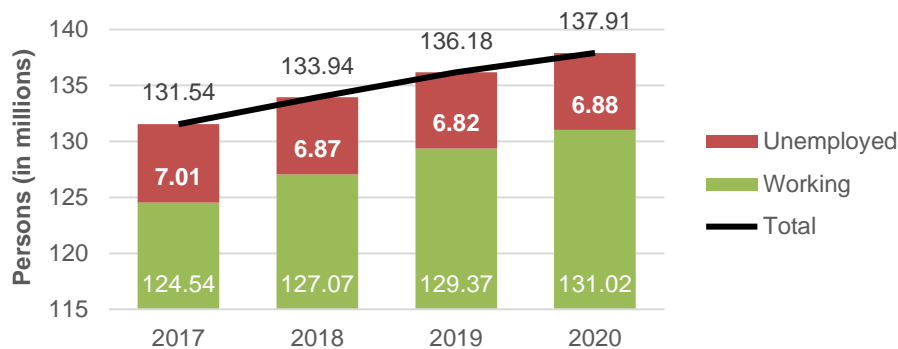
This study aims to determine the role of gender—including gender prejudices and stigmas—in these work–family connections and finds that profound differences in work and family roles may lead to differences in work-related attitudes that ultimately affect business success. Family and business characteristics, human capital, and owners’ commitment to the business are also investigated in terms of business success, and the dynamic through which work and family roles affect business success is clarified. Cornerstones of this study are theories of gender, family, and small business success, as well as models of gender differences and gender similarity.

Keywords: the power of *emak-emak*, work–family connections, *opak*, small business, business success

1 Introduction

Since the financial crisis of 1997–1998, Indonesia has shown some of the highest rates of unemployment in Southeast Asia. Data from Statistics Indonesia, presented in Figure 1 below, shows that 6.88 million Indonesians were unemployed in 2020, an increase from 6.82 million people in 2019.

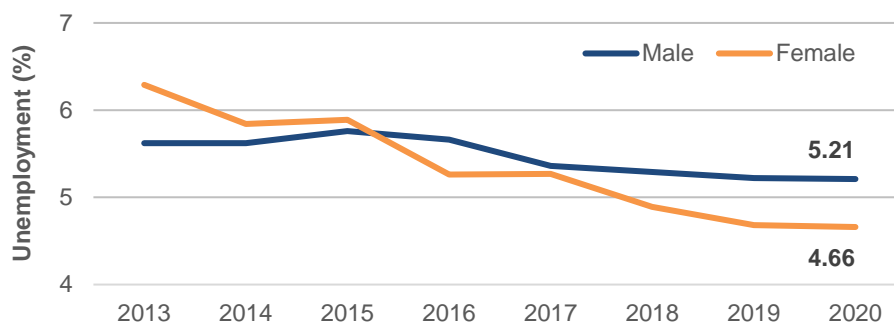
Figure 1. Indonesian labor force, 2017–2020



Note. Total labor force does not include those not economically active (e.g., less than 15 years of age, solely housekeeping, etc.). From Sub-directorate of Manpower Statistics ([2020](#)), p. 3.

Probing more deeply into unemployment rates, Figure 2 below shows that unemployed working men has outnumbered women for the last consecutive years (2016–2020). This data indicates that working Indonesian women have extra motivation to establish a better work situation for themselves, often by owning a small business through which they can sustain themselves and their families.

Figure 2. Indonesian unemployment rate (%) by sex, 2013–2020



Note. Calculated as a percentage of total labor force. Data from Sub-directorate of Manpower Statistics ([2016](#), [2020](#)), pp. 6–7.

Many economically active Indonesian women find themselves working in the rural and informal sectors. As shown in Table 1, informal employment in the non-agriculture sector was higher in rural areas between 2015 and 2018.

