

Ageing and Gender Preferences in Rural Indonesia

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Abstract:

The Asian literature on gender is well known for the strong preference for sons characteristic of patrilineal family systems in major mainland cultures. Elsewhere, however, the situation can be very different, of which the most striking is the powerful preference for daughters, and the eminent role that women play in family economy and society, in Southeast Asia's largest matrilineal population, the Minangkabau of Sumatra. Javanese and Sundanese family systems are also often remarked for women's influential roles, and people commonly state preferences for support and personal care from daughters. In this paper, comparative analysis drawing on ethnographic and panel survey data for rural Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau communities is used to illuminate gendered support in relation to differing patterns of inter-generational exchange, socio-economic status, migration and the availability of children. Practices vary considerably between the Minangkabau and the other two populations, reflecting the primary structural significance of gender in Minangkabau identity. Yet in all communities, family networks function to ensure that both sons and daughters normally play major roles in support of their elders. Networks, and the differences in socio-economic status they maintain, introduce considerable heterogeneity into support arrangements. The influence and importance of gender on elderly support is often contingent on other values and demands on network members, so that gender preferences can only be realised by some elders. Where survey variables are interpreted without reference to network structure and function, the importance of gender is thus likely to be underestimated.

Ageing and Gender Preferences in Rural Indonesia

Philip Kreagerⁱ and Elisabeth Schröder-Butterfillⁱⁱ

Over the last two decades, gender has moved steadily up the agenda of interdisciplinary population studies, beginning with a number of early programmatic statements (Mason, 1993; Greenhalgh, 1994; Obermeyer, 1995), and continuing via substantial collections (e.g. Bledsoe, Lerner and Guyer, 2000) and in-depth studies (e.g. Basu, 1992; Bledsoe, 2002; Johnson-Hanks, 2006). Demographers' increasing focus over the same period on consequences of demographic transition has made the conjunction of two themes -- ageing and gender -- inescapable. Demographic data at the national level readily show potentially significant economic and social differentials between men and women, and these data have been applied directly to making a general case for the importance of gender disadvantages in later life, particularly for women. The impact of such disadvantages, by implication, accumulates across the life course. Thus, in Indonesia, women's disadvantage from the standpoint of variables like the years of education they receive, their income stream, whether they participate equally in formal sector employment, enjoy equity in marriage choices, and have equal access to pensions, has been noted in various studies (e.g. Malhotra, 1991; Rudkin, 1993; Adiotomo and Eggleston, 1998; Kevane and Levine, 1999; Samosir, Tuhimar and Asmanedi, 2004). The accumulative affects of these differences, however, are less than clear. Women are able to participate extensively in intergenerational transfers, leading some commentators to conclude that gender differences in support provision for older people are "practically non-existent" (Frankenberg and Kuhn, 2004: 30). General patterns of economic and social change in which elders receive support from both sons and daughters, and which often give particular emphasis to daughters' roles in providing personal care, continue to follow tradition. In other words, most elders appear to find that both daughters and sons deliver -- even though some gendered aspects of the life course, and elders' expectations about gendered kinds of support, remain unequal.

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Generalised statements of gender disadvantage or advantage, no matter how systematic the survey data on which they rely, can only take us part of the way to understanding whether and how gender differences actually impact on later life. A critical review of the literature by Knodel and Ofstedal (2003), in underscoring this point, has done the field three important favours. First, the authors emphasize that attention to context is a necessary and unavoidable component of social and demographic explanation. We cannot simply assume that aggregate differentials apply uniformly in the diverse settings and circumstances in which people live. Second, and more particularly, they remark the capacity of socio-economic differences to condition and over-ride the importance of gender. For example, disadvantages that individual women or men face may be due less to gender *per se* than to the impact of poverty and social hierarchy on whether family networks function successfully as redistributive mechanisms. In consequence, aggregate gender disadvantages of older women in terms of education and access to healthcare may not impact significantly on their status or the support they receive if family networks consistently include successful younger members whose rising position in society enables them to gain access to modern sector services for their elders. Third, Knodel and Ofstedal argue convincingly that until contextual and structural factors are taken fully into account, an emphasis on the disadvantage of one or another gender is premature. Exploration of patterns of female and male disadvantage provides a more balanced approach.

Two assumptions underlying their critique deserve note. One is that they take the existence of major cultural and economic differences as a given, and expect there to be in consequence much variation – undoubtedly within, as well as between, societies -- in patterns of gender disadvantage and advantage. At least, the potential importance of such differences needs to be checked empirically before general patterns of gendered disadvantage are asserted. Second, study of variation requires methodologies that examine underlying processes, and thereby inform and complement survey data. While surveys can tell us helpfully about aggregate statuses and outcomes, they do not actually observe the family and community mechanisms that give gender and other differentials their meaning and impact.

This paper draws on the longitudinal ethnographic and demographic field study of three communities representing major Indonesian ethnicities (Javanese, Sundanese, Minangkabau), located in three of the five provinces that, since 1990, have reported more than seven per cent of the population over the age of 60. Comparative ethnographic study supported by panel

surveys enables us to establish contexts and variations in family and community support for older people, and the advantages and disadvantages that may accrue in consequence to older men and women. Similar patterns of socio-economic stratification exist in the three communities, which have an important bearing on elderly well being, notably by influencing the supply of children, family network size and structure, and inter-generational exchanges. Following a brief introduction, in which the communities and research methodology are described, the paper notes two contrasting preference structures that differentiate the role of gender in the communities. Gender has a marked structural significance in matrilineal societies, like the Minangkabau, that is not manifest for the Javanese and Sundanese. Case studies then illustrate some aspects of these structures for gender relations. The paper concludes with a brief look to the future, by considering the expectations of current working age generations as to patterns of family support in their own old age.

