

## THE CAPABILITY TO 'HAVE IT ALL': EXPLORING HOW SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS AFFECT MARRIED WOMEN DIRECT SELLERS' LIVES

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**ABSTRACT:** The 'have it all' ideology has proven challenging; thus, many married women turn to direct selling. While offering easiness, recent studies highlight its potential exploitation, particularly among low-income individuals. This study addresses the scarcity of qualitative research on married women in Indonesia's beauty industry who engage in direct selling, examining how socioeconomic conditions impact their lives. Through snowball sampling and in-depth interviews among 16 married women direct sellers, the findings indicated that socioeconomic status enhances their ability to balance multiple roles. However, success is not assured, regardless of initial conditions. These findings are pivotal for policymakers and practitioners seeking to establish a fairer, more empowering environment for women.

**Keywords:** Direct Seller; Married Women; Socioeconomic, Organizational Behavior

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## INTRODUCTION

Married women frequently face a high burden in the workforce due to societal expectations and family responsibilities. These women are expected to prioritize their household task rather than their careers, impacted by cultural norms that define "a good mother as the one who stays home with her children" (Schaner & Das, 2016). Following this expectation, many women put off joining the labor force until their kids are older (Schaner & Das, 2016). They then find they are limited in their career options and need help to get ahead as much financially (Hays, 1996; Rees, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges by increasing unemployment rates (Statista, 2022) and placing additional burdens on family life.

In this context, direct selling became one of the best ways to engage in economic activity. Direct selling involves selling activities conducted directly from the direct seller to the customer through online or offline channels (Direct Selling Association, n.d). The flexibility and low capital requirements of direct selling make it a viable option for them to balance work and domestic responsibilities. This compilation of work-from-home allows women to set their schedules and integrate work tasks with household responsibilities, aligning well with the "have it all" ideology that pressures women to excel at home and in their careers.

Additionally, direct selling provides key advantages that resonate with women looking to join or return to the workforce. Such benefits may include capital, business structures, training, earning potential, empowerment, social capital, and life skills development (Crittenden & Bliton, 2019). Cross-cultural and domestic research on direct sellers reveals that women excel at building social networks (D'Antonio, 2019). Avon, Tupperware, and Mary Kay are some companies that already do so; they take advantage of women's skills to sell and spread success stories of products among their communities (D'Antonio, 2019). Direct selling encourages consumer behavior through feminist products such as cooking utensils, wallets, clothing, and beauty products (Williams, S., & Bemiller, 2011). These products are often marketed through personal stories and testimonials, creating a sense of connection and trust between the seller and the customer.

Although such a model is helpful on multiple fronts, the sustainability of direct selling can sometimes be questioned as a long-term solution for women's employment; there are concerns about its potentially exploitative tool. According to a comprehensive study conducted by Rees (2021), which included interviews with 27 married women who were direct sellers at Rodan + Fields, the company intentionally molds the women's ideology to serve as an exploitative tool, maximizing the performance and productivity of married women in their roles. As an exploitative tool, direct selling often requires significant personal investment and effort, with success heavily dependent on recruiting new sellers rather than just selling products.

In addition, to recruit new direct sellers as many as possible, prospective direct sellers are usually promised by the company that by becoming direct sellers, the quality of their family life will improve (McCaughy & French, 2001;

D'Antonio, 2019). This promise tempts direct sellers, but their ignorance of what will happen to them will become a significant burden for the company. Moreover, the company also made married women feel anxiety, guilt, and failure (Guendouzi, 2006) when they could not balance the two. Based on the preceding description, women's ideology has attracted the researcher's attention to continue exploring the extent to which companies can fulfill promises to fulfill this ideology. Along with the rapid development of technology, this ideology is getting stronger (Rees, 2021), where women can balance work and family through smartphones and internet networks.

During the pandemic, unlike other industries, the beauty industry remains profitable. According to this condition, data from the World Federation Statistical Database 2018-2021 (2022) shows that beauty products are among the most profitable direct-selling products. Research by ŚCieszko, E., Budny, E., Rotsztejn, H., & Erkiert-Polguj (2021) found that increased internet use increased people's knowledge and interest in facial care during lockdown. Based on these data, it can be known that direct sellers from the beauty industries have a crucial role in increasing profit during the pandemic. In Indonesia, awareness of facial care and the desire to appear youthful are growing, influenced by the patriarchal culture (Intan, T., & Abdullah, 2021). This trend is inseparable from the construction of patriarchal culture in Indonesia: the desire to be seen, the demands of the social environment, and the desire to always appear youthful (Intan, T., & Abdullah, 2021). As one of the developing countries that still requires research (Crittenden, V. L., Crittenden, W. F., & Ajjan, 2018), Indonesia is a country that has enormous potential for the beauty product market (Kemenperin, 2020). Therefore, this research will focus on the beauty industry in Indonesia.

Research on direct selling has involved various aspects, which include elaborating on history and the future (D'Antonio, 2019), its relation to the gig economy (Gleim et al., 2019), the advantages of women in this industry (Crittenden & Bliton, 2019), the benefits direct selling (Peterson et al., 2019), the need to build motivation (Gupta, 2022), and the use of women's ideology for corporate profits (Pearce, 2023; Rees, 2021; Wrenn & Waller, 2021). Nonetheless, the above literature still requires further research and a more profound understanding to develop a more comprehensive experience. Consistent with this, the previous research on direct sellers indicated that exploratory study still needs to be improved and that there is a need for research on the dynamics of the life of direct sellers (Khusainova et al., 2018). Moreover, without the latest research regarding the dynamics of life experienced by female direct sellers, researchers will find it difficult to provide reliable advice to companies regarding the best policies and ways to manage their direct sellers, which will ultimately increase the profits they earn. Therefore, to obtain in-depth results regarding the experiences and challenges of direct sellers, exploratory research is needed, one of which can be carried out by conducting in-depth interviews.

