Surviving Spouses: Support for Widows in Malang, East Java
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Chapter 5

THE VICARIOUS SAFETY NET

Neighbourly Support for Widows

1. Introduction

In general, family members are the most important support providers for widows. Family support is, however, precarious. To what extent widows can rely on family support during the period of hardship depends on various factors. Generally, family members are not the sole support providers since other support providers are also play a role in the support arena. This is especially true when family support is insufficient or absent. Neighbours can obviously be included as alternative support providers. There are cases in which widows have to depend strongly on support from neighbours.

This chapter will examine various aspects of neighbourly support for widows who live in Javanese urban neighbourhoods, and will explore the questions: what kinds of neighbourly support are received or gained by the widows? In which circumstances? Who are the support providers? What determines the widows’ access to a certain kind of neighbourly support? How important is neighbourly support for the widows’ well being?

In section two, I will discuss terminological clarification and some entry points on support relation among neighbours. In section three, I shall describe various aspects of neighbouring in Semeru and Kacangan alleys. In this section, the widows’ social activities will also be illustrated. Section four will deal with different kinds of neighbourly support including various categories of support providers. In section five, I shall analyse factors that influence the widows’ access to neighbourly support. Before making some concluding remarks in the last section, I will also highlight the importance of neighbourly support for the widows’ well being.


In this section I shall especially attempt to establish a terminological clarification of ‘neighbours’. Initially, I can agree with Abrams’ definition (in Bulmer, 1986:18-21) that neighbours are simply people who live near one another. Abrams also wrote, “Most of the
literature suggests that neighbours live within walking distance and that face to face contact is possible”. Thus, spatial proximity is an essential and key attribute of neighbours.

However, though spatial proximity is an important attribute in defining neighbours, in the life of many Javanese neighbourhoods or kampung, this spatial proximity is also very much coloured by the norms and ideals of neighbourliness. Neighbours, therefore, should be more than people who live near one another. Based on his research on a kampung community in Yogyakarta, J. Sullivan (1992:71) vividly described this ideological aspect of neighbourly relationship: ‘Kampung community is about neighbourship and there are strong pressures on kampung people to be good neighbours. Good neighbourship or ‘neighbourliness’ is quite precisely defined in the kampung and powerful sanctions function to make community members behave in conformity with the conventions. In the most general terms, neighbourliness is identified with mutual co-operation (gotong royong) an expression covering a familiar set of principles and practices and an elaborate inspirational discourse on neighbourliness’

J. Sullivan also showed how this ideological aspect has been articulated both in the formal discourse as well as in the informal mundane reality. I shall go back to these neighbourly ideals in one of the following sections (section eight on access to neighbourly support), but for this section my emphasis lies on the importance of taking both spatial proximity as well as some neighbourly ideals into account in understanding who neighbours are.

It is true that the spatial proximity and the existing neighbourly ideals cannot guarantee that people who live near one another can establish a good relationship. In all alleys I heard stories and complains about bad relations among particular inhabitants, including next-door neighbours. In these cases, there was no support relation between the neighbours. However, if we look at the other side of the coin, the ideals of neighbourliness often can force neighbours to provide support - especially in the case of death – even though they have a less than ideal relationship towards each other.

Multiplicity of support relationship

Multiplicity of support relationships among neighbours is – in the first place – connected with the fact that neighbours can establish various forms of relationship for instances: friendship, patron-client relationship, clique, cell membership, membership in a particular organisation or even working relationship. It is true that neighbours are not automatically, for instance, friends or engaging in a patron-client relationship. But I found these different forms of

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relationship (or combinations of them) among neighbours in every alley. A person can maintain different forms of relationships with different neighbours. These different forms of relationships not only strongly influence the nature of a support relation between the parties involved, but also can allow a person to engage in multiple support relations.

The multiplicity of support relation among neighbours is also made possible by the fact that neighbourly ties are established both ‘formally’ as well as ‘informally’. I am aware of the danger of using this kind of dichotomy, especially if it is connected with the examination of support and social security. F. and K. von Benda-Beckmann (1994 and 1995) mentioned several reasons why dichotomies such as ‘formal-informal’ or ‘public-private’ should be avoided. The most important reason is that the classification is ambiguous, for it confuses the dimensions of the organisation of social security namely, institution, legal regulation and actual relationships. Therefore they emphasised the idea of social security pluralism. I fully agree with them at this point. Throughout the chapter I try to illustrate the plurality of support: different sorts, providers, actual relationships, regulations etc. However, in an examination of neighbourhood life in Indonesia, the issue of formality/informality should not be overlooked. I use the dichotomy only in relation to different categories of support providers. A formal support is usually facilitated and supervised by the formal neighbourhood co-operations/groups such as the Rukun Tetangga (RT), Rukun Warga (RW), Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga (PKK) etc. In this support, the support providers represent the co-operation /group. The informal support is usually provided by individual neighbours or particular household (rumah tangga) or family (keluarga). The informal support among neighbours is commonly more varied. It includes different kinds of support such as economic, emotional and practical support, while formal support is mostly limited in economic support.

Fluidity of support relationships

Like family support, support relationships among neighbours are also fluid because they are also continuously negotiated and adjusted. The fluidity of neighbourly support is also stimulated by the similar factors, such as those of family support.

First, the fluctuation of support claims at the receiving end is not always compatible with the ability and the willingness to support. This factor is more visible in a widely shared crisis situation such as at the initial part of the economic crisis in Indonesia in 1998. Some of the better off residents complained that their poorer neighbours more often dropped in to their house without a clear reason. Bu Kurnia in Kacangan alley told me, “I know that this is a very
difficult situation for those who don't have a good income. You know the poor family next door don't you? Sometimes the mother came at lunchtime just for a chat. She hoped that she would be invited for a lunch. But, I only cook pas pasan (only enough for the family members) ... so I couldn't invite her for a lunch. With the same amount of money I only buy much less now, therefore I can't give this family a plate of extra food as I did previously.

From the illustration it is clear that in the first place the available resources are preserved for one's own relatives. In many cases, support for a neighbour is rendered when there are extra resources that can be disposed for this purpose. Since the neighbourly ties are commonly less strong than family bonds, neighbours tend to withdraw their willingness to support more easily because of this factor than family members do.

However, the fluidity of neighbourly support in an emergency situation or a sudden crisis is another story. Neighbours are often the prime support providers in the initial stage of an emergency situation or sudden crisis because they live nearby. In this situation, neighbours tend (and are expected) to do more than in the normal situation, especially when family members are absent (either temporally or permanently) and state organised support is not available. As soon as the family members can take over the role of support provider, however, neighbours often reduce their assistance. Therefore, the importance of neighbourly support is especially related to its nature either as a complement or a substitute for family support.

Secondly, the quality of these relationships changes. Among neighbours there are also differentiation between 'close' and 'distant' neighbours, which reflects the quality of the relationships. Consequently, support relations are usually more intensively maintained among close neighbours. However, like all other social relationships, neighbourly ties are also changeable. Geographical and social mobility or conflicts are often the reasons for changes in neighbourly relations. In her study on a poor community in Jakarta, Jellinek (1991:41-42) showed how the social (upwards) mobility can create distance among neighbours and diminish support relations among them, "Over time it became evident that increasing numbers of households which had formerly been part of the community distanced themselves as they tried to accumulate more wealth".

Thirdly, the roles (the providers and the receiver) in support relationships throughout the different life stages change. In an old neighbourhood with a stable population like the Semeru alley, many people are neighbours for a very long period. A few old widows receive support from some young women especially because these young women perceive the old widows as their grandmothers. They have known each other for many years. In this situation,
roles in support relationships change throughout different life stages. When the young women were small, they often played at the widows’ houses and got candies from them. A woman in Semeru alley told me, “When I was small my mother had to work very hard. She went to the market very early in the morning and worked whole day in her warung rujak (fruit salad stall). In the afternoon, when I came from school I usually played at bude (aunt) Sarah’s house. I ate my lunch and took my afternoon nap there. Bude Sarah doesn’t have children so she liked to take care of me in the afternoon”. This young woman is one of those who regularly drop in to bring some food, cakes, fruits or even perform minor nursing tasks for the old bude Sarah. This kind of neighbourly tie is very helpful for old widows who live alone.

However, it is also worthwhile to note that - compared with familial bonds - many of the social ties among neighbours cannot be maintained throughout different stages of people’s lives. Neighbours can move in and out in the neighbourhood; and once they have moved out there will be no pressure to maintain the social ties with the ‘ex’ neighbours. Consequently, long-term ties among different generations of neighbours across the lifespan are quite rare. As mentioned before, such ties usually only exist in an old and stable neighbourhood. And when they have existed, as in the Semeru alley, these intergenerational neighbourly ties still do not imply the same interdependency as those among family members.

3. Neighbouring in the Semeru Alley

Market and non-market differentiation
The first stretch of Semeru alley is the area where the middle class houses can be found. These houses reflect the socio-economic position of the owners. Mostly they are the better-off inhabitants who work as government officers, teachers, employees, traders in big markets or pensioners and have a middle-class lifestyle.

