



The Role of Women as Head of Households in Fulfilling Family Livelihood Needs: A Case Study of Economic Empowerment through Entrepreneurship among Cricket Farmers in Wonorejo Vilage, Srengat, Blitar

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received July 09, 2025 Revised August 10, 2025 Accepted October 02, 2025 *Corresponding author email: fitrianatsany@uinsatu.ac.id Keywords: Female Head of Household, Fulfillment of Basic Needs, Economic Empowerment, Entrepreneurship, Cricket Farming.	This study aims to examine the role of female heads of households in meeting basic family needs and promoting economic empowerment through entrepreneurial activities, specifically in cricket farming in Wonorejo Village, Srengat, Blitar. A qualitative method with a case study approach was employed to explore the dynamics in the field in greater depth. The study found that female heads of households in Wonorejo utilize cricket farming as a primary source of income to support their families. Moreover, entrepreneurship serves as a means of economic empowerment, enabling women not only to gain financial benefits but also to improve their social status and achieve greater economic independence. Several factors contribute to the success of these women in business, including social support, business management skills, and access to markets and information. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the crucial role women play in household and community economies, highlighting the importance of entrepreneurship-based economic empowerment in improving family welfare, particularly for female-headed households.
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INTRODUCTION

Women in Indonesia, particularly those who are widowed, often face significant challenges in fulfilling their household and family needs. In a socio-economic context that remains largely patriarchal, women are frequently perceived as the weaker gender and dependent on men. This perception creates inequalities that hinder their access to economic resources and limit their opportunities to participate in productive activities that could improve their quality of life. In Wonorejo Village, Srengat Subdistrict, Blitar Regency, female heads of households working as cricket farmers have demonstrated remarkable resilience in coping with economic hardship. Without male partners to support them, these women strive to meet basic household needs, raise and educate their children, and manage their homes independently. Despite their perseverance, many still face difficulties in financial management and business development, primarily due to limited knowledge of financial management and restricted access to resources necessary for business expansion.

Numerous studies have explored women's empowerment and economic development in various regions. Most of these focus on improving women's quality of life by enhancing access to economic resources and skills training. Developing skills and enhancing financial literacy allow rural women to manage their businesses more effectively, thereby improving their overall well-being (Kusnadi, 2015). Similarly, Wulandari investigated how female heads of households in rural Indonesia face economic challenges and struggle to sustain their families through small-scale businesses (Wulandari, 2017). These studies show that although these women work diligently, they are often hindered by a lack of managerial skills and financial knowledge necessary to enhance their productivity. Despite often carrying a dual burden of domestic and economic responsibilities, many of these women have managed to sustain small enterprises while maintaining their households. However, Wulandari also pointed out that limited access to empowerment initiatives restricts their ability to grow and compete economically.

However, few studies have specifically examined the experiences of female heads of households engaged in cricket farming—a growing occupation among rural women due to its relatively low start-up costs and manageable operations. This research thus presents a unique contribution by focusing on a profession that has received little scholarly attention, despite its potential to economically empower women in rural communities. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the intersection of widowhood, cricket farming, and economic challenges faced by rural women. While previous studies have primarily examined women's empowerment in sectors such as small enterprises and agriculture, cricket farming as a source of livelihood has not been widely explored. Though promising, this line of work is still fraught with challenges related to financial management and market access.

Understanding these challenges more deeply can help design more relevant and effective strategies for empowering women economically in Wonorejo Village. Moreover, the role of female heads of household in the family is often underrecognized. This study seeks to

investigate how these women cope with social and economic inequalities, and how they can become more self-reliant through education, entrepreneurship, and improved business management. This research is essential as it provides a clear picture of how female heads of households in Wonorejo strive to improve their living standards. It also offers insights into the importance of economic empowerment through skill-building and financial management training for women in rural areas. Economically empowered women who manage finances effectively are likely to gain stronger bargaining positions in society, contributing to reduced gender inequality.

In the context of local economic development, empowering women can accelerate economic growth in villages and improve overall household welfare. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for government and community empowerment organizations in designing more targeted and effective programs for supporting female heads of households. The study applies gender sociology theory to analyze how societal gender roles influence women's access to economic resources and opportunities for entrepreneurship. Gender-based social norms often restrict women's freedom and opportunities, resulting in inequality in various aspects of life, including the economy.