The Direct Selling Association (2017) found that 22% of people involved in direct selling were Hispanic, compared to 18% of Hispanics in the United States (US) population. Hispanics earn more net income from direct selling and report higher satisfaction with their experiences than non-Hispanic whites

(Direct Selling Association, 2017). These findings suggest that direct sellers' motivations may differ according to the intersectionality of class and race. De Casanova (2011) found that Ecuadorian women do not see their identity as a struggle between paid work and family life but as a fluid, interconnected bond. Interestingly, cross-cultural and domestic research on direct selling consultants reveals that women's ability to gather and build social networks is integral to consumption and sales success. Rees (2021) states that further research is still needed to discuss the challenges of socioeconomic conditions in dealing with exploitation by this company, especially since the arrival of the pandemic, which has devastated many Indonesian family economies.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by incorporating socioeconomic factors into understanding the experiences and challenges faced by married women direct sellers in Indonesia. The research question is, 'How do the socioeconomic conditions of married women direct seller shape their ability to carry out multiple roles in family and work life effectively?'. The paper relies on data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 16 married women who worked as direct sellers in Indonesia, focusing on the beauty Industry. This paper contributes to the existing literature on selling and the challenges married women face in balancing responsibilities. By focusing on the beauty industry in Indonesia, the paper provides a unique perspective on the socioeconomic impact of direct selling on married women's lives. The findings of this research can inform policymakers and direct selling companies on how to create a more equitable and empowering environment for women. The next part will elaborate on the previous literature associated with the issue.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

### *Direct Selling*

Direct selling is selling goods/services through direct sellers, usually alongside a fixed sales location (Direct Selling Association, n.d.). In the 1900s, direct selling was defined as face-to-face sales between one person and another; now, direct sellers have utilized digital technology to increase efficiency (Rees, 2021) and expand market reach (Waight, 2019). Therefore, direct selling includes sales made through demonstrations, activities, and other personal contact arrangements and sales via the Internet from one person to another. Direct sellers can work from their homes via social media to sell directly to customers who are the product's end users. After consumers buy a product, direct sellers invite the consumer to become a direct seller to earn additional income and embed their brand in the consumer's lifestyle (D'Antonio, 2019). This invitation allows them to independently own and manage a team to achieve their goals. Therefore, apart from having their team, direct sellers have two types of superiors: upline (direct sellers who oversee other direct sellers) and company management. The dominance of women in the direct selling industry, with a percentage of 75% (Direct Selling Association, 2020), is a form of company confidence in women's ability to gather and build social networks (D'Antonio, 2019). Thus, the next section will discuss the dynamics in women's lives that encourage them to enter the direct selling industry.

*The Ideology of "Have It All"*

The "have it all" ideology has led many women to try balancing work and family responsibilities, but this has proven difficult. Anne-Marie Slaughter mentioned this ideology in the article "Why Women Still Cannot Have It All." This article emphasizes women's persistent difficulties in finding a work-life balance and asks for societal reform to foster an atmosphere that is more egalitarian and encouraging for women to achieve their personal and professional lives (Slaughter, 2012). Most married women enter the labor market after their children are older due to social norms emphasizing that "a good mother stays at home with their children" (Schaner & Das, 2016). The cultural contradictions of motherhood (punishment of working mothers) seem to complicate a woman's experience of motherhood (Blair-Loy, 2003; Hays, 1996) and can lead to feelings of anxiety, guilt, and failure (Guendouzi, 2006) when they cannot balance two.

Female workers, especially those married and with children, will automatically have work and family roles. These multiple roles can affect married women's lives positively and negatively. If their work can support family stability, this will have a positive impact, and vice versa; if it cannot, it will have a negative effect (Utaminingsih, 2017). Regarding task distribution in households, there are significant differences between the roles of men and women, especially the role of women as mothers at home; this belief still strongly influences many areas of Indonesia (Schaner & Das, 2016). The patriarchal view states that women have no right to lead the family, must obey the men, and are assigned to care for the household. Therefore, working will make women more vulnerable in the family (Khoiriyah, 2020). This belief makes women in the family unable to make their own decisions and tend to agree with men in family decisions.

To have "all," not a few of them choose direct selling. Women's motivation in this industry is often centered on the need for flexibility in work while maintaining their family responsibilities (Biggart, 1989; D'Antonio, 2019; Mullaney, Jamie; Shope, 2012). Direct selling allows them to obtain and carry out several roles simultaneously because the working time and place are flexible (Crittenden & Bliton, 2019). This model will enable women to utilize these resources through entrepreneurship, where they have more control over their work (Biggart, 1989). In addition to flexible time, direct selling has also given them something they might not have gotten before, such as capitalization opportunities, formal structures, mentoring, income, self-efficacy, social capital, and various life skills (Crittenden & Bliton, 2019). Based on research conducted by Leach (1984) in D'Antonio (2019), including these women has broken the stigma of women who are often identified as very religious and dependent and tend to take care of the house. According to studies conducted on married women who participated in direct selling, these women were frequently tempted by promises made by corporations that the things they were selling would bring benefits and enhancements to the lives of their families (D'Antonio, 2019; Mccaughey & French, 2001).

