



## Livelihood strategies for widows and divorcees of coastal fishers in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

In Bugis-Makassar families with a patriarchal cultural system, men are the backbone of the family and women only work in the domestic realm. The main problem faced by widows and divorcees of coastal fishers is the dual role that requires them to take care of the household and children as well as earn a living for the needs of the family. This dual function requires a widow to have a strategy and carry out these two roles simultaneously. This study aims to find out how the strategies for making a living for widows of coastal fishers in improving the family economy. This study uses a qualitative approach with case study method. The data collection technique uses a purposive sampling for determining the informant and conducting in-depth interview technique with eight widows consisting of four widows and four divorcees. We also observed the daily activities of the informants. Meanwhile, the interview process was carried out using semi-structured interviews about how the strategy for earning a living was carried out so that it could support the family economy. The study found social capital-based livelihood strategies for poor fishers. They often interpret the strategy as a way or an alternative to a situation. In this case, the widow or divorcee of a coastal fisher is part of the community. Widows and divorcees who work in more than one type of work make their association with others as a form of social capital. Thus, they can provide support to each other as a form of social security and social capital to support the family.

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia is a large maritime country with an area of water that reaches three times the land area. Ironically, while the abundant marine products are still dominated by fishing industries, small-scale fishers are still use simple equipment with small catch as the result. The poverty of fishers does not only apply to men who have low incomes, in reality, the position of women on the coast

is marginalized. Therefore, some research suggest that women fishers cannot escape poverty (Karlita and Pandjaitan 2017). It is exacerbated by the negative views of some Indonesians towards the title of 'widow' or 'divorcee' (*janda* in Indonesian language), that being a widow or a divorcee means experiencing the economic difficulties, especially if they come from the fisher family, the poverty is undeniable. Therefore, several widows and divorcees have to cope with the situation by implementing several strategies to fulfill their daily needs and to 'survive' in their social environment (Fauzi et al 2018)

The death of spouse brings detrimental effect and changes the condition of the living family members (Dribe, Lundh, Nystedt 2007; Fauzi et al 2018). Thus, it is important to understand the family members of the widows or divorcees if we study them. Researchers should understand family life patterns among the widows and divorcees so that a separation between the family unit and household unit must be carried out (Hirschon 2021; Smock and Schwartz 2020). Society still equates the meaning of household and the family union because the household structure generally only consists of nuclear families and blood relatives (Sewapo 2022). In a simple way, family is a normative relationship between people who have biological relationships, while a household is a group of people under the same roof but not always related by blood. This ideal concept in reality, is unable to recognize the lives of poor communities (Fuller, Ajrouch, and Antonucci 2020).

There is a problematic assumption that the head of the family is meant only for men. A man, ideally, is the main breadwinner which is the main support for the family. However, the role can also be carried out by the whole members of family (Akanle and Nwaobiala 2020; Ningrum and Mas'udah 2021). Because of this, the family unit is seen as a social unit based on kinship, marriage and parent-child relationships. Meanwhile, a household unit is a shared living unit for productive, reproductive, consumption, and socialization purposes known as 'one pot one roof' (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 28 Tahun 2014 Tentang Hak Cipta, 2014).

Women who head a household can be *de jure* or *de facto* (Jayasinghe 2022). If a woman heads a household and has never formed a household with the father of her children before, or if a woman is legally or permanently separated from her husband, this is considered as *de jure* (Rahayu 2017). Meanwhile, if a household is headed by a woman whose spouse is temporarily absent from the home or her partner does not play a larger role in the daily household economy, this is considered *de facto* (Spangler and Christie 2020)

The poverty that binds coastal fishers is exacerbated by other factors such as single-parent status (Knox 2021) The phenomenon of the single parent is the condition of a mother who is responsible as the head of the family as well as a housewife who raises children without the assistance of her husband. For a woman, the status of widow presents numerous challenges, including bearing the burden of belittlement, being considered oblique, and being the family's backbone. Their lives will be made even more difficult if their income is low. Another challenge they face is the responsibility of caring for children with limited resources (Nomaguchi and Milkie 2020).

