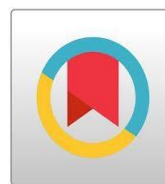


**Vulnerability and Poverty Cycle of Child Labor in the Urban Informal Sector: A Case Study of Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta**



**Kerentanan dan Siklus Kemiskinan Pekerja Anak Perempuan di Sektor Informal Perkotaan: Studi Kasus Pasar Induk Kramat Jati, Jakarta**

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**ABSTRACT**

Female child labourers in the urban informal sector face economic and social exploitation, which keeps them trapped in the cycle of poverty.. This study aims to analyze the vulnerabilities experienced by female child laborers at Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta, and the factors influencing their involvement in informal work. The method used is a qualitative case study with data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and policy analysis. This study involved eight girls aged 9-17 who work in the market. The findings indicate that female child laborers in the market experience economic exploitation, lack of access to education, and involvement in child marriage, further reinforcing the poverty cycle. They work as porters, small traders, and scavengers of leftover vegetables or fruits, earning an uncertain income. Additionally, the unsanitary market environment increases their health risks. These children are also vulnerable to verbal, physical, and sexual violence, both at work and at home. Furthermore, the study found that social and cultural factors contribute to reinforcing traditional female roles, limiting their access to education and legal protection. Therefore, more inclusive policies and sustainable social interventions are necessary to address this issue.

**Kata Kunci**

*Pekerja Anak Perempuan;  
 Sektor Informal;  
 Siklus Kemiskinan;  
 Eksploitasi;  
 Pasar Induk Kramat Jati;*

**ABSTRAK**

Pekerja anak perempuan di sektor informal perkotaan menghadapi eksploitasi ekonomi dan sosial yang menempatkan mereka terus berada dalam siklus kemiskinan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kerentanan yang dialami pekerja anak perempuan di Pasar Induk Kramat Jati, Jakarta, serta faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi keterlibatan mereka dalam pekerjaan informal. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi kasus kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis kebijakan. Penelitian ini melibatkan delapan anak perempuan berusia 9-17 tahun yang bekerja di pasar tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pekerja anak perempuan di pasar mengalami eksploitasi ekonomi, kurangnya akses terhadap pendidikan, serta keterlibatan dalam pernikahan anak yang semakin memperkuat siklus kemiskinan. Mereka bekerja sebagai porter, pedagang kecil, dan pengumpul sisa sayuran atau buah, dengan penghasilan yang tidak menentu. Selain itu, lingkungan pasar yang tidak higienis meningkatkan risiko kesehatan mereka. Anak-anak ini juga rentan terhadap kekerasan verbal, fisik, dan seksual, baik di tempat kerja maupun dalam rumah tangga. Lebih lanjut, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa faktor sosial dan budaya turut berkontribusi dalam memperkuat peran tradisional perempuan yang membatasi akses mereka terhadap pendidikan dan perlindungan hukum. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan kebijakan yang lebih inklusif dan intervensi sosial yang berkelanjutan untuk mengatasi permasalahan ini.

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## Introduction

Poverty is a problem that has never escaped the attention of governments in various parts of the country. It has even become an extraordinary problem in the economic sector, which has become a benchmark for a country's success from time to time, especially in developing countries. Indonesia, as a developing country, realizes the importance of paying attention to this problem and making every effort to reduce the rate of poverty (Hilmi et al., 2022). Poverty can also be seen from another dimension, namely in terms of insufficiency for health, nutrition, and education. The illiteracy rate can be used in education to measure the poverty line. The composite welfare index, as an alternative to using a single dimension, namely from the economic aspect alone, can be a combination of consumption expenditure (economy), health, and education. Income, health, and education should be combined (Susanto & Pangesti, 2020).

This article analyzes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty rates in Indonesia. The authors found that, even in the best-case scenario, the poverty rate is expected to increase from 9.2% in September 2019 to 9.7% by the end of 2020 (Suryahadi et al., 2020). Evaluate poverty trends in Indonesia using the international poverty line. However, Indonesia has succeeded in increasing average income and reducing poverty (Sumner & Edward, 2014). Children make up one-third of Indonesia's population, with many experiencing rising levels of poverty and marginalization, as well as a lack of access to formal social protection programs or well-resourced health systems. From a geographic perspective, the risks faced by Indonesian children during the pandemic are closely tied to where they live and how the infectious disease affects their caregivers, families, peers, and communities. Children also bear the socio-economic consequences of school closures and other social restrictions. Adopting a socio-spatial analysis, this paper examines the extent to which the pandemic and the Indonesian government's response to the crisis have affected children across different geographic locations (Kusumaningrum et al., 2022).