Wrenn's (2022) investigation into Multi-Level Marketing (MLM) systems highlights how the MLM model effectively shifts costs, including overhead expenses like training, recruitment, and supervision, from the company to individual distributors (Wrenn, 2022). In practice, these efforts have been well received by married women because direct selling has opened up opportunities for them to be able to balance work with family (D'Antonio, 2019; Rees, 2021; Wrenn, 2022; Wrenn & Waller, 2021). In their journey, women have succeeded in showing their ability to make a significant contribution to the world of direct selling (Pearce, 2023). However, Rees (2021) found that companies towards women's direct sellers carried out elements of exploitation through women's ideology (Pearce, 2023; Rees, 2021; Wrenn & Waller, 2021). This element of exploitation has become increasingly visible with the development of technology (Rees, 2021), which has increased flexibility by eliminating the boundaries between work and family. Therefore, it is crucial to know the experiences and challenges married women's direct sellers feel regarding using their ideology. The following section will discuss the socioeconomic constructions of women as direct sellers.

#### *Married Women's Socioeconomic Constructions as Direct Seller*

Direct selling has become a shortcut for those who want to become entrepreneurs but are constrained by funds and innovation (D'Antonio, 2019). Cross-cultural and domestic research on direct sellers reveals that women's ability to gather and build social networks is integral to successful consumption and selling (D'Antonio, 2019). The literature also shows that women's actions as direct sellers are influenced by social structures that shape consumption lifestyles, social relationships, and gender roles in the family. In his research, Biggart (1989) evaluated direct selling strategies as an economic actor shaped by the structure of capitalism. He argued that the direct selling is the opposite of the rational and bureaucratic model of capitalism. He stated that even though it has an impersonality, this method is still accepted by many people because it creates community relationships. Community relationships can be created through personalized work relationships and a caring work environment. These two conditions have made many women direct seller/distributor executives feel comfortable giving and receiving. Direct selling executives understand that there is economic power in relationships and social networks in recruiting. This power allows women to utilize their entrepreneurial abilities, where they have greater control over their work (Biggart, 1989).

Mullaney & Shope (2012) found that "social imperatives trump economic imperatives in direct selling and blur the lines between work and pleasure." However, the financial results of this mix of work and fun are bleak. According to the Direct Sales Association, the median annual income for direct sales consultants in 2011 was \$2,400 (Collamer, 2013). This description results from data showing that 89% of direct sellers work part-time, and most work under 10 hours a week (Collamer, 2013). In line with this, William Keep (marketing researcher) reports that most people who join multi-level marketing businesses lose money, and most direct sellers are women who stay at home and need

additional income (Parini, 2018). Critically, the explanation above needs to remember the impact of socioeconomics on the lives of married women direct sellers. Considering the importance of the socioeconomic lives of direct sellers in the explanation above, this research will fill in the literature in Rees (2021) to explore the impact of socioeconomic conditions on married women's lives as direct sellers.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method with an exploratory approach was employed. Exploratory research aims to provide insight and understanding of the problems faced (Malhotra, 2010). This design will help the author achieve the research objective of exploring the impact of socioeconomic conditions on the personal lives of married women direct sellers. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews with 16 married women direct sellers in Indonesia from October 2022 to March 2023, conducted using snowball sampling. This amount is sufficient for data saturation (Guest et al., 2006). The potential limitations of relying solely on one method are mitigated through source (participant) triangulation (Denzin, 2012). This study employed participant triangulation by engaging various roles within the direct selling industry, including resellers, agents, and distributors. This diversified approach is anticipated to enhance the comprehensiveness of the findings, facilitating thorough exploration, validation, or rebuttal of the information provided (Archibald, 2015). The author generally divided participants' socioeconomic status into groups 1 and 2 (see Table 1).

Table 1. Research Participant

Participant Number	Group	Brand	Position	Marriage Status	No. of Children	Other Profession
1	1	MS Glow	Agent	Divorced	3	Retailer
2	1	NUSkin	Ex-Agent	Married	3	-
3	1	Oriflame	Director	Married	2	-
4	1	Shineskin	Reseller	Married	2	MUA
5	2	Oriflame	Beauty Influencer	Married	4	Teacher
6	1	Oriflame	Director	Divorced	2	-
7	1	Shineskin	Distributor	Married	2	-
8	1	Oriflame	Manager	Married	-	-
9	2	Oriflame	Director	Married	2	-
10	2	MS Glow	Reseller	Married	3	-
11	1	Shineskin	Agent	Married	3	Beauty Shop
12	1	SR12	Distributor	Married	-	-
13	2	SR12	Reseller	Married	2	Teacher
14	1	Oriflame	Director	Married	3	State Civil Apparatus
15	2	Oriflame	Ex-manager	Married	3	Teacher Assistant
16	1	Expert	Agent	Married	1	Principal, Lecturer Assistant

Group 1 is the term for those with a fairly good socioeconomic status, while group 2 is for those with a poor socioeconomic status. This classification is

weighed from all the information provided by participants during the data collection process. Social conditions are obtained from education, the environment they live in, and the mindset they show. Meanwhile, economic conditions are obtained from the reasons they work, their income (both as direct sellers and others), and their partner's ability to meet daily needs. Therefore, group 2 needs more income than group 1. To keep the participants' privacy, the author will not mention the names of the participants. The participant's name is replaced by the participant code (P). Therefore, the naming format is "P + participant number," for example, P1, P2, P3, etc.