1. *Ageing in Indonesia*

Beginning in April 1999, a joint Indonesian and British research team has studied the populations of three communities: Kidul in East Java, Citengah in West Java, and Koto Kayo in West Sumatra.ⁱⁱⁱ The family systems in the two communities on Java are characterised by nuclear/bilateral patterns, whilst the Minangkabau population of Koto Kayo is matrilineal. Proportions of adult children reported in 2000 as no longer resident in the community (46, 45 and 75 per cent, respectively) give some idea of the active engagement of family networks in regional, national and international economies. Since most migrants are of younger ages, this level of migration tends to increase the proportion of the population aged 60 and over: 11, 10 and 18 per cent of the respective communities are over the of age 60, noticeably higher than the 7 per cent normal in their respective provinces (Ananta, Anwar and Suzeti, 1997). Each community is characterised by a mixed family economy, drawing on income from migrants, from employment in local government, and from services and

ⁱⁱⁱ Village data presented in this paper were collected in *Ageing in Indonesia, 1999 – 2007*, with the generous support of the Wellcome Trust and the British Academy. We are grateful to Edi Indrizal and Tengku Syawila Fithry, our colleagues at Andalas University, Padang, who conducted the field research at the West Sumatran field site, and to our colleagues Vita Priantina Dewi and Haryono, at the Center for Health Research, University of Indonesia, Depok, who conducted the field research in West Java.

small-scale manufacturing, whilst also retaining the traditional economic base in agriculture and local markets. All three communities are predominantly Muslim. Languages spoken in the home are respectively Javanese, Sundanese, and Minangkabau, with most speakers at least competent in the national language, Bahasa Indonesia. Interviewing has thus relied on inquiries in more than one language in each site.

Extended fieldwork of up to a year's duration, together with return visits of shorter duration, enabled the development of comparable quantitative and qualitative databases. Semi-structured interviewing achieved substantial coverage of the elderly, between 80 and 97 percent in the communities; repeated in-depth interviews were conducted with between 20 and 60 elderly in each site, complemented by in-depth interviews with one or more other adult family members in most cases. Collection of life histories enabled mapping of kin networks, checked by observation of exchanges over time. Fieldwork also made possible observation of local events, and enabled familiarity with problems and adjustments to changing circumstances that make up much of people's daily lives. Randomised surveys of household economy and inter-household exchanges with 50 'young' households and 50 'elderly' households in each of the three communities then served two important functions: they substantiated differences in social and economic status within and between networks which shape family and community responses to older people's needs; and they enabled quantitative analysis of the role of support from absent network members. Two survey rounds, in 2000 and 2005, were accompanied by in-depth follow-up interviews. Randomised health surveys were also carried out in both rounds. This combined qualitative and quantitative methodology means that data were collected for many elderly respondents in several forms (observation, surveys, and semi-structured and in-depth interviews), enabling quality checks on data and the identification and exploration of differing interviewee's interpretations of events and relations.

To begin with, a brief overview of findings from *Ageing in Indonesia* will help to define the contexts in which gender differences matter. A key starting point is the contrast between the matrilineal extended family system of the Minangkabau, and the nuclear family systems, backed up by bilateral kindreds, characteristic of the two Javanese sites. These contrasting kin and family logics entail: 1. strikingly different norms defining inter-generational support; and 2. a categorical emphasis on the position of daughters in the matrilineal system that has no equivalent in the less formal, preferential attitudes of the

Javanese populations to gender. We will discuss the Javanese sites first, before turning to the Minangkabau population in West Sumatra.^{iv}

1.1 Strata, Networks and Gender in Javanese Communities

In the two Javanese sites, family norms may be characterised as a balance entailing generational independence in a context of mutual support in which elders commonly take the major role (Kreager and Schröder-Butterfill, 2008). Couples in later life prefer to live on their own, with at least one adult child living near-by, and with regular and if possible frequent contacts with other children living away from the village. This pattern is substantially realised, as on average family networks experience numbers of younger generation members who are “lost to the system” – i.e. out of contact, and not contributing materially to family networks – at levels of one child or less (Kreager, 2006). On the other hand, where co-residence with children is found, it often reflects either economic vulnerability and lack of independence in the young adult generation (and hence continuing dependence on elderly parents), or the fact that the youngest child has yet not left home. Dependence of the younger adult generation on the old is often consequent on their divorce or lack of employment; further dependence takes the form of a “skipped generation” household in which elders are raising and covering costs of grandchildren that their own children have left with them while working away from the community (Schröder-Butterfill, 2004a). Co-residence, in short, provides no reliable indicator of elderly dependence, and may well indicate the opposite.

Values of independence favoured by the Javanese have a double character, manifest in several aspects of daily life, notably employment, inter-generational exchanges, and support patterns in old age. On the positive side, older people wish to remain active in family and social life, and generally succeed in doing so. Gainfully employed throughout most of their later lives, and sometimes with the help of small pensions, they remain net contributors to the economy, even when families no longer strictly require them to do so. Elders’ continuing employment reflects the fact that their identity and reputation depend on continuing participation in inter-generational exchanges. For example, analysis of the 2000

^{iv} In view of the similarity of Javanese and Sundanese family patterns, and for ease of reference, both communities on Java will here be referred to simply as Javanese.

household survey in the East Javanese site showed that, for family networks including older members, two-fifths of all families engage in balanced exchanges between generations – “balanced” here denoting not a strictly equal monetary value of goods and services, but reciprocity. In the 2005 survey round, this proportion had increased to nearly one-half. Of course, as elders’ physical disabilities increase, their material contribution normally lessens, but even small contributions are recognised to maintain the status quo. Part-time agricultural labour or factory work, and assistance in children’s households, enable elders to participate as expected in family and community rituals. Even if the income gained or saved is small, it remains important in matters of personal and collective esteem. The ‘exchanges’ in question may, to take a common example, enable elders to give out of their own pockets, and as a matter of course, sweets and small favours to grandchildren.

