

# The Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Women Workers in Thailand

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The global financial crisis, which was triggered in 2008 by the effects of the earlier bursting of the United States housing bubble, has had a considerable impact on Thailand because of its export orientation and reliance on external demand. The poor have been the group most severely affected by the economic downturn, as is always the case. In the Southeast Asian region, including in Thailand, women have been among the most vulnerable and are likely to have been disproportionately affected by the crisis.

The original version of this paper<sup>1</sup> had as its primary objective examining whether and how Thai women were being affected by the current global financial crisis. The research objectives included assessing the impact of the crisis on women in Thailand; studying and analyzing the gendered nature of the government's response so far; and developing a set of recommendations for governments, regional institutions and donors. Because of space constraints, in this paper only empirical evidence of the impact of the global crisis on women's employment is presented; the evidence has been derived mainly from the Labor Force Survey undertaken by the National Statistical Office (NSO).

## 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

At the risk of being an oversimplification, Figure 1 illustrates some possible impacts of the current global financial crisis on women in Thailand. First, as Thailand has a very high rate of female labor force participation, a major impact of the crisis could be transmitted through the labor market. The global contraction in demand has resulted in decreased exports from Thailand and tourism to the country, as well as foreign direct investment (FDI), as discussed previously. In turn, manufacturing production and capacity utilization have decreased, which has resulted in a decreased demand for labor in the related industries. Labor market adjustment has resulted in reduced working hours, underemployment, unemployment, and a situation in which laborers leave the labor market. People's reduced income and

adjustment to the difficult labor market conditions have resulted in a change in the patterns of consumption, among other coping strategies, which in turn affects the social conditions of women. To what degree the crisis affects women in the labor market is an empirical question. The second channel through which the crisis adversely affects women is the concomitant decrease in the government's regular budget expenditure on social services and social infrastructure, particularly on health and education. Women are usually more vulnerable to impacts because of their dual roles as workers and housekeepers or mothers. Thus, the second empirical question which this study tries to investigate is how much does the reduction in government budget adversely affect women.

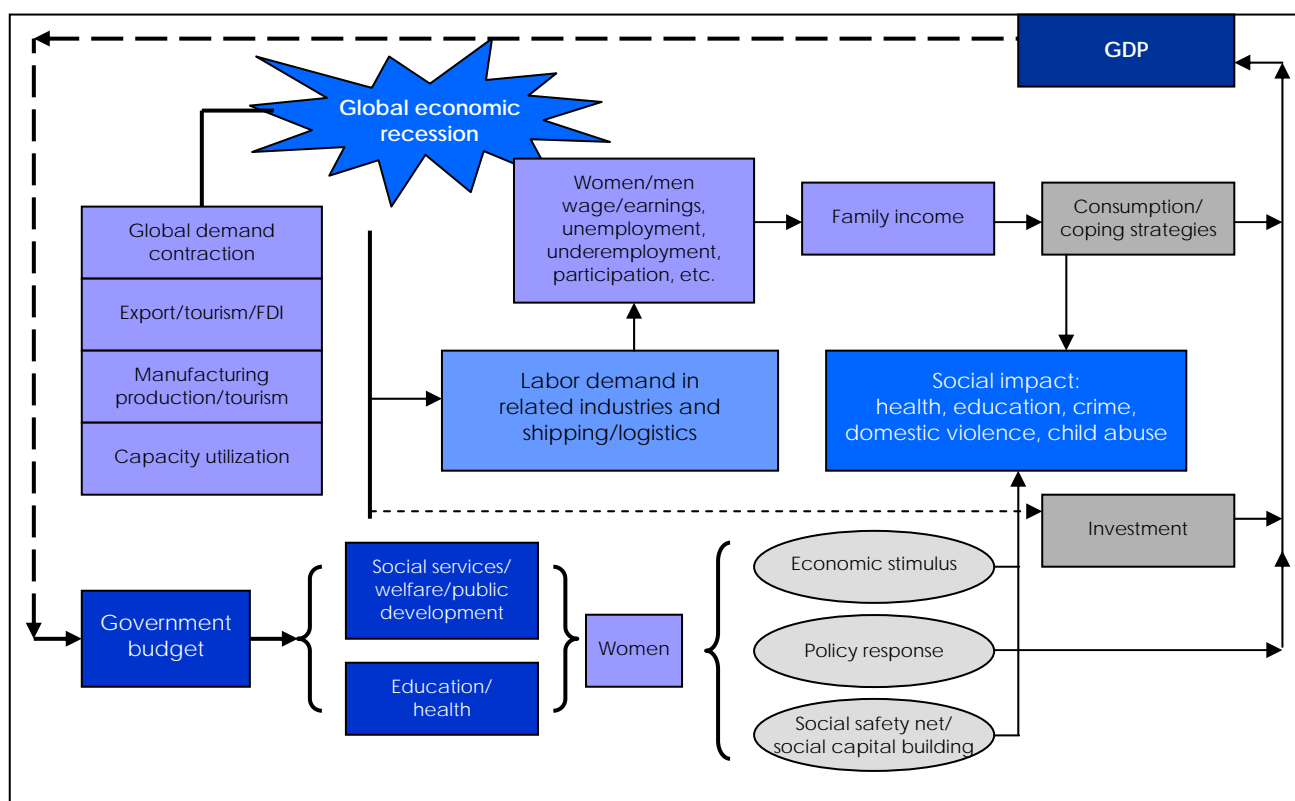
Conceptually, there are a number of possible ways that the crisis may be affecting women, as shown below; however, they are not exhaustive, as there may be other ways as well.