In the second stretch of the ally there is a local market, the pasar Talun, surrounded by shabby small houses. Some of these houses can be considered as shacks, small crudely built wooden huts. Although these houses were initially intended as stalls, the majority of the pasar Talun traders have used them also as a living place. Among the Semeru alley’s inhabitants, these traders are known as the orang pasar or the market people, who are differentiated from the non-market people.

1 These are houses with brick-walls, two or more sleeping rooms, (ceramics) tile floor, sanitary facilities, electricity, tapped water and (relatively) complete furniture. Some of them also with luxuries such as refrigerator, washing machine and a second floor.
These market dwellers are often stereotyped as the rather ‘ill-bred poor’ by many other alley inhabitants. Bu Prayit is a PKK activist both at the RT as well as the kelurahan level. According to her, she is especially active as a PKK advisor in the RT 07 because most of the market dwellers are inhabitants of this particular RT. “Most of these people are poor and low educated, therefore, for their own benefit they have to be taught some important things such as neighbourliness, discipline, healthy life and creative activities”. When I questioned some widows about their relation with other alley residents, they said that they preferred to have ‘not too close’ contact with neighbours especially with the Talun market traders. “The uneducated people can easily misjudge your words so that a neighbourly chat will end up in a quarrel”.

Although the differentiation of market and non-market inhabitants draws an inclusion and exclusion line among the alley dwellers, it prevents a more serious problem in neighbourly relations. The market dwellers establish a more intensive social intercourse among them and have a more distant one with other alley inhabitants, and vice versa. Most contacts among market and non-market inhabitants take place in the market as traders and regular customers.

These vaguely differentiated social domains of market and non-market also overlap with different locations within the alley. The non-market inhabitants live along the first stretch and the market inhabitants occupy the second stretch of the alley. Thus, inhabitants from each social domain have ‘the same sort of people’ as their next-door neighbours. This spatial circumstance can reduce day-to-day friction based on class suspicions.

The lodging houses

The people in lodging houses are also de facto residents of the Semeru alley. But most of them, usually students or single employees, are not officially registered in the RT’s population data. These people are not invited to and do not participate in the neighbourly occasions such as neighbourhood meetings, ritual feasts etc. Generally, the permanent residents do not perceive them as neighbours, although a good neighbourly relation can exist between the lodging house people and the permanent residents. A poor divorced woman in the alley receives a different kind of support from a young woman who lives in one of the lodging houses.
Some practices of neighbourhing


This highly gendered separation can also be found among Semeru alley residents especially at occasions like selamatan (ritual feast), kerja bakti (duty work) or neighbourhood meetings. If a few female neighbours are invited to help the family who holds a selamatan, these women will show up and mostly will work in the kitchen (a private domain) while the male neighbours are invited to participate in the ceremony (a public domain). Even in most of the neighbourhood meetings among the youths (the karang taruna organisation), girls are obviously less visible. In the daily scene, along the alley path, women commonly chat among themselves, while men form their own chat group.

In the market area, where houses are built very close to each other, day-to-day contacts among male and female neighbours happen more frequently. By sitting in front of his own stall, a middle-aged man talks with a woman who sells vegetables. Another woman, who sells bananas, joins this conversation from her own stall. The spatial proximity of the market allows its inhabitants to contact their neighbours from within their own stalls in a very casual way. Everyday, the market dwellers work and live in the same, small area. They use the same public toilets and bathrooms. They cook their meals and wash their clothes in the same path. If someone cooks sambal bajak (hot pepper sauce) which usually spreads a strong smell, a neighbour will loudly comment on it from her own house.

This kind of neighbourly contact is less commonly accepted in the first stretch of the alley. Moreover, it is ‘technically’ much more difficult, because in this area most of the houses have small front and side yards. These yards are usually bordered by fences or walls. People must leave their house for a chat with their next-door neighbours along the alley path or invite them to chat inside their house. The first stretch of Semeru alley is relatively quiet during the day. Since many of the non-market inhabitants do not work in the alley, they usually meet their neighbours outside the work hours.

The formal neighbourhing activities are mostly organised at the RT level. These include the regular meetings such as those which are held by the women’s organisation (the PKK) or special meetings, which are related to special events like Independence Day, the kerja bakti (duty work to clean up the neighbourhood), the ronda malam (the night watch).
Religious groups such as the *perkumpulan muslimat* (a women’s organisation under the *Nahdlatul Ulama*) also regularly organise the Koran readings.

This formal neighbouring has become an integral part of the alley life, also in the market section. It is a broadly accepted form of social intercourse. People know about the variety of individual involvement; some people are very active in many neighbourhood events and some others only show a little interest on it. Even in the PKK, people can withdraw their membership if they wish to. A young widow decided to disengage the PKK after a conflict with another member. The PKK leaders tried to take her back but the young widow refused. When everybody in the organisation knew that her decision was definite, they did not bother about it any longer. In Semeru alley most of the neighbourhood organisations are not significantly affected by this kind of individual non-participation. Those who choose not to participate in the neighbourhood organisations are not automatically driven out in socially marginal position since they still have the informal neighbouring.

Youth and inter-generational relations
The youth usually become a part of the alley scene after *Isya* (approximately after 7.30 p.m.). Their favourite place to chat, play guitar and enjoy their cigarettes is in the front of the Talun market. This gathering is absolutely dominated by young males since young females are not supposed to hang around in the alley path until late in the evening.

The social contacts among the youth in Semeru alley are also affected by the differentiation of ‘market and non-market’. In a youth meeting, one of the boys told me, “Those who are willing to organise kampung activities, are usually the *anak-anak pasar* (the market youths). Many of us have low education, occupy low paid jobs or are even unemployed, but we are *rukun* (harmonious). Yes, indeed, sometimes we were drunk, but we are not criminals. The youths from other *rukun tetangga* (RT) outside the market are not as *rukun* as we are. We only have a distant relationship with them, moreover, they are too busy with their study and then move out from the alley if they get a job”.

An inter-generational gap has coloured the relationship between these boys and the *Rukun Warga* (RW) chief. “Pak RW is not a good leader. He doesn’t like us because

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1 In her study, Jellinek (1991:40-45) also showed that ‘Not all households located in the neighbourhood had close ties with other members of the community’. Some households regard themselves and are regarded by other inhabitants as outsiders. Five categories of outsiders are mentioned namely, ‘(1) the better-off (ie. "middle class"), (2) the very poor, (3) the transient, (4) the culturally distinct and (5) the ostracized. Of these, the fifth category applied not to households but to individual household members, specifically several prostitutes’.
sometimes we were drunk. If he were a good leader, he would talk with us as a respectful father and not just avoid us”. Another boy joined the conversation, “He takes a distance from us, so why should we care about him?” When I asked the RW chief about the youth in his neighbourhood, he said that the youth problems in Semeru alley had decreased since five years ago. “Of course, some boys still regularly consume alcohol but they do not disturb the neighbourhood order. For me, it is their own responsibility. Some people gain a better future and some others do not...”

In July - August 1999, I came back to Semeru alley. At that period, several welfare projects related to the economic crisis were introduced. These projects were labelled as The Social Safety Net or the Jaringan Pengaman Sosial / JPS. One of the JPS economic schemes was the credit for working capital with a low interest (the Dana Bergulir). Many RWs, including RW 01 in Semeru, were entitled to financial support, but the RW chiefs remained responsible for management and control. Many young men saw the credit as an opportunity to create new income-generating activities, but the RW chief did not want to take responsibility and therefore he never applied for the scheme. Ipung, a young man who lives in the market said, “He didn’t trust us, that ‘s all!”

Religion

The majority of Semeru alley inhabitants are Moslems. This neighbourhood is one of the old Moslem neighbourhoods in the inner city of Malang. Although most of the Moslem inhabitants are members of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), there is a small group people (including the RW chief) who are the members of the Muhammadiyah organisation. In the daily neighbouring, members of these different organisations can interact without having serious problems. However, there are differences that they have to manage. An example of the observable differences is the practices around a funeral. The Muhammadiyah members do not hold ritual feasts (the selamatan) after a burial, at least, not as many as the Nahdlatul Ulama members usually do. A ritual feast for a deceased person is one of the communal activities where neighbours can (and should) demonstrate their neighbourliness. The absence of these ritual feasts sometimes has raised uneasiness for many people in the neighbourhood since it means a confrontation with differences among themselves as Moslems in a more direct manner. Although they are obliged to show condolence, they cannot do it in the way they are familiar with. A Christian widow told me that when her husband died, she decided to organise a selamatan, “According to my religion, I don’t have to do it, but by organising the
I can show my respect to the neighbourhood custom and to my Moslem neighbours. I do not live alone here, do I?"

4. Neighbouring in Kacangan Alley

The majority of the Kacangan alley inhabitants came from Samiran village in Pamekasan regency of Madura. This explains the fact that many of the alley residents acknowledge that they are related to each other by kinship ties. In general, only the first-degree relatives are obviously introduced and treated as *dhulur* (relatives). The more distant relatives are seen, in the first place as neighbours.

In Kacangan, the alley path is a centre of neighbourhood social intercourse and a communal multipurpose room. Along this path, adult inhabitants chat, eat, rest, do business, have quarrels, cook, wash their dishes and even play badminton, while the children are running around them. The ways in which social contacts take place are comparable with those of the market section of Semeru alley. In Kacangan alley houses are built very close to each other so that the dwellers can chat, ask questions like “Where are you going?” and greet their neighbours by sitting in front of their own houses.