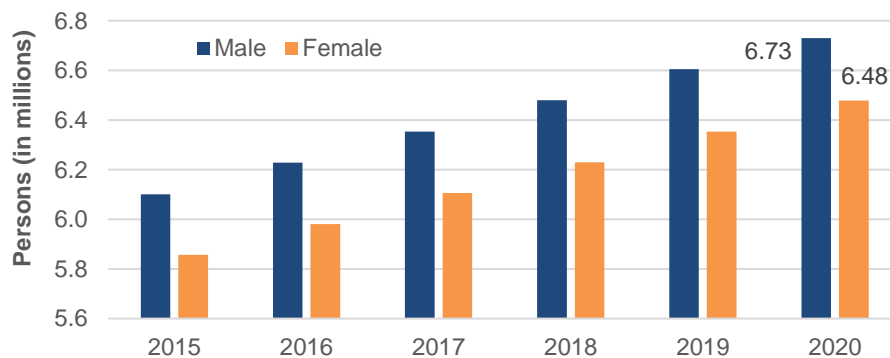
Table 1. Informal employment (%) by area of residence, 2015–2018

Area of Residence	2015	2016	2017	2018
Urban	37.74	38.38	38.48	39.12
Rural	55.78	52.55	54.82	54.79

Note. This excludes informal employment in the agriculture sector. From Badan Pusat Statistik (2018).

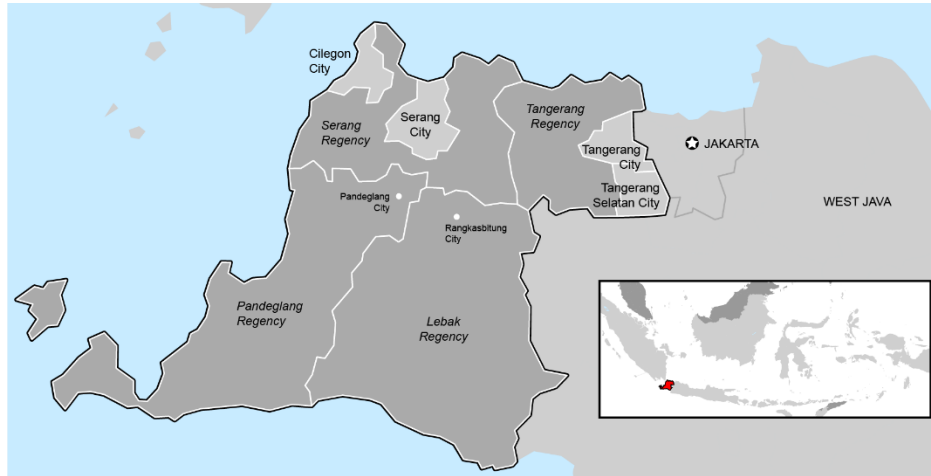
In the specific context of population by sex, Figure 3 shows that men outnumber women in Banten.

Figure 3. Population of Banten Province by sex, 2015–2020



Note. From Bidang Statistik Sosial (2017), p. 11.

After reflecting on this data, we turn next to a map of Banten Province, Indonesia. It is bound to the north by the Java Sea, to the northeast by the Special Capital District of Jakarta, to the east by the province of West Java, to the south by the Indian Ocean, and the west by the Sunda Strait, across which lies the province of Lampung (in southern Sumatra). The capital of Banten is Serang City.

Figure 4. Map of Banten Province, Indonesia

Note. Created by the author. Map of Banten Province (large) from Hddty (2019), CC BY 4.0; Map of Indonesia (small) from Dederling (2010), CC BY 3.0.

Living in a rural area motivates women to utilize natural resources and work with their community to survive. This often takes industrial forms: In 2018, there were 109,959 micro and small manufacturing establishments in Banten, employing 258,112 people (Division of Integration Processing and Statistics Dissemination, 2020, p. 422). The creation of home industries in rural areas indicates an abundance of agricultural products and resources, especially cassava and sweet potato, as seen in Table 2. Banten has large expansive cassava and sweet potato plantation areas, spread across four regencies: Pandeglang, Lebak, Tangerang, and Serang. It is thus a potential food processing center, and various forms of processed cassava have been promoted by the local government through its flagship programs. Processed cassava has readily been available in urban markets in Pandeglang, Serang, Rangkasbitung, etc.

Table 2. Cassava growing area, yield, and productivity by Banten regency, 2019

	Harvested Area (ha)	Production (tons)	Productivity (quintal/ha)
Pandeglang	1,092	25,200	230.77
Lebak	1,271	26,949	212.03
Tangerang	128	2,865	223.83
Serang	521	12,449	238.94

Note. From Division of Integration Processing and Statistics Dissemination (2020), p. 307.

