

Research Article

The Meaning of Work among Elderly Informal Workers in Sekotong, Indonesia

Maya Atri Komalasari¹, Moh. Taquiuddin², Azhari Evendi³, Aliya Rahmawati⁴, Ikrima Fina Hayati⁵

¹Sociology, Universitas Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

²Sociology, Universitas Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

³Sociology, Universitas Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

⁴Sociology, Universitas Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

⁵Sociology, Universitas Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

*Corresponding author's email: mayaatrikomalasari@unram.ac.id

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Abstract

The elderly experience a dual vulnerability as both older adults and informal workers; nonetheless, they continue to choose to work. This study aims to uncover the meaning behind the decision to work among elderly informal workers in Sekotong, West Nusa Tenggara. The research is examined utilizing Schutz's motive theory and the concept of role. Employing a qualitative phenomenological method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Informants were selected purposively, and data analysis was conducted using phenomenological techniques. The results indicate that the meaning behind the elderly's decision to work is shaped by their perspectives on the aspects of working, alongside the concepts of the "because-motive" and the "in-order-to-motive." Two distinct meanings of work emerge among these elderly informal workers. First, working is viewed as "obligatory" to fulfill daily necessities and maintain social self-esteem. This meaning is constructed by elderly breadwinners who live alone and those who serve as heads of households. Second, working is perceived as "non-obligatory," voluntary in nature, and non-determinant of self-esteem. This second meaning is constructed by elderly dependents who do not serve as heads of households.



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Introduction

The number of elderly people in Indonesia continues to increase, including in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB). Based on SUPAS data from 2025, NTB is approaching a phase of population aging, with the percentage of elderly people increasing from 8.21 percent in 2020 to 9.72 percent in 2025 (Sofian, 2026). This increase in the number of elderly people has a dual meaning. First, it represents an achievement in increasing life expectancy. Second, it raises problems, particularly an increase in the dependency ratio and welfare of the elderly. The increase in the number of elderly people is not always directly proportional to their welfare. The welfare of the elderly in Indonesia is still not fully met due to various problems they experience (Bondan & Arsiyah, 2015; Afrizal, 2018; Maidar, 2019; Arfyanto et al., 2020). This condition makes the elderly a vulnerable group in society (Humaedi et al., 2020) and marginalized (Ada et al., 2019; Habil & Berlianti, 2023). This structural vulnerability is further exacerbated when older adults reside and work in rural ecosystems. Most available and accessible jobs for older adults are in the informal sector, which lacks pension schemes or retirement benefits. Consequently, older adults in rural areas must continue working to meet their daily needs. It could be argued that working into old age serves as a survival mechanism for older adults (Sari, 2025).

Paradoxically, despite being a source of vulnerability, the informal sector has become a primary choice for older people in rural areas. The informal sector is often preferred by workers, including older people, due to its accessibility. Several studies have shown that the informal sector tends to be a preferred choice for most older people to work rather than the formal sector (Putri et al., 2023). A similar situation is found in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), particularly West Lombok, where older people work more in the agricultural and trade sectors (Arini & Suprpti, 2019). Furthermore, older people in rural areas make a significant contribution to socioeconomic activities (Djamhari et al., 2020). The proportion of older workers in NTB is relatively large, with the percentage of older people working in rural areas (60.63%) higher than in urban areas (52.97%) (BPS Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, 2024).

Elderly workers in the informal sector in rural areas are considered highly vulnerable. The informal sector itself is a type of work that carries inherent risks (Talib et al., 2020; Putri, 2022; Dewantoro, 2024). Informal sector workers are often associated with the terms vulnerable workers and non-permanent workers. Elderly workers in NTB are included in the categories of vulnerable employment (self-employed, family workers, and daily workers) and non-permanent employment (daily workers in the agricultural and non-agricultural sectors). Based on the 2023 elderly profile data in NTB, the percentage of elderly who are self-employed reached 32.58%; elderly who work for wages reached 41.07%; elderly who work as employees/workers amounted to 4.03%; family workers amounted to 12.61%, and daily workers amounted to 9.72% (BPS Provinsi Nusa Tenggara Barat, 2024).

