

Gender Relations in Agrarian Societies: Unveiling Hidden Influences in Farming Families

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This research explores gender relations in agrarian societies in Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi, with a focus on the role of women in farming families. Women play a crucial role in agricultural activities such as land management, planting, and harvesting. However, their contributions are often excluded from formal economic statistics, as they are seen as part of domestic responsibilities. Gender inequality in these communities is reinforced by patriarchal norms that grant men control over land and strategic decision-making. Using qualitative methods, this study gathered data from 202 informants, including female farm laborers, family members, and community leaders. Data were analyzed using Spradley's model, identifying key themes such as the double burden on women, limited access to agricultural resources, and male-dominated decision-making processes. The findings reveal that in the agrarian society of Enrekang Regency, patriarchal norms continue to dominate family decision-making and resource management. Men are generally regarded as the heads of families, entitled to make strategic decisions, while women are relegated to supportive roles in implementing these decisions. Additionally, gender-based wage discrimination was identified, with women working as farm laborers often receiving lower wages than men despite performing similar tasks. The study also highlights the additional challenges faced by women farmers in the context of climate change, where their limited access to adaptive technologies exacerbates their vulnerability to environmental challenges, such as declining land productivity. Furthermore, restrictions in education and access to information further marginalize women in the ongoing agricultural modernization process. This research recommends more inclusive, gender-responsive policies, including improving women's access to economic resources and technology, as well as providing fairer recognition of their contributions. It is hoped that these findings will offer new insights into

efforts to reduce gender inequality and enhance the well-being of women in the agricultural sector.

Keywords: Gender Relations, Agrarian Society, Gender Inequality, Rural Women, Agricultural Resources, Enrekang Regency, Patriarchy.

1. Introduction

Gender relations in agrarian societies in Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi, present a significant issue for research, given the crucial role of women in the agricultural sector and the inequalities they face regarding access to and control over resources. Enrekang Regency, known for its agricultural commodities such as vegetables and coffee (Illien, 2024), maintains a social structure influenced by traditional norms and local customs (Petr, 2015; Litvin et al., 2024). In this agrarian society, men are typically associated with leadership, decision-making, and control over land, while women are more involved in domestic work and subsistence labor, often unrecognized as part of the formal economy (Tran, 2023). Despite women's active involvement in various stages of agricultural activities, including land management, planting, harvesting, and processing, their contributions are often regarded as part of household responsibilities and are thus excluded from formal statistics (Litvin et al., 2024). This situation leads to a gap in women's access to essential agricultural resources, such as land, capital, and agricultural technology, while men tend to have privileged access to these resources (Drucza & Peveri, 2018).

Historically, the agrarian society in Enrekang Regency has been dominated by a patriarchal system that grants greater control to men (Teklesilassie Yazew, 2024), particularly in terms of land ownership, often through inheritance or formal policies that recognize them as heads of households (Zuhri & Amalia, 2022). This reinforces gender inequality, leaving women with less influence in strategic decision-making, both at the household and community levels (Njuki et al., 2022). However, social and economic changes over recent decades (Leder et al., 2024), including globalization and the commodification of agriculture, have begun to reshape these traditional structures. Globalization and the shift towards market-oriented agriculture have introduced new farming practices focused on increasing production and access to technology (Kohsaka & Miyake, 2021). Unfortunately, these opportunities are often more accessible to men, who are typically landowners and key decision-makers, while women, who lack clear land ownership rights, are marginalized from these emerging economic opportunities (Rowland et al., 2022). Ironically, while agricultural modernization is expected to benefit entire communities, gender disparities have widened, with men reaping more advantages from economic transformations than women (Mosse, 2018).

Gender relations within farming families in Enrekang Regency also impact social well-being and domestic decision-making (Downey & Clune, 2023). Although women are directly involved in household management, including ensuring family food security, their contributions are often overlooked in strategic decision-making regarding land use or the distribution of agricultural yields (Ghasemnejad et al., 2024). In many cases, women play a critical role in organizing the family's daily activities and maintaining subsistence economics, but their contributions are not proportionally recognized. This situation is further complicated by environmental challenges such as climate change, which directly affects the agricultural

sector in Enrekang (Anser et al., 2023). Women's dependence on less productive agricultural land and their limited access to adaptive technologies needed to cope with climate change increase their vulnerability to the risks posed by environmental changes (Antriyandarti et al., 2024).

