

# **The social and economic impact of international female migration on the left-behind parents in East Java, Indonesia**

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this paper is to examine the impact of international female labor migration on the left-behind parents by taking into consideration the daughters' marital status. Data were taken from in-depth interviews with left-behind parents of migrant women (n=37) in East Java Province. The study showed that left-behind parents had limited access to the remittances sent by married daughters, except when childcare responsibilities were carried out by them. Parents of unmarried daughters had some access to remittances, but varied according to economic conditions of the family. Looking after left-behind children was the primary, or in a few cases, secondary responsibility of left-behind parents. Caring for grandchildren was the most serious concern of left-behind parents. The study could not include disabled or seriously ill parents to examine the care arrangements. Typical concern of left-behind parents included safety of daughters, marriage prospects of unmarried daughters, stability of daughters' marriage, and welfare of left-behind grandchildren, and loneliness in cases where the parent was a widow or widower. Welfare of left-behind parents is compromised in the circumstance of international female migration and appropriate childcare for left-behind children is required to address this issue. As married and unmarried daughters present diverse impacts on left-parents, pre-departure programmes should take these variables into consideration to mitigate any potential negative impact on the left-behind parents.

## **Keywords**

international female migration, Indonesia, social impact, economic impact, left-behind children, left-behind parents

## **Introduction**

The population of Indonesia is aging due to fertility decline and increasing life expectancy (McDonald, 2014). Indonesia has the tenth largest elderly population in the world— 8.2 percent of its population of 250 million in 2015 was comprised of those aged 60 and above (UN, 2015). As in other developing countries, the care of the elderly population in Indonesia is not that well-organized, particularly in the rural areas (Arifin et al., 2012; Kadar et al., 2014). In these regions, there is continued reliance on children for support in old age (Antman, 2010). Women (daughters and daughters-in-law) play a pivotal role in caring for the elderly (Hugo, 2002). Thus, the departure

of young women from rural areas to work abroad may negatively affect the care of left-behind parents, especially the elderly, unless they live in multigenerational households.

One of the main drivers of migration in Indonesia is poverty (IOM, 2010). Individuals migrate to earn and support family members. Remittances play an important role in alleviating household level poverty (Antman, 2010). The financial benefit of international migration through remittances may not filter through to every family member in the household. Women with left-behind children send remittances to their marital home or to the guardians to fund the education of their children. Ethnographic studies show that left-behind parents of unmarried women potentially benefit from remittances (Florey and Healey, 2002). Hence, we can speculate that the parents of married women may not benefit from their daughter's migration since these women are most likely to remit money to their marital home to support their husbands and children rather than their parents. In contrast, the parents of unmarried women are expected to benefit from the remittances sent by their children. However, the benefit for parents of unmarried women may be limited as previous studies show that in the case of Indonesia, unmarried women migrate to raise funds for their prospective marriages (Elmhirst, 2002; Florey and Healey, 2002; Syafitri, 2012).

The social and economic impact of female migration on left-behind parents has received some attention but, to date, no study has investigated the importance of the marital status of female migrants in this relationship. The objective of this paper is to understand the role of the marital status of migrant daughters on the social and economic welfare of left-behind parents in East Java. This study attempts to contribute knowledge on the benefits and costs of female migration for left-behind parents and how this differs depending on the migrant daughters' marital status.

### **Caregiving in migrant communities**

International labor migration temporarily separates family members (Hugo, 2002). They may be restricted from returning home for a fixed period of time, resulting in their inability to provide personal care to their elderly parents (Antman, 2010). Pantea (2012) examined the effect of international female migration on elderly parents left behind in Transylvania. The study found that the left-behind parents lived in multigenerational households and received care from other members of the family. At the same time, a reversal of care was found in this context as

grandmothers engaged in various caregiving tasks, such as preparing their grandchildren for school. Hence, the grandmothers replaced their migrant daughter's role in child care and childrearing.