Initially, I got the impression that in this crowded alley, many of residents can enter their neighbours' houses and drop by without being invited. One day I asked the RT chief’s daughter to introduce me to one of the widows. She asked me to follow her. After we had walked a few metres, she began to call to everybody asking whether the widow was at home or not. Several people answered her noisily and some of them followed us to the widow’s house. The introduction took place in the alley path witnessed by many curious neighbours. When I had entered the house, the neighbours followed me. At that moment I knew that a group interview could not be avoided that day. During the interview, a few other neighbours also dropped by through curiosity about me or for other reasons. If they lost interest, they simply left the house. Nobody seemed to be disturbed by movement in and out the house, not even the owner of the house.

Young women and girls are less visible in the alley scene during the day. But they regularly join their mother’s chat group. Young men and boys have their own gathering place outside the alley, next to the railway. These young men and boys usually take part in the alley

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3 The majority of Kacangan alley inhabitants speak Madurese with each other. But they can also speak Javanese very well, though it is the low level Javanese (the East Java dialect). I did the interview with them in Javanese.
neighbourliness during a burial. A widow told me, “Those boys provided me with a lot of assistance when my husband died. They prepared the grave and helped to organise the burial. They didn’t mind that I could only give them cigarettes, coffee and lunch…”

Many people I talked with were not enthusiastic about the neighbourliness in their alley. Neighbours were often pictured as not generous and selfish. But these judgements are also balanced by showing empathy to their neighbours’ poverty, “How could I expect them to be generous if many of them are as poor as I am?”

Negative stories about Kacangan alley dwellers (fights, jealousy, gossip) are told by the richest family in the alley. The mother in this family, bu Atun, has successfully run a food stall in front of their house in the Kacangan alley. This family has bought a big house outside the alley and improved this second house in a middle class style. Their small house in the alley is now occupied by the oldest daughter of bu Atun, but she told me, “I am not happy to live there because the alley is dirty and smelly and the neighbours are meddlesome. Everyday I leave the house early in the morning and come back there in the evening. During the day I stay in my parent’s house. The neighbours in the alley are very curious about my new refrigerator and jewellery. These alley people are lazy but they are jealous of those who are economically better off. How can they improve their lives if they spend a lot of time chatting and gossiping?”

Both bu Atun as well as her younger daughter gave the same criticism of their neighbours in Kacangan alley. It is also obvious that Atun’s daughters do not want to be associated with the Kacangan alley life. When I visited this family again in 1999, bu Atun had moved her food stall to the front yard of the second house outside the alley.

No formal neighbouring activities are organised by the RT in Kacangan alley. The RT chief only carries out a few of his formal tasks such as keeping the residents’ family cards (the kartu keluarga). He is too much occupied by his work as a second-hand goods seller. His illiterate wife is not interested in stimulating PKK activities either.

Since all of the alley inhabitants are Moslems, many of them participate the Koran reading groups at the local mosques. This Koran reading is organised for different age group and gender and has become the only forum of organised neighbouring activity.

5. The Widows and Their Social Activities

In different contexts, widowhood is often connected with a socially marginal position (Os, 1997; Jansen, 1995; Chen, 1998). Widows have to retreat from social life and are not allowed
to participate in communal activities. But how about widows in the alleys? Does widowhood prevent them from partaking in social life?

In all alleys, widows can be met in various occasions and places: among members of chat groups, in the ritual feasts, in the women's organisation meetings, in the local shops etc. The majority of these widows (73%) said that they do not see widowhood as a reason to retreat from social activities, either the informal or the formal ones.

More than 60% of the widows did not consider their status as widows an obstacle to visiting their family and neighbours as much as they did before the widowhood. Some of the widows, especially the pensioners, preferred to stay at home and sit in front of their televisions. Except for attending some organisation meetings they rarely go out. However, the choice to stay at home is more related to other circumstances and less to their widowhood. For some widows, the death of their husband also means a loss of a companion in travelling. As Bu Oentoeng said, "If I have to go alone somewhere, I feel much more insecure with the traffic. In the past, I was always accompanied by my husband".

*Participation and withdrawal*

Almost half of the widows (48%) said that the frequency of their participation in social organisations was not changed by their widowhood. However, the term 'frequency' includes the range from 'high' to 'low'. Both widows who rarely or do not participate at all in social organisations (low frequency), and those who are very active (high frequency), said that their frequency of attendance is not changed.

Twenty two percent of them said that their participation in social organisations has increased since they have become widows. Some reasons were mentioned: they enjoyed being socially very active, they had plenty of time (especially since they did not have to take care of small children or their husbands any longer), they were afraid of loneliness, they liked to find new friends and they wanted to do something.

Several widows told me that when their husbands were still alive, they were not allowed to participate in social organisations. "My husband said that for women, organisation meant a place for gossiping and showing off which could lead to quarrels and jealousy. Therefore, he discouraged me from being a member of an organisation". Although these widowed women had chosen to obey their husbands at that time, they are members of different organisations now. To some extent, they enjoy their freedom to be actively involved in social life since they have become widows.
Almost one third of the widows (30%) reduced the frequency of their attendance at social organisations or even decided to stop their participation. Most of them were elderly widows; therefore the main reason for withdrawing their membership in social organisations was their fragile physical condition and bad health. Mbah Sarah (82), the oldest widow in Semeru alley told me that she could not participate the PKK meetings or the pengajian (Koran reading) any longer because she had difficulty to walk, “My heart wants to join the meetings, but my rheumatic legs can not bring me to them”.

Limited financial resources and lack of facilities (a proper place to hold a meeting, plates, cups etc.) were also mentioned as reasons to retreat from social organisation. Mbok Nah (70) one of the poor widows in Semeru alley, decided to withdraw her membership in PKK because she could not afford its costs. “I am ashamed because each time it’s my turn to be the host for a meeting, I have to ask bu Sarmini (her next door neighbour) if I can use her house, plates and cups. I do not want to bother my neighbours that much. Moreover, I am old now and have less income, the PKK activities are too expensive for me”.

As I mentioned before, some widows prefer to stay at home and watch the soap operas. They do not like to be a part of an organised group and do not feel at ease with formality. They explain their non-participation in reasons such as “I am too shy”, “I do not know what to say in an organisation meeting”, “I do not understand what people are talking about in those meetings”.

Other widows said that they could not join the neighbourhood organisations because they are too much occupied by their work. Bu Arifin (58) does not participate in the PKK or pensioners organisation because she cannot leave her shop, “I am too busy to be an active member of the PKK, but I have sent my daughter in law to participate in it on behalf of me. She is young and has a good education, so I think that she is a better member than I am”. Bu Sarmini (53) has sent her married daughter to attend the PKK meetings, “I often feel sleepy during the meetings. I think that I am too old for it. Besides who will take care of my stall?” When I suggested that her granddaughter could do it for her, she laughed, “And if I am back from the meeting I will find that my money is gone, she is naughty, you know?”

There is only one case of withdrawal from a neighbourhood organisation, in this case the PKK, because of conflict. Zub (48) is one of the younger widows in Semeru alley. She works as a tailor in a small garment workshop. A married man who lived next door was attracted to her. The man’s effort to approach her had caused gossip among some neighbours. The neighbours’ anger was especially directed to the attractive widow and not to the man. Zub said, “It was not fair, it was only based on jealousy. What could I do if that man liked
me? I could only avoid him and make him realise that he was married. It was not my fault...”

After the conflict had reached the PKK and had become a juicy discussion point in one of the meetings, Zub decided to retreat from the women’s organisation. “How can I sit together with people who have hurt me so much? Of course not all of PKK members are that bad, but in general I have lost my interest in the organisation’s activities. I have my own life, that’s enough!”

In Kacangan alley, the main reason for the widows’ non-participation in PKK is simply because this organisation does not exist in the alley. The alternative social organisation in all alleys is the kelompok pengajian (the Koran reading groups). Many of Kacangan alley inhabitants (including the widows) are members of such a group. Even in Semeru alley, especially among the elderly, people do not feel obliged to join the PKK. They may choose to participate only in Koran reading groups, as in the case of bu Arifin above. She has sent one of her daughter in law to attend the PKK meeting on behalf of her because she only wants to join the Koran reading groups. According to her, participation in religious activities would be more useful for elderly people than participation in the PKK.

Membership multiplicity
Since both inside as well outside the alley there are many possibilities for widows to participate in organisations, I shall highlight their membership multiplicity. 36% (40 out of 111) of the widows are not members of any organisation, not even the most popular ones namely, the PKK and the Koran reading groups. In a closer look at each neighbourhood, widows who live in kelurahan Kotalama (including the Kacangan alley) show the lowest degree of participation in organisation. In Kacangan alley 54,5% (6 out f 11) of the widows do not participate in any organisation, while in Semeru alley only 30% (6 out of 20).

Most of the widows (71 out of 111) are members of one or more organisations. They can be further classified as follows: 33% are members of one organisation, 13% are members of two organisations, and 13% are members of three organisations and 4,5% are members of four or more organisations.