Sekotong is a popular coastal and rural tourist destination in West Lombok, visited by both domestic and international tourists. Besides its renowned tourist attractions, Sekotong is a coastal area with a large number of elderly informal workers in the tourism sector (Komalasari et al., 2023a). The Sekotong area is not only a tourist destination but also a place for seniors to seek employment opportunities.

Elderly, or the acronym for elderly, represents the final stage of life, typically aged 60 and above, facing social and economic health challenges that impact quality of life (Alimurdianis et al., 2024). A significant challenge for older adults regarding access to employment is Indonesia's labor policy, which creates age restrictions that structurally limit access for older job seekers, even those with adequate experience, competence, and qualifications (Warsida et al., 2025). Employment options for older adults are severely limited. The challenges are further compounded for older adults without pensions, as pensions significantly impact their workforce participation (Kartikasari & Hanri, 2020). In other words, older adults working as informal workers face greater challenges than those employed in the formal sector, who typically have pensions. Meanwhile, older adults in rural areas are more likely to work in the informal sector due to lower access to education and training/courses (Sandi et al., 2022). Ultimately, older adults, as informal workers in rural areas, are a vulnerable group facing various challenges that complicate their lives.

Working is a conscious decision made by individuals, each with their own considerations. What makes this particularly interesting is that the decision to work is made by elderly people who are vulnerable due to declining physical conditions and face limited job opportunities. Extant literature demonstrates a corporate preference for younger cohorts over older counterparts, structurally limiting formal opportunities. There are rational, deep, and meaningful reasons behind the decision of older people to work in the informal sector in Sekotong. These reasons can be comprehensively examined using the social definition paradigm, which emphasizes the subjectivity of actions within and across social groups (Urfan et al., 2024).

One theory within this paradigm is phenomenology, which emphasizes two aspects: knowledge and action. According to Schutz, the essence of knowledge in social life is considered a tool for controlling the body through human consciousness in everyday life. Therefore, the core of his thinking is how to understand social action through interpretation (Alfani & Putri, 2024). Phenomenology places the individual's role as the giver of meaning (Maliki, 2012). Furthermore, the meaning of an action taken by someone must also be seen in the context of that person's past and future (Supraja, 2015).

The decision of older adults to work cannot be separated from social aspects in society, such as status and role. As informal workers, older adults are also members of society, thus they have status and roles in society. When someone fulfills a role, it means they are exercising the rights and obligations that accompany their status (Sunarto, 2004). An individual's role is closely related to the expectations of others or society towards that individual (Komalasari et al., 2023b). Roles cannot be separated from prevailing

norms in society because roles indicate a function of self-adjustment and are a process (Margayaningsih, 2018).

Many previous studies have examined the reasons or motives for older adults to work (Jane & Abidin, 2020; Riani et al., 2023), however, these studies focused too much on purely economic motives without considering the depth of the lifeworld of the subjects, namely the elderly as informal workers. Meanwhile, the literature discussing elderly informal workers is still limited to studies of media representations (Sandi et al., 2022). This research gap indicates the lack of in-depth sociological studies that combine awareness of the past and future with the pressures of social roles experienced by vulnerable older adults in coastal and rural areas.

This research's novelty lies in the coastal area of Sekotong as both a locus and a social context. Unlike previous research, which generally views the tourism sector as an opportunity for young people, this study offers a different perspective: a rethinking of how elderly informal workers negotiate and interpret tourism in Sekotong as a physical, economic, and social space for survival in old age.

This research contributes theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it enriches the body of knowledge in social gerontology and the sociology of labor, particularly in explaining the structural construction of post-retirement work in developing countries. Practically, the research findings serve as recommendations for the West Lombok (NTB) Regional Government in formulating appropriate social security and protection policies for elderly informal workers living in coastal areas. Therefore, this study aims to uncover the meaning behind the decision of elderly informal workers to work in Sekotong, West Lombok.