On the negative side, elderly vulnerability emerges where elders’ declining material contribution to families coincides with overall family poverty, manifest in limited network size and useful connections, and scarce assets in land or other material resources. Households in lower socio-economic strata show the greatest strain.^v A quarter of elderly people are net receivers of support from children, some 80 per cent of whom belong to poorer strata: support, usually confined to food and/or companionship, does not provide an adequate safety net if, for example, there is a health crisis. Even in families not facing poverty, elders’ sheer physical frailty (particularly incontinence and an inability to carry out minimal tasks of daily living) involves inevitable loss of reputation. The inability to contribute in any way to family or wider exchanges equates to loss of social status, especially where dependence is on charity coming from without the family.^{vi} The potential down-side of normative values of independence and balance of generations here becomes plain: unlike joint family systems (prevalent in much of mainland Asia), or stem family systems (as in Thailand), family networks do not explicitly and normatively designate a particular child as responsible for elder care late in life or for other circumstances of their vulnerability. In Javanese communities, ties between elders and particular children or grandchildren are

^v Socio-economic strata in the three sites were defined by aligning economic differences as revealed in the surveys with local terms of reference that people used in the course of in-depth interviews to describe their own and others’ relative social position. No explicit scheme of social classification is normative in the communities, but four distinctions recur in everyday speech: a. wealthy; b. comfortable; c. getting by; and d. dependent on charity. A more detailed account of the strata is given in Kreager (2006: 8-9).

^{vi} Sophisticated community institutions in many cases exist to provide food and monetary support to the very poor (Schröder-Butterfill, 2007; Kreager (in press). This aspect of support is not differentiated in terms of gender, and thus falls outside the current topic.

preferential: they evolve in the course of personal relationships over the life course, and are thus vulnerable to the usual ups and downs experienced by members of different generations.

The preferential character of Javanese elderly support patterns may give a strategic significance to gender, especially to the role of spouses and daughters, but not in a sense that over-rides the more fundamental role of family networks and of normative values of reciprocity governing them. This situation is most evident in the case of adoption: childless elders in better-off strata are much more likely to be able to find nieces or other female kin to adopt, explicitly with the intention of their providing personal care and companionship in later life (Schröder-Butterfill, 2004b). Clearly, in a family system that emphasizes generational independence, the role of spouses – male or female – is the usual first port of assistance for livelihood or personal care. Given the predominance of women amongst the elderly, men are, as in most societies, on average more likely to have a spouse on whom to rely. Serious male vulnerability nonetheless arises from inadequate networks – especially where there is a lack of female support in the network – as will be demonstrated in the case studies, below.

The preferred residential pattern in which some children are ‘near’, whilst others reside ‘away’ at ever-greater distances, provides a second and potentially crucial back-up for widows, widowers, the unmarried, and frail elderly couples. Intimate personal care is provided normally by daughters or daughters-in-law, and elders in almost all cases will express a preference for having a daughter living near to them. The advantage of the ‘some near/some away’ residential pattern, at least, is that in most cases, a number of members of a family network can be found to provide meals, companionship, or personal care – but arrangements are often mutable, depending on who is available.^{vii} A kind of division of family labour enables children and sometimes other kin to share support responsibilities – some providing food or companionship because they are at hand to do so, others making less continuous contributions during visits or emergencies (such as contributing to hospital costs). The reality, nonetheless, is that levels of migration and alienation within the family network make primary or exclusive reliance on daughters impossible for many people, some or all of the time. Norms of generational independence and reciprocity imply that the needs and

^{vii} Employing non-family members to provide care for elderly parents is considered shameful, although bringing in poorer, more distant kin to provide services (and quietly providing the material incentives to do so) is an option available for some better-off families.

demands of both younger and older generations must be balanced, if possible. In practice, elders have no absolute priority.

The downside of generational independence is thus the *uncertainty* manifest in the frequent inability of elders to say whether preferred members of the family network will actually be present when needed, or will continue to be able to play these roles (Kreager and Schröder-Butterfill, 2007). Daughters, as normatively preferred carers, are undoubtedly under pressure – both direct and indirect – to look after their elders, but this pressure is not prescriptive. Their own lives and the lives of their children and spouses may well remove them from the scene. The history of family relationships, particularly where there has been a lack of reciprocity or other moral failing in the older generation, may effectively excuse daughters from public reprobation for not taking a major part in caring for their ageing elders.

1.2 Strata, Networks and Gender: Minangkabau

Minangkabau society has developed a sophisticated migration-based economy for more than a century, making it an integral part of the wider South East Asian economy. Koto Kayo, as is typical of traditional Minangkabau communities, has a local economic base in agriculture, with almost 90 per cent of households drawing part of their subsistence from rice and other locally grown foodstuffs, while many also engage in cultivation of crops like coffee and cinnamon for the market (Indrizal, 2004). Most of the village's wealth, however, is the product of labour migration (*rantau*) associated particularly with trade in cloth and clothing across the Indonesian archipelago. Upwards of two-thirds of young adults are away from Koto Kayo at a given point in time (Kreager, 2006). *Rantau* is at once a commercial strategy for generating wealth for oneself, one's lineage, and the community. It is also a crucial *rite de passage*. Young men who do not establish themselves successfully on *rantau* cannot attain full respect and position in the community. With time, flows of migrants from the community have established lineage networks and resident communities in major cities like Jakarta and Bandung, and this facilitates the entry of new migrants into successful trade and other employment. It has also enabled women to participate in *rantau* activities, not only as property owners and wives, but as major traders in their own right. Networks are the basis

of major flows of remittances, visits home, and support for local community projects, all of which reinforce or improve family status in the community, as well as building and sustaining ties through local Islamic and political associations. The Minangkabau became ‘transmigrants’ – i.e. a people with a permanent material and cultural basis in more than one place in the Indonesian archipelago – long before global movement patterns made the term into an academic specialism.