### Impact of the Crisis on the Employment of Women

- Job loss in the export manufacturing and service sectors, such as textiles, electronics, and agricultural exports. It has been estimated that, during the 1997 Asian financial crisis, women accounted for 80 percent of the retrenched workers in the textile and electronics industries. In addition, women were more likely to be laid off before men due to their concentration in precarious forms of low-wage employment, as well as to the attitude of employers who regard women as secondary earners.
- Women face aggravated labor conditions and/or loss of income in industries, such as the garment sector, where less overtime is available or where women are expected to work harder for the same wages.
- Impacts are felt also on family nutrition, children's education and health status.

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**Figure 1 Impact of the Financial Crisis on Women**



- A reduction in remittances affects female jobs and family income in labor-sending countries.
- A possible retraction of microcredit affects female-run businesses.
- The labor burden on women increases as they have to take second jobs to make up for the lack of social services or lack of income at a time when they have to expend more time and money for the benefit of the family/household.
- Exacerbating factors such as higher food prices/changes in commodity prices pose the question: “Do women face additional costs in their businesses, livelihoods, or families?”

## 2. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

### Labor Force Participation of Women

The average<sup>2</sup> labor force participation rate of Thai women used to exceed 70 percent prior to the 1997 Asian financial crisis. It dropped to about 65 percent during that crisis and has remained below 65 percent since then. In 2007, the rate was about 64.1 percent, increasing slightly to about 64.3 percent in 2008. Since women are often regarded as being secondary workers, the phenomenon of the increase in the female participa-

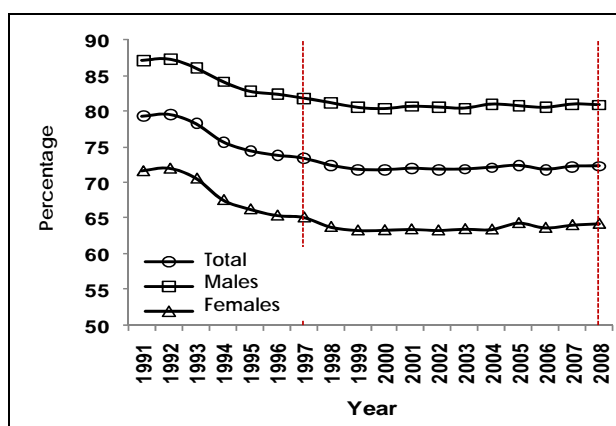
tion rate corresponds to a very mild case of “added workers effect,” where women have to participate more in the labor market in order to supplement family income, which decreased or disappeared during that crisis (Figure 2).

### Unemployment

According to the 1991-2009 Labor Force Survey, the average unemployment rate in 2008 increased very little compared with that of 2007. However, when disaggregated by sex, the picture is quite different. It increased from 1.2 percent to 1.3 percent for men, while it decreased from 1.6 percent to 1.5 percent for women (Figure 3). In fact, the levels of unemployment for men and women are much lower than they were during the 1997 crisis. Even in the first quarter of 2009, although GDP contracted by 7.1 percent, unemployment was only 2.1 percent in comparison to the same period in 2005, when GDP grew by 3.6 percent and unemployment was 2.5 percent (Table 1).

