

Women and Coffee Shops: A Review of Phenomenological Perspectives

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Abstract: *The phenomenon of women working in coffee shops reflects complex social, economic, and cultural dynamics. Using a phenomenological approach, this study focuses on the subjective experiences of women workers, including social domination by shop owners, motivations for working in this sector, and relationships with customers. Field observations and literature review revealed that women workers often face pressure to look good to fulfil customer expectations, often under exploitative working conditions. Economic and educational limitations are the main factors that drive women to work in coffee shops, although this work is often accompanied by social stigma. Relationships with customers reflect unequal power dynamics, with customers capitalising on workers' vulnerable positions for personal gain. The phenomenological approach helps explore the socio-economic realities experienced by women workers, providing insights for empowerment and welfare improvement efforts in the informal sector.*

Keywords: Women Workers, Coffee Shops, Phenomenological Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Coffee shops are one of the places that are part of the culture of Indonesian society. Apart from being a place to drink coffee and chat, coffee shops often have social dynamics that reflect the structure of the surrounding society. One interesting aspect that emerges is the presence of women as workers in coffee shops, who are often associated with flashy clothing and other social stigmas. This phenomenon is not only related to economic aspects, but also touches on issues of gender, power, and social relations.

Women as workers in coffee shops are identical to miniature clothes and *make-up* in order to attract customers. They do this because of the demands of the coffee shop owner to maintain the sustainability of his business. The phenomenon of female workers in coffee shops is often influenced by economic factors and limited access to formal employment. A study found that women in the informal sector often accept jobs with minimal protection due to limited education and opportunities [2]. This is exacerbated by the dominance of stall owners who have great control over workers' behaviour, including how to dress and interact with customers.

In addition, the social stigma against female workers in coffee shops exacerbates their conditions. Many workers face emotional distress due to the inherent stigma, as well as the risk of sexual violence or other exploitation [3]. This phenomenon also creates an unbalanced power dynamic between customers and waiters, where customers often take advantage of workers' vulnerable situations.

Similar to several previous studies, research conducted by Muhammad Khadir, et al (2021) the results of this study

indicate that: there are two types of violence experienced by women in coffee shops, namely: a) verbal violence which includes violence caused by the tongue, words in the form of flirting, seduction, etc. which makes the victim uncomfortable and b) verbal violence which includes violence caused by the tongue. which makes the victim uncomfortable and b) psychological violence which includes glances given by women from male visitors whom they do not know. Then the research conducted by Arladin, F.W (2018) The results of this study show that the bodies of female waiters can be utilised in various situations. The appearance of waitresses is the most visible aspect of consumer exploitation. So that the exploitation of the body works also through controlling the work activities of the waiters, namely the need to provide an entertainment environment when assisting consumers. Physical exploitation is also carried out by controlling the activities of waiters, namely the need to create a pleasant environment when assisting consumers, and research by Elya, et al (2022) the results of research on women as coffee shop waiters to attract customers, namely by using codes or symbols to interact with customers such as using sexy and tight clothes, using very thick *makeup* and others. The existence of this cetol coffee shop, other communities have assumed negatively, plus the surrounding environment is also involved in the impact.

Recognising the three studies above, this paper focuses on identification and analysis aimed at exploring the experiences of women workers in coffee shops, the power dynamics that occur, and their relationships with customers and shop owners. This research uses a phenomenological approach, where there has been no other research with this study. This understanding is expected to provide deeper insights into how this phenomenon reflects the socio-

economic and cultural structures that exist in society. Phenomenologically, this phenomenon is interesting to study because it involves the subjective experiences of women who work in this environment. Phenomenology, according to Edmund Husserl, is an approach to understanding reality from the point of view of the individual experiencing it, without being influenced by previous assumptions [1].

This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how women interpret their roles, work dynamics, and relationships with customers and shop owners.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

2.1 Gender and Women's Studies

Gender is often confused with sex, even though gender is different from sex. Gender is often also understood as a divine gift or divine nature, even though gender is not solely so [14]. Etymologically, the word gender comes from the English language which means sex. Gender can be defined as the differences that exist between men and women in terms of values and behaviour. Etymologically, gender can be defined as cultural expectations of men and women.