ILO Convention No. 182, adopted at the 87th International Labour Conference on 17 June 1999 in Geneva, is a key instrument protecting the human rights of children. It outlines four immediate actions aimed at eliminating the most egregious forms of child labor. These include work that endangers children's health and safety, hinders their access to education, and places them in exploitative conditions—contrary to the principle that children's living conditions should be free from exploitation. Despite these protective measures, the unfortunate reality remains: the worst forms of child labor still exist in many countries, including those that ratified ILO Convention No. 182 in 1999. Before the adoption of ILO

Convention 182, global concern about the exploitation of children in the workplace was considerable. Children often found themselves in hazardous working environments, including industries such as mining, agriculture, and domestic work. Their labor was exploited solely for economic gain, with little consideration for their rights or well-being. Furthermore, many working children do not have access to education. They are forced to drop out of school to supplement their family income or cannot obtain a decent education due to economic constraints (Bahy et al., 2024).

As a result, this perpetuates the cycle of poverty, where children who do not receive adequate education remain trapped in poverty throughout their lives. Before the adoption of ILO Convention 182, many countries lacked sufficient legislation to protect children from labor exploitation. The absence of strong legal protection left children vulnerable to various forms of abuse and exploitation in the workplace, often without appropriate legal repercussions for those responsible. Against this backdrop, ILO Convention 182 is significant because it provides a comprehensive and robust international legal framework aimed at protecting children from harmful labor exploitation while advancing their rights to education, welfare, and adequate protection (Bahy et al., 2024).

Indonesia commits to providing protection guarantees to overcome child labour. The government has stated this commitment by ratifying ILO Convention Number 138 concerning the Minimum Age for Children to Work through Law Number 2 of 1999 and ILO Convention Number 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor through Law Number 1 of 2000. The government then adopted the substance of the two ILO Conventions into Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection and Law Number 13 of 2013 concerning Manpower (Simangunsong et al., 2023) In the research of (Muflih & Wijaya, 2024), Resolving the problem of child labor is one part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed upon by countries in the world through the United Nations. This goal is stated in the 8th goal, namely decent work, and economic growth, precisely in point 8.7, namely ending modern slavery, human trafficking, and child labor. This goal targets the end of child labor by 2025. However, in 2020, the ILO noted that there were still 160 million children who were child laborers worldwide. This means that 1 in 10 children are still child laborers. The ILO also reported that the number of child laborers increased by 8.4 million children compared to 2016 and is predicted to continue to grow if no handling is carried out.

The characteristics of urban child labor are closely related to children's attachment to public spaces such as streets and markets. In some cases, both boys and girls are also sexually

exploited. The above studies generally do not use gender analysis and do not reveal how girls who are employed early experience the risk of poverty throughout their lives. The deprivation of girls' rights in childhood is intertwined with vulnerability to the feminization of poverty in the future. Urban poverty often forces girls to work in the informal sector to help the family economy. In the Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta, many girls work as porters, small traders, or shop assistants. Their involvement in this work not only impacts their physical and mental health but also hinders their access to decent education, thus reinforcing the cycle of poverty. Research by (Maulana & Suryaningrum, 2023) found that poverty is significantly related to the increase in child laborers in Indonesia. Children from low-income families are more vulnerable to being involved in work to help meet the family's economic needs. In addition, research by (Muflih & Wijaya, 2024) in eastern Indonesia in 2022 showed that children whose heads of households work in the informal sector have a higher tendency to become child laborers compared to those whose heads of households work in the formal sector. This is due to income instability and a lack of social protection in the informal sector.

Although the Indonesian government has ratified ILO Convention No. 182 through Law No. 1 of 2000 and initiated various policies to reduce child labor, data shows that in 2023, there were still around 1.01 million children working. This indicates that the challenge of eliminating child labor is still great, especially in the urban informal sector, such as the Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta. Although the Indonesian government has ratified ILO Convention No. 182 through Law No. 1 Year 2000 and initiated various policies to reduce child labor, data shows that in 2023, there are still around 1.01 million children working. This indicates that the challenge of eliminating child labor is still great, especially in the urban informal sector, such as in the Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta. Girls have been vulnerable in a patriarchal society since birth. The lives of men and women in the same situation tend to differ systematically from each other (Jaggar, 2009). Research on child labor in the urban informal sector generally discusses the types of work done and the social dynamics of child workers in public spaces. This article provides an overview of the experiences of poor women who are child workers and the risk of the cycle of poverty being passed on to the next generation. Empirically, research on child labor in the Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta area has never been studied.