Method

Phenomenology was chosen because its objectives align with the research objectives. Phenomenology reveals the meaning of a phenomenon occurring in society through the experiences of the individuals involved (Wita & Mursal, 2022). Specifically, the phenomenology used is Alfred Schutz's phenomenology in social sciences, which offers a new perspective on the focus of research studies and explores the meanings constructed from the realities of everyday life in research specifically and within the broader framework of social science development (Nindito, 2013).

Informants comprised elderly informal workers in Sekotong, selected via purposive sampling. The criteria used included: working as vulnerable workers or temporary workers, having worked for at least 6 months, and working in locations around tourist attractions in Sekotong District such as Elak-elak Beach, Bangko-bangko Beach, and Mekaki Beach (in four villages, namely Buwun Mas, West Sekotong, Pelangan, and Batu Putih). The unit of analysis was the individual, and there were 10 elderly informal workers as informants. The final sample size was determined at ten informants upon reaching data saturation, wherein

subsequent interviews yielded repetitive and redundant thematic codes. The number of informants took into account the fulfillment of data saturation such as the same and consistent informant answers, the diversity of professions of elderly workers (farmers, ship laborers, salt farmers, shellfish workers, food and beverage sellers, stall owners), including gender diversity, namely including male and female informants, and including the diversity of elderly statuses including elderly who live with families and those who live without families.

Data collection was conducted using in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The observation process involved observing the work activities of the elderly, their workplace or work environment, and, on several occasions, trying out the work performed by the elderly. An interview guide was developed with questions to uncover the reasons why the elderly work and understand the meaning behind their decisions to work. The interviews were in-depth but unstructured. The interview process lasted for one month in August 2025. Documentation was carried out by recording interviews with informants using a recorder and taking field notes. Data validity was conducted using triangulation techniques (using 3 data collection techniques) and source triangulation (using 10 informants). The research data was validated by extending the observation for 2 months from July to August 2025. To maintain research ethics, the researcher obtained informant consent and used pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of informant identities.

The data analysis began by describing the types of elderly, their work activities, and their reasons for choosing to work. The next step was the horizontalization stage, which involved collecting and identifying various important and relevant responses and statements, such as the elderly's views on the need for work, the perception that working for the elderly is unusual, and the belief that the elderly feel valuable if they work. The researchers then identified themes within the research findings, namely the elderly in the coastal area of Sekotong, the reasons why the elderly work, and the formation of the meaning of work for the elderly. The researchers then described each theme. Next, key themes were identified. The authors explained the essence of these key themes regarding the reasons for working and the meaning of work for the elderly. These essences were compared with related findings, and similarities and differences were sought. Finally, narratives and descriptions were compiled, resulting in important patterns in the meaning of work decisions for the elderly for each type of informal worker in Sekotong.

Results

Seniors in the Sekotong Coastal Area

Seniors' Livelihoods

The Sekotong area is geographically a coastal area and directly borders the sea. This also indicates that Sekotong is a tourist destination with a variety of tourist attractions and objects (ODTW) on offer. This

certainly has significant potential to influence community activities, including the elderly in the area. Observations indicate that many elderly people still engage in informal work activities in coastal areas every day.



Figure 1. Elderly clam collectors

The Sekotong area, which is both a coastal and highland region and a tourist destination, provides diverse livelihoods for seniors. Seniors living in coastal areas work as shellfish gatherers, salt farmers, and even shipworkers at the harbor. As shellfish gatherers, seniors search for and collect shells left along the coast, which are then collected in sacks and sold to collectors as raw materials for accessories or souvenirs. Seniors who work as salt farmers make salt traditionally, a small-scale salt-making business. As ship crews, seniors work at the harbor, waiting for fishermen who need help removing fish from nets, cleaning boats, and cleaning the harbor area. Many seniors also work in coastal areas and beaches (see Figures 1 and 2).