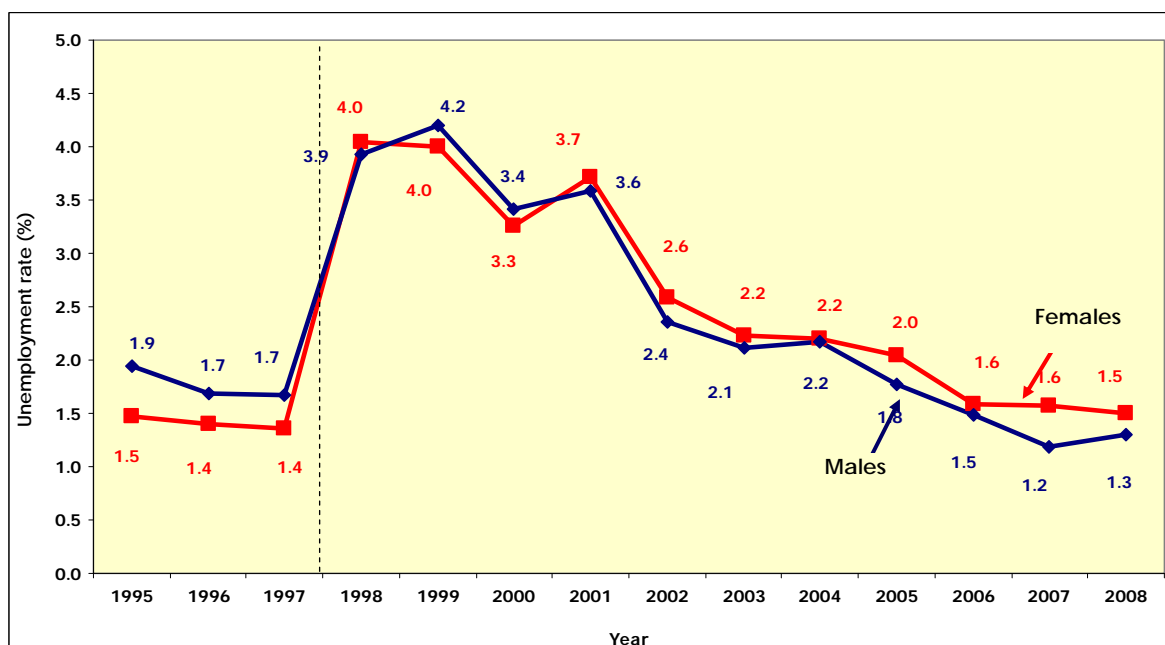
In Thailand, unemployment is like the tip of an iceberg when it comes to measuring employment problems. The employment data may be misleading as they may signal that there are no employment problems. Actually, other employment problems not reflected in the data are more serious in terms of impact on people’s livelihoods. They include underemployment, reduced wages and earnings, the change of jobs to poorer quality

**Figure 2 Labor Force Participation Rate by Sex**



Source: The Labor Force Surveys 1991-2009 (Q1), National Statistical Office.

**Figure 3 Thailand's Unemployment Rate, 1995-2008**



Note: Average data for the first and third quarters.

Source: Labor Force Surveys 1995-2008, National Statistical Office.

**Table 1 Growth Rate of Real GDP and Unemployment Rate**

	2005				2006				2007				2008				2009
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1
Real GDP (percentage change year on year)	3.6	4.7	5.5	4.7	6.4	5.3	4.8	4.5	4.4	4.4	5.1	5.7	6	5.3	3.9	-4.2	-7.1
Unemployment rate (percent)	2.5	2.0	1.3	1.5	1.9	1.7	1.2	1.3	1.6	1.6	1.2	1.1	1.7	1.4	1.2	1.3	2.1

Source: GDP data supplied by the National Economic and Social Development Board; unemployment rates were obtained from the Labor Force Survey, various years, National Statistical Office.

ones that people are forced by circumstances to take (“distress employment: shift to informal employment”),<sup>3</sup> exploitation, and cheating by employers. Also serious are the social impacts resulting from the coping strategies of families with employment problems. Therefore, employment problems other than unemployment need to be closely examined.

At this juncture, however, even the unemployment figures need to be looked at in more detail in order to determine, for example, just who are the people who have been affected. How and to what degree have they been affected? What is the duration of their unemployment? Owing to space limitations and time constraints, only some aspects of these dimensions of employment are illustrated.

### Downsizing—a Large Number of Women Are in Trouble

At least five sub-sectors within the manufacturing sector have been severely affected by the global crisis, namely, electrical machinery and electronics; textiles and garments; motor vehicles and parts; furniture and decorations; machinery and mechanical appliances; and food and beverage products (see Table 2). These industries, except for machinery and mechanical appliances, are dominated by women employees. As shown in Table 3, employment in the five severely affected sub-sectors alone declined by a total of 61,000 persons in the period 2007-2008. During this period, however, there was an increase of 3,000 in the number of women employed, compensating for the 64,000 men unemployed. Proportionately, during the period 2007-2008 men accounted for more than 100 percent of the decrease in employment in the five sub-sectors (Table 3). By contrast, between the first quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009, the number of women employed decreased by 128,700 compared with a decline of 98,500 for men. Between the second quarter of 2008 and the same period in 2009, women’s employment decreased by 110,800 compared with that of men which decreased by 40,000. Proportionately, the decreases in women’s employment accounted for 56.7 percent and 73.5 percent, respectively, of the total during the first quarters of 2008 and 2009 and the second quarters of those years. It should be noted that the decline in employment in these sub-sectors does not necessarily mean layoffs. Some workers may resign voluntarily and move to other industries, or some may find employment in other industries right after a layoff. The reasons that women’s employment declined less than that of men during the period 2007-2008 could be because their wages were lower than that of men, and women were able to keep their jobs during the early stage of the crisis when men had been laid off in large numbers. During the later stage of that crisis, the remaining men, i.e., “hardcore” workers were retained, while the pressure on jobs held by women increased.

The layoffs in 2007 (sum of 4 quarters) totaled 241,499 persons compared with 219,996 persons in 2008 (Table 4). It should be noted that these numbers include only those laid off workers insured under the national social security system. The total employment registered by the Social Security Office was about 8.5 million, accounting for 50.9 percent of the total number of people in wage employment but only 23.1 percent of the total number employed.