Based on the review of previous studies, this research possesses elements of novelty, although there are some similarities with prior studies. This study shares similarities with several previous studies, particularly in examining the relationship between child labor and poverty. Child labor in the urban informal sector is a complex social phenomenon intertwined

with various factors, such as poverty, social vulnerability, and limited access to education and social protection. Globally, numerous studies have shown that child workers tend to come from families with low levels of education and income, facing risks of exploitation and entrapment in the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Several previous studies have discussed the link between child labor and poverty in various contexts. Chanda, (2014), in a study conducted in Lusaka, Zambia, found that child domestic workers generally came from impoverished families affected by HIV/AIDS. Their involvement in domestic labor hindered their access to education and the skills needed for decent employment in the future, thus reinforcing the cycle of poverty. Meanwhile, Mason & Rosenbloom, (2022) highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on increasing inequality and social vulnerability, as well as the importance of responsible management education in equipping younger generations to face socio-economic challenges. Another study by (Sovacool, (2021) revealed the exploitation of child labor in cobalt mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where power relations and patriarchy worsened the conditions of girls working in the sector.

Research on child labor in the informal sector has also been conducted in various countries. For instance, a study by Thi et al., (2023) in Bangladesh showed that child workers engaged in hazardous labor had a higher risk of experiencing psychosocial disorders and school dropout. Ahad et al., (2021) found that children working in the urban informal sector often experienced poor working conditions, negatively affecting their health and education. Meanwhile, Chukwudeh & Oduaran, (2021) highlighted how the transitional phase (liminality) in the lives of child workers influenced their education and increased their risk of social exploitation in Nigeria.

In the Indonesian context, research on child labor in the informal sector remains limited. A study by Satriawan, (2021), based on the 2019 Susenas data, showed that more than 70% of child workers were in the informal sector, with the majority coming from impoverished families and still attending school. Another study by Thakurata & D'Souza, (2018) found that families with limited access to financial markets tended to prioritize child labor over investment in education, thereby creating an intergenerational poverty trap. Additionally, (Ilyas et al., 2020) examined the motives of child laborers in the informal sector and challenged the assumption that they worked solely due to poverty or lack of education.

This research still maintains novelty in several key aspects. The primary focus of this study is on young girls working in the urban informal sector in Indonesia. Most previous studies have discussed child labor in general without specifically highlighting the gender dimension and the social vulnerabilities experienced by girls. Additionally, this study

employs a case study approach at Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta, providing in-depth insights into the experiences of female child laborers in one of Indonesia's largest urban economic centers. Furthermore, this research contributes to understanding the intergenerational cycle of poverty, demonstrating how child labor not only affects the individuals involved but also reinforces limited access to education and social services for future generations. This study also introduces a new perspective in evaluating policies and proposing more sustainable solutions for addressing female child labor in the informal sector. Thus, although there are similarities with previous studies in terms of poverty and its impact on child labor, this research maintains originality in its approach, research location, and in-depth policy analysis. Therefore, this study provides new contributions to the understanding of child labor in Indonesia and offers more effective and sustainable policy-based solutions.

Although previous studies have extensively discussed child labor in various contexts, there is still a gap in research on female child workers in the urban informal sector, especially in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the vulnerability and poverty cycle of female child workers in the urban informal sector, with a case study at Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta. The main focus of this research is to understand the factors that drive girls' involvement in informal labor, its impact on their lives, and the effectiveness of existing policies in protecting and empowering them. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how economic, social, and cultural factors interact in shaping the conditions of female child workers. The findings of this study are expected to enrich the literature on child labor in the informal sector and serve as a foundation for more inclusive and child-centered policy recommendations.

The DKI Jakarta Government noted that the Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta is one of the vulnerable points (gathering areas) for children with social welfare problems, including abandoned children and children on the streets, both for work and other activities. As a center for selling large quantities of basic food that will be resold to smaller markets around Jakarta, the primary market makes this area active for 24 hours. This condition is one of the triggers and opportunities for children to work more. In addition to the status of child laborers, the category of children in the central market area is also included in the category of street children because they spend most of their time in public places. From the author's field notes, children in this area work as porters of goods, assemblers, and sellers of fruit baskets, onion peelers, and also retail vegetable traders. Journalistic coverage (TribunNews, 2019) also documented child workers in this area as 'coolies' because their work involves exploring the central market and picking up vegetables and fruits that fall from the stalls of

large traders. The results of this collection will be cleaned, repackaged, and sold at retail to buyers. The group of child workers that is the focus of this study are children who live in urban areas, especially those who work and live in the Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta, East Jakarta.

### Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study method to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and vulnerabilities of female child laborers in the urban informal sector. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and policy analysis at the Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta. According to Abdussamad, (2021) Qualitative research methods are used to study natural object conditions, where the researcher is the key instrument. Data collection techniques are carried out by triangulation, data analysis is inductive, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization. The study involved eight girls aged 9-17 who were born and raised in the Kramat Jati Central Wholesale, Jakarta area, East Jakarta. Most of the data was collected through informal interviews and listening to children's stories during mentoring and learning together. Interviews and observations of children's lives in the market, learning place, and home were conducted from October to December 2024. The children's identities in this study are not disclosed for their safety. alitative research, data collection is not guided by theory but by facts found during field research.