Additionally, the study utilizes the economic empowerment theory to explain how women can gain agency through access to resources, improved skills, and the ability to make informed economic decisions. A key aspect of economic empowerment is financial management, which enables women to efficiently manage income, sustain their businesses, and support their family's education and needs. Financial management theory is also applied to provide a framework for how female heads of household in Wonorejo can more effectively manage income from cricket farming, including budgeting, capital management, and long-term investments for family economic sustainability. In this village, many women face capital constraints and need additional funding to expand their businesses—for instance, to purchase more cricket boxes, feed, and other farming necessities. Previous studies have shown a consistent focus on women's economic empowerment, particularly in rural areas where women face structural and cultural challenges.

In a similar vein, Studied women farmers in Central Java and found that economic empowerment increases household resilience, especially when women are provided with entrepreneurial knowledge and decision-making skills (Hidayati et al., 2019). Applying economic empowerment theory, argued that gaining control over financial resources enables women, including single mothers, to achieve independence and reduce reliance on their male counterparts (Hossain, 2018). Additionally, Ramli and Wicaksono discussed women's empowerment in the rural livestock sector, their findings suggested that managing livestock businesses provides a viable economic pathway for rural women (Ramli & Wicaksono, 2020). However, as Kurniawati noted, social stigma against female heads of household continues to be a significant barrier (Kurniawati, 2016). In patriarchal rural communities, women—especially

widows—are often perceived as less capable, which limits their access to social and economic opportunities.

In summary, while the current study aligns with prior research in its overarching goal of empowering women economically, it contributes new perspectives by focusing on a unique and underexplored profession, addressing the compounded challenges of gender, stigma, and financial exclusion. The study's findings aim to inform more nuanced and effective empowerment strategies tailored to the needs of female-headed households in rural communities. The following are relevant theories and concepts that can serve as the foundation for research on women's empowerment, particularly for female heads of households working as cricket farmers in Wonorejo Village, Blitar. These theories are related to women's economic empowerment, financial management, and gender perspectives in sociology.

Economic Empowerment Theory emphasizes enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to control their economic resources, make wise economic decisions, and improve their quality of life (Mayoux, 2001). In the context of women's empowerment, this theory focuses on women's ability to access resources, acquire skills, and increase their control over household economies and businesses (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005). Gender Sociology Theory deals with how society constructs gender identities and how gender roles influence individuals in their social and economic lives (Connell, 2005). In this context, gender theory explores the inequalities and discrimination often experienced by women in various aspects of life, including employment, access to resources, and decision-making (Risman, 2004). Women's Empowerment Theory focuses on the process through which women gain greater control over their own lives—personally, socially, and economically (Kabeer, 1999). Empowerment includes increased access to education, health, political participation, and control over decision-making within families and communities (Sen, 1999).

Household Financial Management Theory focuses on how families manage their income and expenses and how financial decisions are made within the household (Garman & Fargue, 2013). This theory identifies the factors influencing financial decisions, including education, experience, and control over economic resources (Shim & Serido, 2009). This theory is used to understand how female heads of households manage household finances through the income generated from cricket farming. The study emphasizes how women can make sound financial decisions to meet their basic needs and sustain their businesses. Social Capital Theory highlights the importance of social relationships in gaining economic advantage (Putman, 2000). Social capital refers to networks, relationships, and shared norms that enable individuals or groups to access resources that are not available solely through personal wealth (Woolcock, 2001). Dependency Theory, originally used to explain economic and social inequalities between developed and developing nations, is also relevant to understanding how dependency on male partners or societal structures hinders development (Dos Santos, 1970; Frank, 1967).

By using these theories, this research analyzes how female heads of households in Wonorejo Village can be empowered through financial management and skill development to achieve economic independence, reduce reliance on men, and confront prevailing social stigmas. In this context, economic empowerment becomes a key factor in improving the quality of life for the women and their children in the village.

METHOD

Qualitative research is an approach used to deeply understand social phenomena by focusing on the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of individuals or groups within their social contexts. It prioritizes holistic understanding and the process of interpretation rather than the quantification or measurement of specific variables (Creswell, 2019). In contrast to quantitative methods, qualitative research explores the subjective aspects of human behavior to uncover rich, detailed insights.

In this research, a qualitative approach is employed to explore how female heads of households in Wonorejo Village, Srengat, Blitar manage their lives as cricket farmers. The study seeks to understand how they face economic challenges and how economic empowerment and financial management contribute to their independence. This approach enables the researcher to examine the social, cultural, and economic factors influencing their daily realities and the transformation they undergo through empowerment.

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design, aiming to portray the experiences and living conditions of female heads of households in Wonorejo Village in depth. It also analyzes how economic empowerment impacts their self-reliance. Rather than focusing on numerical data, this study emphasizes subjective understanding and interpretation based on data collected directly from participants.