Due to snowball sampling, 7 participants (around 43%) came from Oriflame (one of the leading multinational direct-selling brands in the beauty industry). Participants were in the age range of 28 - 46 years, with the majority still with their husbands and already having children. Apart from that, some of the participants in this study have other jobs outside their roles as mothers and direct sellers. In terms of data analysis, the author used the three stages of coding proposed by Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1990), which include open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Seidel & Urquhart, 2013). The next part will discuss the research results.

## RESULTS

After analyzing the coding result, the author found five main themes: the need for flexibility, claims to contribute to the family economy, domestic responsibility, and status privilege. These themes are based on participants' life cycles as the direct sellers found during the data collection, starting from why they chose direct sellers, their experiences in direct selling, and anything they do to achieve success.

### *Need for Flexibility*

This research has found that with their multiple roles, many participants still look for more flexible work, regardless of their socioeconomic status. This situation follows what was conveyed by P9, where she chose to work as a direct seller to continue carrying out her duties as a mother.

*"I needed to work. How do I do it? I have small children, so how I work, have an income, but do not abandon the children" - P9, G2.*

P9's statement reflects her desire to find a balance between work and responsibilities as a mother, where she wants to meet the family's financial needs while caring for her child. Apart from her desire to fulfill the family's needs, P9 strongly desires her income, even without adequate resources (capital and expertise). Her motivation was influenced by her background before marriage, where she was used to working hard as a factory worker and selling *nasi uduk*.

Supporting P9's statement, P3 stated that flexibility motivated her to become a direct seller. Before becoming a direct seller, P3 was an employee at a multinational company with a reasonably large salary. However, when she entered the period of becoming a mother, she looked for work that could be done from home because she wanted to be directly involved in her child's growth.

*"I want an income like my previous job, but with flexible time" - P3, G1.*



P3's statement shows that apart from flexibility, her background as an employee of a multinational company has motivated P3 to pursue direct seller work by encouraging her to earn an income equivalent to her previous salary.

All participants stated that working as a direct seller has time flexibility but requires good time management skills. When compared to jobs that do not have working hours, the freedom of working time in direct seller jobs requires participants to be able to manage their own working time. Direct selling allows participants to have freedom of choice about how they will run their business. This freedom can take the form of the freedom to determine how much work they want to do, when it is most suitable for them, and how much time they want to spend working. In other words, as direct sellers, participants have complete control over their work schedules and priorities. They can adjust their work schedule according to personal needs, including time for family, rest time, or other essential activities. This flexibility allows them to fit their work into their lives without being bound by regular work hours or rigid rules.

As time passes and the position of direct seller increases, the workload felt by participants will increase. For example, the more their position improves, the more targets they will get. Increasing this target then requires a greater allocation of time and work than before, as was stated by P2, who is an ex-agent.

*"Maybe it is like snowballing. In the first year, second year, and third year, those who are busy for a long time, right, do not have time anymore for family" - P2, G1.*

The statement above is P2's experience when she was an agent and spent her time. During the interview process, she also explained how the company succeeded in getting her to follow the behavioral patterns they expected through various variations of prizes that increased at each level. The prize can also be in the form of a target that must be achieved. Although providing these gifts has improved performance significantly, it has eliminated the meaning of flexibility itself.

*"But we are chasing targets, so we do not feel flexible" - P2, G1.*

Furthermore, P2 explained that the loss of flexibility was caused by her desire to work on getting rewards. This ambition ultimately made her sacrifice time to rest and fulfill her role as a housewife. Furthermore, this ambition has made her work beyond regular office hours; even on holidays, she has to participate in various training activities as a direct seller. In this case, the company system and upline determine the time direct sellers allocate to work. A similar statement was also stated by P7, who is a distributor.

*"As long as we still have work, even if we have employees, we still divide our time like that. It is just that it is more flexible if we have our own" - P7, G1.*

As the highest level holder in the direct seller position, P7 said that this job had indeed taken up her time, even though, in this case, she had employees who helped make her work more manageable. As a distributor, P7 must ensure that the team (direct sellers under her auspices) and her employees can achieve the company's targets. Target is the determinant in direct selling; therefore, distributors must allocate time, thought, and energy to maintain their position.

From the findings above, flexibility in direct selling does exist, but that does not mean they have unlimited freedom. The presence of flexibility has required married women direct sellers to manage their time independently as a result of the absence of direct supervision in the direct selling system. Apart from the need for flexibility in carrying out their roles, participants also have the demand to contribute to the family economy.

#### *Claims of Household's Economic Contribution*

The work flexibility provided in the direct selling system has provided opportunities for married women direct sellers to carry out various roles, as stated by P5:

*"I do much work, caring for my parents and children. I also teach in an MI" - P5, G2.*

From this statement, it can be seen that P5 has many roles, both as a child who takes care of her parents, as a mother who takes care of her children, as a worker who helps meet the family's living needs by being a teacher at Islamic elementary school/*Madrasah Ibtid'iyah* (MI) and a direct seller.

Apart from P5's statement, which states the need for flexibility to carry out their role elsewhere, some participants also have other jobs besides direct sellers. Referring to the division of the two previous groups, most of the participants from group 2 had more demands to help meet their family's needs. Therefore, many have other jobs, such as P5, P13, and P15, who work as teachers.

*"It is just for snacks if you volunteer in an Islamic boarding school" - P15, G2.*

The phrase "just enough for snacks" conveyed by P15 indicated how little money she earned from volunteering as a teacher at an Islamic boarding school. This inadequacy made her pursue direct sales work to meet her living needs. Apart from P15, similar expressions were also expressed by P5 and P13. This matter illustrates that teaching is a vulnerable job because there is no welfare guarantee; therefore, they must look for another job to make ends meet.