In the Indonesian context, the migration of married women may involve left-behind parents in caring for their grandchildren. The reversal of care has been reported in origin communities of migrant communities, whereby left-behind elderly parents act as the primary or secondary carers of grandchildren (Graham et al., 2015). A study by Noveria (2015) has emphasized the importance of left-behind parents in providing care to children who are left behind by their migrant parents. Her study in two migrant worker villages in West Java province revealed that grandparents were the main caregivers in a quarter of households with at least one left-behind child that were interviewed. Some grandparents encountered several problems in caring for their grandchildren, mainly due to insufficient funds to meet their grandchildren's needs and in disciplining them, especially pre-teens and teenagers. Even when fathers were the primary caregiver, they may seek help from the grandparents (Noveria, 2015). Accordingly, the reversal of care is anticipated with left-behind parents providing care to the left-behind children of migrant parents.

### **International labor migration and Indonesia's left-behind parents**

The Indonesian government has promoted international labor migration since the 1960s in an effort to tackle high levels of unemployment (Hugo, 2002; IOM, 2010). The international labor migration of women in Indonesia has become an important economic household strategy to financially sustain their families. This is often due to high levels of unemployment, poverty, wage differentials between origin and destination countries, and preference for female migrants by recruiters. It is estimated that women form 70 percent of Indonesia's international labor migrants (; BNP2TKI, 2017a). Female laborers migrate to other parts of Asia and the Middle East, typically for two to three years after signing a contract with a recruiter. They migrate alone and are separated from their families for the duration of their contract.

According to the Government of Indonesia's Law No. 39/2004, both unmarried and married women aged 18 and older are eligible to apply for overseas employment (Republic of Indonesia, 2004). During the application process, the aspiring female migrant is required to have

a letter of permission from her husband, if they are married, while unmarried women must have a letter of permission from their parent or guardian; this letter must be witnessed by the local village head (Farbenblum et al., 2013; Republic of Indonesia, 2004). Based on this requirement, parents of unmarried female migrants are likely to play a greater role in their daughter's migration decision as compared to married daughters.

Women, who have traditionally been the carers of parents, especially in rural areas, are migrating in large numbers (Hugo, 2002, BNP2TKI, 2017a). The Indonesian Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection regulation outlined a number of regulations for the protection of migrants and their families (; BNP2TKI, 2017b). However, there is no particular regulation or policy for the protection of left-behind parents. The departure of daughters has implications for the care arrangement of left-behind parents. Studies on the effects of migration on the left behind, including the elderly, in Indonesia have highlighted the negative health and social effects, such as a reduced social status due to "lower" status associated with migration of daughters (Hugo, 2002), onset of hypertension and depressive symptoms (Lu, 2012), as well as other mental health disorders (Graham et al., 2015). Despite the feminization of labor migration in Indonesia, few studies have explored the perspectives of the left-behind parents to document their views on the social impact of their daughters' migration.

## **Data and methods**

Data for this paper were taken from the qualitative component of a larger study that collected information from both a household survey in two villages (n=178 households) and in-depth interviews with left-behind family members of migrant women, returnees and key informants (n=71 household members). The fieldwork was carried out from November 2015 to January 2016 in Malang and Ponorogo Regencies in East Java Province, which are major source areas for labor migrants. Participants were recruited from two villages in the province: Polorejo village in the district of Babadan in Ponorogo Regency, and Sukowilangun village in Kalipare District in Malang Regency.

The socio-demographic profiles of the two villages are provided in Table 1. The villages are similar in total population size (6,340 and 5,929). International migration in the two villages

started in the 1970s. Female migrants were the majority of international migrants in both communities, although village records show that the proportion of female migrants in 2010 was higher in Sukowilangun (70 percent) than in Polorejo (55 percent).

**Table 1.** Profile of Polorejo and Sukowilangun villages, East Java Province.

	<i>Polorejo village, Babadan District, Ponorogo Regency</i>	<i>Sukowilangun village, Kalipare District, Malang Regency</i>
<b>Total population (2015)</b>	6,340	5,929
<b>Males</b>	3,100	2,856
<b>Females</b>	3,240	3,073
<b>Socio-economic context</b>	Rice farming and animal husbandry	Agriculture
<b>Migration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Started in 1970s</li> <li>• 1980s: chain migration</li> <li>• 1990s: surge in migration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Started in 1973-1974 after dam construction</li> <li>• Mid-1970s: migration driven by recruiters</li> </ul>
<b>Sex ratio of migrants (2010)</b>	55% females; 45% males	70% females; 30% males
<b>Destination countries (2015)</b>	Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan	Hong Kong, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan

Source: Data extracted from Village Office records.