Most of the widows have chosen either to be a member of PKK or Koran reading groups. Their choice is influenced by the availability of some organisations in their neighbourhood, their age and the cost to be paid for the membership of a particular organisation. In some neighbourhoods, the membership cost of PKK is higher than of the Koran reading group. In both organisations the members pay regular contributions, but in the PKK, extra expenses have also been paid for the materials used in creative activities.
Widows who are members of two organisations usually combine the PKK and the Koran reading group. Many widowed pensioners add the pensioners’ organisation to the combination. Widows who are members of four or more organisations often have a good economic position. Most of them are pensioners and very active in a few of organisations outside their neighbourhood, such as in various co-operative and women’s clubs.

Bu Moeslikah (68) is one of these activists. She was a schoolteacher and her deceased husband was a schoolmaster. All of her children possess a university degree and most of them have a good job. Bu Moeslikah is a member of seven organisations namely, a Koran reading group, the PKK and arisan group (rotating credit group), a pensioners’ organisation, the RAS (one of the women’s organisation in the city), and two co-operations. She proudly said, “Every month, I am always very busy during the first and the second weeks”. When I asked why she participates in so many organisations, she answered, “Karena saya takut nganggur (because I am afraid of having nothing to do)”. Sometimes bu Moeslikah has to be absent from a few of her monthly meetings because of her bad health. But once she feels better, she will not miss any meeting.

Another activist is Aminah (65). She was also a schoolteacher. Aminah is one of the better off widows who has run a furniture workshop. Most of Aminah’s social activities are related to some organisations outside her neighbourhood, for instance, she participates in PKK at the higher administrative level such as at the RW and the kelurahan, but not in her own RT. According to Aminah, she could not join the neighbourhood PKK because she was needed at the higher levels, “The neighbourhood meetings can be organised by someone else. Moreover they usually only concentrate on the rotating credit activity”. In fact, the PKK at the RW and the kelurahan levels are socially more prestigious. They have selected members of neighbourhood activists who are often the better off in their own neighbourhood. At these levels, the members also have a better access to maintain a good relation with officers of the local government including their wives.

At this point, the widows’ membership in different organisations does not only demonstrate that widows are far from being socially marginalized. They even purposely choose and arrange their memberships to gain the desired social position. In the following sections, I shall examine different kinds of neighbourly support for widows, namely the economic, emotional and practical-instrumental support. In the discussion of each kind of support, I shall look at the forms, the purpose (to cope with daily problems or to cope with special circumstances) and the providers of support.

Like the economic support which is provided by widows’ family\(^4\), the neighbourly economic support for widows can be categorised into: gifts in kind, money transfers (gifts, loan, payment) and - in much lower frequency than the former two forms - accommodation (shelter). All of these kinds of support can be further differentiated into support for coping with daily needs and support for special purposes or for dealing with special circumstances/crises such as hospitalisation, funeral, selamatan (ritual feast), lebaran (feast at the end of Islamic fasting month) etc.

Another similarity between economic support provided by family and by neighbours is that this support often reflects the emotional proximity between the support providers and the support receivers. Therefore, the economic support to deal with daily needs is usually given by the widows’ closest neighbours.

Support for special purposes or a circumstance is given by a wider range of neighbours. In a funeral for example, people who live outside the neighbourhood, and are not known very well by a stricken family, can express their condolence and give staple food or money in a layatan (funeral attendance).

Some gifts in kind

Support to cope with daily needs is mostly given in the form of gifts in kind, especially (cooked) food or staple food. In Javanese, the practice of giving cooked food is usually called as ater-ater or ngateri (in the passive form: diateri). The food, which is given, can range from simple snack such as fried bananas to a complete and special meal like the combination of yellow rice, fried chicken, vegetables, eggs etc.

In many neighbourhoods in Java, food exchange among neighbours is very common. It is often perceived as demonstration of good neighbourship and not automatically as support for neighbours. This is also parallel with the fact that food exchange is also practised among neighbours who have similar economic position. Even if the gift is meant to help a needy neighbour, the giver will politely underline that she gives the food (the ateran) because she wants her neighbour to taste it, and not because the neighbour needs it.

Bu Mar (59) and her husband live in a nice house 17 kilometres outside Malang. Her husband is a pensioner and they are financially well supported by their children. In their

\(^4\) See chapter 4
neighbourhood they are seen as better-off and respectable people. Next to bu Mar’s house live two older women. One of them has never married and the other is a widow. These sisters are poor and entirely depend on the insufficient financial support from their family. Everyone in the neighbourhood knows that these sisters sometimes have almost nothing to eat. Therefore bu Mar often cooks extra food to be given to her poor neighbours. When I stayed in bu Mar’s house, I asked her whether I could bring the food to the poor women. Bu Mar told me, “Please, don’t forget to say to them that bu Mar has cooked the extra food because she wants you to taste it”. When I did say this, one of the women replied politely, “Yes, bu Mar can cook very well”. The other started to tell me about different kinds of food they had received from bu Mar. The important issue was the taste of the food while both bu Mar as the giver as well as the poor women as the receiver knew that the ateran (the food) was especially meant for help.

Between neighbours who have long standing relationship, an ateran, which is actually meant as support, can be given in a more easy going way. Take case of bu Noto (71) and mbah Sarah (82) in Semeru alley. These women have been each other’s close neighbour for more than forty years. They know each other’s life stories, both the better and the worse periods. Now both of them are widows and have become each other’s chat partner.

Bu Noto has a good economic position since she has a pension and sometimes receives financial support from her children. On the other hand, mbah Sarah does not have a pension and her only daughter has abandoned her. For several years, mbah Sarah has also been suffering from rheumatism. Bu Noto told me that she felt sorry for mbah Sarah; therefore she tried to help her in different ways including regularly providing meals.

Because of their long-standing relationship, bu Noto could casually come to mbah Sarah’s house and ask whether mbah Sarah had cooked her meal. Mbah Sarah told me that without waiting for mbah Sarah’s answer, bu Noto usually continued, “Don’t cook today, I have meal for you, I will get it!” Then she left mbah Sarah’s house for a while and came back with a plate of food in her hands. Both of the old ladies know precisely about the intention of the meals. They are support for mbah Sarah who is physically and financially less able to provide meals for herself. But in this case, because of their emotional closeness, the support can be given in a more relaxed manner.

Some widows receive meals from their close neighbours in special circumstances such as when they are seriously ill. The cases of Wak Ju (67) and Mak Nyai (79) will illustrate this. These two old widows live alone and have suffered from hypertension. Each
time they become too ill to take care of themselves, some close neighbours provide them meals.

When I asked Wak Ju’s neighbours in Semeru alley about their ‘meals service’ they laughed. According to them, doing this service was not always easy since the sick widow could openly say that the meals were not good. They said that the widow’s unfriendly comments should not be taken seriously, “Sick old people usually can not fully realise what they say to other people”.

Mbak Kesi, Mak Nyai’s next door neighbour said, “I don’t have choice, she is old, alone and sometimes very sick. I cannot let bad things happen to her, can I? A few months ago, she almost burned the whole neighbourhood because she had forgotten to put out her stove. I had told her not to cook by herself, because she was ill and I would make meals for her. But she was very obstinate. However, I think, young people should be patient to the elderly”. At this point, the service can be perceived as a mix of compassion for the elderly, good neighbourship and self-protection. Giving food to needy neighbours also happens in special occasions, for instance if there is something to be celebrated by the family (graduation, promotion etc.) or at religious feast. The food is a symbol of the family’s gratefulness.

Economic support in kind also includes tapped water, clothes, and kitchen utensils. Widows who do not have tapped water in their house can often get clean water from their neighbours. Bu Mar has allowed one of her widowed neighbours to get clean water from her house. According to her, initially she had doubts. Bu Mar wanted to help the widow but she was afraid that other neighbours who did not have tapped water would ask too.

Bu Mar’s help is indeed selective. She does not mind giving bu Tri water and paying the extra cost of water pump electricity, because the widow has bad health and only lives with her daughter. In bu Mar’s view these women really need help since they have nobody to get clean water from the spring, especially during the rainy season. Bu Mar told me, “Another family also can not afford to have their own tapped water, but in that family there are healthy men, the father and two sons. The sons should get water from the spring for the family, it is all right for young men to do some work. They should not only be busy with their guitars. I won’t pay extra electricity costs for them”

Much less frequently, widows also get cloths and kitchen utensils from their neighbours. However, people are usually very careful in giving second-hand goods, even to their poorer neighbours. One day, bu Yati, a widow in Kacangan alley asked me for second-
hand dresses, according to her, she did not just ask every neighbour for second-hand clothes, “I only dare to ask those who treat me well”.

New clothes are usually given around lebaran and they are called persenan. People know to whom they will give the gifts and from whom they may receive gifts. But generally, ‘the have’ should give the persenan to ‘the have less’.

Money transfer: loan, credit, payment

Economic support in the form of money transfer is provided as loan, credit, payment or gift. Borrowing money is a common manner of dealing with cash shortage among neighbours. The local warungs (shops) are usually the sources of credit for their neighbours. Nevertheless, loan and credit are usually more precisely calculated by the support provider than giving meals or second-hand goods. Even though they do not always expect that the poor neighbour will return the borrowed money or pay the credit, not all of the poor neighbours will be considered as deserving poor.