Global efforts through international legal frameworks have been made to address gender inequality in the agrarian sector, including in Enrekang Regency. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and conventions from the International Labour Organization (ILO) aim to improve the conditions of rural women by providing better access to economic and social resources. Article 14 of CEDAW, for instance, specifically emphasizes the need to strengthen women's rights in rural areas, including access to land, credit, technology, and participation in decision-making. Additionally, ILO conventions No. 184 and No. 156 stress the importance of protecting female agricultural workers and promoting equality in family responsibilities between men and women (K.C. & Whetstone, 2022). However, the local implementation of these policies faces significant challenges, especially due to the strong social norms and customs in Enrekang Regency that still prioritize patriarchal views in family and community decision-making (Teklesilassie Yazew, 2024).

Therefore, it is crucial to further examine how gender relations in agrarian societies in Enrekang Regency influence the distribution of resources and economic opportunities, as well as their impact on social well-being and family dynamics. This research aims to explore the hidden influences of gender relations within farming families in Enrekang and evaluate how international policies and global conventions can be more effectively implemented to reduce gender inequality in this agrarian community. Consequently, this study is expected to provide meaningful contributions to understanding the role of gender in economic and social development in Enrekang Regency, while suggesting more inclusive solutions to enhance the well-being of women in the agricultural sector in this region.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of gender relations within the families of female farm laborers in Enrekang Regency (Creswell, J. W., 2013). The qualitative approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to explore in detail the experiences, perceptions, and meanings derived from social and cultural interactions related to gender roles, particularly in the context of agrarian communities deeply influenced by patriarchal values (Patton, M. Q., 2015). The study adopts a constructivist paradigm, viewing social reality as a product of social constructions created through daily interactions, social institutions, and cultural norms present in society.

The informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, involving 202 participants, including female farm laborers, their husbands or family members, landowners, government officials, and local community leaders. Data collection was conducted through various methods, including in-depth interviews, participant observation, documentation, and photo and audio-video recordings. In-depth interviews focused on exploring the experiences and perspectives of informants regarding gender roles and dynamics within the family, while

direct observation was conducted to examine how gender roles are enacted in daily life, both in the fields and at home. Data analysis was carried out using Spradley's model, which consists of four main stages: domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme analysis. These stages enabled the researcher to identify and explore key themes emerging from the data, such as how gender roles are constructed, maintained, and negotiated by women and men within farm laborer families.

The validity of the data was ensured through the application of several techniques, including triangulation, member checks, peer debriefing, audit trails, and data saturation (Bernard, H. R., & Gravlee, C. C., 2014). Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from various sources and methods, such as interviews, observations, and documents. Member checks were conducted to ensure that the researcher's interpretations aligned with the informants' experiences. Peer debriefing involved discussions with colleagues to test the validity of findings, and an audit trail ensured detailed and transparent documentation of the research process. With this comprehensive methodology, the study aims to provide a thorough depiction of gender relations within female farm laborer families in Enrekang Regency, offering new insights into gender inequality in rural agricultural sectors. The findings can be utilized to formulate solutions for promoting gender equality and improving the welfare of women in the agricultural sector.

3. Results and Discussion

The research on gender relations in the agrarian society of Enrekang Regency reveals the complex dynamics surrounding the role of women in farming families and the inequalities they face, both in domestic and public spheres. The study shows that women, particularly female farm laborers, bear a heavy workload due to the dual roles they perform simultaneously. On the one hand, they are directly involved in agricultural activities, working long hours—approximately 7 to 8 hours a day—carrying out tasks such as land preparation, planting, crop care, and harvesting. On the other hand, they shoulder significant household responsibilities, including child care, cooking, cleaning, and managing the family's daily needs. This dual role creates immense pressure, as women must work hard in the public sphere as farm laborers while also managing household duties, often without receiving due recognition for their contributions in both areas.