Data in this qualitative study are collected using several techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), namely: (1) Participant Observation – the researcher is directly involved in the daily activities of the women as cricket farmers to observe how they manage their businesses, handle household finances, and engage in social interactions within work and family contexts. This method allows the researcher to collect richer data beyond what can be obtained through interviews alone. (2) In-depth Interviews – conducted with female heads of households involved in cricket farming. The interview questions are designed to explore their understanding of economic empowerment, household financial management, and the challenges they face in running their businesses. These interviews are open-ended, allowing participants to speak freely about their experiences. (3) Documentation – this involves analyzing documents related to financial management and business development, such as financial records or progress reports from local women's groups in the cricket farming sector.

The primary data sources in this research include female heads of households who are actively involved in cricket farming in Wonorejo Village. Additional sources involve their family

members and the surrounding community. These multiple perspectives provide a more comprehensive understanding of the empowerment process. Documents such as financial records and community-based economic reports are also included as secondary sources to complement and validate the qualitative findings.

The collected data are analyzed using thematic analysis (Patton, 2002), which focuses on identifying recurring themes or patterns within the data. The researcher categorizes information related to economic empowerment, financial management, and the social factors affecting the lives of the participants. This thematic approach helps the researcher uncover relationships between variables and build narratives that reflect the real-life experiences of female heads of households.

To enhance the validity and credibility of the research, the study employs a triangulation model. Triangulation is a technique used to verify findings by collecting data from various sources or using different methods. Its goal is to minimize bias and increase the reliability of the results. Source triangulation data are gathered from multiple sources—female heads of households, their family members, and community members—allowing for complementary and reinforcing perspectives. Method Triangulation such as Multiple data collection techniques (interviews, observations, and documentation) are used to obtain a more complete and accurate picture of the women's lives and empowerment efforts. More than one researcher is involved in data collection and analysis to minimize bias that may arise from a single perspective or interpretation (Flick, 2018).

Data validity and reliability are ensured through several measures. Internal Validity is achieved through the use of triangulation and diverse, in-depth data collection techniques, which provide a more accurate depiction of field realities. Although focused on one village, the findings may apply to a broader rural context in Indonesia, as many rural women face similar conditions. Reliability is maintained by thoroughly documenting every stage of the research, including interview procedures, data analysis methods, and triangulation processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

This research complies with ethical standards in social research. Informed Consent is obtained from all participants before interviews or observations, with clear explanations of the study's purpose and the voluntary nature of their participation. Confidentiality is upheld by protecting participants' identities and using the collected information solely for research purposes. Respect for Local Values and Beliefs is prioritized, ensuring that the research is conducted in a manner that honors the cultural and social norms of the Wonorejo Village community.

Through the use of qualitative methods and triangulation, this research seeks to gain a deeper and more valid understanding of the economic empowerment of female heads of households through financial management and cricket farming in Wonorejo Village (Jick, 1979).

This approach enables the study to highlight the personal and collective transformation of these women in their pursuit of economic independence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cricket farming, as the primary livelihood of female heads of households in Wonorejo Village, holds significant economic value. Crickets are a commodity with stable demand both locally and nationally, serving as feed for birds and fish as well as an alternative protein source. The income generated from cricket farming can cover basic family needs and offers potential for business expansion if managed properly. However, the economic success of this enterprise largely depends on effective financial and operational management.

Regarding monthly financial management, cricket farmers face challenges in recording and managing cash flows. Generally, their income comes from cricket sales, which fluctuate depending on harvest volume and market prices, typically ranging from several hundred thousand to a few million Indonesian Rupiah per month. Meanwhile, expenditures include costs for feed, cage maintenance, electricity, and other production necessities. Unfortunately, most female heads of households manage their finances informally without detailed bookkeeping, resulting in difficulties in controlling cash flow and planning expenditures and business investments optimally. For example, some informants admitted to mixing personal and business finances, which risks obscuring clear assessments of profit and loss.

Furthermore, social control by the community over female heads of households working as cricket farmers is also quite strong. Although economically empowering, traditional social norms still limit women's roles in the public sphere. Female cricket farmers often face skeptical views from their communities, which regard this type of work as inappropriate or inconsistent with the traditional role of women as household caretakers. Such social control can exert psychological pressure and restrict women's access to wider market networks or capital. However, support from community groups and small business cooperatives helps mitigate this stigma by providing spaces for women to share experiences and strengthen their bargaining position within society.