### Employment of Women by Industry

In spite of the global crisis, total employment increased from 36.19 million persons in 2007 to 36.83 million in 2008, a net increase of 641,000 workers over the year, producing an annualized rate of increase of 1.8 percent. However, because the crisis is affecting export-oriented industries more than others, manufacturing experienced an employment decrease of 178,000 persons, or a rate of -3.0 percent for the year. In the hotel and restaurant sector, although there was an increase in employment of 39,600 persons year on year, the rate of increase slowed from 4.1 percent in the period 2006-2007 to 1.4 percent in the period 2007-2008. Table 5 indicates that employment has shifted to agriculture; wholesale and retail trades; and construction.

Table 5 shows that men dominated employment in three major industries: agriculture; wholesale and retail trades; and construction (female-to-male ratios are less than 1). Women dominated employment in manufacturing; and hotels and restaurants. This employment structure by sex is consistent between 2007 and 2008, that is, in 2008 it changed only very slightly, particularly in manufacturing. Employment in manufacturing decreased from 5,851,400 in 2007 to 5,673,400 in 2008, a decrease of 178,000 jobs. As a result, the share of employment in manufacturing has dropped from 16.2 percent of the total in 2007 to 15.4 percent in 2008. The number of women exiting this sector between 2007 and 2008 was 33,100<sup>4</sup> compared with 144,900 men, which resulted in an increase in the female-to-male ratio from 1.08 to 1.13. Surprisingly, employment in the hotel and restaurant sector increased for both men and women, with almost three times as many women having been absorbed (29,500) than men (10,000). This phenomenon probably can be explained by the Bank of Thailand’s data: although the number of foreign tourist arrivals in 2008 contracted by 1.3 percent from that of the previous year, tourism revenues from foreign tourists amounted to 588 billion baht, an increase of 5.9 percent. However, even though employment in this sector increased, the growth rate was less than it had been in the previous year. Figure 5, which shows the share of employment by sex in eight industries in 2007 and 2008, indicates that the employment of women is concentrated in the education sector.

**Table 2 Employment by Manufacturing Sub-sectors at Risk of Layoffs, 2007 to Second Quarter of 2009**

Sector	Sex	Persons		Growth (percentage year on year)		Persons		Growth (percentage year on year)		Persons		Growth (percentage year on year)	
		2007	2008	2007	2008	2008 Q1	2009 Q1	2008 Q1	2009 Q1	2008 Q2	2009 Q2	2008 Q2	2009 Q2
Electrical machinery and electronics	Total	483,379	449,672	5.0	-7.0	460,144	433,213	0.1	-5.9	442,729	378,582	-13.0	-14.5
	Male	164,667	141,078	14.0	-14.3	156,123	159,771	1.6	2.3	138,501	137,912	-20.6	-0.4
	Female	318,711	308,595	0.8	-3.2	304,021	273,443	-0.7	-10.1	304,228	240,670	-9.1	-20.9
Textiles and garments	Total	1,125,995	1,109,430	-4.3	-1.5	1,207,272	1,130,001	-1.9	-6.4	1,139,884	1,155,921	2.9	1.4
	Male	252,837	238,167	-2.0	-5.8	250,247	215,982	-6.9	-13.7	237,390	238,208	-7.9	0.3
	Female	873,158	871,264	-4.9	-0.2	957,025	914,019	-0.5	-4.5	902,494	917,713	6.1	1.7
Motor vehicles and motor vehicle parts	Total	262,076	255,326	17.0	-2.6	258,215	220,225	0.8	-14.7	270,575	215,445	1.0	-20.4
	Male	180,389	173,510	14.3	-3.8	174,469	146,702	-2.2	-15.9	180,899	137,459	-3.8	-24.0
	Female	81,686	81,816	23.3	0.2	83,746	73,523	7.6	-12.2	89,676	77,986	12.5	-13.0
Furniture and decorations	Total	516,771	512,685	-3.7	-0.8	602,060	542,958	0.2	-9.8	492,817	461,347	-6.6	-6.4
	Male	252,919	239,657	-4.9	-5.2	282,635	252,918	-4.3	-10.5	228,192	234,314	-11.9	2.7
	Female	263,852	273,028	-2.6	3.5	319,425	290,040	4.6	-9.2	264,625	227,034	-1.5	-14.2
Machinery and mechanical appliances	Total	167,918	168,004	-9.4	0.1	165,142	139,347	11.1	-15.6	187,081	170,992	7.1	-8.6
	Male	106,972	101,282	-6.4	-5.3	98,590	88,271	5.2	-10.5	111,485	108,610	2.7	-2.6
	Female	60,947	66,722	-14.1	9.5	66,552	51,076	21.2	-23.3	75,596	62,382	14.3	-17.5
Food and beverage products	Total	1,081,978	1,091,027	5.7	0.8	1,143,962	1,223,665	4.0	7.0	1,076,783	1,124,085	-1.1	4.4
	Male	528,807	542,167	6.5	2.5	569,596	608,028	2.7	6.7	533,100	531,739	3.9	-0.3
	Female	553,171	548,860	5.1	-0.8	574,366	615,637	5.2	7.2	543,683	592,347	-5.6	9.0

Note: Yearly statistics are an average of four quarters in a year.