According to United Nations (UN) data, in 2021, 124 million people worldwide are considered as poor (Oyekale 2022). The dual role that widows and divorcees requires them to be able to balance housework and public work properly (McConnon, Midgette, and Conry-Murray 2022).. To be able to manage the family, they must be physically and mentally mature (Latifiani 2019; Yoosefi Lebni et al. 2020). Widows' social standing is also lower than that of married women. Separation from their husbands causes economic vulnerability, especially for those who have children and

live in poverty. Some of them work as traders, household assistants, laborers, and so on to support their economy (Carr, Cornman, and Freedman 2019; Förster et al. 2019; Liu et al. 2020).

Widows and divorcees who work as traders employ a variety of methods and strategies to support their families (Khumalo, Mthuli, and Singh 2019). Rural poor families try various low-paying jobs, rely on kinship ties and reciprocal exchanges for social security and protection, and even migrate to other areas such as cities to make a living (Chopra 2021; Smith and McBride 2021). Economic and social strategies are used by several households who work as traders to earn a living (Deschênes, Dumas, and Lambert 2020; Lekhooa 2021).

The economic strategy is implemented through the use of a dual income pattern, namely household labor and migration (Evertsen and van der Geest 2020; Xu et al. 2020). Meanwhile, the social strategy is implemented by leveraging existing kinship and community ties such as religious gatherings, lottery club members (*arisan*), and other social service activities (Falatehan 2017). In economic matters, community institutions play an important role for poor households. Social capital is important in poor households' livelihood strategies and it is the primary focus of attention when developing a sustainable livelihood strategy (Churchill and Smyth 2020). As a result, widows and divorcees of coastal fishers who work as traders take on a variety of jobs and employ a variety of strategies to supplement their family's income. The widow has a dual source of income, one of which is social capital, a form of social security provided by the strong ties within the community (Ameyaw et al. 2020; Mitu et al. 2021).

Widows and divorcees of coastal fishers admit that trading is their only source of income because it is the only way they can provide for their family members (Gara 2021; Martin Moral 2021). Some individuals with a low level of education view the trading profession as a means to support their families and their children's education. They only began trading after becoming widows or divorcees. Some reside with their ex-husbands, but then, later, are not responsible for providing for the children. In contrast, widows whose husbands pass away are left with nothing but debts (Erickson 2022). This is interesting to study because, in a Bugis-Makassar family with a patriarchal society, the man typically serves as the family's backbone and the woman is relegated to domestic duties.

The main issue that widows and divorcees face is the dual role that requires them to care for the household and children as well as earn a living for the family needs. This dual role necessitates a strategy for them to carry out these two roles simultaneously. This is the focus of the research, namely the strategy of widows and divorcees of coastal fishers in generating family income while maintaining their role as housewives. The complexity of their problems, including household matters that she bears alone, meeting her personal needs, and even caring for her children, serves as the backdrop for the author to dive into the lives of widows and divorcees of coastal fishers. The main objective is to discover how they improve their family's economy.

## **2. Method**

This research was conducted in the Ujung Tanah sub-district, Makassar City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The subjects in this research were eight women in the coastal area, four of them are widows and the other four are divorcees. They have children, do trading, and join social institutions or groups. The people who participated in this study were those who had the

experience required by ongoing research with data. They are from Fatimah Azzahra Fishers's Group, Pattingalloa Village, Ujung Tanah District, Makassar City, Indonesia.

This study uses a qualitative approach related to case studies of earning strategies. While the data collection technique uses a purposive sample, we used in-depth interviews and observation techniques. We observe informants' daily activities, namely the widows of coastal fishers. While the interview process was carried out by communicating about the informant's social capital-based livelihood strategy. We use several data collection techniques in order to make this research more intimate, leading to the good rapport building. The variety of techniques is also useful to reduce the bias and to look at the advantages and disadvantages of each technique (Denzin dan Lincoln 2009:495-499).

Data analysis focused on revealing strategies for making a living and interpreting the meaning of the survival process carried out by women. This study uses arguments from Ellis (2000) that conceptually, survival strategies are seen in the process of constructing ideas from various activities and social support to survive and improve social and economic levels. Also, study from Weber (1973) regarding rational action strengthen several arguments in this article.