A local warung owner in Kemirahan alley told me that the credit she gave to mbah Temi (71), an old widow in her neighbourhood, would not be paid back. “It is all right, she only buys things in a small amount. I know that she cannot pay her debts; I also do not expect it to happen. Providing credits for people like mbah Temi are amal (good deeds)”. But in other part of Kemirahan alley, a quarrel happened between a warung owner and bu Nurul (50), a pensioner widow who lives not far from the warung. Bu Nurul had a big amount of debts to the local shop because she had held a big wedding party for her oldest daughter. According to some neighbours, the shop owner was angry because the widow had delayed the payment of the debts. One of the neighbours said in a lowered voice, “It is bu Nurul’s fault. She knew that she could not afford such a wedding party, but she was too proud to admit it. Now she falls into trouble”.

A few widows are also economically supported by their neighbours in the form of payment. These neighbours paid the water and electricity contributions, or school fees for the widows’ children every month. A neighbourhood chief in Kotalama regularly paid the contribution of cheap rice packages for some widows in his neighbourhood.

Gift for fatherless children (orphans)

In Semeru alley, a widow told me about financial support which is given by her neighbours for her youngest son. This financial support is called sedekah untuk anak yatim (the non obligatory gift for fatherless children). This maintenance and protection of the fatherless
children is encouraged by Islam. There are references to this in the Koran (in Al Baqarah 2:215 and 220, Adh Dhuhaa 93: 9, Al Maa’uun 107:2). When I had discussed this issue with a kyai (religious leader) in Semeru alley, he emphasised that the maintenance and protection were especially meant for children who had not reached the baligh age yet (below fifteen years).

According to the widowed mother, Nung (46), she regularly received economic support in different forms (money, staple food, school payment, cloths) from her neighbours. These support forms were mainly aimed at the maintenance of Nung’s youngest son, Fathon (11), but they were given through his mother and they were also managed by her. Nung said, “I never give the money to Fathon in a large amount because he will spend it at once. Usually I keep it and give him small amounts for his daily pocket money. I never use the money for myself or my other children, I don’t dare! People gave the gifts for Fathon because he is a deserving fatherless child according to the Koran. Moreover, the other children are perceived as old enough to support themselves”.

The gifts were given both by individual neighbours as well as by a religious organisation in the neighbourhood. During the Assyura month, Nung also received a similar support from the Koran reading group that she has participated in. The group leader usually asked all members to collect money for buying cloths which would be provided for widowed members of the group who had young children.

Although the sedekah (gift) providers often were not Nung’s close neighbours, she knew them all (as neighbours or members of the Koran reading group). There is no ‘stranger’ among these providers. Nung also underlined that many of the providers were not the better-off people, “I have some friends who have good lives but never give a sedekah. It is all right, I do not expect it either, but there is a old blind woman who regularly gives pocket money for Fathon although her economic condition is actually not much better than mine. This old woman has difficulty in getting to my house, therefore she usually has asked other people to bring the money to me”.

The fact that Nung knew all of the sedekah providers did not mean that she had close daily contacts with them. During my stay in the alley, I learned that Nung is one of a few widows who rarely went out of her house. She usually spent most of her time at home or in her family small shop. “As a mother, I really appreciate these people for what they have done for my son. I will pray to them, I hope God will give his blessing. But I never visit them just for a nice chat, it won’t be good. However, my children and I will visit them at the lebaran (the celebration at the end of the fasting month)"
Burial fund

Many widows (78%) receive support from the neighbourhood group (the RT) or other organisation in the neighbourhood (the PKK) for covering burial costs (buying a piece of land for the grave, the grave stones, the paraphernalia to take care of the deceased and for the grave diggers’ payment). This particular financial support is called the uang kematian (burial fund).

In many neighbourhoods (but not in Kacangan alley), the residents are obliged to pay between Rp 500 - Rp 1000/ household/month for several purposes, including the burial fund. The money collected will be allocated: 20% for the RW’s fund, 20% for the RT’s fund, 20% for the dana lingkungan (neighbourhood maintenance fund) and 40% for the burial fund.

Depending on the individual initiative of the neighbourhood chiefs, the management of the burial fund can be done either at the RT or at the RW level. Take case of Semeru alley, the burial fund has been managed by the RW chief for years. When a resident died, the RW chief would organise and cover the burial costs as economic support for the stricken family. The total cost of this burial would usually between Rp.67.000 - Rp.77.000. The chief said, “In many neighbourhoods, a stricken family will only receive financial assistance of Rp.25.000 from the burial fund. This amount of money is not even enough for taking care the deceased, let alone for paying the gravediggers. In my neighbourhood, a bereaved family does not have to bother with the burial, we will organise it and cover most of the costs for them. I think this way is more helpful for them, especially for the widows, ...they are usually too confused and distressed to organise things such as contacting a cemetery caretaker and hiring gravediggers”.

According to the RW chief, the pooling of nine RT’s burial fund at the RW level could assure that they would have enough money to pay the burial cost. Since not every RT could collect a sufficient amount of burial fund, the residents of some ‘problematic’ RTs run the risk of receiving a smaller amount of financial assistance.⁵

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⁵ A few RTs were not able to collect a sufficient amount of money to cover the burial cost because of different reasons: many residents could not pay the contribution fully because of their low income (this was the problem of the RT in Talun Market), the fund was used for private purposes by the RT chief or simply because many residents were reluctant to pay their contribution (since they were not convinced of the advantages of such a fund)
The support providers

In general, the providers of neighbourly support for widows can be classified into three categories, first, the individual neighbours, second, the informal group of neighbours and third, formal organisation in the neighbourhood.

These categories are parallel with Jay’s (1969:188-189) differentiation of dyadic and corporate relationship. Support, which is given by individual neighbours, obviously reflects a dyadic relationship between the provider and the receiver.

A group of neighbours who is informally formed as a clique or neighbourly cell (see J. Sullivan, 1992:45) can also provide support. Even though the group members know precisely the support rendered by each of them and can have influence on it, the support is usually not perceived as given on behalf of the group. The individual members are the support providers, while the group can be seen as a forum to discuss many things, including a support flow. In this, support, which is given by the members of a clique or neighbourly cell, also takes place in a dyadic relationship.

An example of it was a clique led by the wife of an RT chief in Semeru alley. The clique members were immediate neighbours. Almost every evening (mostly after 6.30 P.M) they gathered in front of bu Mim’s (the RT chief’s wife) house. This daily gathering was their forum to chat, to exchange gossip and information, to consult and to make plans. Among the cluster of the clique members’ houses, lived Wak Ju (67), a childless widow. One day, Wak Ju was severely ill and could not take care of herself. Since the old widow lived alone, most of the clique members felt that they should help her. The clique members provided different forms of support varying from calling a doctor, and giving meals to closing the widow’s door and windows every night. Bu Mim, the clique leader, even had asked the widow to stay at her house for a while. During this period, the clique’s gathering also became a forum to discuss what the members had done or would do for the old widow. A few forms of support might be planned together in this forum, but the clique members only provided them as long as they wanted to. The decision whether or not to act as a support provider was mainly taken individually. As you have noticed in the discussion above, in all alleys, formal organisation (or in Jay’s term: the ‘corporate groups’) which often act as support providers are the rukun tetangga (the RT), rukun warga (the RW), PKK (the women organisation) and the kelompok pengajian (the Koran reading group). One important difference between these formal organisations with groups such as clique or neighbourly cell is the recognition from the organisation members and the beneficiary, that the support is given on behalf of the
organisation ("The RW organised the burial" or "The PKK gave us money for the selamatan").

These different categories of support providers offer different forms of support. The differences are related to various factors. The first factor is the nature of relationship between the support provider and receiver and the second factor is gender.

In examining the first factor, I shall return to Jay’s classification. The dyadic (one to one) relationship is more flexible for solving day-to-day problems such as cash or food shortage. As I wrote above, in this relationship, the decision whether or not to provide support will be taken individually. There is no necessity to account for the decision to a wider public, at least not formally.

The limited number of parties involved in a dyadic relationship is also preferred in the negotiation of some daily problems that are associated with ‘intimacy’. The widows often told me that they would only go to their close neighbours for borrowing money. A few of them added that they even preferred to borrow money from a professional usurer than from a ‘distant’ neighbour. This statement reflects an attempt to avoid an unpleasant confrontation with one’s own neighbours, for instance if the request were refused. Mulder (1996:111) wrote that avoidance is one manner of dealing with conflict among Javanese and Tagalog Filipino’s. He also noted that, ‘[...] often, they stay out of trouble by not involving themselves at all [...]’ This would explain why day-to-day economic support is mainly provided by close neighbours, while formal organisations and distant neighbours are more involved as support providers in special circumstance or crises.

Just as among family members, support relation among neighbours are highly gendered. Women provide different forms of support than men, especially because widowhood is often associated with ‘women’s business’. For instance, in January 1996, I did preliminary fieldwork in a few neighbourhoods in Malang and Surabaya. In a visit to a RT chief in Kemirahan alley, I asked him about welfare schemes for widows. My question made him laugh. He said that widows were women’s business; I had to ask his wife since he had nothing to do with them.