Source: Labor Force Surveys, various years, National Statistical Office.

**Table 3 Changes in Employment in Five Manufacturing Sectors Affected by the Global Crisis in 2008-2009**

Employment (thousands)	Onset of crisis, 2007/8				Middle of the crisis, 2008/9							
	2007	2008	Change	Percentage distribution	2008 Q1	2009 Q1	Change	Percentage distribution	2008 Q2	2009 Q2	Change	Percentage distribution
	1	2	3=(2-1)	4	5	6	7=(6-5)	8	9	10	11=(10-9)	12
	Total	2,556.1	2,495.1	-61.0	100.0	2,692.8	2,465.7	-227.1	100.0	2,533.1	2,382.3	-150.8
Men	957.8	893.7	-64.1	105.1	962.1	863.6	-98.5	43.4	896.5	856.5	-40.0	26.5
Women	1,598.4	1,601.4	3.0	-4.9	1,730.8	1,602.1	-128.7	56.6	1,636.6	1,525.8	-110.8	73.5

Note: The sectors are electrical machinery and electronics; textiles and garments; motor vehicles and parts; furniture and decorations; and machinery and mechanical appliances.

Source: Labor Force Surveys, National Statistical Office (calculated from Table 2).

**Table 4 Termination of Employment (Insolvent Firms and Laidoff Persons)**

Termination of employment	2007				2008			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Number of firms (units)	8,106	7,005	6,492	6,826	7,078	6,035	5,358	3,662
Number of employees (persons)	63,152	51,869	61,378	65,100	57,252	82,771	45,627	34,346
<b>Growth (percentage year on year)</b>								
Number of firms	-2.2	3.2	-4.9	-2.8	-12.7	-13.8	-17.5	-46.4
Number of employees	-16.9	-10.9	10.7	7.3	-9.3	59.6	-25.7	-47.2

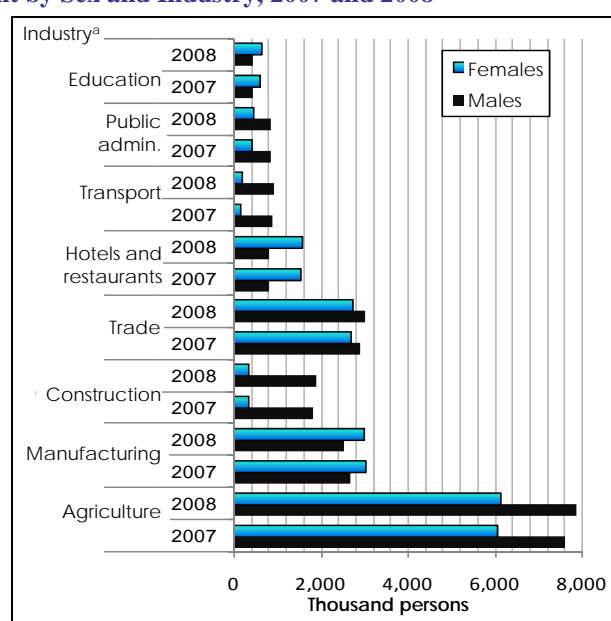
Source: Social Security Office, Ministry of Labour (compiled by Bank of Thailand).

**Table 5 Employment by Major Industry and by Sex, 2007-2008**

Industry	2007				2008			
	Total	Male	Female	Female-to-male ratio	Total	Male	Female	Female-to-male ratio
<b>Total (thousands)</b>	<b>36,187.3</b>	<b>19,659.9</b>	<b>16,527.4</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>36,828.3</b>	<b>19,998.0</b>	<b>16,830.3</b>	<b>0.84</b>
Percentage share of total	100.0	54.3	45.7		100.0	54.3	45.7	
<b>1. Agriculture</b>	<b>14,119.3</b>	<b>7,965.7</b>	<b>6,153.7</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>14,431.5</b>	<b>8,222.9</b>	<b>6,208.6</b>	<b>0.76</b>
Percentage share of total	39.0	22.0	17.0		39.2	22.3	16.9	
<b>2. Manufacturing</b>	<b>5,851.4</b>	<b>2,808.5</b>	<b>3,042.9</b>	<b>1.08</b>	<b>5,673.4</b>	<b>2,663.6</b>	<b>3,009.8</b>	<b>1.13</b>
Percentage share of total	16.2	7.8	8.4		15.4	7.2	8.2	
<b>3. Wholesale and retail trades</b>	<b>5,622.6</b>	<b>2,933.4</b>	<b>2,689.1</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>5,745.0</b>	<b>3,020.9</b>	<b>2,724.1</b>	<b>0.90</b>
Percentage share of total	15.5	8.1	7.4		15.6	8.2	7.4	
<b>4. Hotels and restaurants</b>	<b>2,338.8</b>	<b>808.8</b>	<b>1,530.0</b>	<b>1.89</b>	<b>2,378.4</b>	<b>818.8</b>	<b>1,559.5</b>	<b>1.90</b>
Percentage share of total	6.5	2.2	4.2		6.5	2.2	4.2	
<b>5. Construction</b>	<b>2,190.1</b>	<b>1,845.1</b>	<b>345.0</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>2,233.3</b>	<b>1,890.3</b>	<b>343.0</b>	<b>0.18</b>
Percentage share of total	6.1	5.1	1.0		6.1	5.1	0.9	
<b>6. Others</b>	<b>6,065.1</b>	<b>3,298.4</b>	<b>2,766.7</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>6,366.8</b>	<b>3,381.5</b>	<b>2,985.3</b>	<b>0.88</b>
Percentage share of total	16.8	9.1	7.6		17.3	9.2	8.1	