In Banten, a local food product known as *opak* (cassava crackers) has been produced by home industries operated by women, often known locally as *emak-emak*. Although this term means ‘mother’, it is often used more broadly to refer to married middle-aged Indonesian women, and has connotations of power, toughness, mobility, freedom, resilience, independence, and stubbornness possessed by a woman¹. Figure 5 below depicts the *opak* production chain and indicates the lengthy process through which this local product is produced with traditional equipment.

Figure 5. Production chain of *opak*



Note. Photos by the author.

Although women dominate *opak* production, their home industries are frequently owned by men. As such, examining these industries is a fruitful way to determine the role of gender, including gender prejudices and stigmas, in work–family connections. Indisputably, integrating work and family to achieve business viability is challenging for both female and male small business owners. Several studies have compared the success of female and male entrepreneurs (Fairlie & Robb, [2009](#); Boden & Nucci, [2000](#); Du Rietz & Henrekson, [2000](#)).

¹ The phrase “power of *emak-emak*” first became prominent on social media when female voters and women participated in politics during Indonesia’s 2019 presidential election. It has recently been trendy in Indonesian economics to study the ‘power of *emak-emak*’.



This study, however, takes the novel approach of clarifying how work and family dynamics affect business success, using recent phenomenon among *opak* business owners to show how gender contributes to business success.

2 Literature Review and Hypothesis

In the 1970s, sex and gender were first academically distinguished, with the former being defined as the biological distinction between men and women, and the latter being defined as the social and cultural aspects of masculinity and femininity (Lopez-Nicolas et al., [2020](#)). Given their interest in this diverse field, scholars have developed theories regarding gender that explore matters of intersectionality, diversity, and minority. Gender research has evolved to encompass various aspects of management research, including management information systems (Trauth, [2013](#)), business creation (Bird & Brush, [2002](#)), entrepreneurial leadership (Harrison et al., [2015](#)), and innovation studies (Nählinder et al., [2015](#)). With respect to the growing interest in gender and entrepreneurship issues, Link and Strong ([2016](#)) systematically constructed an annotated bibliography of 563 publications from 1979 to 2016, reflecting 16 different categories of research, concluding that their data shows a positive trend. The largest number of studies (21%) discuss what they term “to become an entrepreneur”; this is followed by “characteristics of entrepreneurs” (15%) and “performance of entrepreneurial firms” (12%). Gender issues have become an increasingly important part of entrepreneurial studies over the past thirty years (Lopez-Nicolas et al., [2020](#)), and there is tremendous growth in attention on working women, both in practice and in research.

Such a trend is interesting because women have been discriminated against in many areas of life. Entrepreneurship scholars have investigated gender inequality in matters of start-ups (Minniti, [2017](#)), CEO remunerations (Xiao et al., [2013](#)), and access to top-level management positions (Hoobler et al., [2018](#)). Inequalities commonly stem from women’s limited opportunities to access education and lack of management experience (Jادیyappa et al., [2019](#)). Studies have found that entrepreneurs and managers are ordinarily male or masculine and concluded that male characteristics are associated with entrepreneurial and leadership behavior (Gupta et al., [2009](#); Ryan et al., [2016](#)). A study by Kelley et al. ([2017](#)), by contrast, shows that women often find themselves pursuing varied organizational and economic goals, having different motivations than men (e.g., necessity vs. opportunity), and aiming to own a new business. Another study has shown that female and male board members exhibit gendered behaviors (Palvia et al., [2014](#)); women managers tend to be more risk-averse, focus on the long-term, and be competent in influencing their organization to be innovative

(Simerly & Gan, [2017](#); Torchia et al., [2011](#)). Despite debatable results on continuing gender differences in job characteristics, a growing body of research shows remarkable similarity in the processes through which women and men evaluate their jobs (Loscocco & Leicht, [1993](#)). Hence, we come to our first hypothesis:

***H1:** There are significant differences in variables between men and women.*

This study is inspired by the gender and job models proposed by Feldberg & Glenn ([1979](#)), which provide a means for organizing relevant research on specific gender and family characteristics in terms of small business success. This model helps find differences between women and men, both in work processes and in work outcomes (Loscocco & Leicht, [1993](#)). Furthermore, with ‘the power of *emak-emak*’ as the center of this study, we hypothesize:

***H2:** Family characteristics have a significant indirect effect on women’s business success.*

Previous research had assumed that there are broadly rooted institutional bases for gender differences. The fundamental differences between women and men are understood as personal traits, such as motivation and commitment, and used to explain and interpret the finding. Supporting the dynamicity of gender differences in the business realm, a study by Fairlie and Robb ([2009](#)) provides a robust resource that focuses on human business capital and financial capital. The standard economic model predicts that these elements significantly affect companies’ production processes, and further holds that companies’ specific characteristics predict their business success.