Figure 2. Elderly workers at the harbor

Meanwhile, seniors living near mountainous and agricultural areas often work as farmers, farm laborers, and livestock breeders. Another common profession among seniors living near tourist areas is running their own businesses as traders. Some seniors sell snacks and drinks, and some own stalls selling basic necessities and gasoline. Those who own stalls selling snacks, ice cream, coffee, and other drinks serve local residents and passing tourists, or simply provide a place to rest before continuing their journey (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Elderly as food and beverage vendor

Social and Economic Factors Affecting the Elderly

Based on the latest statistical data for 2024, the number of elderly people in Sekotong District reached 5,162 people or 7.31% of the total population of Sekotong District (BPS Kabupaten Lombok Barat, 2025). The areas used for this research, namely Sekotong Barat Village, Pelangan Village, Batu Putih Village, and Buwun Mas Village, are classified as villages with the largest populations in Sekotong District. One of the villages is even the most densely populated village, namely Buwun Mas Village, with a population of 14,970 people. Table 1 outlines the population distribution across villages within Sekotong District in 2024.

Table 1. Population by Village/Sub-district in Sekotong District, 2024.

Village/Sub-district	Total population
Pelangan	9.183
Sekotong Barat	10.625
Buwun Mas	14.970
Sekotong Tengah	8.684
Kedaro	6.547
Batu Putih	8.148
Cendi Manik	6.450
Gili Gede Indah	1.510

Village/Sub-district	Total population
Taman Baru	4.467
Sekotong District	70.584

Of the four villages selected for this study, all have the largest populations in Sekotong District: Buwun Mas Village, West Sekotong Village, Pelangan Village, and Batu Putih Village. This contributes to fiercer job competition, especially for the elderly.

Despite being a tourist destination, transportation in the Sekotong area is inadequate. Public transportation is very limited and only serves tourist attractions, such as the harbor or pier for crossings to Gili Nanggu, Gili Kendis, and Gili Sudak. Public transportation between villages is extremely limited, so many residents resort to private vehicles for inter-village travel. This difficulty is also experienced by the elderly, especially those who don't own a private vehicle or lack the skills to drive a motorized vehicle. This significantly limits the mobility of the elderly, thus limiting their access to employment opportunities. The limitations of public transportation are proven by statistical data (see Table 2), overall there are only 9 infrastructure and transportation facilities between villages/districts in Sekotong.

Table 2. Number of Villages/Sub-districts According to Inter-Village Transportation Infrastructure and Facilities in Sekotong District 2024

Inter-village/sub-district Transportation Infrastructure and Facilities	Total
Land	8
Water	-
Land and water	1
Air/water	-

Reasons for the Elderly to Work

Meeting Daily Needs

The ever-increasing daily needs are the primary reason these elderly workers continue working. They decide to work because they are forced to meet the necessities of life that must be met. Although the income from their work is relatively small and even uncertain, they persist because it at least provides for their living expenses. This is especially evident among elderly people living alone and those who are heads of households. The increasing number of dependents forces elderly people who act as heads of households to continue working to meet the ever-increasing household needs (Saputro et al., 2023; Dewiani & Meydianawathi, 2025). They stated that the purpose of working was to meet their own living needs as well as the needs of their families, partners, and children. The following are statements from MSL informants regarding their motivations for working in old age:

"Yes, I have to keep working because I have two children who are still in college and need a lot of tuition fees" (MSL, August 16, 2025)

Meanwhile, elderly people who live alone are forced to work to survive. Work becomes the only option for them, driven by the desire to continue their lives on their own. Especially for elderly people without partners or children, work becomes a necessity. The following is a statement from one informant, an elderly person living alone without family, Mrs. SIH:

"To meet my personal needs, because I didn't marry until I was old and didn't have children, I had no one to rely on" (SIH, August 30, 2025).

Meeting daily needs forces seniors to work. Economic factors are a driving factor for seniors to work (Junaidi et al., 2017).

Helping Family Members Meet Their Needs

Helping family members meet their needs is a key reason for working for those who live with their families but are not heads of household. The reason for working is driven by a desire to assist family members in meeting their family's financial needs. They strive to help meet their family's daily needs. Elderly individuals don't work every day; they only work when they feel like it, simply to help out. The following is an explanation from informant Mrs. MDA, who works in her child's salt-making business:

"(Working) Just to help my child with his work" (MDA, August 30, 2025)

This desire to help is influenced by the values they believe in, namely the value of mutual assistance or helping others. The value of mutual assistance within families and communities is also common in social life and has even become a value and ethic that is believed in and practiced (Putra & Upe, 2019; Danurwinda et al., 2024). One of the reasons that motivates the elderly to work is to help their husbands or children in meeting the family's living needs (Putri et al., 2023).