This close identification of individual, family and community identity with success on *rantau* results in a very different normative structure of inter-generational relations than we observed above in the Javanese communities. Key evidence of a family network’s success and solidarity is elderly parents’ ability to rely on a combination of remittances and local practical support, rather than having to continue to work. Quite unlike rural Java, dependence in later life is a source of satisfaction and respect. Where Javanese elders emphasise their own continuing contributions (even where they are also receiving material support from children), Minangkabau elders stress contributions of the younger generation, even where local agricultural income means they can survive comfortably on their own. Both as an ideal and in practice, the emphasis on support from children is strong. For two-thirds of elders, net inter-generational exchanges flow predominantly upwards from the younger generation (including, as appropriate in a matrilineal society, support from nephews and nieces). The second round of the household survey, following up the situation of the oldest old, showed that this pattern intensifies to almost nine-tenths of elders over age seventy (Kreager and Schröder-Butterfill, 2008).

The fundamental importance of upward flows is confirmed by interviews with the younger generation. Once economically established, children feel compelled to provide parents with monetary support as evidence of their *rantau* activities. Not to do so would be considered shameful. By providing generous support, younger network members see themselves as repaying the assistance they received as children and young adults, when support from parents and other older kin was often crucial to beginning successful migration careers. Downward flows of support in Koto Kayo (characteristic of about one in six elders’ households) are, as in Java, associated with having young children. Unlike Java, we found no instances of young grandchildren being left in the care of elderly grandparents, although

skipped generation households (older women living with an adult granddaughter) represent an occasional solution to care and companionship when the young adult generation is all on *rantau*. Balanced flows between generations (a further one in six elder's households) arise where elders are still working and both have children who remain dependent as well as those sending remittances. While it happens that some children do not succeed on *rantau*, in most families this is compensated by remittances from other children. Not all families, of course, have equally developed networks, and relative success is consequently structured by network size and the differences between socio-economic strata to which network differentials have given rise. Four-fifths of those elders in receipt of upward flows of support belong to upper and upper-middle strata, whilst downward and balanced flows predominate in poorer strata (Kreager and Schröder-Butterfill, 2008).

The strategic importance of gender, as in the Javanese sites, is conditioned by relative socio-economic status and the size and constituency of networks. Gender plays, however, a much more profound role within these constraints, as would be expected in a matrilineal society. The 4.8 million Minangkabau in Indonesia form the world's second largest matrilineal population, and the organisation of descent and inheritance follows prescriptive rules in which rights and property pass from mothers to daughters, and women take major roles in the management of family affairs in conjunction with their brothers. Men thus look to their sister's children as heirs, although they are also likely to have strong (if less formalised) ties to their own children. Normative preference is for the senior female to live in the matriline's ancestral home (*rumah gadang*), with the daughter who will succeed her. The husband of the senior female, and the daughter's husband, live as 'honoured guests' in the *rumah gadang*; their major family and material interests are in the property and *rumah gadang* of their sisters, and this gives them an inevitably ambivalent status in relation to their wives' matriline – especially as the senior female's brother takes the major formal and practical role in decision-making. The prescriptive nature of matrilineal descent is perhaps most evident in the emphasis on links between mothers and daughters: a matriline without daughters faces no future, and kinship here is referred to as "lost" (*keluarga punah*). Sons cannot inherit and pass on property and, indeed, a matriline without daughters is considered childless no matter how many sons – and successful ones – it may have (Indrizal, 2004).^{viii}

^{viii} The contrast to patrilineal family systems lacking heirs underscores the prescriptive nature of matrilineal descent. Men without sons in a patrilineage may take further wives, either by divorcing the current wife or

Childlessness affects seven per cent of older people, but a further 17 per cent lack surviving female offspring (Indrizal, Kreager, and Schröder-Butterfill, in press).

The prescriptive character of matrilineal descent carries a number of structural entailments that can make gender differences problematic, both for men and women. One is a kind of *de facto* childlessness, a situation in which, for example, all daughters decide to remain permanently away from the *rumah gadang*, preferring their lives on *rantau*. Although distant family members may be found to maintain ancestral properties, the lack of a daughter resident in the *rumah gadang* is a disgrace. A second liability is the structural vulnerability of older men without wives, whether on account of divorce, the wife's death, or non-marriage.

Active involvement in labour migration to a considerable extent mitigates the ambivalent position of the husband as “guest” in his wife's household – for much of the time, he is likely to be away. Older men tend to return, however, to Koto Kayo late in life, as the younger generation assumes its more prominent role in *rantau* activities. Where the wife predeceases the husband, he is expected to return to his sister's home, i.e., away from his children. Where the man has maintained successfully the influential role of *mamak* (mother's brother) in respect to his nieces and nephews, this situation may be welcome. Where personal ties to his children are stronger, or where he has been less successful on *rantau* or in the community, the norm may be a less than happy one. Childlessness, including *de facto* childlessness, also becomes a potential source of vulnerability here. In addition to the seven per cent of households without daughters, nearly one-third of households have all daughters away on *rantau* – an issue, which may or may not be open to subsequent family negotiation.