Note: Yearly statistics for 2007 and 2008 are the average of the first quarter and third quarter figures.

Source: Labor Force Surveys, various years, National Statistical Office.

**Figure 5 Share of Employment by Sex and Industry, 2007 and 2008**

Notes: The share of employment is the average for the first and third quarters.

<sup>a</sup> Over 1 million totally employed persons.

Source: Labor Force Surveys, various years, National Statistical Office.

## Wage Employment

The number of persons in wage employment was 16.4 million in 2007, increasing to 16.7 million in 2008, an increase of 1.9 percent. Women accounted for 44.3 percent of wage employment in 2007; this figure increased slightly to 44.7 percent in 2008 (Table 6).

## Employment of Women by Major Occupation

According to Table 7, women's employment can be categorized into four types of employees: professionals; technicians and associate professionals; clerks; and service and sales workers. Between 2007 and 2008, women were still concentrated in these four categories, although there were slight changes in the female-to-male ratios, which increased for professionals and technicians. This means that the proportions of women in these occupations have increased compared with that of men. At the same time, the female-to-male ratio of clerks and service workers decreased, which means that the proportions of women in these occupations have decreased compared with that of men.

During the period 2007-2008, some women workers shifted to more difficult but lower-paying jobs in three occupations. The proportion of women working as service workers and sales workers increased from 9.2 percent to 9.9 percent; that working in crafts and related trades, from 3.7 to 3.8 percent; and that in elementary occupation, from 6.0 to 6.1 percent. In terms of numbers, the increase of women working in two occupations alone, service work and sales work, was as many as 319,000 persons (see Table 7).

## Hours of Work and Underemployment

Figure 6 shows whether or not women are more likely to be asked to work reduced hours; it shows the trend of work hours per week according to sex. From 2001 to 2008, women's hours of work became increasingly fewer compared with that of men. This fact is in line with the comments made by a few speakers at a seminar entitled the "Impact of the Economic Crisis in

2008 on Women Workers," which was held at the Century Park Hotel, Bangkok, on March 5, 2009. According to Alice Chang (Arom Pongpangan Foundation 2009), women are more at risk of being laid off than their male counterparts. At the same seminar, a female worker said that, when she had been laid off, she found it more difficult for her as a woman, compared with men, to find another job. According to Plernpis Srisiri, who also spoke at that seminar, a number of women workers in Ayutthaya, Nakhon Pathom, Pathum Thani, and Chon Buri had already been laid off from jobs in the textile, electronic parts and computer industries. Many women workers were divorcees and had to work in order to care for their children. When they were unemployed and without income, they experienced mental depression.

Figure 7 shows the underemployment trend over the period 1991-2008. Moderate underemployment means working fewer than 30 hours per week, while severe underemployment means working fewer than 20 hours per week. It is astonishing that the level of underemployment among women during the current global crisis is much higher than it had been during the 1997 Asian crisis, although the trend dropped somewhat from 2007 to 2008, particularly that for severe underemployment.

## Women's Earnings

As shown in Figure 8, the nominal average wage income per month of private employees had been increasing constantly before the 1997 crisis, although the increase obviously slowed for a few years after that crisis. Wage income has begun increasing again, especially since 2005. The wage level of private women employees has been constantly lower than that of men. However, these data should be interpreted with caution. First, the data refer to the nominal wage; the real wage may not have increased. Second, the data are only for private women employees interviewed under the survey conducted by NSO. Women in the informal sector may not be at this wage level or their earnings may not have increased at the same speed.