### **3. Result and discussion**

The results of this study describe the strategy of coastal fishers's widows in improving their household economy. Anwar (2013) suggests that a livelihood strategy based on social capital for poor fishers is a real resource in developing various choices of livelihood strategies. The earning strategy tends to scatter. This happens because the nature of its main natural capital is the sea. This condition is exacerbated by the very limited access for them to modern fishing technology so income uncertainty is very high. Poverty demands the resilience of households to survive, by utilizing and optimizing the role of social capital as the last resource when households run out of resources to survive. Meanwhile, on the other hand, widows and divorcees may get discriminatory treatment from their social environment (Fauzi, et al 2018).

Also, research from Subair and Haris (2019) which illustrates that women breadwinner with poor households have a powerless condition which can be seen from their very high dependency on life and economic dependence on buyers and business owners. Another vulnerability they have is that they are susceptible to diseases such as tuberculosis and diarrhoea as a consequence of their work. They are also vulnerable to various psychological issues such as stress and depression, making moral and emotional supports important along with financial assistance (Irluh and Elsie 2018)

Relevant to this, the study of Laila and Amanah (2015) states that the livelihood strategy undertaken by women is to become fishers quite rapidly in coastal areas including single and/or multiple livelihood strategies. Ethnic background in a family that has an attachment to the pattern of livelihood, migration, and occupation of the respondents is a determinant factor that has a significant influence on their livelihood strategy, including moral support and social security within their community.

To achieve a decent standard of living, human resources who are skilled are needed to take risks in various types of work to earn household income. Efforts to maintain life are very dependent on various businesses or jobs, both in the formal and informal sectors. The burden on the widows of coastal fishers in the Ujung Tanah sub-district in Table 1 shows how many people they have to covered.

Table 1. Informant Profiles

Name	Age (Years)	Status	Education	Number of children	Number of Persons Covered
Am	68	Widow	Did not complete primary school	6	8
Has	42	Divorcee	Primary school	4	7
San	70	Widow	Primary school	5	4
Hj. Ruki	57	Divorcee	Senior High School	3	5
Nona	65	Widow	Did not complete primary school	7	10
Dg. Rajang	60	Divorcee	Primary school	3	7
Basse	52	Widow	Primary school	4	6
Maryam	52	Divorcee	Did not complete high school	1	5

Many strategies and adaptation process are interpreted as alternative ways to a situation that must be undertaken by a person or group of people. In this case, the widows of coastal fishers are part of a community that is experiencing several changes in society that impact their existence and income every day. Therefore, the widow or divorcee has several strategies or ways to deal with and maintain the existence in the community. Several active strategies or additional types of work carried out by widows and divorcees of coastal fishers such as receiving orders, fish auctions, weaving clothes, selling ice and oil, removing fish spines, frying shredded fish and onions, selling cakes, crackers, syrup, noodles, food, vegetables, and ice cream. Some of the women also become a washerwoman, a household assistant, and a babysitter of neighbours' children, the livelihood strategies of the widows and divorcees of coastal fishers in Table 2 show that they generally do more than one job to earn additional income to meet their household needs (Carr, Cornman, and Freedman 2019; Förster et al. 2019; Khumalo, Mthuli, and Singh 2019; Liu et al. 2020). However, it is important to note that not all widows and divorcees can access all kind of the livelihood strategies. This is regarding the issue of equality, it depends on their preferences and their access to the capital. For instance, for those who do not have lots of money, they cannot start selling food or beverage or opening a small shop as one of the most popular strategy implemented by widows and divorcees. It is exemplified by Nona who only cook fish and take care of neighbour's baby since she does not have much money to start a small-scale business.

Table 2. Strategies for Widow and Divorcee to Make a Living

Name	Livelihood Strategy
Am	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ordering Mattress</li> <li>2. Joining Fish Auction</li> <li>3. Selling Oil</li> <li>4. Weaving Clothes</li> </ol>
Has	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Selling Ice</li> <li>2. Selling Crackers</li> <li>3. Remove Fish Bones</li> </ol>

Name	Livelihood Strategy
San	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Fried Onions Etc</li> <li>1. Selling Cakes</li> <li>2. Selling Noodles</li> <li>3. Selling Ice Cream</li> <li>4. Being a clothes washer</li> </ol>
Hj Ruki	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Opening a Small Shop</li> <li>2. Removing Fish Bones</li> <li>3. Helping to Cook Fried Shredded Fish and Shallots</li> </ol>
Nona	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cooking fish</li> <li>2. Taking care of the Neighbor's Children</li> </ol>
Dg Rajang	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Helping Children Selling Food</li> <li>2. Selling Vegetables Around</li> </ol>
Basse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cleaning Fish Bones</li> <li>2. Being a Household Assistant</li> <li>3. Selling Fried Shredded Fish</li> </ol>
Maryam	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Opening a Small Shop</li> <li>2. Washing Neighbor's Clothes</li> </ol>