Role as Head of the Family

The role of head of the family reflects the reasons why older adults work, especially those who hold the position of head of the family. Research findings demonstrate this fact through several statements from informants Mr. MSL and Mr. MST, who are elderly heads of household.

"(Working) To provide for the needs of my children and wife" (MSL, August 6, 2025)

"(Working) To buy rice and food, and give it to my wife" (MST, August 30, 2025)

The status of head of the family forces those in that position to carry out their roles according to the

role expectations of society. In the context of roles, it is assumed that people are integral parts of certain social positions that hold expectations for their own behavior and for the behavior of others around them (Prayudi et al., 2019). The status and role of head of the family demands the fulfillment of the expected role of breadwinner. Married elderly men tend to work due to economic pressures within the family (Puri & Wasudewa, 2022). Husbands try to carry out their responsibilities in providing for their families (Sitorus & Turnip, 2024).

Shame If Not Working

Social constructs also influence the reasons for working among older adults. This construct refers to the feeling of shame that arises if they do not work. This construct applies to both men and women and to members of society in general. This is illustrated by the following statements from informants MSL, an elderly man, and HLH, an elderly woman:

"Because I am the head of the family, of course I would be ashamed if I did not work. As long as I am healthy, I will continue to work." (MSL, August 16, 2025)

"Yes, if I don't work, I will certainly feel ashamed at home in front of my neighbors." (HLH, August 10, 2025)

As long as they are healthy, elderly men should continue working to avoid embarrassment in society. Unemployed husbands often experience psychological stress and social stigma. Meanwhile, the research findings also show that older women also feel ashamed if they don't work, suggesting that work is a social construct. Women work to gain recognition and respect from their social environment (Iswari & Pradhanawati, 2018)

Work Has Become a Part of Life

Working has become a part of life for the elderly, as well as for the communities in which they live. It has become a habit and a part of their lives. For them, work has long been a part of their lives, giving them a reason to continue working into old age. Furthermore, if they don't work, they feel strange because they've become accustomed to it. Informant SAH's statement reinforces this.

"(If I don't work) I'm not ashamed, but I'm used to working" (SAH, August 7, 2025)

Since they were young, older people have developed a work ethic, so if they stop, it feels like something is missing from their lives. Work has been part of their daily routine for decades, even decades. Older workers still choose to work because they are continuing the work they had when they were younger (Ramadhayanty & Murlianti, 2023).

Still physically and socially able to work, interact, and carry out daily activities

Relatively good physical health is a reason for older adults to work or continue working. This is because their physical condition does not prevent them from working. They feel they still have physical health, the ability to perform daily household chores, and the ability to interact in society, making them worthy of working. Statements from SRM informants confirm this.

“Yes, I’m healthy. Thank God, I can still do my activities and am strong enough to fast on Mondays and Thursdays. (SRM, August 30, 2025)

Elderly people who are still healthy and able to work strengthen their motivation to work. Good physical health allows them to live more independently, actively, and productively. Below is a more concise and simple explanation with a table regarding the reasons behind the decision of seniors to work (see Table 3).

Table 3. Reasons Why the Elderly Decide to Work

Reasons for Deciding to Work	Type of Elderly		
	Without family	Living with family	Living with family and as the head of the household
Meeting daily living needs	Yes	No	Yes
Helping family members	No	Yes	No
Role as the head of the family (providing for the family)	No	No	Yes
Ashamed if not working	Yes	Yes	Yes
Still physically and socially capable of working, interacting and carrying out daily activities	Yes	Yes	Yes
Working has become a part of life	Yes	Yes	Yes

The Formation of the Meaning of Working for the Elderly

The “Everyone Needs to Work” View

In general, older adults believe that everyone must work to earn an income and meet their living expenses. These older adults hold this view, particularly those who are heads of households or those without family members to support them. They hold this view because of their position as breadwinners, not recipients. The findings of this study reflect the statements of MSL informants, who are older breadwinners.