**Table 6 Wage Employment by Sex and Work Status, 2007-2008 ('000 persons)**

	2007			2008		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
<b>Total wage employment</b>	<b>16,411.9</b>	<b>9,144.9</b>	<b>7,267.0</b>	<b>16,721.7</b>	<b>9,245.0</b>	<b>7,476.8</b>
Percentage share of total	100.0	55.7	44.3	100.0	55.3	44.7
<b>1. Government employees</b>	<b>2,830.7</b>	<b>1,546.1</b>	<b>1,284.6</b>	<b>2,940.7</b>	<b>1,550.4</b>	<b>1,390.3</b>
Percentage share of total	17.2	9.4	7.8	17.6	9.3	8.3
<b>2. State enterprise employees</b>	<b>339.9</b>	<b>237.0</b>	<b>102.9</b>	<b>352.7</b>	<b>241.0</b>	<b>111.7</b>
Percentage share of total	2.1	1.4	0.6	2.1	1.4	0.7
<b>3. Private employees</b>	<b>13,241.2</b>	<b>7,361.8</b>	<b>5,879.4</b>	<b>13,428.3</b>	<b>7,453.5</b>	<b>5,974.8</b>
Percentage share of total	80.7	44.9	35.8	80.3	44.6	35.7

Note: Yearly statistics for 2007 and 2008 are the average of the first quarter and third quarter figures.

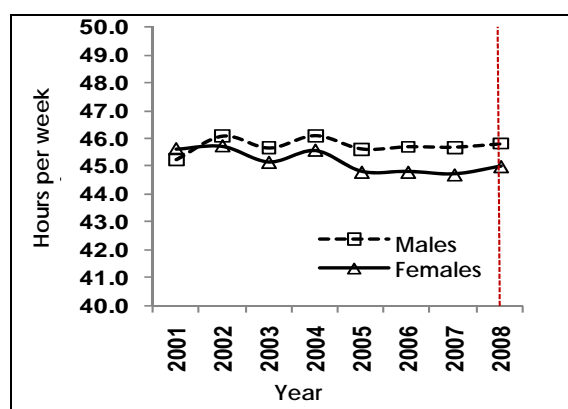
Source: Labor Force Surveys, various years, National Statistical Office.

**Table 7 Employment by Occupation and Sex, 2007-2008 ('000 persons)**

Occupation	2007				2008			
	Total	Male	Female	female-to-male ratio	Total	Male	Female	female-to-male ratio
Total	36,187.3	19,659.9	16,527.4	0.84	36,828.3	19,998.0	16,830.3	0.84
Percentage share of total	100.0	54.3	45.7		100.0	54.3	45.7	
1. Legislators, senior officials and managers	2,505.6	1,770.0	735.6	0.42	1,708.7	1,232.3	476.4	0.39
Percentage share of total	6.9	4.9	2.0		4.6	3.3	1.3	
2. Professionals	1,417.1	594.4	822.8	1.38	1,484.2	609.8	874.4	1.43
Percentage share of total	3.9	1.6	2.3		4.0	1.7	2.4	
3. Technicians and associate professionals	1,543.9	754.2	789.7	1.05	1,520.4	724.9	795.5	1.10
Percentage share of total	4.3	2.1	2.2		4.1	2.0	2.2	
4. Clerks	1,326.1	439.4	886.6	2.02	1,388.6	477.7	910.9	1.91
Percentage share of total	3.7	1.2	2.5		3.8	1.3	2.5	
5. Service workers and shop and market sales workers	5,209.2	1,896.5	3,312.6	1.75	5,843.1	2,211.5	3,631.6	1.64
Percentage share of total	14.4	5.2	9.2		15.9	6.0	9.9	
6. Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	12,597.6	7,050.6	5,546.9	0.79	12,885.4	7,300.5	5,584.9	0.77
Percentage share of total	34.8	19.5	15.3		35.0	19.8	15.2	
7. Craft and workers in related trades	4,124.0	2,774.7	1,349.3	0.49	4,392.6	2,989.8	1,402.7	0.47
Percentage share of total	11.4	7.7	3.7		11.9	8.1	3.8	
8. Plant and machine operators and assemblers	3,024.7	2,094.2	930.6	0.44	2,994.3	2,080.5	913.8	0.44
Percentage share of total	8.4	5.8	2.6		8.1	5.6	2.5	
9. Elementary occupations	4,439.2	2,285.9	2,153.2	0.94	4,611.0	2,371.0	2,240.0	0.94
Percentage share of total	12.3	6.3	6.0		12.5	6.4	6.1	

Note: Yearly statistics for 2007 and 2008 are the average of the first quarter and third quarter figures.

Source: Labor Force Surveys, various years, National Statistical Office.