**Table 1. List of research participants**

Child Initials	Age	School Status	Residence Status/Living	Marital Status
Child A	16 Years	Dropped out of 6th grade during Covid-19	With neighbors	-
Child B	10 Years	2nd grade elementary school	Cared for by neighbors/friends of the deceased mother	-
Child C	10 Years	Dropped out of 1st grade	With neighbors/more often living in the market	-
Child D	17 Years	Dropped out of 2nd grade	With husband and children	unregistered marriage at the age of 15
Child E	13 Years	Never attended school	Dont live with	-

			parents, more often living in the market	
Child F	15 Years	Never attended school, passed the A package exam	Lives with aunt	-
Child G	17 Years	Dropped out of 2nd grade	At mother's house with husband and children	unregistered marriage at the age of 15
Child H	9 Years	Never attended school	With parents	-

The validity of the data in this study is ensured through the following strategies: Triangulation Sources: Data were obtained from various parties, including female child laborers and their families. Methods: Field observations, in-depth interviews, and policy analysis were employed to compare and strengthen findings from different perspectives.

Member Checking, The results of interviews and findings were reconfirmed with respondents to ensure that the interpretation of the data aligned with their experiences. Prolonged Engagement The researcher was engaged in the field for an extended period to deeply understand the social and cultural conditions of female child laborers, reducing bias and enhancing data validity. Audit Trail, The entire research process was systematically documented, from data collection to analysis, enabling evaluation and verification by other researchers. Researcher Reflexivity, Awareness of potential biases and efforts to maintain objectivity in data analysis were actively undertaken. By implementing these strategies, this study ensures strong validity and reliability in depicting the social reality of female child laborers in the urban informal sector.

## Result and Discussion

### Result

The children informants involved in this study were aged 9-17 years. Although they were of school age, three of the eight children had never attended formal school, and most of them dropped out of school in grades 1-2 of elementary school. The household conditions of these children were different; some lived separately from their parents and lived in the market (child E), some lived at home and worked in the market with their biological parents (child H), and some were raised by siblings (child F) or neighbors (child B). Two of the eight children are 17, married, and have a baby aged 9-12 months. During data collection, these children were in the market environment with their playmates and peers. Children A, D, and



G were seen more often with some of their friends. Children B, C, and H also had 3-4 other children aged 3-9 years. The researcher focused on eight children because the researcher had known these children longer than their other peers.

### **Forms of Economic and Social Exploitation of Girls**

Various forms of informal work are carried out in this wholesale market. From the researcher's observations, children work as porters of goods, errand boys (helpers) for traders, sorters of rotten vegetables and fruits, onion peelers, spice grinders, plastic bag sellers, assemblers, and wooden boxes for fruit. Girls' work is generally unrelated to transporting heavy goods; they usually peel onions, sort and remove chili stalks, and sell retail with their parents. In addition to these jobs, most of the girls who became informants also worked as 'nyarang'; they asked, took, or scavenged fruit and vegetables from large traders or those that had just been unloaded from trucks. Children collect one or several types of vegetables, such as corn, cabbage, eggplant, and broccoli, and sell them to retailers in the market area. For one bundle of vegetables, they get Rp. 5,000-15,000, depending on the types of vegetables they collect. The wholesale market is usually more active at night, unloading and loading agricultural products from around Jakarta. Nighttime is the best time for these children to collect vegetables and fruits, either by asking from the transport trucks or looking for fallen fruits and vegetables.

*Child B: "If we 'look' at dawn, you know, sis, with our male friends" (interview with child B on December 4, 2024 at the informant's house) (Anak B, 2024).*

This condition shows that working children face a significant challenge balancing work and education. Fatigue at night makes it difficult for them to wake up in the morning and attend school, which ultimately impacts their academic achievement. This problem can lead to dropping out of school or receiving a low-quality education. Possible solutions include stricter regulations regarding child labor, educational support programs, and increasing public awareness of children's rights to get a decent education without being disturbed by work. During the observation, a teacher at a public elementary school in the market area sought child C because she had not attended school for almost a year. The child was sleepy and tired and did not do homework, so she was absent from school and chose to be active in the market. When choosing a school or a market, children choose the market because they can socialize with friends they know and also get money for the things they want to buy.

The money earned by children is used for daily needs, including food and drinks, buying toys, and paying for public toilets in the market when they need the toilet. The money

from selling vegetables and fruit is also deposited with the parents/guardians who care for them. Children are empowered to meet their own needs and contribute money to the family to meet the needs of other family members.

*Child B: "After looking for it, I save the money with Mama X. Sometimes, I put it in a piggy bank. I once got seventy rupiahs (IDR 70,000), sold a big watermelon, and Mama bought some of it for cigarettes.", (interview with child B on December 4, 2024 at the informant's house) (Anak B, 2024).*

In addition to being exploited to get money, children are also placed as objects when receiving assistance from private institutions (charity, CSR, donations) and the government. Marginalized children are often the objects of sharing aid from the community and government, but assistance does not fully support the growth and development of children. The view of one of the guardians of the child who pulled child F from the market revealed that children are also used for the benefit of getting as much assistance and money as possible in various ways.