Based on in-depth interviews with three informants (SM, MD, and RN), it was found that female heads of households in Wonorejo Village are in a vulnerable socio-economic position. The informants were aged between 35 and 50 years, with marital statuses including divorce or widowhood. They have dependents, mostly children still in school, and are the sole breadwinners of their families. Their main source of income is cricket farming, managed independently or in small groups. This enterprise serves as the primary income source, although some also engage in side jobs such as selling snacks or working as casual laborers. This condition shows that female heads of households carry a double burden: managing domestic affairs while also being the main economic providers. Sociologically, this reflects a patriarchal social structure that still restricts women's roles in the public domain. From the perspective of gender sociology, particularly

theory of public and private patriarchy, women face systemic subordination in both domestic (family) and public (workplace) spheres. This illustrates that gender inequality remains a significant barrier to the economic independence of female heads of households (Walby, 1990).

The informants independently manage both household and business finances, although most do not yet implement systematic financial recording. SM and RN manage their income informally, while MD has started basic bookkeeping after participating in entrepreneurship training organized by the village. This limited financial management capacity affects their ability to grow their businesses, budget household expenses, and separate personal and business finances. In this context, concept of women's empowerment is relevant. Kabeer defines empowerment as access to resources, the agency to make strategic decisions, and achievements resulting from those decisions (Kabeer, 1999). Effective financial management is a form of agency, that reflects greater capacity and control over economic resources.

This research identifies three main challenges faced by female heads of households: Limited access to capital, due to lack of collateral, and insufficient financial information. Difficulty in business development, especially in marketing and management. Social stigma, regarding women working in public and being household heads. These challenges are consistent with structural inequality as discussed in gender sociology. Gender roles are socially constructed and continuously negotiated within power relations. In rural settings such as Wonorejo, traditional norms remain dominant and restrict women's mobility and access to economic opportunities.

Entrepreneurship and financial training have begun to show positive impacts on the independence of female heads of households. For example, MD has started separating business and household income and has set growth targets for her cricket farming business. Community-based enterprises also serve as crucial spaces for knowledge sharing and social support. This aligns with community-based empowerment models, which emphasize the role of social networks as tools for change (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010). Women who are supported by communities tend to be more resilient and capable of sustaining their businesses.

From the perspective of Islamic economics, the economic empowerment of women aligns with principles such as al-adalah (justice), al-qudrah (capability), and al-maslahah (public benefit). Islam promotes fair distribution of resources and recognizes the right of every individual, including women, to work and manage wealth (Chapra, 2000). Relevant Islamic financial instruments include careful Hasan (non-interest loans) and mudharabah (profit-sharing partnerships). These concepts can serve as foundations for establishing women's cooperatives based on sharia principles, enabling more equitable access to business capital. Furthermore, women's economic empowerment supports the objectives of maqashid syariah, particularly the protection of wealth (hifzh al-maal), life (hifzh al-nafs), and lineage (hifzh al-nasl). Thus, building women's economic capacity is not only a financial effort but also a spiritual and social obligation in Islam.

This study also reveals a transformation in gender roles. The informants have taken over the roles of family breadwinners and primary decision-makers. This shift indicates a social dynamic where traditional gender roles are being redefined. According to Giddens' theory of structuration, social structure changes through the actions of agents—in this case, women—who actively negotiate their roles within society (Giddens, 1984). These women are not merely policy recipients but are active agents of social change.

Based on field findings and theoretical analysis, the following recommendations are proposed: (1) Sustainable training programs, focusing on business management, financial literacy, and digital marketing. (2) Establishment of women's Islamic cooperatives, using *musyarakah* and *qardhul hasan* models for microbusiness financing. (3) Community-based gender equality campaigns, to reduce social stigma against female heads of households. Program replication, positioning Wonorejo as a pilot village for empowerment models that can be applied in other similar rural areas.

The findings of this research reveal a multidimensional reality of economic empowerment among female heads of households in Wonorejo Village. The discussion below will explore the implications of these findings within relevant theoretical frameworks. Overall, the economic value of cricket farming has the potential to become a profitable livelihood if supported by systematic financial management and positive social support. Therefore, financial management training and strengthening women's social networks are crucial to improving business performance and reducing social barriers faced by female heads of households in Wonorejo.

1. Gender Inequality and Structural Constraints

The lived experiences of the informants reflect the persistence of gender-based structural inequality. Despite their active economic role as cricket farmers and sole income earners, these women still face challenges stemming from patriarchal norms that restrict women's mobility, access to capital, and social legitimacy as entrepreneurs. As Walby articulates in her theory of patriarchy, both public and private spheres continue to regulate and restrict women's roles through institutionalized gender hierarchies (Walby, 1990). These women are negotiating roles that deviate from traditional expectations, and their efforts often meet social resistance. This is reinforced by Butler's theory, which suggests that gender is performative—socially enacted and maintained through repeated behaviors within power-laden structures (Butler, 1990). In this context, female heads of households must constantly justify their roles in the economic sphere, not just through performance but also resilience in the face of social stigma. This aligns with findings in other rural settings where women's economic initiatives are often overshadowed by community expectations that reinforce gender roles (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010).