Furthermore, the study found that cultural norms and patriarchal traditions in Enrekang Regency play a significant role in shaping gender relations. In farming families, men are still regarded as the heads of households with authority over decision-making, particularly concerning agricultural and financial matters. Although women often participate in discussions about farming activities and household affairs, final decisions typically rest with the husband or male head of the family. Women are more involved in executing these decisions, whether in agricultural activities or household management, but they rarely have full control over strategic direction or resource management. This dependency reinforces women's subordinate position within the family structure, where they are confined to roles more focused on implementation than decision-making.

One of the key findings of this research is the significant disparity in women's access to

agricultural resources, including land, capital, and technology. The data show that the majority of agricultural land in Enrekang Regency is owned by men, either through inheritance, purchase, or formal policies that grant ownership rights to husbands or male heads of households. As a result, women have very limited access to agricultural land, despite being directly involved in managing it. This inequality also extends to access to capital and financial assistance. In many cases, financial institutions or government assistance programs prioritize providing credit or aid to men as landowners, making it difficult for women—especially female farm laborers without land ownership—to obtain the capital necessary to expand their farming businesses or improve their agricultural productivity. Women's dependence on men for land ownership and access to capital exacerbates the economic inequalities they experience.

The study also highlights the educational limitations faced by female farm laborers in Enrekang Regency. Most women involved in this research had only basic education, with some not completing school. This low level of education limits women's access to information, technology, and training that could improve their agricultural skills or enable them to take a more active role in decision-making at the family or community level. The lack of education also hinders women's participation in agricultural training programs, which are more readily accessible to men, leaving women lagging behind in the adoption of modern agricultural technologies that could improve crop yields.

In addition to educational challenges, the research reveals gender-based wage inequality experienced by female farm laborers. Despite performing the same work as men in the fields, women are often paid less than their male counterparts. This indicates ongoing gender-based discrimination in the agricultural sector of Enrekang Regency. Moreover, the domestic work performed by women at home is not recognized as an economic contribution, despite its importance to the family's survival and well-being. Women's contributions to managing the household, supporting children, and ensuring family food security are often overlooked in the calculation of the family's economic value, further underscoring the economic marginalization experienced by women in this region.

Aside from economic and social factors, this study also highlights the environmental challenges faced by women farmers in Enrekang Regency, particularly in the context of climate change. Extreme climate events, such as increased frequency of heavy rainfall and prolonged droughts, negatively affect agricultural productivity. Women managing small agricultural plots or working on less productive land are more vulnerable to losses caused by climate change. Additionally, women's limited access to adaptive technologies and information related to climate risk mitigation makes it difficult for them to cope with these changes, further increasing their dependency on men, who have better access to the resources needed to address environmental challenges.

Overall, this study demonstrates that gender relations within farming families in Enrekang Regency are still heavily influenced by patriarchal structures, which reinforce unequal access to resources and control over decision-making. Women, particularly female farm laborers, experience heavy workloads and limited access to economic opportunities, while their contributions to both agricultural and domestic activities are not proportionately valued. Therefore, this research recommends the need for more inclusive, gender-responsive policy

interventions to improve women's access to economic resources such as land, capital, and technology, as well as to strengthen their role in decision-making at the family and community levels. By doing so, it is hoped that the welfare of female farmers in Enrekang Regency will improve, ultimately contributing to more sustainable economic and social development in the region.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal significant gender inequalities in agrarian society in Enrekang Regency, visible across various aspects such as the division of labor, decision-making, and access to resources. These results can be analyzed using various sociological theories related to gender and social structures.

One of the main findings is the dual burden experienced by women, reflecting the Gender Role Theory proposed by Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales (1955). This theory suggests that society often rigidly divides gender roles, where men take on instrumental roles related to productive work and strategic decision-making, while women assume expressive roles associated with domestic and reproductive duties. In Enrekang, this division of labor is clearly observed, with women bearing the heavy dual burden of participating in agricultural activities for 7-8 hours a day while also managing household responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare. This situation exemplifies the "double burden," where women perform both productive and reproductive work without receiving equal recognition to men, despite their critical contributions to household and agricultural sustainability.