*Aunt of F child: "If there is assistance... only then will these children be dressed in nice clothes. Sis, there is also assistance such as rice, they also sell it, not for household needs... they even pawn the certificates (important documents of the children)." (interview with Aunt of F Child on December 9, 2024 at the informant's house) (Bibi dari Anak F, 2024).*

This statement describes the worrying social and economic conditions where assistance that should be used for the welfare of children is instead misused by parents or families. Children only get attention and decent clothing when there is assistance, while their basic needs, including education, are often neglected. In addition, selling assistance and pawning essential documents such as birth certificates shows a high level of economic pressure, even to the point of sacrificing the child's future. This is a considerable risk because children can have difficulty accessing education, health, and legal protection services without official documents.

In addition to data from observations and interviews with child workers, official documents from (UNICEF, 2023) confirm that UNICEF highlights the importance of more inclusive social protection measures and targeted social sector interventions to provide a strong social safety net for poor and vulnerable households. As many as 40 percent of children face difficulties due to social and economic factors in various aspects of life, including food and nutrition, health, education, and child protection. This shows the multidimensional challenges in improving child welfare. UNICEF noted an increase in child protection services in Indonesia, with an increase in reported cases of violence against children from 14,586 in

2022 to 20,221 in 2023. This shows that access to protection services is starting to increase, although the challenge of child exploitation still remains.

### **Poor Market Environment and Health**

Girls spend most of their time in the dirty and humid market environment. Their hands and feet are covered in minor wounds and skin diseases. Most children do not wear shoes while walking around the market area. Some have the flu. Vulnerability to physical illness and even death accompanies the lives of children in the market. Child E said that a few months ago, her older sibling, who lived with her in the new market, passed away. Sister F, who is the same age as a high school student, was seriously ill. After the market, people took her to the health center. It turned out that the illness that sister F was experiencing was lung disease, and her whole body looked like she had chickenpox. After being treated and returning home a few days later, she died.

These children are also free to use the money they earn from their work to buy the toys and food they want. There are no restrictions on the types of food and toys purchased (mostly snacks and packaged drinks). There is no control over the nutritious food consumed by these children. Girls (adolescents) have a higher risk of experiencing nutritional problems than boys, especially anemia and Chronic Energy Deficiency (CED). The problem of adolescent girls' nutrition not only has an impact on decreasing immunity, fitness, and productivity but also has a more profound impact because of the reproductive function of women who will become pregnant and give birth to a baby, thus increasing the risk of maternal death, premature birth and low birth weight (LBW) (KEMENKES, 2018).

### **Vulnerability to violence: No safe place either at home or in the market**

The connection of girls to public spaces (often referred to as street children) experiences a culture that is vulnerable to various forms of violence. Girls in the teenage peer group have the habit of smoking and being close to alcoholic beverages. The guardian of child F told about friendships in the market environment for girls that endanger the child and her future.

*Guardian of child F: "I once allowed child F to go to the market, sis, when she came home, you know, she was drunk, drinking with her friends. Being offered a drink to a small child like this, don't you think?" (interview with Guardian of child F on December 9, 2024 at the informant's house) (Wali Anak F, 2024)*

Vulnerability to violence based on age is also experienced by younger girls because the tendency of childhood poverty is also positively related to various forms of delinquency (Jarjoura et al., 2002)). This statement highlights how childhood poverty not only impacts economic well-being but also increases vulnerability to violence, especially for younger girls. Complex economic factors can create an environment that is vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, or other forms of violence. In addition, the positive relationship between poverty and delinquency suggests that children who grow up in difficult conditions are more vulnerable to deviant behavior. This can be due to life pressures, lack of parental supervision, or limited access to good education and guidance.

*Child C: " I put the money in a pocket, then someone took it. Like they checked it, sis. My female friends also took it while I was sleeping." (interview with child C on December 4, 2024 at the informant's house) (Anak C, 2024).*

In the household environment, children also experienced verbal and physical abuse from parents/guardians. Initially, child F lived with his mother and often experienced physical violence, so he was taken to live with his grandmother. In his grandmother's house, child F also did not feel safe; child F was said to have experienced sexual violence by his own grandmother's boyfriend so that child F's aunt then pulled child F from the market and lived with her family in a house about 1 km from the market. Related to social exclusion, children who live in the market also experience discrimination from children who live in densely populated areas around *Kampung Tengah* and *Kandang Sapi*.