“Yes, everyone has to work to meet their living needs” (MSL, August 16, 2025)

However, there are informants who oppose or contradict the view that "everyone needs to work." The informant is an elderly person who lives with his family but is not the head of the family so he is the breadwinner. He believes that if there is someone to support them, then work is not necessary. The following is the statement of informant Mrs. MHD who is not the head of the family.

"You don't need to work if you have children and a husband to support you" (MHD, August 30, 2025)

The Perspective: "Elderly People Are Considered Strange If They Work"

In general, working older adults are considered normal or natural. Their community doesn't view it as abnormal. Working older adults are a common phenomenon in society. Those who tend to agree with this view are those who are breadwinners (those who live alone or with their families and are the head of the household). This is supported by the statement of one informant, Ms. UAS:

"Because in the village, working is commonplace and considered normal, because they feel they are still able to work." (UAS, August 16, 2025)

It's perfectly normal for older adults to become or continue to work because they retain their physical, mental, and social abilities. Furthermore, even as workers, older adults still make a significant contribution to the family economy. Other research even shows an annual increase in the number and percentage of older adults still actively working, significantly contributing to the national economy (Aqil, 2023).

On the other hand, some seniors who hold the view that "it's strange for seniors to work" are those who are breadwinners or those who live with their families but are not the head of the household. Mrs. MHD explained this explanation.

"Yes (it's strange for seniors to work) because here, it's rare for older people to work, except for men. Like my husband, who, despite his age, still works as a fisherman." (MHD, August 30, 2025)

The view that "Seniors Feel Valuable When They Work"

In general, older adults agree and believe that they feel valued when they work. Working makes them feel valuable. This is reinforced by the following statement from informant Mrs. UAS.

"Yes (valuable) as long as they are able to work and there is work to be done, then they will be valued for their work and income" (UAS, August 16, 2025)

Elderly people define the value of life as being able and economically independent to meet their daily needs. This independence makes them feel valued and more confident. Working not only provides

economic benefits but also supports self-confidence, independence, and healthy social relationships (V. J. Pratiwi et al., 2025).

There was also an elderly person who interpreted the value of work as not based on economic capability. Elderly people who disagreed with the view of feeling valuable through work were those who were not heads of households, as they also desired to rest at home and be cared for by their families. In other words, the ability to meet life's needs was not a determinant of self-worth. The statement by informant Mrs. MHD, who is an elderly person who lives with her family but is not the head of the household, confirmed this:

"Because when a person is old, they have to be cared for by their children, unless it is their own wish to continue working" (MHD, August 30, 2025).

Some older adults consider their self-worth not to be based on economic independence, but instead expect family support. This aligns with previous research showing that older adults' motivations for working are not economic but based on hobbies and personal interests (Ulfa, 2019). It's possible that older adults work simply to pursue their hobbies. The research results show the views of older adults on work. A simple explanation is provided in the table below (see table 4).

Table 4. Elderly Perspective on Working

Type of elderly	People must work	Elderly Perspective Elderly people are considered strange if they work	Elderly people are valuable when they work
Elderly people living alone and elderly people who are heads of households (breadwinner)	Agree	Disagree	Agree
Elderly people who live with family but are not the head of the household (recipient of sustenance)	Disagree	Agree	Disagree

Discussion

Elderly workers in Sekotong face vulnerability. This is due to the difficulty of finding work in coastal and rural areas. The limited availability of employment opportunities makes informal employment their only option. Furthermore, their skills and education are limited. One informant, Mrs. HLH, expressed difficulty in finding work.

"Because finding work here is difficult, so whatever can be done will be done as long as it is possible (HLH, August 10, 2025)

Most of them only have a primary school education, and some have no education at all, making it difficult for them to find work in other sectors, especially the formal sector. Elderly people have limited access to formal employment (Kinasih et al., 2026).

Another factor, mobility, influences the choice of the informal sector by the elderly. This is because they are relatively low-mobility and lack private vehicles, so they prefer jobs located close to or near their homes. Meanwhile, public transportation is unavailable in rural areas. Access to rural transportation is inadequate, resulting in challenges such as long distances, poor road conditions, and limited transportation infrastructure (Baihaki et al., 2023).