While the prescriptive character of female descent gives rise to critical constraints in some matrilineal households, the situation is clearly easier in the majority of households where the continuity of the matriline is not endangered. A senior female without daughters may have a

(where permitted) via polygyny, in order to obtain male offspring. A woman who may be fertile, but is unable to bear daughters, generally has no parallel option of obtaining daughters via remarriage. In contrast to Java, adoption is also not considered an acceptable solution (cf. Schröder-Butterfill and Kreager, 2005).

sister with daughters, one of whom is prepared (and will reap considerable advantages) by assuming the mantle of senior female on the death of her aunt. Most daughters (who are not in line to become senior female) and sons are less constrained by the matrilineal rule; their residence in households near the *rumah gadang* or permanently away on *rantau* is less of an issue, assuming (as is the commonly observed norm) that their remittances, visits and continuing support for the family and community keeps them within the family orbit.^{ix} The pattern of “some children near/some away”, which we noted in the case of Javanese communities, also characterises support patterns in Koto Kayo. That is: although daughters are fundamental to matrilineal ideology and practice, daily support for older people comes normally both from sons and daughters, varying according to their capacities and their point in *rantau* development, and in this respect inter-generational exchanges resemble the preferential pattern observed in the Javanese communities.

2. Discussion

The observation, cited earlier, by Frankenberg and Kuhn (2004), that in Indonesia gender differences in support provision for older people are “practically non-existent”, was based on national-level surveys. We are now in a position to interpret this assertion more carefully. On one hand, it may be taken as broadly true, as both daughters and sons are actively engaged in support of their elders. While elders commonly express a desire for their daughters’ support, particularly in personal matters, their preference is no less to have a number of children of both sexes actively engaged.^x Support is part of a long term and diverse body of exchanges that take place across the life course. The family networks that characterise inter-generational support appear to function in a way that permits flexibility -- they include both sons and daughters as well as continuing elderly support of younger generations, and allow for changes in support roles according to the possibilities and needs of both generations (and, also, of grandchildren). Elders’ preference for daughters’ involvement, in short, is not pursued single-mindedly, or without due allowance for the

^{ix} Between 66 and 93 per cent of Minangkabau migrants contribute remittances or other support to their elders, depending on strata; the lower figure, which refers to the wealthiest strata, reflects the fact that any one point in time only some children may be contributing; percentages for the other three strata are at least 87.5 percent. (Kreager, 2006).

^x However, it should be noted that older Minangkabau men without wives, where they have reached physical disability that restricts carrying out basic life tasks, will express a preference for male personal care.

preferences of the daughters themselves – which inevitably embrace more than issues of support for ageing parents.

On the other hand – and as Frankenberg and Kuhn are no doubt well aware – to say that gendered patterns of support effectively do not exist is a radical simplification of a complex set of realities. The fact and value of a daughter's involvement and care is a general sociological phenomenon in thousands of Indonesian communities such as those described in this paper. This is true whether expressed as a preference or, as in the matrilineal case, a prescription that stipulates that the whole continuity and reputation of a family absolutely require a daughter to take the primary role at the centre of the matriline. What is at issue in all of these cases is not only the importance of gender as encompassing a set of values in Javanese, Sundanese and Minangkabau cultures, but the inevitable heterogeneity of practice in these communities, which means that gender preferences are realised (or not) in different ways amongst several values, and are subject to varying constraints. Not everyone manages to have the children they prefer actually care for them in old age, or do so all of the time. Alternative arrangements are inevitably necessary. The presence of these alternatives, and the fact that many, or even most, elders may have to make do with them, does not lessen the importance of the gendered values in question. Norms are only achieved some of the time, and this may enhance their value, rather than lessen it.

As we have noted, actual flows of inter-generational support, whether from sons or daughters, are mediated by socio-economic status and network behaviour. Members of current elder generations who belong to better-off strata and more successful networks are, particularly in Java, both more likely to have surviving children and to be better able to adopt young people successfully to look after them.^{xi} In contrast, one of the several consequences of the prescriptive character of matrilineal succession in the Minangkabau case is that a lack of daughters cannot be alleviated by economic or social success. The following brief case studies are intended to illustrate how family systems in these cultures cope – with varying success – when they run up against constraints on the availability of support, particularly where that support involves a normative gender preference. We will consider, in turn: 1.

^{xi} On historical demographic factors that influence the shortage of children in current older cohorts, see Schröder-Butterfill and Kreager, 2005; on the generality of this pattern outside Indonesia, Kreager 2004; a good review of demographic patterns of childlessness affecting these cohorts at the provincial level is given by Hull and Tukiran (1976).

coping with childlessness and *de facto* childlessness; 2. male vulnerability in the absence of a spouse and/or children.

Vulnerability in Javanese, Sundanese and Minangkabau societies does not necessarily arise from a lack of children, or of daughters or sons. Adoption (often of siblings' children) and remarriage provide alternative routes to children in the Javanese communities. In the logic of the matrilineal system, a sister's children are equivalent to a woman's own children, as they belong to the same matriline, can inherit ancestral property, and perpetuate both. Indeed, no distinction is made in kin terms between a woman's own children and the children of her sister, both being referred to simply as *anak* (child). Children will refer to their matrilineal aunts as *mandeh ketek* ('small mother', if the aunt is junior to the mother) or *mandeh gadang* ('big mother', if the aunt is senior). A woman without children can thus take a positive and respected place in the family as classificatory mother of her sister's children, and it is to these children that she will look for assistance should she need it (van Reenen 1996: 214).

Problems arise, as noted earlier, either where there are no daughters prepared to return permanently from *rantau* and assume matrilineal responsibilities in the *rumah gadang*, or where sisters also lack children. In the former, children's regular remittances and return visits to the village ensure adequate levels of material support for most elders. However, the psychological insecurity arising from an absence of children locally, and the threat of an empty *rumah gadang*, cannot be underestimated. This is particularly felt by elderly women whose daughters are all away, since they look to one of these daughters to take over the management and continuity of ancestral property. The case of Asnima exemplifies the paradox of, on the one hand, having many and successful children, while on the other hand feeling lonely, vulnerable and 'childless' because none are locally available.