*Child A: 'They called me sis... tramp tramp. They said are the children of wholesale market so smelly. If mother do not work at wholesale market, do not eat as well. They called me pungent smell.' (interview with child A on December 4, 2024 at the informant's house) (Anak A, 2024).*

These children receive negative labels and are shunned by other children who are not active in the market. They are also bullied when they play or do activities in residential areas near the market. The government once prioritized green open spaces or parks to accommodate children playing. Still, these children do not use many existing playgrounds because they conflict with children from different socio-economic backgrounds.

### **Family Vulnerability: Crime and Unregistered Marriage**

ILO, (2011) revealed a common symptom that children of urban workers are in socially disadvantaged, alcoholic, or morally bankrupt families; destructive dynamics in relationships often accompany financial challenges. Children A, B, and C (siblings), for example, have not usually met their father since their biological mother died two years ago.

Children A and C sometimes live in the market, in the house of their married older brother, or in the home of a neighbor considered an older sibling or sister. Child C is cared for by mother Y, who is a friend of their biological mother.

*Child B: "C face resembles her mother, but our father has remarried unregistered marriage now". (interview with child B on December 4, 2024 at the informant's house) (Anak B, 2024)*

Child F has 2 siblings with 2 different fathers; during the interview, child F had never met his father since childhood. The family where Child F lives also has a vulnerable nuclear family issue.

*Aunt of F Child: "I take care of 3 younger siblings with 3 different fathers, sis. They all live here. My father and I also fight. There was once a letter that he had to sign, but he didn't want to. My father was caught and went to prison. It's been three years; this December, it will be three years." (interview with Aunt of child F on December 9, 2024 at the informant's house) (Bibi dari Anak F, 2024)*

The poverty of the girls families is intertwined with the misfortune of morally bankrupt family members.

*Child D: "When we were married, father had to be their guardian, and she could get a phone video call (VC) from prison" interview with Child D on December 4, 2024 at the informant's house) (Anak D, 2024).*

In addition to the family structure that is far from ideal, the adult male figure who is expected to be the family's supporter must also be held accountable for their criminal actions in prison. The family function is not functioning well. The risks experienced by girls who still have to depend on their biological parents for their future require children to maintain communication and provide support to their parents.

## **Child Marriage**

The problem of child marriage occurs not only because of poverty but is supported by tradition and religious interpretation. Saptandari, (2016) stated that child marriage is exacerbated by various policies that seem to legalize child marriage increasingly. Women and girls have a weak status in the family and society in the dominance of patriarchal ideology, so the rights of girls are increasingly challenging to fulfill. Two daughters, D and G, were married when they were 15 years old. Currently, they have a child aged +/- 1 year. These children were married underage and did not yet have an identity card (KTP), so the marriage was conducted as an unregistered marriage. The legalization of child marriage in a secret manner is wrapped in religious beliefs. A unregistered marriage reduces the functions

of the family and places women in a vulnerable situation where their rights are not fulfilled; even the state prohibits unregistered marriage because it does not have legal force, which makes it difficult for the state to provide protection (Pamuji, 2016).

Until the first child was born, children D and G had not registered the marriage with the government, so the children who were born also did not have an identity such as a birth certificate. The absence of marriage and birth documents will keep their children away from essential health services and also access to educational facilities when children start school age. In addition to child marriage being vulnerable to being victims of unilateral divorce, victims of sexual violence and pedophilia, victims of domestic violence, dropping out of school, and closed access to the world of work (Anshor, 2016), child marriage lowers risks to the next generation such as the cases of children D and G.

Data from the Central Statistics Agency shows that the number of child marriages in Indonesia has decreased in recent years. In 2021, 9.23% of women decided to marry before the age of 18. In the following year, 2022, the figure decreased to 8.06%, and in 2023, the percentage was 6.92%. Despite the decline, the number of child marriages in urban areas such as Jakarta is still quite high, especially in families with low levels of education. This confirms the findings of this study that economic and social factors greatly influence children's decisions to marry early (Susenas & Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024).

### **‘Hidden’ Work In The Domestic Sphere**

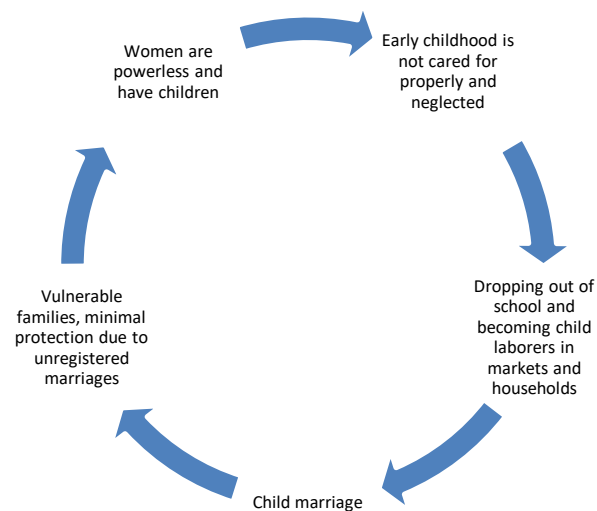
Children’s housework is not only socially and culturally accepted but is also viewed positively as a type of work appreciated in a patriarchal society. Children A and F do not live in their parent’s house but in the home of a family member or someone they know. These children have dropped out of school, so their time is not allocated to education; instead, it mainly helps with the care and household tasks where they live. Child A lives in the house of someone who has a baby who is a few weeks old. When the baby’s parents trade or are active in the market, Child A becomes a substitute caregiver. When the baby is returned to his parents, Child A returns to the stall and replaces her by selling again. Child A does not do much housework because he has been helping full-time in the market.