Furthermore, by looking at the positions they have obtained, the demands of many roles have limited their steps in direct selling. This limitation happened because carrying out many roles requires the allocation of time, thought, and energy, ultimately reducing the direct seller's performance in carrying out their work. It can be seen from their position in the company in the middle (agent) to lower (reseller) position range.

In contrast to group 2, group 1, who have other jobs, tend to make direct selling of their side job to get additional income, as expressed by P4, who has a primary job as MUA (Make-Up Artist):

*"Reseller is a side job. It is just for fun with prizes" - P4, G1.*

The statement "just for fun" can be considered as the absence of demands in the work so that she can carry out direct seller work according to her desire. This lack of demand is because her husband can still meet the family's needs, and she already has a job as an MUA with quite promising income potential. Apart from indicating a lack of demands, this expression can also be interpreted as a need for further intention to pursue this job. This lack of further intention

ultimately resulted in her remaining in the reseller position (the lowest position of a direct seller) for five years.

In general, the demand to contribute to the family economy is closely related to participants' socioeconomic conditions, which can change over time, as expressed by P7:

*"My husband works on projects, so in 2014, the project was finished, and I finally started to get serious in direct selling" - P7, G1*

The quoted statement explains the changes in P4's activities in her work as a direct seller. In 2014, P7's husband had no project to work on, so the family's economy was disrupted. The family economy was disrupted because, at that time, P7's husband's job was the family's primary income source. In this case, P7 was moved to meet the family's needs by starting to work as a direct seller. Furthermore, P7 added that women will pursue direct selling when faced with economic needs.

*"If they need it, they do not need to be motivated" - P7, G1.*

The statement conveyed by P7 was her opinion regarding the triggers for women's success in direct sales work, starting from the economic limitations they experience. This opinion is based on her personal experience and her team management experience. With economic limitations, a person will be motivated to put more effort into their work. However, it is essential to remember that perceived economic limitations are subjective for direct sellers.

### *Domestic Responsibilities*

The requirement to contribute to the family economy only includes most participants' responsibility for their domestic affairs. Domestic responsibilities are the obligations they must carry out as mothers and wives. Regarding domestic responsibilities that must be borne, group 2 tends to have a more significant burden than group 1, as is the case with child care, as conveyed by P15. By taking care of her children independently and contributing to the economy, she began to feel very tired.

*"It is relaxing when the child is still 2. Only when the child is 3, Masya Allah, there is always housework" - P15, G2*

P15 admitted that she could not manage her time between her job as a direct seller and her household obligations when she had three children, especially since her children were not far apart in age and were still childhood age. The phrase "Masha Allah" she uttered can be interpreted as a difficulty she can no longer bear. Looking deeper, she worked as a direct seller and a teacher at an Islamic boarding school.

*"Online webinars were only available during Covid, even at night, so there was a time conflict. Previously, they were offline in Sudirman" - P15, G2.*

Moreover, the demand for online webinars at night during the pandemic has caused conflict with her responsibilities in caring for her children. She also said that the conflict she experienced had caused her to feel guilty towards her child. Apart from that, her statement stating that there is an offline webinar in the Sudirman area in the city center is an expression that shows the costs that must be paid to attend the webinar. Attending a webinar is not an obligation.

Still, considering that her position at that time was that of a manager who had to set an excellent example to the direct sellers under her, she felt that the webinar was a form of her responsibility as a manager. These difficulties ultimately made her resign as a direct seller of beauty products, even though she had achieved a reasonably good position. Despite this, she remains a direct seller of other products because she needs targets to achieve and activities she must carry out.

This experience is quite different from what was experienced by group 1 in terms of taking care of the household. Most of them were assisted by household assistants or other parties who helped. Having this helpful party has given them more opportunities to balance work and household, which means they feel the opportunity for a positive experience in direct seller work will be greater.

*"I also happen to have a household member staying overnight, so if I have a meeting outside, I can arrange it" - P3, G1.*

In addition, parenting patterns are very influential; P3 was previously a private team member who rarely had free time with her children at home. After she decided to become a direct seller, her son's response was excellent because he found his mother always at home, even though she was still working.

*"If it is my first child, maybe he feels it when I go to work, well then I am at home, he is pleased" - P3, G1.*

On the other hand, participants who had never worked before focused on home life, as stated by P2. She ended up with deep trauma and inactivity in direct selling due to guilt triggered by changes in her children's character.

*"I never left my children for weeks before, never even overnight. Up to a week, when I come home, they do not miss me" - P2, G1*

This situation was felt when she received a reward for going abroad, which her company fully funded for two weeks for her achievement. This change in the children's character makes her worry about not fulfilling her obligations as a mother. As an illustration, P2 has three children, each of whom is looked after by a household assistant, and she works for an MLM company that requires targets to be met to maintain and improve a position. Moreover, the company system where she works has succeeded in spending her time with her family. These activities include daily, weekly, and monthly activities. Of these three activities, participants admitted that they were always asked about targets, which ultimately added to the burden on their minds.

*"I am always asked about targets, so it seems like I am bored too, right?" - P2, G1.*

Overall, it was found that although each participant was responsible for caring for domestic affairs, group 2 was more charged with doing it independently than group 1. Therefore, group 1 tended to have a more positive experience than group 2.

### *Status Privilege*

The findings suggest that the high socioeconomic status that is utilized can make it easier for married women to achieve success in direct selling. This ease is shown by most of Group 1, which has succeeded in direct selling. This condition can be observed in those already in the upper-middle position.