Gender is a social construction built through cultural, political, and social practices that defines the roles of women, girls, men, and boys, as well as social definitions of what it means to be masculine and feminine. Gender roles are taught, learnt and absorbed and vary between and even within cultures. Gender often defines the duties and responsibilities expected of women, girls, men, and boys at any given time in their lives and sets out some of the barriers they may face or opportunities and privileges they may enjoy throughout their lives [15].

Gender, along with age, sexual orientation and gender identity, determines the power that women, girls, men and boys have and their ability to access and control resources. For example, although international legal frameworks guarantee equal rights for women and men, the lived experiences of women, girls, men and boys differ. In most contexts, men and boys play gender roles that often hold more social, economic and political power than women and girls [16]. As a result, men and boys exercise more decision-making power and autonomy over their own lives and over decisions within their communities and families. In contrast, women and girls often lack the power to manage their own lives, including making decisions over their own bodies, marital status and having access to social, economic or political resources.

2.2 Women Workers and Coffee Shops

The position of women in the family is always a dilemma, especially those who are married. On the one hand, working in the domestic sector (looking after children, cooking, cleaning the house) will neglect the public sector (work, education). Vice versa, if too focused on the role of the public sector, the role in the domestic sector will be neglected [17]. Women's decision to work or not to work is also influenced

by marital status, the status of the head of the household, and the number of family dependents. Married women tend to participate in the labour force.

The next factor that influences is the status of women in the household, if women act as the head of the household, women are responsible for fulfilling family needs [19]. In addition, the number of family dependents is also a factor that affects women's labour force participation due to the volume of family needs that must be met [20]. The more children there are, the greater the number of dependents. A larger number of family dependents will increase the likelihood of a person entering the workforce [21].

One job that is considered easy for women to do is working in a coffee shop. This job usually involves tasks such as serving drinks, serving customers, and keeping the work area clean. With good communication skills and a friendly demeanour, women can quickly adapt to the demands of this job. In addition, the intersection of working hours at some coffee shops is also an attraction, allowing women to balance work with other responsibilities. Although seemingly simple, this work still requires precision, patience, and the ability to deal with different types of customers, making it a suitable choice for many women who are looking for practical work while still contributing, as working women earn additional income that can improve their standard of living and the standard of living of family members, as well as reduce fertility which results in increased investment in the quality of children [18].

2.3 Women Workers in Phenomenological Perspective

In essence, the work as the backbone of the family is mostly done by husbands, but not a few wives also play a role as workers in household life [22]. In addition to fulfilling the needs of daily life, women work also to increase their sense of pleasure. This is in accordance with the statement of Bericat [23] who said that the subjective well-being of female workers is characterised by the existence of perceived life satisfaction, being able to bring up positive feelings in the work environment and minimise negative feelings.

In a phenomenological perspective, women workers are understood through their direct and subjective experiences of the role. This perspective not only views work as a physical activity, but also as a meaning-making process influenced by social, cultural and personal contexts. Women workers often face challenges such as gender stereotypes or unrecognised workloads, but these experiences also give them space to build their identities, gain independence, and find meaning beyond their work routines.

Phenomenology invites us to see this work not just as a series of tasks, but as an experience that involves emotions, interactions, and self-reflection. By understanding this dimension of experience, we can better appreciate the role and contribution of women workers in various employment sectors [7].

2.4 Phenomenological Theory

Phenomenology comes from a school of philosophical thought pioneered by Edmund Husserl, a German thinker active in the early 20th century [4]. Husserl tried to show that by using the phenomenological method of ordinary experience to mummy experience, we can know an absolute certainty with the important arrangement of our conscious actions, such as thinking and remembering, and on the other hand the important arrangement of objects is the purpose of these actions, according to Husserl [5]. Retentive consciousness or memory may have rational advantages in terms of storing and accessing knowledge, but it cannot replace the original (presentative) experience that only direct perception or active intellectual vision has.

Phenomenology is a research method that focuses on understanding an individual's subjective experience of a particular phenomenon. Edmund Husserl, a pioneer of phenomenology, stated that this approach aims to understand phenomena as they appear in consciousness, without being influenced by previous assumptions or theories[1]. Husserl emphasised the importance of exploring subjective meanings to get an in-depth picture of social reality.

There are four main features or characteristics of phenomenology[6]. *Firstly*, Husserl aimed to understand the origins of the elements that make up human experience, focusing on their constitutive character. This is seen in his investigation of logic, where he explores the basis of logical ideality in depth.