Asnima, aged seventy-five, is the youngest of eight siblings and the only sister. She descends from a line of clan headmen (*penghulu datuk*), and one of her sons is a present *penghulu datuk*. She has nine children, seven sons and two daughters. All of Asnima's children are married and living in their respective migration sites. Both daughters married non-Minangkabau. The oldest has a successful permanent job in Jakarta. The other daughter, married to an Acehnese, recently moved to Padang, a good three hours distant from Koto Kayo. For the time being, Asnima can look after the *rumah gadang* and family lands. She is financially secure, because her children regularly support her and she has income from the lineage rice-fields. None of this, however, can still her fears about the future presence of her lineage in the village. Asnima often visits her several

children, but will not consider settling permanently with any of them. Living with a son is not, in any case, an option, since this violates Minangkabau norms and would reflect badly on her daughters. If she had her own way, Asnima would raise the only granddaughter she has via her daughters, because it will ultimately be that granddaughter's responsibility to continue the matriline. Asnima nowadays occupies the ancestral home on her own, although sometimes a young, unrelated woman keeps her company at night, helps her with cooking and takes care of her when she is ill.

Asnima's situation illustrates the contrary impacts of migration on communities like Koto Kayo. On one hand, *rantau* continues to serve as a major guarantee of material support and social standing for elderly people in the village. On the other, these strengths co-exist with genuine practical and psychological vulnerabilities bound up with the threat of the end of the matriline's presence in the community. Thus far, most traditional ancestral homes continue to be occupied, although some, like Asnima's, at present are rather quiet. In less prosperous communities, many *rumah gadang* are being abandoned and fall into disrepair. When frailty or ill-health makes some form of practical assistance necessary, women like Asnima face a choice between two courses of action, neither of which preserves self-esteem or public face: accepting help from a non-relative, or leaving the ancestral home to be with a daughter who has moved away.

A contrasting example in which a woman with many children is left, nonetheless, *de facto* childless, can be drawn from the ethnography of Citengah, our West Javanese research village.

Rumiati is a widow in her late 70s with eight children by her first, but now deceased, husband. Of the eight, one son died in infancy, and Rumiati also lost an adult daughter in childbirth, which left the baby girl to be raised by her grandmother. Rumiati remarried but had no further children. Her second husband has also died. Despite working hard as agricultural labourer, Rumiati needed to sell half of the small amount of land she possessed in order to assist several of her children to depart on transmigration to Sumatra and Kalimantan. A further sale provided a 'loan' (never repaid) to her granddaughter to help her start up a business as a trader. The granddaughter was also given the larger half of Rumiati's house after her marriage. None of the five children that left have ever returned or sent money, not even her youngest daughter, who left her first-born son in Rumiati's care when she departed. The only daughter who is now nearby is poor and relies on sharecropping the remainder of her mother's land to survive. Rumiati's present income from agricultural labour has to support her and her co-resident grandson, who is still at school.

In comparative terms, the absence of local, supportive children in both Asnima's and Rumiati's cases are instances of migration gone wrong from the older generation's point of view. Neither, despite the undoubted assistance they provided their children, have any child at hand on whom they can rely near the end of their lives. Yet the two cases also highlight important differences between Minangkabau and Javanese communities. In Java, parents are expected to assist adult children to become independent, often to the limits of their ability, and to step in if necessary even after children have left home. This does not obligate children to provide reciprocal flows of support to elderly parents, as it does in Koto Kayo. In Koto Kayo young grandchildren were never left with grandparents, whereas in Java it is not unusual for grandparents to be left in charge of grandchildren when the middle generation migrates, without this eliciting regular or adequate remittances (Schröder-Butterfill 2004b). This latter responsibility, however, provides Rumiati with a small compensation not possible for Asnima: she retains the presence of the granddaughter whom she raised, and any (albeit modest) assistance she may need, whether in the form of cooked food or care in illness, is likely to come from her granddaughter. Despite Asnima's much greater material well being, her ability to organise her later life in a way that carries out local norms, and successfully involves a daughter or granddaughter, remains less than Rumiati's.

Turning now to examples of male vulnerability, the example of Jamain shows how Minangkabau elders whose lineage faces extinction, and who have failed to create adequate ties within the matrilineal system, experience severe insecurity and loss of status. They have no safety net of support late in life of the kind that Minangkabau lineages normally provide.

Atypically for men from Koto Kayo, Jamain only briefly took part in labour migration and returned unsuccessful. His two marriages were childless, ending in divorce. The second earned him disapproval from fellow-villagers for marrying a woman from outside the village. Jamain's older brother has four children, but in accordance with the structure of Minangkabau society, their first loyalties lie with their mother's matriline. It is to his sister and her offspring that a man normally turns for support. Unfortunately, the sister also remained childless, and recently died. Jamain now relies on a sympathetic neighbor and on less sympathetic fellow-villagers, who unwillingly give him money when he begs. Begging lowers Jamain's status and dignity, and deviates strongly from expected Minangkabau behaviour. The lack of daughters in his extended family network means that Jamain's matriline is doomed to extinction. Since his sister died, Jamain can at least

live in his ancestral house and benefit from the production of family rice-land. Eventually, the house with its land will fall to a distant, collateral line.