*"My experience as a teacher makes me happy to meet new people and build my team using the online system, which is beneficial for my direct seller job" - P8, K1.*

Before being a direct seller, P8 was a teacher at a private school. Her experience as a teacher has made her life as a direct seller easier, which requires meeting people, making connections, looking for potential customers, and coaching teams online. Apart from that, group 1 will benefit from marketing products. They can market products efficiently because they have support from the social environment even though the prices they offer are pretty high, as said by P6, a former marketing manager at a travel company.

*"After I joined, it turned out that many people were entrusting orders to me, for example, I could sell a lot like this, why didn't I just take it seriously" - P6, G1.*

At the start of selling a product, the people who buy it are usually close people around them. Apart from having greater ease in selling products, for group 1, business capital is not an obstacle; the difference for group 2, as mentioned by P10, who often experienced difficulties in terms of capital:

*"The biggest challenge is capital. As housewives, we only rely on our husband's income" - P10, G2.*

In doing her job as a direct seller, her capital only comes from her husband's monthly salary, so her capital is limited. If we look at it from the company system, the company where she works is a wholesale company. As mentioned in the previous section, purchasing goods from wholesale companies establishes a system that the more goods they buy, the cheaper the product price they will get. With this system, every direct seller will be encouraged to purchase products in large quantities. However, a scheme like this does not affect the direct seller group, which still has minimal capital due to its inability to buy large quantities. Furthermore, this incident not only occurs in company systems that implement wholesale but is also faced by direct sellers using MLM company systems.

*"The problem is the capital because the capital is quite large for a tupo. The price is Rp. 870,000,00, for me, that is expensive" - P15, G2*

Even though the company's system prohibits using personal capital for selling, the lack of understanding of consumers accustomed to buying traditionally (paying for goods after seeing the physical goods in person) has required P15 to use her money. This consumer behavior manifests the social conditions that must be faced by P15, where consumers still need to understand the systematics of stock-free shopping implemented by the P15 company. The term "tupo" conveyed by P15 is an abbreviation of "tutup poin / close points," which means the minimum points that must be achieved to maintain her direct seller position. For P15, the nominal amount of money to get closing points is still quite large for the current economic situation.

From the explanation above, it is clear that socioeconomics provides convenience to participants who are in reasonably good socioeconomic conditions. In this case, one of group 2 (P9) further explained that socioeconomic background was not a barrier for her to succeed in this job, demonstrated through her achievements in successfully occupying a reasonably high position as a direct

seller, even though she has a poor socioeconomic background. If we delve deeper into her background, P9 is a former Nasi Uduk seller and factory worker. An illustration of the economic situation she is experiencing can be seen from her statement below:

*"The beginning of a career as a direct seller is the struggle. So I could not obey the child, even eat meatballs" - P9, G2.*

Her inability to buy the food that her child wanted shows how difficult her economic situation was at the beginning of her career as a direct seller. Her economic crisis is also demonstrated by her inability to buy a laptop and Internet equipment to support her career as a direct seller. Based on her educational background, she is a high school graduate who needs to gain expertise in technology. The following is a quote from the expression conveyed by P9:

*"The challenge is learning. I cannot do it, hahaha. When I could not open the website, I cried. I do not know how to copy-paste, even though it is just copy-paste" - P9, G2.*

P9 statement showed her frustration and challenge in learning new skills when using the technology. This self-frustration is formed because she has no background in technology, so she can not operate the laptop features, even though the primary task is copy-paste. P9's inexpertise in using the technology is also felt by most participants from group 2 because of their socioeconomic limitations. Technology is a supporting ability to achieve success in direct seller work, considering that most marketing and training is done online. This research found that if participants want to achieve success, they must reach every market, which they can only get if they use technology. Moreover, some companies require their direct seller to use technology in doing their job because the use of technology will make their job easier, as mentioned by P3:

*"The online business system is completely provided in the application, so it is effortless" - P3, G1.*

P3 expressed her satisfaction with the integrated business support provided by her company. Her satisfaction was based on her experience of the system being easy to use and apply. She feels at ease because she is skilled in using technology. However, it should be noted that not all participants are experienced in using technology at the start of their careers. In contrast to participants who understand technology, participants who are unfamiliar with technology tend to choose companies that make it easier for them in the sales process.

Although most of the group 2 participants felt unfamiliar with technology, technological unfamiliarity is not only experienced by them but also by almost all participants who are in their fourth year of age, as stated by P7:

*"I cannot make Facebook, I cannot make Instagram, email, my husband made it" - P7, G1*

P7 statement described the efforts she made to face the challenges. However, compared with P9, the difference comes from their company background. P9 came from an MLM company, which allowed her to receive technology training and guidance from Upline and the company. Meanwhile, P7 comes from an emerging wholesale company with immature systems. This system requires P7 to learn various things independently and is responsible for

training all direct sellers under its auspices. P7's statement also indicated her husband's support to help in doing her job. Besides P7, P12 also gets full support from her husband. This condition occurred because they called them "couplepreneurs," who do direct sales work with their partners. The excellent support given by their partner has brought them to the highest position of a direct seller, namely as a distributor. These couplepreneurs are not at the beginning of their career. Their selves start their job, and then, in the process, they become couplepreneurs. It is worth noting that other direct sellers may not feel lucky to have received excellent help from their partners.