There are few jobs in the tourism sector that are accessible to the elderly. The development of the modern sector (tourism) provides few opportunities for the elderly workforce to utilize their potential (Fitrianifah, 2017). This is because these jobs generally require specialized knowledge and skills, which the elderly, such as those employed as tour guides, lack. Furthermore, other jobs in the tourism sector, such as motorcycle rentals, are also inaccessible to the elderly due to their limited capital. Therefore, although Sekotong is a tourist area, not all tourism-related job opportunities are accessible to the elderly. Opportunities within the tourism area accessible to the elderly include trading or selling food, beverages, and gasoline. Based on observations, tourists visiting Sekotong typically use motorized transportation such as cars and motorcycles, requiring gasoline for refueling. The number of gas stations (SPBU) in the Sekotong area is still limited, making retail gasoline sales a potential job opportunity, especially for the elderly. One CND informant confirmed this with the following statement:

"It just so happens that there are a lot of foreign tourists here, so it's quite strategic to open a shop, especially selling gasoline, which is enough for daily needs" (Interview, August 16, 2025).

The income of elderly people working in the informal sector in Sekotong is considered inadequate for daily living standards. The average income earned by elderly people is insufficient to meet their basic needs. Furthermore, as informal workers, their income is uncertain or inconsistent. This sometimes forces them to borrow money from neighbors or relatives. However, some elderly people who have side jobs also work more than one job. Unfortunately, most elderly people do not have a side job, so their income from informal work is their sole means of meeting their daily needs. Debt is a common way for elderly people to meet their living expenses. The following is a statement from an informant, SAH, a trader, regarding debt.

"My income is uncertain, if it's a lot, it's enough, if it's not enough, I sometimes borrow money from my neighbors." (SAH, August 7, 2025)

The economic conditions of the elderly are still far from prosperous. Elderly people living in rural areas, without pensions or health insurance, with limited education, or facing physical or emotional difficulties are significantly more vulnerable to poverty (Faharuddin, 2025).

The manifest vulnerability of elderly informal workers constitutes the "because-motive" driving their workforce participation. Similar to economic factors such as meeting daily living needs, and biological factors that indicate that elderly people are still strong enough to work, psychological factors indicate that working has become an ingrained habit for elderly people since they were young. The because motive of elderly people work revolves around external and structural pressures as elderly informal workers and the resources they still possess, namely biological and psychological abilities (a strong motivation to continue working). Furthermore, this shows that efforts to survive and continue living (survival) tend to be the reason why elderly informal workers in the Sekotong coast.

Meanwhile, in order to motivate for elderly informal workers to work is the hope of maintaining their honor and self-worth in society. This is primarily demonstrated by their avoidance of social stigma and the shame of being unemployed or no longer productive. Furthermore, the self-worth of elderly individuals as heads of families and those living alone is due to their ability to fulfill their social roles, as expected by society, namely as breadwinners. In order to motivate refers to elderly individuals as heads of families and those living alone.

For them, carrying out a social role is also an in-order motive for working. Therefore, work is interpreted as a necessity for the survival of individuals and families and for maintaining self-respect in society. Work becomes their only option, with no other options. Like it or not, they must work to survive and maintain their social dignity. This interpretation tends to come from older adults who are breadwinners, namely those living alone and those who are heads of households. Economic factors are the driving force behind most older adults' work (Pratiwi & Samudro, 2017; Yusuf et al., 2020) . The subjects of this study were elderly informal workers, who do not have non-work income such as pension guarantees, thus forcing them to continue working. In addition, previous research findings state that for elderly women it is a form of social responsibility, to build relationships with other people, as a form of independence, for personal freedom, and as a form of self-existence (Lestari & Afiatin, 2019).