Participants for the in-depth interviews were identified from the migration history module in the household survey. Households with a current international female labor migrant and a returnee female migrant at the time of the study were selected for the qualitative component of the study. Consent was sought from eligible household members to participate in the in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews, which lasted on average around 30-60 minutes, were conducted in the language of the participant (Bahasa or Javanese) and were recorded. The interviews were transcribed and anonymized by the respective field researchers. A professional organization translated the anonymized transcripts from local languages to English. One of the co-authors monitored the translations for consistency.

This analysis was based on a sub-sample of the qualitative data—the in-depth interviews of the parents of married (n=23) and unmarried (n=11) female migrants.

## **Study sample**

As mentioned earlier, the paper is based on the perspectives of 34 in-depth interviews conducted with left-behind parents from the two villages. Tables 2 and 3 outline the profile of the left-behind parents and their migrant daughters. Eleven interviews were conducted with the parents of unmarried female migrants: 5 in Malang and 6 in Ponorogo Regency. Twenty-three interviews were conducted with the parents of married female migrants: 12 in Malang and 11 in Ponorogo Regency. Three of the interviews in Malang were conducted with married couples jointly (Mrs R and Mr T, Mr SR and Mrs PI, and Mrs RI and Mr SB).

Among the parents of unmarried migrants, the mean age was 57 years (range 31-70). Four interviewees were farmers, another four were unemployed and two women were homemakers. The parents of unmarried women were separated from their daughters for an average of five years, with the shortest lasting two years and the longest lasting ten years. In comparison, the mean age of the parents of married female migrants was 58 years (range 32-85). More females (17) were interviewed than males (9). They had low level of education (primary) or no education. Most of the parents were farmers (13), while the remainder were retired (4) or worked in trade and services (4). On average, the parents of married women were separated from their daughters for about four years, the shortest was 4 months and longest was 15 years. Overall, most of the parents lived with their spouses; some lived with their grandchildren in multigenerational households.

**Table 2.** Background characteristics of left-behind parents of unmarried migrants, East Java, 2015-2016.

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Education	Year daughter migrated	Period of separation	Living arrangement
<i>Malang Regency</i>							
Mrs M	Female	52	Unemployed	Primary	2006	10	Lives with husband and grandchildren
Mrs MH	Female	60	Housewife	No education	2011	4	Lives with her grandson
Mrs SR	Female	61	Housewife	Primary	2006	9	Lives with other daughter
Mrs SU	Female	65	Housewife	Primary	2014	2	Lives with husband
Mrs P	Female	70	Not working	No education	2005	10	Widow, living alone
<i>Ponorogo Regency</i>							
Mrs SW	Female	31	Farmer	Primary	2013	2	Lives with her husband
Mr MI	Male	55	Farmer	No education	2013	3	Lives with his wife
Mr S	Male	57	Farmer	Primary	2010	6	Living with 2 other daughters
Mrs SI	Female	57	Farmer	Primary	2013	3	Living with 2 unmarried daughters
Mr SO	Male	60	Farmer	Primary	2013	2	Living with 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> daughters and they are all married and have kids (the migrant is the 4 <sup>th</sup> daughter)
Mr D	Male	62	Not working	Primary	2012	4	Widower, living with the (younger) son

Source: Fieldwork.