However, it needs to be emphasized that whether participants come from companies with less mature systems or mature companies, direct sellers who are uplines are still responsible for ensuring that their team can understand and apply the sales systematics implemented in their company. As stated by P6, who is an upline:

*"Challenge for me is when I meet people who are difficult to use the online system, while all Oriflame system is using online" - P6, G1*

P6 is a direct seller that comes from a company with a mature system. From the expression P6 above, it can be seen that even though the company system (including training) has been designed, the upline is still responsible for ensuring that their downline understands and practices the company's systematics. A good practice will ultimately increase the upline's opportunities to achieve the targets. Therefore, to ensure this, uplines are often charged with personal training, especially for direct sellers unfamiliar with technology. This notion implies that companies usually forget to give participants the rights needed to succeed because they are considered partners. As a result, they have to bear the burden of investment from the various learning and capital they spend without any certainty of success in this job.

## DISCUSSION

This study revealed that married women's socioeconomic condition will enhance their ability to balance multiple roles effectively. This research has provided the view that direct sellers' socioeconomic conditions will influence their experiences and the challenges they will experience. Married women's direct sellers often face multiple roles between family life and work. They handle household and family work as a mother, wife, or family member. On the other hand, direct sellers must play an active role in selling directly to online and offline consumers. In doing their multiple roles, this research found that they need flexibility in carrying out their various roles. Therefore, work flexibility is the main reason for most married women's direct sellers to start their careers as direct sellers. This research has strengthened previous studies, which stated that flexibility is one of the biggest motivations for mothers to become direct sellers (Biggart, 1989; D'Antonio, 2019; Mullaney & Shope, 2012). Just like previous research, this happens because, through flexibility, married women can obtain and carry out roles at the same time (Crittenden & Bliton, 2019), especially now that most of the direct seller's work is done through advertisements that they display on social media status. Additionally, based on the explanation of the

findings above, the motivation for flexibility is based on their sense of responsibility as a mother.

Married women direct sellers with previous jobs, either those with excellent or poor socioeconomic conditions, have more enthusiasm when starting their careers as direct sellers. This high enthusiasm arises because, in their previous jobs, they often lacked time to gather with their families. Apart from that, their work experience has made them more skilled at managing their time independently for their work as direct sellers and their responsibilities as housewives. In contrast to women who already have work experience, this research found that women who have never had work experience tend to be less able to use their time to balance family and work. Furthermore, they admit they are more easily influenced to pursue targets and work beyond regular working hours (7 hours per day) without a weekly break. In this case, working more than that time makes it easy to feel burnt out.

Although the company promises flexibility, this research found that it also encourages direct sellers through various prizes that increase with increasing positions and the burden they have to bear. This prize is hoped to help the company achieve its sales targets by improving the performance of married women direct sellers. Furthermore, this increase in performance will impact reducing work flexibility. The situation illustrated the flexibility that is thought to be able to be done casually and can waste the time of a married woman's direct sellers. This dominance of work-life disturbs the balance between work-life and family. This description also found that research conducted at a US company stated that the company had exploited the investment provided by direct sellers (Rees, 2021), which was authentic and occurred in Indonesia.

Another illustration of exploitation in this research is direct sellers' unclear rights and obligations. This research found that although this job was flexible, it took up most of their time. The time spent is used to think about and create new marketing methods, organize and train the team to achieve sales targets, determine promos to attract consumer attention and deal with consumer complaints. From the details of its activities, the company only produces goods by handing over buying and selling activities to direct sellers. The explanation above strengthens Wrenn's (2022) research, which means that the MLM company system transfers costs (due to overhead costs such as job training, recruitment, and job supervision) from the company to individual distributors. This research found that not only companies with an MLM system transfer costs from the company to individual distributors but also other business systems in direct selling, namely the wholesale system.

This research shows that flexibility can attract and retain direct sellers, but flexibility is a demand. These demands are in the form of demands to regulate work time and organize whatever they do independently without any pressure or direction from their superiors. This demand arises considering that direct sellers are external parties to the company who are often considered partners. In this case, this research also adds to the previous literature that the amount of exploitation carried out by a company depends on the company's system and how the upline is treated. This research also found that company exploitation did not reach the lowest position of direct sellers, namely resellers, because the



reseller needs to pursue a position in this industry. So, even if they do not achieve the target and are expelled from a company, the reseller can quickly move to another company that does not have a sales target.

Apart from the need for flexibility, married women's direct sellers also have demands to contribute to the family economy. In this case, the results found that direct sellers from poor socioeconomics tend to have a more significant burden to help the family economy than those with reasonably good socioeconomics. This more substantial burden encourages most of them to have other jobs besides being direct sellers. When investigated further, their additional work is often vulnerable and does not guarantee their welfare, so they still need income from direct selling to meet their family's needs. This research also illustrates that direct sellers with poor socioeconomic conditions and more than one job tend to be in the lower middle position in direct selling.

The absence of socioeconomic does not necessarily guarantee that a direct seller has a low position in direct selling and vice versa. However, direct sellers with higher socioeconomic conditions will be more facilitated than those with poor socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, the experiences of married women direct sellers with better socioeconomic conditions tend to be more positive. From this explanation, this research has strengthened and enriched the understanding of the assumption of the Direct Selling Association (2017), which states that "direct sellers' motivations may differ according to the intersectionality of class and race." Strengthening and understanding these assumptions is explained through a description of the conditions in Indonesia. In addition, explaining the conditions experienced by two groups with different economic backgrounds has filled the gap in the literature discussed by previous research regarding the lack of literature on the influence of socioeconomics, as stated by Rees (2021).