***H3:** Business characteristics have a significant indirect effect on women’s business success.*

3 Research Methodology

Population and Sample

This study examines the owners of small *opak* businesses, both men and women, located in the center of *opak* production in Banten: Pulosari District, Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province. Fifteen men and nineteen women were interviewed. For data analysis, we used the partial least square (PLS) path analysis method using SmartPLS.



Instrumental Variables

Table 3 below presents the instrumental variables, elucidating the specific variables used in this study.

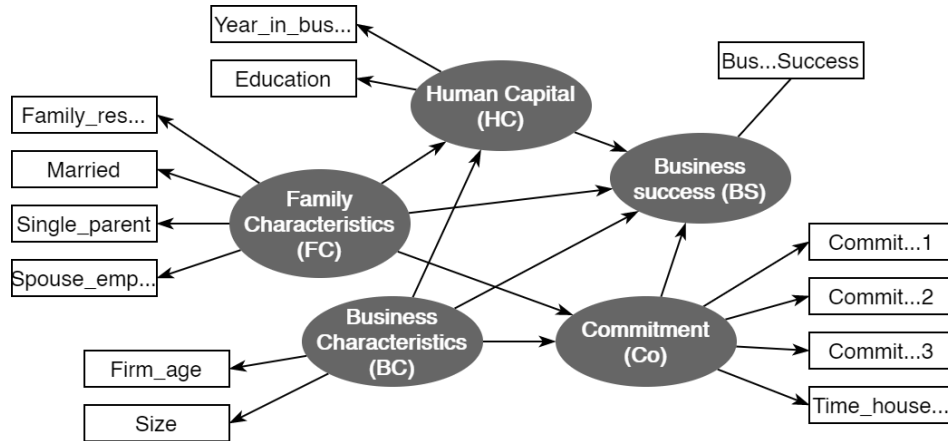
Table 3. Instrumental variables

Variable	Explanation
Family Characteristics (FC)	Married Marital status (Married=1, not married=0).
	Spouse Employed Whether or not the spouse works in the business (Spouse employed=1, spouse not employed=0).
	Family Responsibility Whether or not the business owner has children under the age of 6 years old (Min=0, max=3).
	Single Parent Whether or not the business owner is divorced or widowed (Single parent=1, not single parent=0).
Business Characteristics (BC)	Size The number of employees
	Company Age How long the company has been operating (years).
Human Capital (HC)	Years in Industry How long has the business owner been in business (years)?
	Education How long has the business owner studied (years)?
Commitment (Co)	Commitment 1 Ask the business owner to confirm the statement: "I have other activities more important than my business" (5-point Likert scale).
	Commitment 2 Ask the business owner to confirm the statement: "The most important things that happen to me involves my family rather than my business" (5-point Likert scale).
	Commitment 3 Ask the business owner to confirm the statement: "I would prefer that others judge me by my business rather than my other accomplishments" (5-point Likert scale).
	Time in Housework How long does the business owner handle household tasks (hours)
Business success (BS)	Company's Gross Earnings Average monthly gross earnings logged for the company

Path Model

We proposed a path model to ascertain which constructs drive business success. We operated two models, one for women and one for men, to see the differences.

Figure 6. Path model



Note. Designed using SmartPLS software.

4 Results and Discussion

Table 4 provides descriptive statistics that elucidate the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation within the variables. However, to show the differences between men and women, we highlight only the mean.