Secondly, through the concept of *epoche* in *Idea I*, Husserl suspended previous conceptual assumptions, including the naturalistic view of human beings. This step enables an understanding of the world as phenomena that emerge through multi-sensory perception. *Third*, he developed phenomenological reduction, which means tracing the process of meaning formation in direct experience of the surrounding world, rooted in transcendental origins.

Fourth, Merleau-Ponty continues Husserl's ideas by emphasising the importance of the body in the formation of the meaning of the world. He integrates visual experience with other sensory modalities such as kinesthesia and proprioception, replacing Husserl's "*I-pole*" concept with a new approach that emphasises the bodily dimension and anonymity of the protoconstitution. All of this describes phenomenology as an attempt to uncover the basis of phenomena as they are experienced directly in consciousness, leaving aside assumptions that limit such understanding [6].

Phenomenological development was continued by Alfred Schutz, an Austrian philosopher and sociologist known as the founder of social phenomenology. In social research, Alfred Schutz developed social phenomenology which focuses on how individuals interpret their social world. Schutz emphasised the importance of individuals' subjective interpretations of the world they experience to understand social interactions and everyday actions [7].

Schutz sought to understand how individuals organise their social world based on their direct experience, which is

reflected in concepts such as *life-world*, *intersubjectivity*, and *typification* [8]. Some phenomenological ideas according to Schutz are described as follows:

- Intersubjectivity: How individuals' subjective experiences can be mutually understood in social interactions.
- Typification: The process by which individuals create generalised categories or types to make sense of their social world.
- Life-world*: The concept of the world as the world directly experienced by the individual in everyday life, a concept heavily influenced by Husserl's phenomenology.

Schutz introduced the idea that although individuals live in an objective social world, they also experience it subjectively through their own perspectives, and the way they interact and give meaning to those social experiences.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Methods

In the research Women and Coffee Shops: A Review of Phenomenological Perspectives researchers used a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological approach which is a subjective experience or experience displayed in individual daily phenomena and the study of consciousness from the principal perspective of a person Husserl [9]. The phenomenological approach describes the meaning of a lived experience of several people about a concept or phenomenon. People involved in dealing with a phenomenon explore the structure of consciousness of human life experience [10].

In social research, the main procedure in phenomenological analysis is to try to look objectively at the process of our perception and more specifically, how the world is shaped so that we can perceive objects that exist independently. This approach also invites us to understand how consciousness shapes our fantasies, emotional lives, attitudes, and views of what we perceive as the external world. Phenomenology seeks to mentally remove ourselves from this engagement to investigate the perceptions and actions that follow. Thus, this approach allows us to understand the relationship between inner truth and external reality, which is ultimately shaped by interpretative processes [4].

This is in line with qualitative research because qualitative research focuses on the meaning, perception, and experience of humans in a particular context, while the phenomenological approach specifically seeks to explore and explore the essence of these experiences as experienced by the subject. So, phenomenology is one of the main approaches in qualitative research that aims to understand the subjective experiences of individuals.

3.2 Data Collections Instrument and Technique

In phenomenological methods, data collection techniques are designed to explore the subjective experiences of individuals in depth, with the aim of understanding the meaning and essence of these experiences. This is

summarised in qualitative method data collection, namely interviews, document analysis, and observation [10]. *Phenomenological* data analysis techniques mentioned in the book *Phenomenological Research Methods* by Clark Moustakas are four stages, namely: *Epoche*, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. The steps taken by the researcher to get the appropriate results. The purpose of data analysis in this study is to obtain the results of the problem formulation that has been determined by the researcher so that it can be used to answer the problem formulation that has been written in accordance with the research background [13].

This research was conducted in 5 coffee shops in Jember Regency with two considerations, namely the affordability of the location and the provision of services beyond serving coffee buyers. Data collection techniques in this study were non-participatory observation, interviews and document analysis. While the determination of informants in this study was carried out using *purposive sampling* technique, where researchers selected informants based on the criteria of length of time working in coffee shops, hours worked each day, experience possessed and also the interaction and communication possessed by female workers in coffee shops.

In addition, a review of previous literature was used to support the research. The literature review was used to support the field findings and understand the broader context. This review includes previous research on:

- a. Phenomenology in social research, which can explain how an individual's subjective experience can reflect wider social reality [1].
- b. Women in the informal sector, including economic and social factors that encourage women to work in coffee shops [3].
- c. Power relations and gender, which discusses how gender inequalities arise in various informal work contexts [12].