As owners of multiple roles, the demand to contribute to the family economy still needs to eliminate the domestic responsibilities of married women's direct sellers. Domestic affairs include the duties they must fulfill as mothers and wives within the scope of domestic life. As with the demand to take part in helping the family's economy, this research also found that direct sellers with poor socioeconomic conditions tend to be charged more with domestic work compared to direct sellers with good socioeconomic conditions. This condition shows that a patriarchal culture still says that "a good mother stays at home with their children" (Schaner & Das, 2016), although some have experienced a shift due to help from their partners or other parties. In this case, direct sellers with better socioeconomic conditions can employ household assistants more. This assistant has been able to lighten their responsibilities in the domestic realm. This reduction in demands gives them more opportunities to balance work and household, ultimately making it easier for them to succeed in this industry.

Moreover, better socioeconomic conditions, in terms of the life of couplepreneurs, even though the work is done simultaneously, women can make important decisions because they are the ones who start and run a career in this field; this differs from patriarchal culture, which states that women cannot make decisions (Schaner & Das, 2016). Furthermore, the patriarchal view, which states

that women tend to be assigned to take care of the household, seems inappropriate in the findings of this research because they divide their duties into domestic work (housework and childcare) and work as direct sellers. In the end, this research strengthens Leach's (1984) research in D'Antonio (2019), which states that the entry of women into the direct selling industry has broken the stigma of women who are often identified as being very religious, dependent, and tend to take care of the house (D'Antonio, 2019). This explanation gives a new perspective that the patriarchal culture tends to be felt by married women in poor socioeconomic conditions.

Moreover, direct sellers with poor socioeconomic conditions are more likely to experience difficulties starting their careers. This research found that they need much capital and sufficient skills to become a direct seller, with no guarantee of success when they allocate it. Therefore, direct sellers with poor socioeconomic conditions will experience difficulties finding business capital because their capital is limited to their husband's salaries. If examined more deeply, there are differences in capital allocation between the married women direct sellers because of their company systems differences, even though both face the same difficulties regarding lack of capital. In terms of capital, both MLM and wholesale still require a significant amount of capital, even though the allocation is different. For MLM, more capital is needed to take part in offline training, and the capital covers the goods consumers purchase.

Meanwhile, for wholesalers, more capital is allocated to buying goods to sell because the more goods customers buy, the lower the price the direct seller gets. This description shows that the minimal capital promises offered by most companies in the direct selling industry (D'Antonio, 2019; Mccaughey & French, 2001) are not delivered to direct sellers with poor socioeconomic conditions. This condition may occur due to differences in perceptions regarding "minimal capital," which is often based on each experience's socioeconomic conditions; minimal capital for one person may not necessarily be minimal for another.

This research has also strengthened previous literature, which states that if their work can support family stability, this will have a positive impact (Utaminingsih, 2017). Conversely, if their work cannot support family stability, it will have a negative effect (Utaminingsih, 2017). In this case, married women try to balance their lives between being direct sellers and homemakers by prioritizing family stability. When they feel that their family's stability is disturbed with anxiety and guilt and feel like they have failed to fulfill their role as a good mother, they will rethink the continuity of their work as direct sellers. Following existing literature, these three feelings are feelings that companies use to exploit every investment married women give in direct selling (Guendouzi, 2006). Rather than being exploited, in this research, it was these three feelings that made them end their careers as direct sellers.

The findings have filled the literature gap that Rees (2021) stated by adding socioeconomic factors' influence on the lives of married women's direct sellers. This research finds that socioeconomic background will influence the journey of married women direct sellers to succeed in direct selling. Factors such as education, social status, access to resources, and family environment can influence their success in the industry. A more substantial socioeconomic

background can give married women direct sellers an advantage in building social networks, gaining customer trust, and facing business challenges. To achieve these benefits, they need to utilize them effectively. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the role of socioeconomic background can help increase opportunities and support for married women direct sellers to achieve success in their careers.

This research has filled the literature gap that Rees (2021) stated in his study, which found no significant difference in socioeconomic conditions regarding negative views of direct seller jobs. Every direct seller must face negative opinions from various parties, rejection, anger, various characteristics of leaders and teams, and even their families. These opposing views will indirectly cause many married women to leave their jobs as direct sellers. This research reveals the need for more motivation to survive in direct selling. Those who prioritize their duties and obligations to their family, most of whom have poor socioeconomic status, can choose a company or position that does not target anything. From the explanation above, this research has contributed to practitioners' better understanding of the characteristics of direct sellers according to their needs. With a greater sense of this, it is hoped that practitioners will be more aware of the appropriate approach to utilize it best.

Overall, this research found that due to being often considered partners, companies must remember to provide various rights that women direct sellers need to succeed in their work as direct sellers. The impact is that women direct sellers have to bear the burden of investment from the various learning and capital they spend without any certainty of success in this industry. Therefore, companies must clarify the rights and obligations related to the role of direct seller, including clarity regarding compensation, return and replacement policies, and other regulations. Clarity of rights and responsibilities will minimize the possibility of conflict between the company and the direct seller.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

This research is only cross-sectional, so it will result in the results obtained only explaining a specific period. Therefore, similar studies conducted at different times may produce different results. Further longitudinal research can be undertaken to enrich the research by determining differences in the life patterns of married women direct sellers from other times. This research conducted an overall study of direct sellers in Indonesia in the beauty products industry, regardless of the system differences they experienced. Therefore, further research will be more meaningful if it is carried out more intentionally. Future research can focus on other industries (such as electronic devices, health, and fashion). By taking context elsewhere, research can be more comprehensive and relevant, providing a more holistic view of the phenomenon under study and improving the overall quality of research. Our final note indicates the scope of this study's research approach may benefit from a broader experience of larger data points in quantitative approach setting.

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