A different situation is experienced by older adults who live with their families but are not the head of the family. Their social role is as members of society and as family members who are provided with a living. Their because motives for working tend to be based on the resources they still possess, namely their

physical and biological abilities, and a strong motivation to work to help ease the burden on the breadwinner. This indicates that older adults' work motives are more relational and situational. Relational means they work because of their relationship with the head of the family, and situational means they don't work every day or at any time, but rather according to their own wishes.

Meanwhile, the in-order motive of older adults who are not heads of households tends to maintain their physical and mental health and well-being. Continuing to work keeps them away from boredom and loneliness. Boredom and loneliness actually make them susceptible to illness due to lack of physical activity. Their in-order motive indicates that they experience role distance. Role distance is a concept by Erving Goffman that defines the degree of separation of an individual from the roles they are expected to play. It is also defined as a function of a person's social status. For example, people with high social status more often exhibit social distance due to reasons of different social status than people with lower status positions (Manihuruk, 2005). Their daily needs are met by the head of the family, who is the breadwinner, so they are not required to work. They also do not need to fulfill the role expectations of the head of the family because the demands of being the breadwinner are not inherent in their status as mere family members, such as grandmothers or wives. For them, work is interpreted as something voluntary for the elderly. Working is a conscious choice made by the elderly among other options. Working does not determine their social worth.

In this case, a contradiction was found between the results of this study and previous studies. Other studies show that the intrinsic factors of the elderly encourage them to work because they come from within themselves and are rooted in hobbies (Ulfa, 2019). Previous research findings also highlighted that the elderly continue to work today because they want to maximize their worship, as they seek blessings in their lives (Pratiwi & Samudro, 2017). Two previous studies contradict the meaning of work in this study.

The findings of this study reinforce the assumptions of Alfred Schutz's motive theory, with its concepts of 'because motive' and 'in order to motive'. The vulnerability experienced by elderly informal workers tends to be their "because motive," while their "in-order motive" is also their "in-order motive." Thus, there is a strong link between a person's structural vulnerability and their "because motive" and "in-order motive" when taking action or carrying out life decisions. Furthermore, new insights have been generated, namely the concept of social roles, which can sharpen Schultz's theory of motives, especially because the context of the subjects studied are members of society and cannot be separated from aspects of status/position and role in society. The application of motivation theory is broader and more diverse because it can be applied to elderly informal workers in coastal and rural areas, such as the Sekotong region.

Conclusion

Elderly people in the coastal area of Sekotong are elderly informal sector workers who experience vulnerability. Despite experiencing vulnerability in terms of limited accessible jobs, to uncertain income

that is insufficient to meet their needs, the elderly still decide to work. This decision is based on various reasons for elderly informal workers. The meaning behind the elderly's decision to work is formed due to the alignment of field findings with the concepts of "because motives" and "in order to motives." This alignment shows two meanings behind the decision to work as interpreted by elderly informal workers in Sekotong. Elderly breadwinners, namely those who live alone and those who are heads of families, understand that working or doing work is obligatory as valuable members of society, while also meeting the needs of themselves and their families. Meanwhile, elderly who are provided with support, namely those who live with their families but are not heads of families, view work or doing work as something that is not mandatory, voluntary, and does not determine their self-esteem in society.

An interesting finding from this study is that the main reasons why older adults decide to work are economic pressure to meet their living needs, their role as heads of families, and social constructs about the value of working people. However, this finding contradicts several previous studies that were able to explore the intrinsic aspects of why older adults work, namely working as a hobby and working as a blessing. The intrinsic aspects of older adults' reasons for working that have not been comprehensively explained are a limitation of this study. Furthermore, this study has not thoroughly explored the barriers, challenges, and resilience specific to older adults working in the informal sector who live alone or as heads of families, considering that they experience double vulnerability compared to older adults who live with their families and are not heads of families.

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Author's contributions

Conceptualization: Maya Atri Komalasari; **Methodology:** Maya Atri Komalasari, Moh. Taqiuddin; **Data collection:** Aliya Rahmawati, Ikrima Fina Hayati; **Formal analysis:** Maya Atri Komalasari; **Writing—original draft preparation:** Maya Atri Komalasari; **Writing—review and editing:** Moh. Taqiuddin; **Supervision:** Azhari Evendi. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Data availability

All authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

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