Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has been and continues to be a major policy direction in advanced economies. A number of arguments are made to justify this policy approach:

- The provision of ECEC enables mothers of young children to maintain their attachment to the labour force. In the short term, this increases the family’s income reducing the chance that the family will be poor. In the longer term, it enables the woman to enjoy the benefits of her education more fully and to progress her career. In contrast, a long absence from the labour force can greatly reduce future employment prospects.

- At the national level, higher labour force participation for mothers adds to national product and GDP per capita. It enables the nation to realise on the investment that has been made in the woman’s education. It has been observed that nations can avoid the onset of unacceptably low fertility by supporting the employment of mothers.

- ECEC is an essential component of gender equity and the creation of a healthy balance between work and family.

- Most importantly, ECEC is good for children, especially those in poor families. A considerable amount of research evidence has shown that ECEC enhances children’s intellectual development. Through ECEC, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to start formal schooling on a level comparable to those from more well endowed families. ECEC therefore is a means of ending the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.

- By preparing children for school, ECEC enables primary schools to spend less time on remedial education.

This policy brief focuses on the evidence for the first of these dot points: mothers being out of the labour force because they have no one to look after their children.

### Reasons for not working

Among respondents in the *2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Survey*, there was very little difference in the employment status of men and women who did not have children. In both cases around 30 percent were not employed and most of these were students. However, for those that had children, the difference in employment status was huge: only 7 percent of fathers were not employed compared to 67 percent of mothers.

The survey investigated the reasons for not being employed. For childless respondents, both men and women, and for fathers, the dominant
Table 1. Employment status by parenthood and sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Childless respondents</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Currently not employed</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>684</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Survey

answers were either that they were studying or that they could not find work at all or work that was suitable. In contrast, the reasons that mothers were not working were heavily related to care of their children. Similar questions were asked about the employment of wives of married males with similar responses.

The employment situations of the 1,413 mothers in the sample including the wives of male respondents are shown in Table 2. Only 31 percent were employed. An almost equal percentage (30%) was not working because they had no one to look after their children. One in seven was not working because their husbands did not permit them to work.

When mothers returned to work after the birth of a child, the child care was provided by the child’s grandparents (51%), by a servant or a trained baby sitter (14%), by other relatives (12%), or by friends or neighbors (3%). In eight percent of cases, the child was cared for by the father of the child and in 12 percent of cases, the mother was able to have the child with her while she worked. It is clear from this distribution that most mothers who could not depend on relatives to do the caring or were unable to afford to pay for a servant or trained baby sitter, would have little option other than not working. Fathers, neighbors and working while caring for the child were not common forms of child care. Thus 30 percent of mothers were not working because they had no one to look after their children.

Consistent with the interpretation in the previous paragraph, multivariate analysis found that mothers who were not working because they had no one to look after the children were more likely to be migrants to Greater Jakarta, to have husbands with lower incomes and to not have tertiary education. In summary, they were more disadvantaged than other mothers.

The fact that many women who would prefer to work are not able to do so represents a loss of human capital to the economy. It also means that poorer households remain poorer than they would be if the wife was able to work. It is very likely that children living in disadvantaged circumstances will be less ready for school than those that are more advantaged, especially those who are cared for by a trained worker. This seems to be the belief of well-off families in Jakarta who send their pre-school children to expensive early learning centers.

Potential policy directions

If the concern is only about poorer mothers being unable to work, a relatively cheap option would be to organize child care locally in poorer communities where the carers would be other women living in the same community who are paid for their services. A nutrition program could be associated with this type of scheme providing children from poorer families with a healthy and nutritious meal.

If the concern is about the health and early education of the child while at the same time allowing the mother to work, then a program somewhat like the United States Head Start Program is a possible approach. Besides, health and nutrition programs, Head Start provides early education for the children of poor families. This is done at the local level. Evaluations of Head Start in the US have produced a range of results, mainly positive but sometimes negative, however, the societal features leading to some poor results in
The US are generally not applicable to Jakarta (substance abuse, race, dysfunctional primary schools). In general, however, participants in *Head Start* from poor families have been shown to be much better prepared for school and to have much better adult outcomes than poor children that did not participate in *Head Start* (Currie and Thomas 1995).

A program targeted to only poor families, however, has some limitations. First, other targeted programs for the poor in Indonesia, for example, the subsidised rice (*Beras Miskin* - Raskin) and direct cash assistance (*Bantuan Langsung Tunai* – BLT) programs, have experienced problems in defining and establishing eligibility at the local level sometimes leading to conflict. Even if this was not an issue, a program like *Head Start* would provide an advantage to those children participating in the program and not to children who were cared for in other ways (grandparents, other relatives, etc.).

The ultimate approach is a universal early childhood education program. Such programs have now become common in many developed countries. These apply usually only to three and four year old children to prepare them for the first year of school at age five.

There are obviously very substantial cost differences between these various options. In addition, an early childhood education approach requires specialist training of early childhood educators, not yet a major specialisation in Indonesian teacher training programs.

**Reference**

Research Team:

Australian Demographic and Social Research Institute-Australian National University (ADSRI-ANU):
• Dr. Iwu Dwisetyani Utomo (Principal Investigator I)
• Prof. Peter McDonald (Principal Investigator II)
• Prof. Terence Hull (Principal Investigator III)
• Anna Reimondos
• Dr. Ariane Utomo

Centre for Health Research-University of Indonesia:
• Dr. Sabarinah Prasetyo
• Prof. Budi Utomo
• Heru Suparno
• Dadun
• Yelda Fitria

Asian Research Institute-National University of Singapore (ARI-NUS):
• Prof. Gavin Jones

Correspondence: Peter.McDonald@anu.edu.au or Iwu.Utomo@anu.edu.au

The 2010 Greater Jakarta Transition to Adulthood Survey Description:

This study on transition to adulthood is being conducted in Jakarta, Bekasi and Tanggerang. This study is the first comprehensive survey on transition to adulthood conducted in Indonesia. The study is funded by the Australian Research Council, WHO, ADSRI-ANU and the ARI-NUS. The sampling involved a two-stage cluster sample using the probability proportional to size (PPS) method. In the first stage, 60 Kelurahan (District) were selected using PPS. In the second stage, five counties (Rukun Tetangga) were chosen within each selected Kelurahan by systematic random sampling. The 300 selected RT were then censused and mapped. The census collected information on the age, sex, marital status and relationship to head of household of all household members. From the census, a listing of all eligible respondents (aged 20-34) living in the Rukun Tetangga was compiled. Eleven eligible persons were then selected by simple random sampling from the eligible county population. This resulted in a sample of 3,006 young adults.

Two survey instruments were employed. The first questionnaire administered by a trained interviewer covered all demographic aspects of the respondents, including their parents and spouse (if the respondent is married): education, work and migration histories; income and economic status; working conditions; living arrangements, relationships and marriage; number of children, family planning practices and abortion; physical-mental health related issues and happiness; smoking and drinking; religiosity and affiliation to religious and or political organizations; gender norms, values of children and world views. The second self-administered questionnaire covered issues relating to sexual practices and behavior, safe sex practices, STDs/HIV/AIDS knowledge, access to reproductive health services, and drug use. After completion, the respondent sealed this questionnaire in an envelope before returning it to the interviewer. The study also includes 100 in-depth interviews with randomly selected respondents from the survey.

This study will produce a series of policy briefs and if funding is made possible will be continued as a longitudinal panel study following the livelihood, demographic and career aspects of the respondents over 10 years. The same respondents will be interviewed once every three years.

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