

Women and Status Janda: Diverse Experiences of Migration in East Kalimantan, Indonesia

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Abstract

East Kalimantan has long been a migration destination for many people from other parts of Indonesia, particularly Java and Sulawesi, as many people seek the economic opportunities offered by natural resource exploitation in the province. East Kalimantan has also been a major resettlement location for the Indonesian government's official Transmigration program. The experiences of migrants to East Kalimantan is gendered as resource exploitation employment, in industries such as logging and mining, is dominated by men.

Women's experiences of migration, while diverse, are directly affected by the phenomenon. Based on a series of life-history interviews, this paper explores the experiences of one particular group of women migrants in an area of East Kalimantan; women who support themselves and their families economically without a male partner. The term 'janda' in Indonesian can mean either divorcee or widow. Across Indonesia, it is possible to generalize that living with janda status carries negative perceptions and practices that represent divorcees/widows as being sexually experienced but unattached and therefore potentially promiscuous and dangerous. These perceptions, combined with the gendered economic reality of East Kalimantan, play a major role in these women's identities, migration decisionmaking, and economic and social survival strategies. Some of the strategies used by the women interviewed include running small businesses and sex work.