As shown by the descriptive statistics, most women do not involve their spouses in the business; in contrast, men generally involve their spouses. Men are shown to have more family responsibilities than women. No male single parents are attested, while some are found amongst women respondents. Women's companies tend to be larger and endure longer than men's companies; for women, the mean length of operations is twelve years, whereas for men the mean is ten years. Women also tend to have more business experience than men, twelve and ten years, respectively. Also, women have more education (eight years) than men (seven years). Ultimately, business success appears greater amongst men than women.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics

		Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Female (valid n = 19)	Age	28	68	49.8947	10.58770
	Marital Status	1	1	1.0000	.00000
	Spouse Employed	0	1	.4211	.50726
	Family Responsibility	0	1	.1053	.31530
	Single Parent	0	1	.1053	.31530
	Size	0	5	2.3158	1.33552
	Firm Age	5	20	12.1579	4.50016
	Years in Business	5	20	12.1579	4.50016
	Education	6	16	8.4211	2.71448
	Commitment_1	3	4	3.7895	.41885
	Commitment_2	3	4	3.5789	.50726
	Commitment_3	2	4	3.7368	.56195
	Time in Housework	2.40	21.60	18.1263	4.09673
	Business Success	500000	2500000	1592105.2632	662542.06531
Male (valid n = 15)	Age	40	69	53.2667	9.36915
	Marital Status	1	1	1.0000	.00000
	Spouse Employed	1	1	1.0000	.00000
	Family Responsibility	0	1	.2000	.41404
	Single Parent	0	0	.0000	.00000
	Size	0	4	1.6000	.98561
	Firm Age	5	20	10.6667	5.30049
	Years in Business	5	20	10.6667	5.30049
	Education	6	12	7.6000	2.22967
	Commitment_1	3	4	3.2000	.41404
	Commitment_2	3	4	3.0667	.25820
	Commitment_3	3	4	3.8000	.41404
	Time in Housework	14.40	22.80	18.7200	1.96658
	Business Success	500000	6000000	2016666.6667	1248093.78463

According to the independent t-test (see Table 5), we found significant differences between women and men in terms of spousal involvement, single parenthood, and commitment, especially in response to Statement 2 (“The most important thing that happens to me involves my family rather than my business”). The t-tests of these three variables are lower than 0.05, returning values of 0.000

(spouse employed), 0.006 (single parenthood), and 0.000 (family importance). These results are consistent with the previous studies that found considerable similarity in the processes through which women and men evaluate their jobs (Loscocco & Leicht, 1993). Therefore, H1 is accepted.

Table 5. Independent samples t-test

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means				
Equal Var. Assumed	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	
Age	Y	.338	.565	-.969	32	.340	-3.37193	3.47908
	N			-.984	31.532	.333	-3.37193	3.42812
Spouse Employed	Y	552.157	.000*	-4.406	32	.000	-.57895	.13140
	N			-4.975	18.000	.000	-.57895	.11637
Family Duties	Y	2.348	.135	-.758	32	.454	-.09474	.12497
	N			-.734	25.583	.470	-.09474	.12908
Single Parent	Y	8.533	.006*	1.289	32	.207	.10526	.08168
	N			1.455	18.000	.163	.10526	.07234
Size	Y	1.133	.295	1.734	32	.093	.71579	.41279
	N			1.797	31.889	.082	.71579	.39829
Firm's Age	Y	.241	.627	.887	32	.382	1.49123	1.68088
	N			.870	27.533	.392	1.49123	1.71432
Years in Business	Y	.241	.627	.887	32	.382	1.49123	1.68088
	N			.870	27.533	.392	1.49123	1.71432
Education	Y	.056	.815	.946	32	.351	.82105	.86829
	N			.968	31.930	.340	.82105	.84808
Commit_1	Y	.021	.884	4.095	32	.000	.58947	.14395
	N			4.101	30.351	.000	.58947	.14374
Commit_2	Y	43.310	.000*	3.557	32	.001	.51228	.14404
	N			3.820	27.891	.001	.51228	.13412
Commit_3	Y	.749	.393	-.364	32	.718	-.06316	.17360
	N			-.377	31.883	.709	-.06316	.16748
Time in Housework	Y	.802	.377	-.515	32	.610	-.59368	1.15243
	N			-.556	27.076	.583	-.59368	1.06825
Business Success	Y	.114	.737	-1.276	32	.211	-424561.40351	332805.73435
	N			-1.192	20.147	.247	-424561.40351	356303.89963

We also used SmartPLS to explain the only significant results that support the hypothesis. The bootstrapping result (see Table 6) shows that t-statistics of business characteristics (BC) → human capital (HC) in women samples is 3.335 (> t-table 1.690) and its p-value is 0.001 (<0.05), and human capital (HC) → business success (BS) has t-statistics of 1.979 (> t-table 1.690), with a p-value