**Table 3.** Background characteristics of left-behind parents of married migrants, East Java, 2015-2016.

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Education	Year daughter migrated	Period of separation (years)	Living arrangement
<i>Malang Regency</i>							
Mrs PI*	Female	42	Farmer	Primary	2003	2	Lives with husband
Mr SR*	Male	46	Blacksmith	Primary	2013	2	Lives with wife and grandchild
Mrs R*	Female	45	Trades	Secondary	2009	6	Lives with wife
Mr T*	Male	57	Truck driver	Secondary	2009	6	Lives with husband
Mrs RI*	Female	45	Trade	Primary	2013	2	Lives with husband, son and grandsons
Mr SB*	Male	57	Truck driver	Primary	2013	2	Lives with wife, son and grandson
Mr SK	Male	50	Farmer	Primary	No info	No info	Divorced and lives alone; grandson
Mrs SU	Female	60	Retired	None	2005	10	Widow, lives with 2 grandchildren
Mrs MH	Female	60	Retired	None	2011	4	Widow, lives with her first child, son-in-law, grandchildren and great grandchild
Mrs ST	Female	60	Unemployed	Primary	No info	No info	Lives with son-in-law and grandchildren
Mrs SM	Female	62	Farmer	Primary	2009	6	Widow, cares for the grandchildren
Mrs P	Female	63	Farm worker	None	2009	6	Widow, responsible for household chores, lives with 2 left-behind grandchildren
Mrs R	Female	65	Retired	None	No info	No info	Widow and lives with grandson
Mrs T	Female	67	Laborer	Primary	2000	15	Widow and lives alone
Mrs SN	Female	70	Retired	None	2013	2	Lives with wife
<i>Ponorogo Regency</i>							
Mrs SN	Female	32	Farmer	Primary	2006	9	Responsible for household chores
Mrs JI	Female	48	Farmer	Primary	No info	No info	Lives with her blind husband and grandchild
Mr SP	Male	55	Farmer	Primary	No info	No info	Lives with his wife and son's family
Mrs JH	Female	55	Farmer	None	2015	0.3	Lives with her 2 grandchildren who are aged 6 years and 5 months
Mrs K	Female	55	Farmer	None	2014	1	Lives with her husband
Mr MD	Male	58	Farmer	None	2014	1	Lives with wife who cares for him
Mr I	Male	63	Farmer	Primary	2012	3	Lives with wife who cares for him
Mr SI	Male	64	Farmer	Primary	No info	No info	Lives with wife and a daughter
Mrs SH	Female	65	Trades/ services	Primary	2013	2	Lives alone
Mr MR	Male	70	Farmer	None	2012	3	Lives with children
Mrs M	Female	85	Retired	None	2011	4	Lives with her husband

\*Note. The (couple) participants with asterisks next to their names were interviewed jointly.

Source: Fieldwork.

## Data analysis

In-depth interview transcripts were analyzed and coded to identify key themes using a coding framework developed from predetermined themes in the literature review and those which emerged during the analysis of the data. Table 4 presents themes that were identified from literature and during the data analysis. The major themes, those identified from literature and during data analysis were: migration decision, migration motivation, social impact, economic impact, and well-being and communication. Minor themes, identified during data analysis were: financial independence, marriage postponement and consent. The themes were discussed with co-authors before using thematic analysis to code the transcripts in QRS NVivo 10, a software that aids the organization of qualitative data and enables data retrieval in a systematic manner.

**Table 4.** Themes from in-depth interviews with left-behind parents of migrant women in East Java by marital status.

Theme	Marital status of migrant daughter	
	Unmarried	Married
<i>Theme 1: Migration decision</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial independence</li> <li>• Parental consent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial independence</li> <li>• Husband's consent</li> </ul>
<i>Theme 2: Migration motivation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push factor:</li> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Support parents</li> <li>• Fund sibling's education</li> <li>• Saving for wedding</li> <li>• Entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Pull factors:</li> <li>• higher salary</li> <li>• Better life</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Push factors:</li> <li>• poverty</li> <li>• Fund children's education</li> <li>• Home construction</li> </ul>
<i>Theme 3: Communication</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobile phone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular communication</li> <li>• Annual leave</li> </ul>
<i>Theme 4: Social impact</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Household chores</li> <li>• Marriage postponement</li> <li>• Protracted migration</li> <li>• No home visits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Household chores</li> <li>• Grandchildren care giving</li> <li>• Care of left-behind parents</li> <li>• Family stability</li> <li>• Divorce</li> </ul>
<i>Theme 5: Economic impact</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daughter is breadwinner</li> <li>• Send remittances (home): basic necessities, home construction, loan repayment</li> <li>• Acquire savings (personal): marriage and savings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daughter is breadwinner in marital home</li> <li>• Financial security</li> <li>• Home construction</li> <li>• Lack of financial benefit for left-behind parent</li> </ul>
<i>Theme 6: Health and well-being</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety about daughter's well-being and marriage prospects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health of left-behind parent</li> <li>• Loneliness</li> </ul>

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- Concern about exploitation and trafficking of daughter
    - Loneliness
  - Anxiety and stress after daughter's departure
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## Findings

Key findings from the study are summarized in Table 5. These findings are further expanded in the succeeding paragraphs.