Given the logic of Minangkabau kinship organization, in which connections may be traced according to increasingly distant but inclusive units of kin, relatives sharing responsibilities can normally be identified by going back several generations. In the eyes of other villagers, had Jamain conducted himself in a manner more in keeping with the ethos of the Minangkabau people, someone from such a collateral line might well have stepped in to help. Equally, money sent back to the village by successful migrants, distributed by the mosque, would have been more forthcoming.

A comparable case of male vulnerability in the absence of a spouse and/or children comes from Kidul, in East Java.

Lubis has no children of his own, but gained four stepchildren by two marriages, including two daughters. He also helped to raise two boys belonging to a neighbour. None of his stepchildren continue to live locally. Lubis's family was very poor, often without regular work, but small sums of money from one of the "raised" boys, and occasional gifts from his stepchildren, have helped him to get by. In 2002, Lubis's second wife left him to live with one of her daughters, leaving him on his own, relying chiefly on a neighbour and a nephew (his first wife's sister's son) for his meals. The situation quickly deteriorated when Lubis fell and became bed-ridden. For a short time one stepdaughter visited and sent money, but day-to-day care was available only from the neighbour and the nephew. Neither was prepared to continue providing intensive support for long, especially as Lubis's condition worsened. Against his will he was taken to the home of a distant relative in a neighbouring city who, although possessing nominal rights to inherit Lubis's house, had not been in contact for many years. Lubis died shortly thereafter, and his wish to be returned to Kidul for burial was ignored.

Both Lubis and Jamain are examples of older men who reach the end of their lives with all but non-existent support networks. Poverty, unsuccessful marriages, and childlessness combine powerfully to limit their options, even in Lubis's case in which there were numerous stepchildren, and of both sexes. In both cases none of the alternatives to having children (more distant kin, neighbours, step-children) proved comparable to care by an own child or spouse, and the quality of care and the extent to which care could be sustained were likewise lessened. Those who took responsibility for looking after Lubis, if only for a time, were simply people who happened to be near-by and to have a modest tie of some kind to him. From the outside, the attitude of Lubis's step-children, or Jamain's brother's children, may seem uncaring – but it is a reminder that support is a relationship

built up over time via networks; values like gendered care, or sustained care, are secondary to the structure of ties a life course does, or does not, create. To the extent that men are less likely to build enduring networks in Indonesian communities, their vulnerability tends to be greater.

2. Concluding Note

The subject of gender, as it emerged in late 20th-century social demography, has commonly been approached as a potential marker of disadvantage, particularly as experienced by women. In the Indonesian case, at least, we have seen that, even where gender differences serve as powerful mechanisms of individual and group identity, inter-generational relationships and flows of support are guided by flexible network arrangements that in most cases secure support of both sons and daughters. There are, moreover, major differences in the way Indonesian cultures configure gender, which we have summarised and contrasted very briefly as *preferential* (for support from daughters, in the Javanese and Sundanese communities) and *prescriptive* (the Minangkabau maintain a powerful gender ideology emphasizing female lines of descent, inheritance, and family government in which preferences regarding ongoing material support nonetheless rely on both sexes). In sum, gendered support, whilst important to older people in their perception of their situations, and often in the patterns of assistance they actually receive, is not determinant of levels of support or of the diverse network arrangements by which family and community networks respond to elderly needs.

Gender undoubtedly poses a dilemma for demography, and for ageing research more generally. Gender differences, as they influence inter-generational relations and patterns of support, are undoubtedly important, yet they commonly resist reduction to the value of a variable or set of variables suited to mainstream demographic, economic and sociological modelling. The difficulty, of course, enters long before modelling techniques are applied, in the customary simplifications employed in collecting and compiling data, and in the way classes of data are then taken as proxies for difficult-to-get-at multi-dimensional phenomena, like gender. By way of conclusion, it may therefore be interesting to look at some survey data on the three communities described in this paper, to see what happens when description and analysis attempt to shortcut the heterogeneity of gender support patterns. We shall take

current and projected living arrangements as a case in point, since demography and ageing research have long emphasized their significance.

It could be argued, for example, that residential arrangements, to the extent that they indicate older people's desires and access to support, may provide a relatively simple and efficient measure of disadvantage. Thus, if residence is an accurate proxy for the extent to which older people are successful in realising generally stated preferences for the assistance of children of one or the other gender (i.e. residence indicates that they actually enjoy the support of a son or daughter), then we can use measures of residence patterns as indicators of gender-related advantage or disadvantage. Does such an approach stand up to scrutiny?

Table 1 gives percentages of elders' living arrangements, in three groups: *independent* (including those living alone, with spouse, or with dependent unmarried or young descendants); *with an adult female descendant* (a married daughter, an adult non-married daughter, or a married granddaughter); or *with an adult male descendant* (a married son, adult non-married son, or married grandson). The pattern in the Table of gender-specific co-residence with children or grandchildren reflects in a general way the contrasting status of daughter preference across the three communities. A closer look at the table, however, drawing on the evidence presented above, shows that elders' relative advantage or disadvantage, and whether support really depends gender differences, is not tied consistently to residence.

Table 1. Living Arrangements of Older People in 2005 (by percent)

	Kidul	Citengah	Koto Kayo
Independent	37.7	61.6	47
Adult female descendant	26.5	23	53
Adult male Descendant	35.8	15.4	0
Total:	100	100	100
No. of elders	53	52	49

Source: *Ageing in Indonesia Household Survey*.

Beginning with Koto Kayo, where we would expect the strongest evidence for the importance of daughters, we see that living with a son or grandson never occurs, while the prescriptive importance of living with a co-resident daughter holds good in over half of households. This evidence supports the importance of gender preference, specifically the norm in which one daughter is supposed to remain or return to live in the ancestral property of her matriline. The situation of the nearly one-half of elders who do not co-reside with their daughters, however, is more difficult to interpret. As the case studies given above indicate, ‘independent’ encompasses several sub-groups. The 47% not currently co-residing with daughters are not a uniform block of people, identifiable as not conforming to residential norms. Their current residence arrangements reflect the developmental character of kin networks, and the many different needs and opportunities networks address. Once we take into account network patterns between households, then ‘independent’ and ‘co-resident’ cease to be discrete categories.