4. RESULT

4.1 Women Workers and Coffee Shops

Coffee shops that employ women often offer unique concepts, combining serving service with intimacy and interpersonal appeal. However, the job often requires them to stay at the workplace and abide by the owner's rules, including restrictions on returning home. Even so, their income can vary depending on the duration of their work and the additional services they provide, so it remains an option for some women.

Based on informants' information, working as a waitress in a pangku coffee shop is not a difficult thing for women. With an attractive appearance, sexy clothes, *make-up* and the ability to mix drinks, they can already work. Their main duties include serving drinks and accompanying customers who are enjoying coffee, which are routine activities.

Observations show that working as a waitress in a pangku coffee shop in Ponorogo Regency requires a serious commitment. Shop owners do not accept women who only want to try working temporarily, such as for one week or one

month. In addition, female waitresses have a close working relationship with the shop owner, including living with the owner and rarely returning home. Their food needs are covered by the owner at no extra cost. Women's working hours as waitresses in the pangku coffee shop start at 18.30 WIB until 24.00 WIB every day, without any holidays, but if there is an obstacle, they can get permission not to come in. Sometimes, in addition to serving customers at night, they often help the owner in the morning to clean the coffee shop and prepare for selling in the evening.

The salaries of the waiters vary and are determined by the stall owners based on certain criteria seen over a period of time. Their basic salary ranges from Rp800,000 to Rp900,000 per month. However, their income can increase to Rp1,500,000 to Rp3,000,000 per month if they are willing to serve guest requests outside of their working hours as coffee shop workers. This salary is considered sufficient by the female workers to fulfil their daily needs and buy clothes or *make-up* equipment to support their work.

Another interesting finding is the relationship between female workers and customers. It is not uncommon for female workers to be treated like being invited to chat, told to accompany, to be groped by their customers, and to lead to covert prostitution.

4.2 Women Workers and Coffee Shops in Phenomenological Perspective

The results of this study show that women workers in coffee shops face various social, economic and cultural challenges that significantly affect their lives. Firstly, the dominance of stall owners over female workers is very prominent. Shop owners have great control over how waitresses look and work, including requiring certain clothing that is considered attractive to customers. This control often creates psychological pressure for workers, especially as they have no other options due to pressing economic needs. This is consistent with previous findings that women in the informal sector tend to be more vulnerable to exploitation due to the lack of formal employment alternatives [11].

The dominance of men over female workers in coffee shops often reflects serious gender inequality in the informal workforce. Coffee shop owners, who are mostly men, use their power to force female workers to wear miniature clothes and *make-up* to attract customers, especially men, in order to boost profits. In this situation, female workers are often not only required to perform primary tasks such as making and serving coffee, but also face pressure to serve customers in ways that go beyond the bounds of professionalism. This creates a work environment that is vulnerable to exploitation, where women are positioned as objects of commodification, both physically and emotionally. This situation not only harms women individually but also reinforces gender stereotypes that devalue women's work in society.

The phenomenon can be analysed using the concept of *epoche* in phenomenology. *Epoche* requires researchers to suspend moral, social, or cultural prejudices or assumptions when studying this phenomenon. In this context, researchers

try to understand the experiences of women workers from their point of view, including the pressures they experience, the way they give meaning to the work situation, and the survival strategies they develop. By suspending normative judgements, phenomenology allows researchers to explore how women workers internalise or perhaps resist such domination, as well as how these power relations shape the meaning of their daily experiences in exploitative work environments.

This is reinforced by Connell's opinion that the dominance of men over women in various work environments reflects an unequal social structure. This phenomenon is often seen in informal work [13]. As experienced by female workers in coffee shops, where they face great control from shop owners over aspects of their appearance and work methods.

Based on observations in the field, the reasons why women work as workers in coffee shops are often related to economic needs and limited access to adequate education. As revealed by the informant, Nurma (pseudonym), who had to become a female worker in a coffee shop because she came from a family background with a low income so that this job was the only option to fulfil life's needs. In many cases, women working in this sector are forced to choose low-paying jobs as a form of fulfilling their daily needs, especially when better job opportunities are hard to reach. According to another informant, Lisa (saramaran name), maintaining a job as a female worker in a coffee shop requires the fulfilment of secondary needs, such as clothes and *make-up*. This is also done because of the demands of the coffee shop owner to attract customers.