2. Women's Agency and Empowerment

The research clearly illustrates the exercise of agency—a core concept in Kabeer's (1999) framework of empowerment. Women are not passive recipients of development programs; they actively seek ways to generate income, manage their households, and improve their children's well-being. For instance, MD's engagement with financial literacy programs and bookkeeping reflects a growing strategic capability in financial decision-making. Kabeer's model emphasizes that empowerment involves more than access to resources—it also requires the ability to make purposeful choices and to translate them into tangible outcomes (Kabeer, 1999). The informants' experiences show the early stages of this transformation, particularly in financial independence and entrepreneurial decision-making. However, the lack of institutional support—such as access to low-interest credit or structured mentorship—still limits the extent of their empowerment. True empowerment, as argued by Rowlands, should lead to transformative shifts in both personal confidence and societal structures, which in this case remains a work in progress (Rowlands, 1997).

3. The Role of Islamic Economics in Inclusive Empowerment

Islamic economic principles offer both theological and practical frameworks that support the economic empowerment of women. From a normative standpoint, the Qur'an emphasizes *adl* (justice) and *amanah* (trust) in all economic transactions, including women's right to earn, own, and manage wealth independently (Qur'an, 4:32). The application of Islamic financial instruments such as *qardhul hasan* and *mudharabah* can reduce barriers to capital faced by low-income female entrepreneurs. These models emphasize risk-sharing and prohibit exploitative practices, which is critical in empowering marginalized women. Islamic economics seeks to combine moral purpose with economic functionality, fostering social justice alongside financial inclusion (Chapra, 2000). In the context of Wonorejo, the establishment of a women's cooperative based on Shariah principles could address both structural exclusion and spiritual values, enhancing women's participation without violating community norms. Furthermore, the alignment with *maqashid syariah*—especially *hifzh al-maal* (protection of wealth) and *hifzh al-nasl* (preservation of family)—strengthens the argument that empowering women economically is not only permissible but encouraged in Islam as a means of achieving societal welfare.

4. Social Role Transformation and Gender Restructuring

The informants' transition into economic providers marks a shift in the traditional division of labor. Structuration theory provides a useful lens here: social change does not only occur through external policies but also through the practices of individuals—agents—who reinterpret and transform structures through their everyday actions (Giddens, 1984). The female heads of households in this study, particularly MD and RN, demonstrate such agency by taking control over their economic choices, leading family decisions, and redefining their roles in the community. Over time, these micro-level practices may lead to broader social transformations and challenge entrenched gender norms. Nevertheless, for this transformation to be sustained

and replicated, supportive structures—such as gender-sensitive development policies, community-based financial systems, and culturally rooted educational programs—must be institutionalized.

5. Community, Networking, and Shared Empowerment

Empowerment in this context is not purely individualistic; it is relational. The research shows that community-based initiatives such as informal women's groups, local training, and shared resources significantly impact the informants' confidence and knowledge sharing. This resonates with the concept of collective empowerment (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010), where social capital, mutual support, and shared learning processes enhance individual capacities. In rural environments, where formal resources may be limited, these grassroots structures can become powerful tools for economic resilience and gender transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that cricket farming holds significant economic potential for female heads of households in Wonorejo Village. While it can meet the families' basic needs, the success of this enterprise largely depends on effective financial and operational management. Most women, however, lack adequate financial literacy, often mix personal and business finances, and face limited access to capital, marketing channels, and business-related information. Beyond economic challenges, these women also encounter social stigma and patriarchal norms that constrain their participation in the public sphere. Nevertheless, some women have begun to demonstrate agency and independence, such as participating in entrepreneurship training and separating household and business finances. Islamic economic principles, including qardhul hasan and mudharabah, offer relevant alternatives for supporting female empowerment through justice-based and socially beneficial financial mechanisms. A shift in gender roles is also evident, with women increasingly taking on the role of primary breadwinners and decision-makers within their families. Community support, entrepreneurship training, and the establishment of Sharia-based women's cooperatives are identified as key strategies to strengthen women's economic position. This community-based and religiously grounded empowerment approach not only improves household welfare but also contributes to broader social transformation toward gender equality in rural settings.

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