Pressing the cost of living necessities is one of their strategies also. Reducing facility costs by reducing expenses or by practicing frugal living. For some people, it may be difficult but, when it is viewed from the financial needs in the future, such view is considered appropriate. Because everyone needs to prepare for the needs of themselves and their family in the future, such for education costs and health costs. They also need to develop assets. Thus, the way to fulfil those future costs are none other than saving and investing from each income and reducing other or non-essential spending items.

Saving money on expenses, in addition to reducing excessive expenses outside of the basic needs of the family, become one of the best possible ways to minimize the cost of shopping, such as buying household appliances or eating out. Saving is an act of setting aside and keeping money or valuable assets somewhere for the long term. Apart from reducing expenses or saving money, some merchant widows and divorcees choose to save their extra income as a preparation for upcoming difficult times or emergency, especially to prepare for the needs of the family and children. They practice the frugal living, by not spending lots of money other than for daily needs. All of these should be practiced by the widow and the divorcee since they are in the state of economic vulnerability, raising their children in the midst of poverty. Thus, as suggest by several studies, having variety of strategies is helpful to support their household and to sustain the family (Carr, Cornman, and Freedman 2019; Förster et al. 2019; Khumalo, Mthuli, and Singh 2019; Liu et al. 2020; Churchill and Smyth 2020).

The involvement of family members in earning a living is one of the strategies used by widow and divorcee who become traders. The members of the household are actively involved in increasing the household income. Male household members, especially those who are adults, tend to be involved in heavy work activities such as market labourers, construction workers, and others. Meanwhile, for those who are still children, their involvement is limited to helping the widow or divorcee working as a merchant to look after her food stall.

Crime is all kinds of actions that are economically and psychologically detrimental that violate the law and social norms. To some extent, crime is a form of rational action (or rationality), one of many ideal type constructions, namely instrumentally rational (*zweckrational*), value-rational (*wertrational*), affectual, and traditional (Weber 1978). In the case of San, who is a mother of two children, there is a person married and lives with her. Now, she has three grandchildren that become her dependents. Although she works as a vegetable seller at the Central Market, her income is not enough to meet her daily needs. Apart from that, she also sells vegetables at her home and also various kinds of drinks. However, due to the feeling of endless poverty and misery, she admitted that she sometimes accidentally committed theft.

Becoming a theft is also a strategy since the widows and divorcees in this research are generally poor and marginal, characterized by ownership of narrow land, small assets, and limited capital. They also a labour with limited skills as well. Becoming a single mother is enough reason to meet the needs in life with a certain effort and strategy, even though they should become a theft, by looking it from a rational action perspective. Weber (1978) argue that rationality is one of the ideal type construction about rational action. It is fundamental and can be found in every culture. In this case, when a mother becoming a theft because of the poverty, is also a form of rationality and can be categorized as instrumentally rational (*zweckrational*), in which actors consider the consequences of their actions, see the best and most efficient ways to achieve their goals, look for external factors that can be exploited (also avoided), and put aside certain values to concentrate fully on the benefits to be obtained (Weber 1978:24-25; Rudyansjah 2020:99-100). Being a theft is a form of instrumentally rational action since even though the widow or the divorcee does consider their action, but they put aside the values (customary, law, and religious values) and only focus on the benefit instantly. They consider stealing as the most efficient way to earn money to fulfill their needs (benefit) for the household.

Looking from their livelihood system, it is found that most of the widows and divorcees are village government officials, traders or sellers, and fishers. Widows and divorcees have a strategy in which become their efforts to not only focus on one job. However, they also seek work in other ways for extra income and monthly income to be able to meet their daily and other needs. As widows or divorcees, they have responsibilities that they become the head of the family and take care of all household affairs, making their family economy is very hard in her life. In other words, they have to provide the needs of their children (and other family members living in their home) as well as educational and basic needs and other needs that can be felt by a widow and a divorcee who has been abandoned by her husband.