The daily economic support for widows is more likely to be provided by female neighbours, while economic support on special occasions such as a funeral is also given by male neighbours, for example the RT or RW chiefs.
7. The Emotional Support

Network and Emotional Attachment

Studies on relationships among inhabitants of neighbourhoods in Java were done both in rural as well as in urban settings (see Jay, 1969; Guiness, 1986; Jellinek, 1991; Murray, 1991; J. Sullivan, 1992; N. Sullivan, 1994). Although it was not approached in a similar way and degree, in all of these studies we can find discussion on network and sharing activities among neighbours. The network and sharing activities can be woman-centred, fluid or compartmentalised, but they are often (at least, in the first instance) related to people's economic survival.

The network and sharing activities among people in the neighbourhoods do not necessarily go along with emotional attachment between them. About the residents of a neighbourhood in Jakarta, Murray (1991:81) wrote, 'People have wide circles of acquaintances but a narrow circle of intimacy, outside which they like to answer direct questions with evasions or outright lies concerning personal affairs'.

This situation seems to be parallel with the absence of close and long lasting friendship among Javanese villagers in Jay's (1969:201 - 206) study. Nevertheless, people do acknowledge the importance of good neighbourship especially with their immediate neighbours. There are flows of various forms of economic and practical assistance, but how do neighbours offer emotional assistance if they have preferred to maintain an emotionally distant relationship with each other?

Norma Sullivan (1994:95) indicated the neighbourly cell as a safe place to share tales and secrets, at least for the cell members. Adult-female cell members confide in each other about different issues including worries and joys. But such a close neighbourly cell cannot always be formed in every neighbourhood. Moreover, not all residents of a neighbourhood engage in a neighbourly cell or other informal groups.

Both in Semeru as well as in Kacagan alleys there was no stable pattern of neighbourly cells such as those described by the Sullivans (1992 and 1994) in the Sitiwaru neighbourhood in Yogyakarta. There were groups with more or less the same members, but they mainly functioned as chat forums.

As far as I could see from my participation in the chatting occasions of these groups, the group members mostly talked about 'other people' who did not engage in the gathering (including the group members who were absent at that time). The conversation about
themselves or particular person, who was present, was not usually controversial (although gossip about ‘other people’ in the neighbourhood could be very elaborate and spicy).

In both alleys there were also chat groups that were formed by women who are related. It was difficult for me to assess the degree of emotional attachment among members of these groups. Like the non-kinsmen groups, their conversations were mostly about ‘other people’ in the neighbourhood, about soap operas or today’s menu.

In the examination of emotional support by widows’ family members (chapter 4), I mentioned that during the interviews widows were more constrained in talking about their emotional circumstances than about their financial circumstances or social life. The conversation about their feelings was usually conducted in a less emotional way. This also happens in the chat forum. Mulder (1996:147) wrote that his Javanese informants often described themselves as ‘closed’, by which they mean that they never reveal their true feelings. In the discussion of self-mastery and presentation of one self, Mulder also noted, ‘This anxiety about presentation leads to a subdued style of interaction in which people try to present themselves smoothly and politely while not committing themselves to each other. This was because all forms of emotional commitment may lead to disappointment and constitute potential threats to one’s peace. Therefore, one should not involved unnecessarily and stay out of the way of other’.

**Some aspects of emotional support**

Like emotional support, which is given by the widows’ family, neighbourly support can be classified into the crisis and the daily support.

A funeral is a perfect occasion to observe crisis support. Most studies about Javanese neighbourhoods (from Jay’s rural study at the end of the 60’s to several urban studies in the 80’s and 90’s done by Jellinek, the Sullivans and Guiness) showed that neighbourly caring activities were intensified (temporally) by a crisis, especially when somebody died. However, these caring activities include different kinds of support, especially the economic and practical support. But, how do neighbours provide emotional support for widows in a funeral?

When a fellow resident dies, neighbours in general are compelled to visit the bereaved family, to express their sympathy and to bring gifts of staple food or money. Although people usually stay for a while, many visitors only silently sit among other visitors. In most of the funerals, I observed that the conversations between the widow and some of the visitors were mainly about the deceased: his last illness, the signs of his death such as dreams, last words etc. The visitors may say a few words to console the widow, but seldom continued in an
emotionally supportive conversation. The visit in itself can be perceived as an emotional support. Widows often told me in a grateful way that many people had come to her husband’s funeral. This large number of funeral attendants indicated that the deceased was well respected.

To my questions about daily emotional support, most widows answered that they would not easily tell neighbours about their emotional problems (for instances the sadness at being abandoned by the only daughter, the anger toward the impolite daughter in law, the worries about delayed financial support etc.). Some of them said that they might tell their emotional problem to the close neighbours since these people could be considered as ‘family members’.

Even in the chat group, I seldom heard widows elaborately talk about their widowhood problem. It seemed to me that if they felt lonely, their participation as such in the chat forum was the solution to the problem. In such a direct and open situation, people tended to tell and to respond to small complains superficially (and delicately). The exchanged comments or advice were not expected to be a threat to the harmonious sphere of the chat gathering. They had to avoid salah omong (to say something inappropriate) that could raise salah paham (misunderstanding).

Thus, in the flow of emotional support, the preference for keeping a distance, trust and courtesy between the provider and the receiver of support can be more significant than in the economic and practical support. About the gender aspect of support providers, it was obvious that the widows gained emotional support primarily from female neighbours.

8. The Practical Support

Some forms of support

Different forms of practical support, which will be examined in this section, are personal care, assistance in doing households chores, assistance in dealing with formal-official affairs and in an emergency situation.

Personal care for widows is mostly provided by their neighbours when the widows get sick. It usually includes minor nursing tasks such as closing doors and widows at night, warming the food or just regularly dropping in to check the widow’s condition. In almost every neighbourhood I found a case of neighbours doing these kinds of task for a widow. These cases have several similar aspects, first, the widows are old, living alone and ill, second, the support providers have known the widows for a long time and third, the personal
care which is provided, does not include cleaning, dressing or going to the toilet, even though the widow may need these sorts of assistance.

The fact that the support providers have known the widows for a long period also indicates, to some extent, a kind of ‘(grand) mother - (grand) child’ emotional bond. The support providers showed this bond in expressions like, “I have to help her, she’s like my own grandmother” or “We have known each other for along time, when I was a child, I played at her house”.

However not all elderly widows who live alone will be taken care of by their neighbours when they get sick. In these cases, usually the aspect of emotional bond is absent. Mbok Nah (64) was a widow who lived alone in one of the wooden stalls in Talun market of Semeru alley. She had been ill for more than three weeks before she died in February 1999. During mbok Nah’s period of illness, nobody had taken care of her, not even her immediate neighbours. Bu Sarmini (53) told me about mbok Nah’s last day, “I knew that she was suffering from a heavy cough that night, but I didn’t come to her because it was very late. The next morning she didn’t open the door and window like she always did. I was afraid to come to her house alone, so I asked my daughter and a few other people to accompany me. When we could finally open the door, we saw mbok Nah sitting on her bed but she had died already”.

Old widows are regularly assisted by some neighbours in doing household chores. This assistance is mainly given in the form of shopping for the widows (titip belanja). If the widows are seriously ill the assistance may be extended by cooking the widows’ meals. However the latter is usually considered as inefficient. If it is necessary, neighbours prefer to cook an extra amount of food in their own house and give a small part of it to the widows.

Neighbourly assistance in dealing with formal official affairs is primarily given in organising a burial. As I have described before, in Semeru alley, the RW chief would contact a cemetery caretaker about the tasks involved in preparing a grave, including hiring several grave diggers. Bu Sarsih (60) in Kotalama told me that young men in her neighbourhood had helped her in finding a grave at the nearest cemetery and voluntarily dug it. This assistance can also be found in other forms. In Semeru alley, a widow was helped by the RT chief to open a bank account. She was also escorted by the RT chief when she brought the money to the bank.

Neighbourly assistance is also obviously present in emergency situations. Widows who are suddenly ill or have an accident may experience what is the meaning of “immediate neighbours are better than relatives who live far away”. When Wak Ju (67), in Semeru alley,
had a stroke, her immediate neighbours brought her to a doctor, informed her relatives and went the pharmacy to buy medicines. One night, bu Moestari (55), a widow who lives in a small town 17 kilometres from Malang, got a severe asthma attack. It was 1.30 a.m. when the widow’s twelve year-old daughter hysterically woke up one of the immediate neighbours. The neighbour brought bu Moestari to the nearest hospital. Fortunately, bu Moestari did not have to stay at the hospital, however, it was almost 5 a.m. when the neighbour could bring her back home.

Emergency situations are not only related to the widows’ health problems. Mbok Temi (80) in Kemirahan alley got instant assistance from several men in her neighbourhood to re-build her deteriorated kitchen that had almost collapsed.

Some Aspect of Practical Support

As in other kinds of support, it is important to pay attention to the gender aspect of the practical support flow. Personal care and assistance in doing household chores are primarily provided by female neighbours, while assistance in dealing with various formal-official affairs are provided by male neighbours. The assistance in emergency situations is less gender bound. Bringing the widow to a doctor, informing the widows’ relatives or buying medicines in the pharmacy can be done either by men or by women. Moreover, in such a critical situation people are expected to do whatever they can. As a result, the gender boundaries can be flexibly trespassed. Unless, the emergency assistance is ‘absolutely men’s work’ such as repairing (a part of) a house.