**Table 5.** Social and economic impact of women's migration on left-behind parents by marital status.

	<b>Marital status of migrant daughter</b>	
	<b>Unmarried</b>	<b>Married</b>
<b>Motivation for migration</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To support household</li> <li>● To support parents and siblings</li> <li>● For home construction</li> <li>● Save for marriage</li> <li>● To gain experience</li> <li>● Save for business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To fund children's education</li> <li>● To help husband financially</li> <li>● To construct family home</li> <li>● To save for business</li> </ul>
<b>Migration decision</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Decision made independently</li> <li>● Permission sought from parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Decision made independently</li> <li>● Permission sought from husband</li> </ul>
<b>Beneficiaries of remittances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parents and siblings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sent to husband and parents if they provide care for children</li> </ul>
<b>Care of parent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Couples lived by themselves and cared for each other</li> <li>● Multigenerational living</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parents reside in multigenerational household with grandchildren</li> </ul>
<b>Reversal of child care</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● (Not applicable, unmarried migrant had no children)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cared for grandchildren</li> <li>● Assisted left-behind husbands in caring for left-behind children</li> </ul>
<b>Transnational communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Regular communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Infrequent communication</li> </ul>
<b>Well-being</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Migrant's well-being abroad</li> <li>● Worried about marriage prospects and safety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Migrant's well-being abroad</li> <li>● Divorce and its impact on grandchildren</li> </ul>

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### *Motivation for migration and decision-making*

There were overlapping reasons for migrating among married and unmarried women, especially when focusing on the push and pull factors, such as poor economic situation at home and attractive wages in migrant destinations. The parents of married and unmarried female migrants noted that their daughters migrated due to their poor economic situation, and their ambition to save capital to pursue a small business or to support education of their children. High levels of unemployment

and lack of economic opportunities for women in the villages seemed to be their underlying reason to migrate. Unmarried women, in particular, migrated because they wanted to help their parents and siblings and save for prospective marriage. Overall, parents had a limited role in the decision-making of their daughters' migration, although their permission was often sought. The following examples demonstrate that the motivation for migration was multifaceted:

It was her own idea [to migrate and work there ]. She wanted to join her friend. She even worked in a garment factory but then she felt that the salary was too small so she wanted to go abroad to earn a big salary. She went to Singapore. ... [S]he said that she left to earn money and looked for capital so that she can afford her own life here later independently [Mr M. 70 years, laborer, Ponorogo Regency].

I [Mother] did give her permission to go. Because we need cash money and maybe with her going abroad, some of our problems could be solved.... She works as a sales girl [Mrs S. 67 years, laborer, Ponorogo Regency].

The official policy in Indonesia stipulates that women require permission before they can migrate to work internationally as a labor migrant. Unmarried women need a letter of permission from their parent or guardian and married women need a letter of permission from their husbands before they can apply to be a migrant worker. The parents of both groups of women noted that their children independently made the decision to migrate before seeking consent from them or their husbands. Therefore, parents felt powerless in influencing their daughter's decision because of their determination to leave the village.

'They [neighbors/ members of the community] just ask, why did you give permission to your daughters to work overseas, how I have the heart to do it. I can't stop them.' The main motivation for migrating was to fund the children's education' [Mrs S., 60 years, retired, Malang Regency].