Their lack of formal education and training makes them more likely to accept jobs in the informal sector such as coffee shops, where the skills required are more limited and can be learnt on the job. In addition, although many women have the potential to access higher education, social and cultural factors often limit their opportunities to continue their education to the fullest. The informants admitted that for women, choosing to work as a waitress in a *pangku* coffee shop is not a difficult thing to do, as they only need to be attractive, sexy and able to mix drinks. According to them, delivering and also accompanying customers who are enjoying coffee is not uncommon every day.

As a result, women are often trapped in low-income jobs and less favourable working conditions, exacerbating economic and social inequality. This factor is compounded by the social stigma often attached to their work, making it difficult for them to break out of the cycle of informal employment such as in coffee shops. In phenomenological research, the exploitation of women workers in coffee shops can be understood as a reflection of economic needs and social norms that place women in vulnerable positions. Previous studies have shown that women in the informal sector are often forced to accept less than ideal working conditions due to limited education and formal employment opportunities [3].

The relationship between women workers and customers exhibits unequal power dynamics. In many cases, customers take advantage of workers' vulnerable positions to obtain additional services such as in the context of sexuality and this creates a workspace that is vulnerable to exploitation and harassment, both explicitly and implicitly. This is supported by informants that during their work, female workers often receive flirtations such as *cat calling*, pinching private areas, and invitations to stay overnight together. This situation creates ethical boundaries that are difficult for workers to maintain, given that they depend on the income earned from customers.

The findings can be analysed with Schutz's phenomenology, that interactions between individuals create a shared understanding influenced by each other's subjective experiences [8]. Customers often take advantage of female workers' vulnerable positions, reflecting unequal power dynamics. Phenomenology helps reveal how women workers make meaning of these relationships and their strategies to survive in these conditions.

Based on the exposure of the findings in the field above, it can be analysed through Schutz's phenomenology, namely *life-world*, *intersubjectivity*, and *typification*.

- a. *Life-world*: For female coffee shop workers, their life-world reflects the world they experience through interactions with customers, shop owners, and co-workers, where they are engaged not only in the work of serving coffee, but also in more complex social negotiations related to gender, power, and economics. Their lifeworld is influenced by existing social norms, such as the pressure to dress and behave in a certain way to attract customers, as well as economic necessity that requires them to accept often exploitative working conditions. This world is not only the physical world in which they work, but also a world full of social and emotional meanings that are formed through their direct experiences in that context.
- b. *Intersubjectivity*: In the context of women workers in coffee shops, intersubjectivity is visible in how they interact with customers and co-workers, and how social meanings and norms are shaped in these relationships. For example, while the subjective experiences of women workers may vary, they often share a collective awareness of the roles expected of them, such as serving customers in a way that could be perceived as sexualised or dressing scantily to attract attention. It is in these relationships that some women workers develop coping strategies, such as building emotional connections with customers to protect themselves from direct exploitation.
- c. *Typification*: In the context of women workers in coffee shops, typification is seen in the way they categorise customers and the social interactions that occur in the workplace. For example, women workers might classify customers based on their behaviour-such as customers who come just to enjoy

coffee or customers who expect more services, such as extra attention or even sexual advances. By using these categories or types, women workers can navigate the expectations and demands that come from customers as well as coffee shop owners.

5. CONCLUSION

This research shows that women workers in coffee shops face a range of social, economic and cultural challenges that shape their lived experiences. The dominance of warung owners over female workers, who force them to wear miniskirts and serve more than just making coffee, reflects the entrenched gender inequality in the informal sector. This exploitation often stems from pressing economic needs and limited access to adequate education. This phenomenon also creates a work environment that is vulnerable to harassment and exploitation, where female workers are often positioned as objects of commodification to attract customers, especially men.

Using a phenomenological approach, the findings are analysed through concepts such as *life-world*, *intersubjectivity*, and *typification*. The life-world of female coffee shop workers is influenced by social norms and power that require them to accept non-ideal working conditions. In their interactions with customers and colleagues, there is a collective understanding of the roles and expectations imposed on them. Through the process of *typification*, female workers categorise customers based on their behaviour, which helps them manage their daily interactions. Overall, this study reveals how women workers' subjective experiences are influenced by power dynamics, social norms and economic needs, and how they survive in often exploitative conditions.

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