Widows and divorcees have the responsibility to take care for children, an effort in maintaining their family's economy, namely by having sufficient resilience to carry out her role without a spouse. In this case, the widows or divorcees have their strategy for meeting the needs of their families. The strategy for earning a living for the widow or the divorcee in this study is an attempt or a way to survive by making alternatives or steps taken about maintaining survival. Various ways are implemented so that they can be fulfilled their family's needs such as working from morning to evening.

Those women are generally in a state of deprivation. They face obstacles in meeting basic needs in the family because limited ability they have to earn income for their family members. Especially if they are in a state of poverty, the situation of survival needs is difficult and far from reaching the decent life. Based on this statement, obtaining decent needs means that all the minimum basic

needs should be fulfilled. Women as the head of the family are required to fulfil all the needs of their family, that they have to work to meet the needs of both food and clothing needs, important things that must be owned by a family. In this case, the strategy for the widow or the divorcee living for their family, namely: a. additional types of work (harvest labour, sharecroppers, salon business); b. reducing the cost of saving facilities; d. optimization of family labour; e. criminality.

Easton et al. (2020) views trust is an attitude of mutual trust in society that allows these people to unite with each other and contribute to increase social capital. As explained by Luhmann et al. (2019), trust is the hope that grows in a society that is shown by the existence of honest, regular behaviour, and cooperation based on shared norms. In a society that has a high level of trust, social rules tend to be positive as well as relationships that are also cooperative. Trust is a product of good social capital. The existence of good social capital is marked by the existence of strong social institutions. Thus, social capital creates a harmonious social life.

The prosperity obtained is also played by the high level of public trust both between individuals and communities, which is none other than the result of the honest behaviour of most individual widows, consistency in behaviour, responsibility, and mutual respect. When the widows have strong mutual trust, at that time, the social capital owned by the widows of traders is also high, achieving a common goal, namely social welfare, as a for of social security, a social strategy in leveraging social ties (Falatehan 2017). Widows and divorcees are more dependent on economic if they do not have assets such as land. They need extra support form their community so they have to build good behaviour to gain respect from the community in order to achive the mutual trust (Dribe, Lundh, Nystedt 2007)

In trading activities, cooperation between traders is very close, such as by lending the necessary basic needs (rice, fish, vegetables, etc.). Cooperation in economic and social activities takes place based on trust. Because of that, there is no worry that what is lent will not be returned, or the owner of the capital will be deceived by the main trader, the widow in the Ujung Tanah sub-district. This kind of social capital can be also categorized as social security, in which people help each other to secure the live of their neighbours. Another example, for instance, is the sharing of catch obtained by a neighbor (who is a fisher) to several people in the village, particularly those who are vulnerable (in this case, the widow and the divorcee) (Wahyudin 2015:7). Falatehen (2017) describes this as a form of social strategy, by leveraging existing kinship and community ties as a social security.

This social security is a good example within the the coastal community although studies show that in several cases, widows and divorcees tend to receive negative perspective from their community. One of the example for instance is that being a widow or a divorcee means being poor. Nevertheless, this view, on the other hand, becomes one of the reasons why people from their own community help them in their daily life. Borrowing the interest-free money are common practice in the market as an example of this. Mutual trust in one another and a high commitment to repay loans on time keep the relationship between traders always maintained. This good relationship then becomes one of the social assets for widows or divorcees to leave their poverty and to achieve prosperity.



#### 4. Conclusion

A livelihood strategy based on social capital for poor fishers is a real resource. Strategy is often interpreted as a way or an alternative to a situation. In this case, the widow of a coastal fisher is part of the community. Several active strategies or additional types of work are performed. There is a frugal living applied by the merchant's widow and divorcee towards their needs. Widows and divorcees in Ujung Tanah Subdistrict, when viewed from their livelihood system, have a strategy in which they become the head of the family as well as take care of all household affairs. This will face obstacles in meeting basic needs in the family because with limited abilities they have to earn an income. Widows and divorcees of coastal fishers who work as traders have various jobs and employ a variety of strategies to fulfill their family's income and to sustain their household. One of them even become a theft in the midst of the poverty. These variety of strategies are their rational actions for living. The widow and the divorcee also use social capital, a form of social security provided by the strong ties within the community. This social capital has a significant impact on the life of the widows and divorcees in which building trust becoming one important aspect in this relation

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