The other aspect that should be looked at is the widows’ personal situation namely some combinations of their age, living arrangement, health condition and the length of residence. Personal care and assistance in doing household chores are usually provided to old widows who are living alone. This is especially true when the widows get ill. The flow of these forms of support will be - to some extent - insured by the long-standing neighbourly relation between the widows and the support providers.

It is difficult to compare this situation with young widows since all of them have relatives (parents and siblings) who live near by. These relatives, including the widows’ teenage children, will be the main providers of personal care and assistance in performing the household’s chores. Moreover, these young widows usually do not have physical difficulty in take caring for themselves.

Regardless of the widow’s age, she can ask the male neighbours to help her in dealing with formal-official affairs, especially if she does not have adult male relatives living nearby.
9. Access to Neighbourly Support

The widows’ access to various kinds of neighbourly support is influenced by different factors. This section is aimed to examine the factors that determine the widows’ access to a certain kind of support. In order to do that, I shall highlight two groups of factors, namely the specific factors (either for informal or the formal support) and the general factors.

Specific factors of access to informal support

As discussed before, under the term of ‘informal support’ I include support, which is given by individual neighbours or/and informally formed groups of neighbours like chat groups, clique or neighbourly cells.

In the former sections I have mentioned that daily support tends to be more flexibly provided by individual neighbours or informal groups of neighbours. These sorts of support providers are more likely tied to subjective criteria in selecting a support receiver. Therefore aspects such as the residential proximity\(^6\), the widows’ age, the length of residence and the presence of an alternative support network will determine the widows’ access to the daily – informal support.

In a closer look at a few cases, the combinations of aspects are also important. The most important aspects in the support flow between mbah Sarah (82) and bu Noto (71) are their residential closeness and long standing friendship. But for Wak Ju (67) and Mak Nyai (79) – besides the residential proximity and long-standing neighbourly relation – their old age and the lack of alternative support network such as family support are also the legitimate criteria for the neighbours to give them various kinds of support.

Specific factors of access to formal support

The examination of access to formal support highlights three factors, first, the widows’ involvement in neighbourhood corporate relation\(^7\), second, the quality of the widows relation

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\(^6\) In her study on poor community in Jakarta, Jellinek (1991:34-35) highlighted the importance of paying attention to the residential proximity in understanding kampung life. Several streets studies by Philip Abram (Bulmer,1986:83) also showed that proximity was one of the important factors accounting for neighbouring, ‘Being next door to somebody is different from living in the next street to them[...] In the street studies the people next door were the most salient relationship, both positively in terms of friendliness, help and reciprocity – and negatively – in terms of problems over noise, fences, car parking or social distance.

\(^7\) For the term ‘corporate relationship’ I refer to Jay’s (1969:188-189) differentiation of corporate and dyadic relationship. The corporate relationship is the fundament of corporate group. This kind of group usually has a set of official and formal programs or activities.
with the neighbourhood activists, third, the presence of activists\(^8\) who can maintain a good connection with the higher rank bureaucracy.

It is crucial for understanding the puzzle of inclusion and exclusion practices in many neighbourhood organisations to assess to what degree people will be involved in various corporate groups. Generally, different kinds of formal organisation exist in an Indonesian neighbourhood. On the one hand, there is a social expectation – or even pressure - to be engaged in these organisations. On the other hand, a resident shall not be penalised severely because of her/ his lack of interest in the organisations. However, the indifferent inhabitant may be excluded from some services and assistance rendered by the organisations.

Dartik (38) and Nung (46) are residents of the Semeru alley. Both of the widows are Moslems and have children younger than 12 years. According to the Koran, these young children are entitled to the gift for the fatherless children (sedekah untuk anak yatim). However, only Nung’s son regularly receives this kind of gift. This gift is given by neighbours who are members of the Koran reading group in the neighbourhood. Nung is a devoted member of this group and on the contrary Dartik has never been involved in this group.

Another example is the case of bu Santo (60) and bu Moestari (50). Both of the widows live in the Tirto neighbourhood, which is situated 17 kilometres outside Malang. Bu Moestari is an active member of the women’s organisation, PKK. She usually attends various neighbourhood meetings, participates in the PKK choir and sport competitions. On the contrary, bu Santo and her never-married sister have a socially isolated life. Neighbours rarely drop in to visit them and vice versa. Everyone in the neighbourhood knows that the two old women have insufficient and unstable income. Sometimes they even do not have enough money to buy rice or petroleum.

In April 1999, one of the social safety net schemes was introduced. The poor residents of Tirto neighbourhood (and many other urban neighbourhoods) were entitled to free medical treatment. For this purpose, a sort of identity card (the kartu sehat) would be given to the entitled ones. Bu Moestari was chosen by the PKK activists as the deserving one in the neighbourhood. She got the card without many problems. Although bu Santo was – at least – as needy as bu Moestari, the PKK activist did not apply for a kartu sehat for her. The economic hardship of this socially isolated widow was easily overlooked. When I asked one

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\(^8\) In his research, Abram (Bulmer, 1986) also paid attention the ‘caring agents’ or ‘central figures’. These terms refer to particular individuals in a neighbourhood who actively encourage, organise and perform helping activities or other neighbourly activities.
of the PKK activists about this, she only said that bu Santo never showed an interest in the organisation or in other form of neighbourliness.

Relationships among neighbours are usually layered according to factors such as economic position and the degree of one’s influence in local politics. In many neighbourhoods, the activists and leaders are often the better-off residents. This means that not all of the poorer co-residents have access to approach these richer activists for help.

Bu Asmah (60) lives in one of the alleys in Kotalama. She is the aunt of the RW head. Although bu Asmah definitely does not belong to the poorest group of widows in the neighbourhood, she was entitled to almost every introduced social safety net scheme such as the cheap rice allotment, the free medical treatment and the low interest credit scheme. I talked about bu Asmah with some PKK activists in the alley, although I could not ask them directly why a widow who was not ‘really’ poor according to the neighbourhood standard regularly received assistance while the poorer widows had to take turns. I got the impression that the PKK activists talked about bu Asmah with respect, especially when they emphasised her connection with the RW head. The special bond with an important man in the neighbourhood was an important factor to gain better access to many kinds of formal support.

Only a small number of selected residents, mainly the neighbourhood activists, have access to government institution outside the neighbourhood. Many of the formal schemes, which are implemented at the neighbourhood level, are organised from the national or regional level. The allotment of cheap rice is an example of it. The rice packages are distributed top-down from the municipal level to the smaller and the smallest units of administration. The end of this chain of distribution is the RT unit. The RT heads have to apply for his neighbourhood’s allotment to the higher unit of administration such as the kelurahan. If they fail to do so, their neighbourhood will run the risk of being neglected by the higher administration unit. In other words, the neighbourhood leaders should be able to articulate and to protect the neighbourhood’s needs, since many of the inhabitants have to depend heavily on them.

The Mawar alley and the Kacangan alley are both situated in the kelurahan Kotalama. I was surprised by the fact that the poor inhabitants of Mawar alley received cheap rice packages almost every month, while none in the Kacangan alley ever received them. Soon, it was clear that the RT head in Kacangan alley did not apply for his neighbourhood’s allotment. This ‘indifference’ was caused by an inability to approach the higher administration units and formulate the neighbourhood needs through bureaucratic instruments such as a proposal or a formal letter. This case demonstrates that the absence of appropriate central figures to act as
brokers between the residents of a particular neighbourhood and the bureaucratic world outside can reduce the residents’ access to many sorts of formal support.

Besides these various aspects that determine the widows’ access to either informal or formal support, there are also aspects that are related to both informal as well as formal support namely: the guidelines to support which are effectuated by availability of the economic resources, gender and religion.

The guidelines to support and availability of resources

The discussion about ideas on and efforts towards maintaining harmonious relationships in the Javanese neighbourhoods is ubiquitous in the literature (see Guiness, 1986; J.Sullivan, 1992; Mulder, 1996). In all alleys people are quite familiar with the notion of rukun (harmony) in relationships among neighbours. Even the young men in the alleys, who are often associated with trouble making, also talk about the importance of harmony among kampung dwellers. A young man in Kacangan alley told me seriously how he and his friend assisted their bereaved neighbours, “In such a situation we were very rukun”.

Sullivan (1992:71) examined four neighbourly ideals in a Javanese context namely, podo-podo (equality), lomo (generosity), tepo seliro (consideration for others) and isin (shame). Sullivan’s examination demonstrates vividly how these neighbourly ideals were applied in the kampung life. Of course a gap can always be found between the ideals and the daily application, but the fact that people have taken these ideals into their consideration can stimulate the support relations among them.

All Semeru residents I talked with (both widows and non widows) knew about these ideals. Some of them were sceptical about the ideals and connected this scepticism with the ‘urban-ness’ of their neighbourhood. I also talked with some support providers about why they helped their neighbours. Their answers were not always clear, however they told me about some motivations, which were comparable to the neighbourly ideals mentioned by Sullivan.