*Child A: "No way, I'm really tired from the market, I don't want to work anymore at home." (interview with Child A on December 4, 2024 at the informant's house) (Anak A, 2024).*

Child F is different from child because she is no longer active in the market. She helps more with housework and her aunt's salon business.

*Aunt of F Child "... I often hear people say what are you doing with your aunt, you're just being used as a servant. Now it's like this, sis, I don't want to make her a servant. She wants to live with me or her parents or anyone else, washing dishes is mandatory for her, She knows, She's a girl. So she wakes up and takes a shower (it's mandatory to take a shower) then wash the rice (cook rice) because that's what She does until later... if the floor is dirty, She sweeps it and mops it, and cleans the room by herself, she is the ones who sleep."* interview with Aunt of child F on December 9, 2024 at the informant's house) (Bibi dari Anak F, 2024)

The preservation of women's traditional roles and responsibilities, inside and outside the household, and the perception of domestic service as part of women's "apprenticeship" for adulthood and marriage also contribute to the continuation of child domestic work as a form of child labor (ILO, 2000). The marginalization of women in this region begins with the neglect of children's rights from childhood, including the right to education, health, and protection until adolescence and adulthood. Without support and intervention from outside parties, this phenomenon will repeat itself in the next generation. The cycle that can be described based on the experiences of girl child workers in this region is as follows:



**Chart 1. Cycle of Violation of Women's Rights Child Laborers**

The image illustrates the vicious cycle of poverty and social vulnerability experienced by girls. Here is an explanation of the flow:

1. Early childhood is not cared for properly and neglected  
Children who do not receive good care tend to experience various risks, including violence and exploitation.
2. Dropping out of school and becoming child laborers in markets and households  
Due to a lack of attention and economic support, children—especially girls—are forced to work to survive, so their right to education is neglected.

### 3. Child marriage

With limited access to education and the economy, many girls end up marrying at an early age as a form of "escaping" from poverty or social pressure.

### 4. Vulnerable families, minimal protection due to unregistered marriages

Many child marriages are carried out informally (unofficially) so that women and children in these families do not receive adequate legal, social, or economic protection.

### 5. Women are powerless and have children

Women who marry early often do not have the skills or education to be economically independent, so they return to poverty, and this cycle repeats itself to the next generation.

This image shows how poverty, lack of education, and child marriage are interrelated to create a cycle that is difficult to break.

## Discussion

The phenomenon of female child labor in the urban informal sector not only reflects economic hardships but also highlights the social complexities that exacerbate their cycle of poverty. In this study, data were collected through direct observation at Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta, in-depth interviews with child laborers and their families, and a literature review on child labor in the informal sector.

### Social and Economic Conditions of Female Child Laborers

Based on the research findings, the children working in the market were between 9 and 17 years old. Despite being of school age, most of them had dropped out of elementary school in grades 1-2 or had never attended formal education. Economic factors were the primary reason they worked, as they had to help their families with the income they earned. The tasks performed by these female child laborers generally involved light activities such as peeling onions, sorting chilies, or selling goods in small quantities. However, some of them also worked as *nyarang*, which involves collecting and selling leftover vegetables and fruits that are still consumable. Their earnings ranged from IDR 5,000 to IDR 15,000 per bundle of vegetables. Although the work may seem simple, it required them to be active in the market from night until early morning, leaving them exhausted and struggling to wake up for school.

As a result of this workload, these children tended to choose work over school. This situation was worsened by an environment that did not support their education. A teacher at a local elementary school even tried to track down one of the child laborers who had been



absent for nearly a year. The dilemma between school and the market was evident, where the market provided a more familiar environment and economic opportunities, even though it was exploitative.

### **Economic and Social Exploitation**

Besides working to meet their own needs, these female child laborers often handed over part of their earnings to their parents or guardians. In some cases, their earnings were used to buy household necessities, including cigarettes for their parents. Furthermore, these children were also used as objects in the distribution of social aid from the government and private organizations. Assistance meant to improve their welfare was often misused by their families. An interview with one of the guardians revealed that aid such as rice and clothing was resold, and there were even cases where families took loans using the children's identity documents as collateral.