Moreover, the study finds that men in Enrekang generally hold primary control over economic resources and strategic decisions, particularly concerning land management and family income. This can be explained by Patriarchy Theory introduced by Sylvia Walby (1990), which argues that in patriarchal systems, men dominate various social structures, including resource ownership and decision-making. In Enrekang, this patriarchal structure remains strong, where women, despite their extensive knowledge and active role in agricultural operations, are rarely involved in strategic decision-making. Men are seen as family leaders with the right to make major decisions, while women assume supportive roles, both within and outside the household.

The unequal access to resources found in this research can be analyzed through the Access Theory of Ribot and Peluso (2003). This theory explains that access to resources is not solely determined by formal ownership but also by the ability to utilize those resources through social, economic, and political relationships. In this study, female farm laborers often do not formally own land, and their access to land and capital largely depends on their relationships with men, particularly husbands or other male family members. Men, recognized as household heads, receive priority in land ownership and access to capital, while women have limited access without formal ownership. This injustice worsens women's position within the social and economic structure of Enrekang's agrarian society.

Furthermore, the study highlights gender-based wage disparities, which reflect Gender Wage Inequality Theories. These theories suggest that women's work is often undervalued compared to men's, even when they perform the same tasks. This wage discrimination, rooted in traditional views of gender roles, not only lowers women's economic welfare but also

diminishes their motivation and the acknowledgment of their contributions to agricultural activities.

In terms of health, female farm laborers in Enrekang also face serious health risks, particularly due to exposure to agricultural chemicals such as pesticides. Women's limited access to adequate healthcare echoes Ecofeminism, which emphasizes that women are often more exposed to environmental and health risks in societies that overlook their needs. The lack of access to healthcare services, especially for women working in the informal sector like agriculture, worsens this situation, heightening the long-term health risks faced by women.

International policies such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) should theoretically help reduce the gender inequalities observed in this study. However, the implementation of these policies at the local level is hindered by strong patriarchal norms and cultural traditions in Enrekang. Therefore, stronger interventions from the government and civil society organizations are needed to ensure that female farm laborers obtain their rights, including access to economic resources, education, and recognition of their contributions.

In summary, this research shows that although women play a central role in agricultural activities and household management in Enrekang Regency, they remain in a subordinate position due to patriarchal structures that reinforce gender inequality. This inequality affects women's social, economic, and health well-being, and further efforts are needed to empower women, enhance their access to education, resources, and decision-making, and reform the social structures that impede gender equality.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research conducted on gender relations in the agrarian society of Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi, it was found that women, particularly female farm laborers, experience gender inequality in various aspects, including the double workload, access to agricultural resources, and decision-making at the family and community levels.

Women play a crucial role in agricultural activities and household management, yet their contributions are often not acknowledged or valued proportionally. In their daily lives, they work in agriculture for 7-8 hours a day while also carrying domestic responsibilities. Patriarchal norms continue to dominate, resulting in men having greater control over economic resources such as land and capital.

Although women play a large role in the agricultural sector, they are often marginalized in strategic decision-making and access to technology and education, which further reinforces their subordinate position in the agrarian sector. Wage inequality between men and women is also a significant issue.

This research recommends more inclusive policies to improve women's access to economic resources, education, and technology, as well as provide fair recognition of their contributions. These efforts are expected to reduce gender inequality and enhance the social and economic well-being of women in the agricultural sector in Enrekang Regency.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristekdikti) for their support and opportunity to continue my studies and complete this research.

My sincere thanks also go to the Educational Fund Management Institution (LPDP) and the Indonesian Education Scholarship (BPI) for providing scholarships and full support throughout the study process.

Additionally, I extend my heartfelt thanks to Makassar State University for facilitating my postgraduate studies in the Doctorate of Sociology program, and to Muhammadiyah University of Enrekang for their academic guidance and support during the research process. The guidance from professors and staff at both universities played a vital role in the completion of this research. I hope that all the help and support provided will be rewarded abundantly, and that the findings of this research will contribute to the development of knowledge, particularly in gender studies and the agrarian sector.

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