One sub-group within the ‘independent’ category is composed of elders with all children away on *rantau* who have, or believe they have, the firm commitment of a daughter who will return to the *rumah gadang*. There is, however, another sub-group, to which Asnima (see case study, above) belongs, that does not have any such commitment. Upward support flows from sons and daughters, however, are ample for both of these sub-groups, so that neither is subject to economic disadvantage – quite the contrary. Economic advantage is thus not tied to key gender differences for either sub-group – even though the implication for households whose daughters refuse to return from *rantau* is extinction. There are still further sub-groups, moreover, including elders like Jamain (again, see case study, above), who are demographically disadvantaged because they do not have children, and economically disadvantaged because they lack *rantau* support; yet, as noted in Jamain’s case, his demographic disadvantage need not have left him so economically weak if he had participated in normative exchanges during his lifetime. There exists, in short, yet another sub-group of elders without children who are nonetheless economically well off, on account of matrilineal patterns of exchange.

For Koto Kayo, then, Table 1 provides at best a very crude picture of gender preferences and possible related disadvantage, even though there is a strong pattern of co-

residence with daughters for half of the population. Co-residence is but one phase of network patterns, and one that occurs for some elders, but not others; half of the community is currently not in co-residence, but this is a diverse set of sub-groups not consistently related to economic or demographic disadvantage. Data on actual networks and on how and why they change over time is thus crucial to interpreting residential arrangements, and to actually testing whether residence is an adequate proxy for gender disadvantage.

The need for contextual evidence on network behaviour as well as conventional survey measures to establish whether there is a clear link between disadvantage and gender is even more pronounced for the two communities on Java. From Table 1 we can see that Citengah is much more successful (61.6%) in observing the preference for elders living independently than is Kidul (37.7%). Living with a son, however, describes between one-sixth and one third of households in the two communities, and predominates over co-residence with daughters in Kidul. Once again, however, knowledge of how networks give rise to sub-groups within these categories fundamentally changes our understanding of what they mean. Two points stand out. One is that ‘independent’ disguises many households in which a son or daughter elsewhere in the community (perhaps merely next-door) is in fact providing major support, as well as possibly receiving help from their elders’ household. The other, in Kidul, is that co-residence with a son or daughter frequently describes a household strongly dependent on its elderly members, not one in which elders are net recipients of assistance. Within the co-resident categories in Kidul, the percentage of households in which elders live with a married son or married daughter is the same (20.8%), and these are sub-groups in which there is much more likely to be a balanced flow of support between generations. The remaining sub-groups within these categories (living with an adult non-married child, or married grandchild) are likely to be households in which elders provide most material support; they are, in fact, more like “independent” households that continue to have unmarried younger descendents.^{xii} Not only is there no reliable link here between residence, gender, and disadvantage, it is clear that static residence data, whether at a given point or points in time (the exercise can also be carried out for the 2000 round of the household survey), cannot on their own be relied upon without more fundamental evidence of network processes.

^{xii} If we adjust the percentages in Kidul to reflect this (e.g. by transferring all households characterised by dependent adult non-married children and married grandchildren to the ‘independent’ elder categories), then the percentage of ‘independent’ in Kidul rises much closer (57.7%) to that of Citengah.

If we ask adults who are not yet elderly what living arrangements they would prefer in old age (Table 2), their responses likewise return us to the current state of play in family networks, since preferences expressed for residence with or near a child of a given gender depends on actual and potential network relationships. Daughter preference is, once again,

Table 2: Who do you hope to live with in old age?

	Kidul	Koto Kayo	Citengah
Alone / with spouse	16.2	0.0	9.5
Any child / all children / only has one child	22.1	0.0	34.9
Specific child: daughter	25.0	64.5	54.0
Specific child: son	10.3	0.0	1.6
Other relative (nephew, niece, grandchild)	2.9	4.8	0.0
Don't know	23.5	30.7	0.0
N of respondents	68	62	63
Youngest child	19.1	3.2	15.9

strongest for Koto Kayo: the nearly one-third in the community who responded “don’t know” live predominantly in households in which there is not yet a daughter. The percentage preferring co-residence with a daughter in Kidul (25%) and Citengah (54%) are the highest in these communities, but co-exist with substantial sub-groups in which living in other arrangements is preferable. Clearly, where childbearing is unfinished, and where the future material success, location of residence, and marriage patterns of children are unknown, answering this question becomes very hypothetical.^{xiii} Once again, in communities in which inter-generational exchanges between households, continuing involvement of elders in the family economy, and the involvement of several children in support flows over time, are all normative, respondents answering this survey question are, in effect, being asked to make a complex set of assumptions about how their family networks will play out over time. As we have seen, in the contemporary situation in the three communities, preference for daughters as a social fact co-exists with other components of family networks and changing constraints

^{xiii} A sizeable minority expressed preferences that blur preference for residence with or near a daughter with residence with or near the youngest child (19% in Kidul, 16% in Citengah); a further ambiguity is that stated preferences for living with a daughter may for some respondents not reflect a preference for daughters, but a preference for living with a particular child who happens to be a daughter.

on them. Gendered support is not a variable that can be isolated as a determinant of behaviour (unless the whole complex of factors could somehow be identified in a way that enabled their interaction with gender to be controlled). Attempts by means of proxies to define the importance of gender as a key variable in support patterns are therefore likely to understate its role in many, if not most, older people's lives.

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