### **Health Impacts and Environmental Conditions**

These female child laborers spent most of their time in unhygienic market environments. They frequently suffered from minor wounds and skin diseases due to the dirty and humid conditions of the market. Many of them walked around barefoot, making them vulnerable to infections and other health issues. More severe health cases were also discovered, including one child worker who shared that her older sibling had died from lung disease after falling ill in the market environment. Without adequate access to healthcare, their conditions became increasingly vulnerable to serious, potentially fatal diseases.

From a nutritional perspective, these female child laborers were also at risk of anemia and Chronic Energy Deficiency (CED). A study by the Indonesian Ministry of Health KEMENKES, (2018) indicated that adolescent girls have a higher risk of nutritional deficiencies compared to boys, affecting their immune system, productivity, and future pregnancy health.

### **Vulnerability to Violence and Sexual Exploitation**

Female child laborers in the market faced not only economic exploitation but also social and sexual violence. They were often subjected to bullying and discrimination by other children who did not work in the market. One informant confessed that she was frequently mocked as a "smelly market child" by other children in her neighborhood. More alarmingly, some of these girls were also exposed to gender-based violence. An interview

with one guardian revealed that her daughter once came home intoxicated after being offered alcohol by her peers in the market. This situation shows that the market was not just a workplace for these children but also an environment that increased their risk of harassment and exploitation. Violence was not limited to the market; it also occurred within their homes. These female child laborers were often victims of verbal and physical abuse by their parents or guardians. Some cases even indicated sexual abuse by family members or adults in their surroundings.

### **The Cycle of Poverty and Child Marriage**

Child marriage was one of the consequences of their vulnerable socio-economic conditions. This study found that two out of eight informants had married at the age of 15 and now had children. Their marriage was conducted through an unregistered marriage, leaving their children without legal identity documents such as birth certificates. A study by Pamuji, (2016) highlighted that unregistered child marriages placed women in increasingly vulnerable positions, both legally and in terms of access to healthcare and education for their children. This also heightened the risk of unilateral divorce, domestic violence, and limitations in securing employment in the future. This phenomenon perpetuates a recurring cycle: girls drop out of school, work in the informal sector, enter child marriages, and ultimately become trapped in poverty due to a lack of economic and educational opportunities.

### **Domestic Work as an Invisible Form of Exploitation**

In addition to working in the market, these female child laborers were also burdened with domestic responsibilities at home. Some of them lived with foster families or relatives, where they were required to perform household chores as part of their "duties" as girls. An interview with one guardian revealed that her foster daughter had to wake up early, cook, clean the house, and take care of her younger siblings before being allowed to go to the market. Household chores were often not regarded as exploitation but rather as "training" for their future roles as wives and mothers. According to the International Labour Organization ILO, (2000), the normalization of domestic roles for women from an early age contributes to their marginalization in education and economic participation. Without external intervention, this cycle will continue to repeat itself across generations.

## **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

Based on the findings, it is evident that female child laborers in the urban informal sector experience economic, social, and health exploitation, which further exacerbates their cycle of poverty. Structural poverty, social exclusion, and cultural norms that do not favor women worsen their conditions.

To address this issue, several policy recommendations can be implemented:

### **a. Increasing Access to Education**

- Implementing flexible schooling programs for child laborers.
- Providing special scholarships for girls from impoverished families.

### **b. Strengthening Social Protection**

- Enforcing stricter supervision of child labor in the informal sector.
- Ensuring that social assistance is family-based and not dependent on children's economic contributions.

### **c. Preventing Child Marriage**

- Establishing stricter regulations on the minimum legal age for marriage.
- Providing free birth registration services to ensure children have official identities.

With more inclusive and child-centered policy interventions, it is hoped that the cycle of poverty trapping female child laborers in the informal sector can be broken.

## **Conclusion**

This study highlights the vulnerabilities of female child laborers in the urban informal sector, particularly at Kramat Jati Wholesale Market, Jakarta. They not only experience economic and social exploitation but are also trapped in an intergenerational cycle of poverty. Limited access to education, poor working conditions, as well as health and violence risks are the main factors exacerbating their situation. Additionally, the practice of child marriage within their communities further hinders their chances of escaping poverty. To address this issue, several policy recommendations can be proposed:

1. Enhancing Access to Education: Implementing flexible schooling programs for child laborers and providing special scholarships for girls from low-income families.

2. Strengthening Social Protection: Enforcing stricter supervision of child labor in the informal sector and ensuring that social assistance is family-based rather than dependent on children's economic contributions.
3. Preventing Child Marriage: Establishing stricter regulations on the minimum legal age for marriage and providing free birth registration services to ensure children have official identities.

This study has several limitations, such as the limited number of participants and the specific geographic scope. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the dynamics of female child laborers in the informal sector across different urban areas. Future studies could also adopt a quantitative approach to provide a broader picture of the socio-economic impacts of female child laborers in the informal sector.

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