### *Beneficiaries of remittances*

The parents of unmarried women benefited substantially from remittances sent by their daughters whereas the opposite was true for the parents of married women. The latter remitted most of their

income to their marital home, hence their husbands and children were the primary beneficiaries of migration. Married women only remitted money to their left-behind parents when the latter provided care to the left-behind children. There were exceptional circumstances when married daughters provided financial support to their parents, such as when there was a medical emergency. In contrast, since one of the motivating factors for migrating for unmarried women was to help their parents, they remitted money for basic necessities on a regular basis. Unmarried daughters helped parents by contributing to the family economy, where the parents were the direct beneficiaries. Through their remittances, these women became the breadwinners in the household just as some married women became breadwinners through remittances sent to their husbands. Remittances from the unmarried daughters were also saved for their marriage. Parents of unmarried females benefitted from money remitted by their daughters. The money was used for constructing a home, to build up savings and to pay for medical care. The financial contribution by one unmarried woman was commended by her father:

Before she was abroad, there was no help. When she went abroad, the help started. I said “sis, I’m busy, can you send me some money?” When my daughter is at home, there is no income. The income was just from me, as a farmer. You know that the salary as farmer is not enough. So I need some help [Mr I , 63 years, farmer, Ponorogo Regency].

### *Care of parent*

Most of the parents lived together as a couple or with their grandchildren. Since majority of left-behind parents had more than one child, they were able to seek support from their other children following the departure of one of their daughters. There were cases where the parent had only one child and after their daughter’s departure, if they were elderly, they struggled in terms of care. Some of the left-behind parents were also widowed and resided alone. As well as being lonely, the care of the parent was complicated when they were in poor health. In such cases, the parent was reliant on the migrant child’s financial support for healthcare. Overall, left-behind parents varied in age and health status, hence not all of them required care in the absence of their children.

I do miss her, but the important thing is I am still healthy [Mr SP, 55 years, farmer, Ponorogo Regency].

I am still strong. Blessings from God. If I am not strong, just pray to God and ask me to be strong. I have government health insurance so do not pay if I take treatment (Mrs SM, 62 years, Farmer, Malang Regency]

### *Reversal of child care*

In Javanese society, it is the mothers who typically look after children and undertake housework. With their migration, left-behind grandmothers almost routinely undertake cooking, cleaning the house and taking care of the grandchildren, accompanying them to the mosque and helping them to learn to read the Koran. Grandmothers became the primary carer of the left-behind children in cases where the migrant mother is divorced after migration. Even where husbands are present, left-behind grandmothers provided support to the left-behind husbands to take care of the children. In childcare, grandmothers played a more significant role than grandfathers. The grandmother's greatest concern was raising the left-behind children in the absence of their mother.

I feel pity for [my grandchildren]. I take care of one of them since they were infants [Mrs P, 63 years, farmer, Malang Regency].

.. yes.. I take care of my grandson since he was born and his mother worked in various places for money for our life.... .. I miss my daughter... we are far away from her.. I hope God gives us the best and my daughter could survive, healthy and feels like home there.. and I hope she will tell me when she is not comfortable there and come home quickly. [Mrs SM, 62 years, farmer, Malang Regency].

### *Communication*

A key indicator of the welfare of left-behind parents is their ability to communicate and be in touch with their migrant daughters overseas. It appears that parents use digital technology, such as smartphones and other digital platforms, to communicate with their migrant daughters. Parents reported a great deal of satisfaction in being able to communicate with their daughters online. The use of visual technology, however, is facilitated when the migrants' children are living with the grandparents.

Now, we often communicate by video call with the phone that was bought by M for me. It is not difficult now to communicate with M because we can see the photos, videos and hear her voice easily. ...We usually use Line, Yahoo Messenger and Facebook because those are free of charge. Usually I'm the one who picks up the call and then I use the loud speaker on my phone so the whole family can hear [Mr Male, years, farmer, Ponorogo Regency].

The migrant's marital status matter in terms of their communication with the left-behind parents. In general, the parents of married daughters reported that their daughters did not stay in contact regularly. They held the view that daughters communicate with their marital home (where their children live) more frequently than with their natal home. Unmarried daughters more frequently contacted their left-behind parents. There were also instances of unmarried daughters not staying in contact with their parents. It appears that communication with left-behind parents is often based on need and circumstances.