0.048 (<0.05). Thus, H2 is rejected and H3 is accepted. This indicates that, when achieving business success, women are indirectly influenced first by business characteristics (the company's size and age) and then by human capital (education and business experience). This suggests that women entrepreneurs often obtain knowledge from their social networks and make sufficient preparations before opening their businesses (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016). A study by Robb and Watson (2012) shows that women are more involved in learning and innovating sequences than men (DeTienne & Chandler, 2007). Therefore, this study is consistent with the previous investigations of gender's role in company performance (Fairlie & Robb, 2009). Commitment is considered an important element of business success in men's models; this differs from women, even though in both models business characteristics also influence human capital. This study has revealed that women-owned companies were more likely to close and had lower levels of business success. It thus supports previous studies of female-owned businesses and their performance (Chell & Baines, 1998).

Table 6. Hypothesis test (path analysis)

Variable		BC → BS	BC → Co	BC → HC	Co → BS	FC → BS	FC → Co	FC → HC	HC → BS
Women (n = 19)	Sample	2.146	-0.446	0.961	-0.513	-0.237	0.209	-0.044	-2.425
	Mean	0.195	-0.291	0.793	-0.264	-0.288	-0.023	-0.035	-0.203
	Std. Dev.	1.264	0.427	0.288	0.493	0.416	0.456	0.303	1.225
	T-Stats.	1.698	1.045	3.335	1.039	0.569	0.457	0.145	1.979
	P- Values	0.09	0.296	0.001*	0.299	0.57	0.648	0.885	0.048*
Men (n = 15)	Sample	-1.18	0.508	0.921	0.999	0.231	-0.161	0.028	1.083
	Mean	-0.468	0.158	0.846	0.85	0.181	-0.058	-0.036	0.621
	Std. Dev.	1.202	0.599	0.236	0.439	0.462	0.383	0.27	1.069
	T-Stats.	0.982	0.848	3.907	2.273	0.5	0.421	0.102	1.013
	P- Values	0.327	0.397	0.000*	0.023*	0.617	0.674	0.919	0.312

This research has departed from an analysis of the involvement of women in community-based entrepreneurship in Banten, Indonesia. This perspective is vital, as Indonesian men and women have different knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Specifically, women in rural areas have more limited options for accessing formal employment; as a result, many take innovative opportunities to

operate an in-home industry and make traditional foods for their neighborhood. The relationship with the informal economy is not the same for all workers and must be explained by socio-cultural factors deriving from the gender structure of society (Baylina & Garcia-Ramon, [1998](#)). For instance, the patriarchal ideology that limits women's access to education and confines them to the private domain is particularly strong in the rural areas of Banten, and thus has conditioned many women to own their own home industries. Although most women have received a formal education and academic degree, they have limited options for working in formal employment because male employees are preferred over female ones. Although most women in Banten are not poor, they are taught by local culture and Islamic tradition to engage themselves in domestic activities that keep them away from the outside world.

This survey was carried out in a rural area where much of the population is active in agriculture. Female workers have always been significant, and women have often lived in extended families where income is derived from diverse sources: their husbands' wages, the retirement pensions of the elderly, the sale of farm products, and the household production of items. Most women informants indicated that they worked at home and owned a small business primarily to take care of their children and families, including their husbands, parents, and parents-in-law, especially at mealtimes. Similarly, many stated that their family's income was relatively low, and thus they needed money to support their extended family. Many of them provided their initial capital from their savings; a few others got their husbands to provide the necessary capital.

In the shared and strict culture of the people of Banten Province, the man is entirely responsible for the family's income, while the woman is entirely responsible for household work and family care. At best, a husband in Banten Province might lend a hand with some household activities, but it is the wives who are expected to handle domestic work and childcare. Women are considered to uphold moral values, as mothering and nurturing are perceived as desirable qualities and associated inherently with womanhood (Little, [1987](#)).