It is beyond this study to analyse whether these motivations can be perceived as a genuine altruism or a particular form of reciprocity. My emphasis is on the fact that there are support relations and support flows among neighbours and that people are aware of the general norms of neighbourliness and beneficence. As normative guidelines, the ideals themselves cannot guarantee the quality of the rendered support, but they can motivate people to do good deeds for their neighbours especially when (economic) resources are available for this.
In this discussion I shall relate ‘the availability of economic resources in the neighbourhood’ mainly with the heterogeneity of the residents’ economic position. If we can understand a resource as something, which can be drawn upon for aid, the better-off co-residents can also be perceived as part of the resources. This idea will be interesting when it is connected with the fact that most of the economic support providers in all alleys are the better off residents. These people have a surplus that can be given to their needy neighbours. In other words, the presence of residents who have more can facilitate the flow of economic support for the residents who have less.

In a neighbourhood where everybody is as poor as everybody else, the inhabitants will be fully occupied by their own economic survival (see Baross, 1984:164). Kacangan alley is not that kind of neighbourhood, however if this alley is compared with the Semeru alley, the economic position of Kacangan alley’s inhabitants is homogeneously poorer. In the interviews, many of the Kacangan alley’s residents often explicitly acknowledged that they could not expect to be helped economically by their neighbours because these neighbours were sama-sama orang mlarat (as poor as themselves) or podho repoté (having the same hardships). Most of the people do not have the extra resources to be given to their neighbours.

By discussing this factor I shall argue that combination between the notion of neighbourliness and the availability of resources can enlarge people’s access to neighbourly support.

**Gender and religion**

Differentiation based on gender is omnipresent in every neighbourhood. Men or women will give or receive different forms of support. It will be more difficult for a widower to live alone and to obtain practical support from his female neighbours whenever he needs it in time of illness. It is also almost unthinkable that the widower will get personal care from the male neighbours. A widower will be entitled to the burial fund but he will not receive the donation from the women’s network such as the PKK or the Dhasa Wisma.

In all alleys, most of the inhabitants are Moslems, but there are few Christians. In general, people are careful with the religious difference among them. But the boundary of ‘us’ and ‘them’ is still present. This boundary – to some extent – has influenced the support relations among neighbours. According to the RW head in Semeru alley, the non-Moslem residents are not fully entitled to the burial fund although they are obliged to pay the contribution. The reason is, according to him, “They do not hold burial like us”. However, these non-Moslem residents receive some money, approximately half of what the Moslem
residents usually get for a burial. To sum up, being a man or a woman, or having a different religion from the majority of neighbours can lead to different support relationships.

10. The Importance of Neighbourly Support

In the previous chapter (chapter 4) on family support, I have shown that most of the widows mentioned that family members were the prime support providers for them; unless they were absent for various reasons. However, these family members are not simply the sole support providers. In this chapter I have demonstrated that widows can also be helped by their neighbours in various ways. How important, then, is this neighbourly support for the widows? In order to answer this question, I shall first analyse to what extent neighbours will assist.

All support relations stop at a certain limit. Where does the limit lie for different kinds of neighbourly support? A few cases below will illustrate this. As I wrote before, personal care, which is performed by neighbours, only includes minor nursing tasks. I did not find any case where neighbours helped a widow in cleaning herself, dressing or going to the toilet. In chapter 4, I described the case of an old widow who had to be taken in the hospital because of a severe stroke attack. Her family members had to take turn as a ‘watcher’ in the hospital all night long and every night as the hospital regulation had compelled. Sometimes when the children and grandchildren were exhausted, they asked one of their close neighbours to watch the ill widow. However they paid this neighbour Rp 25.000/night. Thus, this kind of personal care was perceived as not to be expected from neighbours, at least without a proper exchange or repayment.

What happened to a few old widows who lived alone and were seriously ill also showed that whenever the major nursing tasks had to be performed (cleaning, dressing and going to the toilet) for a longer period, a relative was asked to come or the widows were temporally ‘evacuated’ to one of the relatives’ house. If it was financially possible – instead of expecting neighbourly support - the widows (or their relatives) were expected to hire a servant or nurse to perform the nursing tasks.

When Wak Ju – a widow in the Semeru alley – stayed at her adopted son’s house for the recovery, some of the immediate neighbours planned to visit her. I was glad to be invited to join them, since this visit would be an excellent example of emotional support among neighbours or at least of neighbourliness. We chose a day in the weekend and everybody seemed to be satisfied about it. When the given day got closer, a few women began to give signs of objection. They complained that they had other important events to be attended in
that weekend. One had to attend a wedding ceremony of a niece, one had to participate in a special training day in her office and one had to visit families outside the city. The number of people who had this kind of excuse was growing. When the chosen day came, nobody talked about the planned visit any longer. There was no obvious reason for the cancellation and I was just told that the visit was *tidak jadi* (cancelled). It was obvious that everybody accepted the fact that people gave a higher priority to their own familial matters.

In general people are careful in asking economic assistance from their neighbours. Borrowing money from a moneylender was sometimes preferred above a loan from one’s neighbours. A reason that is often mentioned is *malu kalau ditolak* (it would be shameful if the request were refused). Many widows in the Talun market and Kacangan alley told me that they did not expect to be helped financially by their neighbours because these neighbours were as poor as the widows themselves. Thus, they knew exactly that the limited (financial) resource would have to be preserved in the first place for the neighbours’ own need.

With the illustration above, I attempt to highlight some limitations of neighbourly support. People have different degree of commitment in helping their own relatives, friends or neighbours. These differences are especially connected to one’s perception and calculation on diverse obligations (who are obliged to do what for whom). Within this perception and calculation, some matters like reciprocity, moral debts (*hutang budi*), trust and predictability can be included.

At the time priorities have to be drawn or choices have to be made, the cases above have shown that people will opt in the first place for their own family. According to Anderson (in Bulmer, 1986:105), ‘Though neighbours did provide some help, and though there were certain bureaucratically organised assistance agencies, each had major drawbacks as a reliable and low cost source of aid. Neighbours lacked a firmly enough structured basis of reciprocation in a heterogeneous and mobile society. Kinship by contrast, could provide this structured link, and could thus form a basis for reciprocation [...]

Even though this unreliability of neighbourly support is recognisable in the alleys, the picture of neighbourly support should be completed with the fact that neighbours were often very important in coping with emergency situation or sudden crises. In such an emergency situation, people who can be reached easily because they live nearby tend to be the ones who render the immediate assistance. However, an emergency situation or sudden crisis usually lasts for a short time only. The day when the husband died or the first few hours of severe illness were common examples of sudden crisis for many widows. In these situations, neighbours were the prime support providers. As soon as the widows’ family had come and
gathered, most of the neighbours would retreat from the support arena. Compared with the widows’ family members, neighbours have a lower rank in the hierarchy of duty. Consequently, if the family members are present, neighbours are less obliged to help.

11. Concluding Remarks

First of all, neighbours are more than people who live near one another. Spatial proximity as the key attribute for defining neighbours should be understood in relation to some existing ideals on neighbourliness. This spatial proximity and the ideals of neighbourliness are also crucial for establishing and maintaining neighbourly support relationships.

Like support relations among family members, support relations among neighbours are also multiple and fluid. Neighbours can engage in various forms of relation such as friendship, co-membership in a neighbourly organisation, patron-client relationship or even work relationship. A person can gain different support from various relationships he/she has engaged. Moreover neighbourly relations can also be established both formally as well as informally. Both ways imply different possibilities of gaining support. As neighbourly ties are changeable, the neighbourly support relationships are also fluid. They are continuously negotiated and adjusted. Again, as in family support, this fluidity is influenced by factors such as incompatibility of support demand at the receiving end and the willingness to support at the providing end, changes in the quality of relationships and changes in roles in a support relation.

Neighbourly support varies. It includes different kinds of support (economic, emotional and practical support). Each kind of support also includes various forms of support. For instance, economic support can be provided in the forms of gifts in kind, loan, payments or accommodation. These various form of support are rendered by different categories of providers. It is important to pay attention to the ways and circumstances in which individual neighbours, informal groups of neighbours, and formal organisations in the neighbourhood provide support for the widows.

The compositions of neighbourly support ‘packages’ which are gained by the widows are different. In a few cases, the widows were barely supported by their neighbours. Various factors can serve to explaining this situation. Informal support, which is given by individual or informal groups of neighbours, is usually influenced by factors such as residential proximity, the widows’ age, the length of residence etc. while formal support, which is given by formal organisations in the neighbourhood, is influenced by factors such as the widows’
involvement in the given organisations. Besides these specific factors, there are factors that determine the widow’s access to neighbourly support in general.

If we compare neighbourly support with the family support for widows, we find a relatively similar pattern related to issues such as gender, emotional closeness, age, life stages etc. However, there are also differences between them. Along this similar pattern, different accents can also be found. For an example, while family members are usually regarded as responsible for the support of widows for a longer term, neighbours can be more efficient in assisting the widows in emergency situation or sudden crises. Therefore, it is important that neighbourly support is not examined in isolation from other sources of support, especially family support. There are circumstances where neighbourly support becomes a salient complement or substitute for the other sources of support.