Very rare because she is hard to be contacted.....Yes, because my children do not want to be disturbed so [they] rarely call me [Mrs SR, 61 years, housewife, Malang Regency].

She called when she had her own interest....she called when something important happens. [Mrs K, 55 years, farmer, Ponorogo Regency].

### *Well-being of parents and daughters*

Regardless of the marital status of the migrant, left-behind parents reported that they were concerned about their daughter's well-being and safety while working abroad. While parents were concerned about the safety of their unmarried daughters and their postponement of marriage, the concern for married daughters centered on the left-behind children and the status of their daughters' marriage. Parents of both groups reported being affected by poor health. The elderly parents experienced stress if there was irregular communication and insufficient financial support from daughters for the left-behind children.

...but I do not know the fate of her marriage... I just know her status is still married. But I am not sure later they might want a divorce.....I do not know. Anyway she doesn't communicate with her husband [Mr HR, 70 years, farmer, Ponorogo Regency].

I feel sad that she [daughter] is not with us. I hope she is here. But then when we call we burst into tears. She [daughter] said she will return home... I have health problems... hypertension... I had been hospitalised few times [Mrs SN, 62 years, farmer, Ponorogo Regency].

## **Discussion and conclusions**

This paper has examined how the marital status of migrant daughters affects the socio-economic welfare of left-behind parents in East Java. It also examined the motivation for migration of both unmarried and married women. Data for the paper came from interviews with left-behind parents. The motivations for migration differed for unmarried and married migrant women, although some commonalities were also noted. The decision to migrate was mostly the women's; in general, parents did not play a significant role in the migration decision-making process of their daughters. This reflects the role of women as decision-makers in Javanese society (Stoler, 1977).

The beneficiaries and uses of remittances also vary according to the marital status of migrant daughters. The principal beneficiaries of married migrant women's remittances were their immediate family, husband and children. The parents of married women received remittances only in cases where they looked after their grandchildren or in times of crisis. Unmarried women, on the other hand, remit money to their parents, or keep their earning as savings for immediate or future use, such as saving for their marriage. Unmarried daughters have taken key roles as breadwinners in some cases, particularly where the economic situation of the family is relatively poorer. Thus, their economic contributions to their families are substantial. This pattern of contributing to the a family presents a more general scenario of *female migrant sending contexts* in South East Asia (Graham et al., 2012; Démurger, 2015)

The migration of women can also lead to a reversal in caregiving. In their old age, parents have traditionally been looked after by their daughters, but in the context of migration, parents assume the carer role for their grandchildren. This responsibility may affect the welfare of elderly men and women in Indonesia and in communities that send women to migrate overseas. Left-behind grandmothers have much greater responsibilities for child care than left-behind grandfathers and were more likely to report higher levels of stress. This finding is supported by other studies in the region (Chiou et al., 2005; Ho et al., 2009).

The care needed by the left-behind parents varies by age, gender and widow/widower status. The elderly parents of married migrant women tend to live in multigenerational households with grandchildren and were older than the parents of unmarried daughters. In these settings, the left-behind parents received care from other members of the household. The parents of unmarried migrants were younger; in terms of care, these couples took care of each other. These parents were concerned about the marriage prospects of their daughters. Regardless of their migrant daughters' marital status, the left-behind parents expressed concern about the safety and welfare of their daughters overseas. In our sample, there were no cases where the parents were ill or very old. This will be an issue for future research.

This research highlights two areas for policy-making in Indonesia and similar settings in Southeast Asia. Firstly, the welfare of left-behind parents is compromised in situations where they become the primary carers of the migrant women's left-behind children. This responsibility may result in psychological stress to the migrants' parents. Appropriate child care programs and support systems addressing the needs of left-behind children of all ages and sexes will help ensure the well-being of migrants' elderly parents who take on the caregiving responsibility. Secondly, the welfare of left-behind parents, particularly the widows/widowers or those living alone, requires support and assistance from social services. Enhanced communication between migrant daughters and their parents should be encouraged in the pre-departure briefing. Since the migration of married and unmarried daughters pose different consequences for the left-behind parents, these should be factored in migration policies and programs to address the potential negative impacts on the left-behind parents, particularly the elderly.

## **Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this paper.

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