Although women in Banten Province are highly influenced by a patriarchal culture that restricts them to the domestic sphere, no matter their level of education, it is also essential to look briefly at the business opportunities available to rural women. To gain in-depth knowledge of these issues, a qualitative survey was used to assess the knowledge, attitude, and practices of women working in the *opak* home industry. The knowledge, attitudes, and practices of participants are presented broadly in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Knowledge, attitude, and practice

Question	Answer	
	Y	N
Knowledge:		
Do you understand the production process of <i>opak</i> ?	100%	-
Do you know how to sell <i>opak</i> ?	100%	-
Do you understand how to run this business?	100%	-
Do you know that this business is profitable?	100%	-
Do you know how to sustainably run the business?	100%	-
Attitude:		
Family income is not the husband/father's responsibility.	11.8%	88.2%
A family business can be run by women.	100%	-
Women have the right to earn income.	100%	-
Women are able to run a business.	100%	-
Women have the capacity to manage finances.	100%	-
Practice:		
Women's businesses are more successful.	100%	-
Earnings from women's business are greater than from men's.	100%	-
Work relations established by women are more successful.	100%	-
Women can produce high-quality products.	100%	-
Business finances operated by women are more manageable.	100%	-

Participants presented a range of knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to the *opak* home industry's success. All participants (100%) expressed high levels of knowledge regarding *opak* home industry ownership, including knowledge of how to make the product, how to sell the product, how to run a small business, how to make a small business profitable, and how to sustain a small business in the long term. Participants also described some positive behaviors and attitudes associated with business success; all agreed that female family members can manage family businesses, that women have the right to earn their income, that women can run a business, and that women can manage finances. In the same attitude survey, only 11.8% of female participants stated that men are not solely responsible for their family's income. Although all of the participants viewed businesses managed by women as more successful than those managed by men, our descriptive statistics indicated that women-owned companies are more likely to close and had lower levels of business success. This supports earlier studies, which found that women-owned businesses underperform financially (Chell & Baines, [1998](#)). Employment relations in

businesses run by women are more advanced than those of men, and their finances tend to be more organized. Likewise, products from woman-operated businesses are better than those from male-owned enterprises.

Regarding the knowledge, attitude, and practices of local women in Banten, it was also found that the informal businesses that they managed were much smaller than formal businesses; on average, they employed fewer than five people, with lower productivity and wages for the employees. However, these home industries had robust control of the quantity and quality of the *opak* produced. A fixed amount of work was required from every working woman, and faulty work was not paid for. One distinct characteristic of the women working in household *opak* production is the fact that they, unlike men, are able to balance paid work and domestic work (i.e., the traditional wife-role).

Traditionally, women have been identified with domestic household work. More recently, however, women have taken many of the functions and responsibilities traditionally associated with men. Women have become essential contributors to economic and social development (Latif et al., [2011](#)), and their integration into the global economy through economic liberalization is perceived as a useful way for developing countries to overcome poverty and economic inequality (Kartiwi & Gunawan, [2013](#)).

In Banten, more women own a home industry or work in one than men. The *opak* producers of Banten are spread broadly throughout the rural parts of the province, and such home industry is essential for developing the entrepreneurial talents of villagers—especially women (Tambunan, [2008](#)). Women's entrepreneurship results in the creation of new rural small industries, which can increase local capabilities and bring economic growth. Due to their financial awareness and empowerment, *emak* contribute pivotally to family income even as they balance their lives as wives in a domestic sphere; at the same time, they help reduce poverty in their communities (Tambunan, [2009](#)).



5 Conclusion

Increased unemployment rates among women have provided them with extra motivation to create a better work situation for themselves by opening and operating a small business. In Banten Province, Indonesia, many economically active women find themselves working in the informal sector, including by producing food products such as *opak* (cassava crackers). Such women, locally known as *emak-emak*, are often associated with power, toughness, mobility, freedom, resilience, independence, and stubbornness.

This study aimed to determine the role of gender, including gender prejudices and stigmas, in work–family connections; such a perspective is essential, because Indonesian men and women have different knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Indisputably, integrating work and family is challenging for both male and female small-business owners in their quest for business viability. Based on our in-depth analysis, this study finds that women's business success is indirectly influenced by business characteristics (for instance, company size and age) and human capital (for instance, education and business experience). In addition, our data indicate that, with larger companies, women can establish their human capital and improve their business success.

In Banten, more women own or work in a home industry than men. These industries are spread through much of rural Banten and play a significant role in developing rural entrepreneurs—especially women. This, in turn, increases local capabilities to enhance rural economic growth in Banten. Such power has given rise to the new term, 'the power of *emak-emak*', which plays an essential role in their ability to earn income and helps reduce poverty at both the family and community level.

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