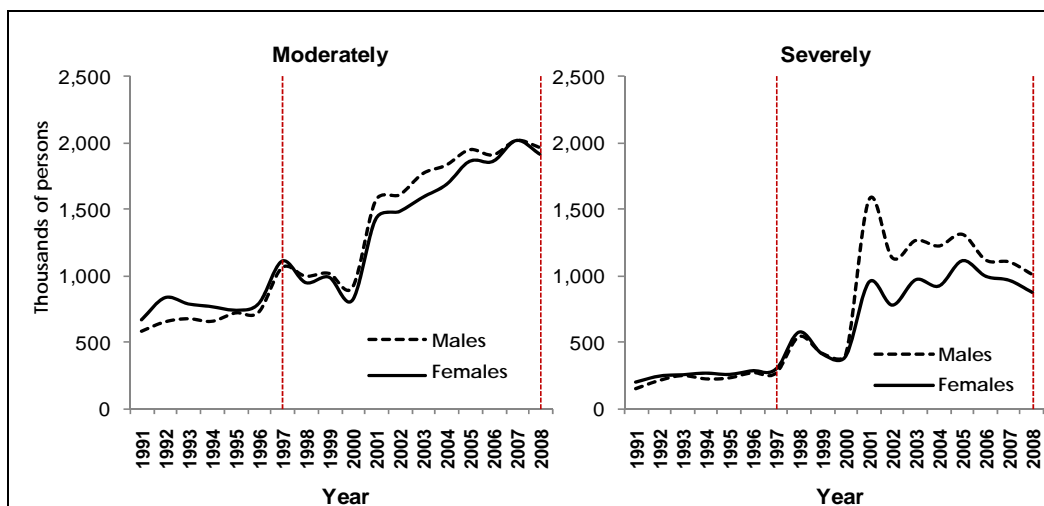
**Figure 6 Average Number of Hours Worked per Week**

Note: The term "hours worked" means the number of hours actually worked during the survey week. For a person holding more than one job, his/her hours worked would be the sum total of hours worked on all jobs. For a person who had a regular job but was not at work during the survey week, the hours worked would be recorded as zero. Before 2001, for a person who had a regular job but was not at work during the survey week, the number of hours normally worked in a week was taken as the hours worked (NSO, 2009).

Source: Labor Force Surveys, various years, National Statistical Office.



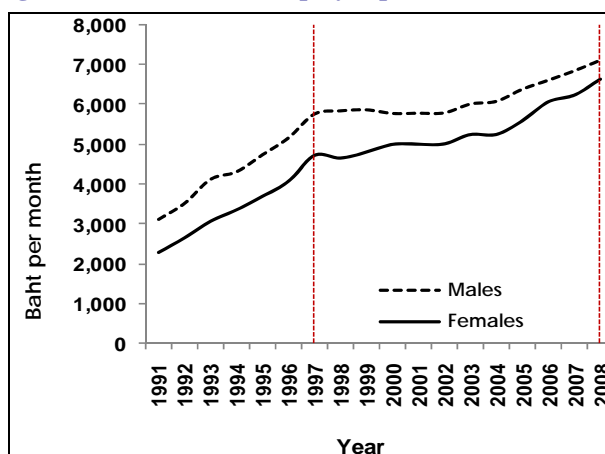
**Figure 7 Moderately and Severely Underemployed Persons by Sex**



Note: Moderately underemployed means that 20-30 hours of work per week are performed; severely underemployed means that fewer than 20 hours of work per week are performed.

Source: Labor Force Surveys, various years, National Statistical Office.

**Figure 8 Nominal Average Wage Income of Private Employee per Month**



Source: Labor Force Surveys, various years, National Statistical Office.

**Home Workers, Contract Workers, and Sub-contractors**

These groups of workers are basically home workers. According to surveys conducted by NSO, in 2007 the number of female home workers was 337,526 out of a total of 440,251, or 76.7 percent of the total, which represents a decline from 419,680 such workers in 2005. However, the average growth rate of female home workers was 3.8 percent per year during the period 1999-2007. Because there are no data for 2008, it is difficult to predict the impact of the global crisis on female home workers (Table 8).

**4. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The global financial crisis, which was triggered in 2008 by the effects of the earlier bursting of the United States housing bubble, has had a considerable

impact on Thailand because of its export orientation and reliance on external demand. However, the impact of the crisis is unevenly distributed among different sectors. Partly because of Thailand’s experience during the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the effects of the current crisis are not as severe as they might otherwise have been. The real sector has been the most adversely affected, as Thailand is highly dependent on exports (the share of exports to real GDP is more than 70 percent and the share of net exports to real GDP is about 16 percent).

In Thailand, women are among the most vulnerable to the downturn and are likely to be disproportionately affected by the crisis for the following reasons:

- Women are overrepresented in sectors where the crisis has led to numerous job cuts, especially in export manufacturing; the garment industry; electronics; and services;

**Table 8 Number of Home Workers by Type and Sex**

Type	Sex	1999	2002	2005	2007	Annual growth (%) (1999-2007)
<b>Number (persons)</b>						
<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>311,790</b>	<b>592,235</b>	<b>549,803</b>	<b>440,251</b>	<b>4.4</b>
	Male	62,250	129,415	130,123	102,725	6.5
	Female	249,540	462,820	419,680	337,526	3.8
<b>Contract workers</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>253,137</b>	<b>473,565</b>	<b>443,599</b>	<b>377,449</b>	<b>5.1</b>
	Male	46,223	93,038	94,461	80,342	7.2
	Female	206,914	380,527	349,138	297,107	4.6
<b>Unpaid home workers</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>55,928</b>	<b>115,699</b>	<b>103,438</b>	<b>60,230</b>	<b>0.9</b>
	Male	14,348	35,542	34,737	20,908	4.8
	Female	41,580	80,157	68,701	39,322	-0.7
<b>Subcontractors</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>2,725</b>	<b>2,971</b>	<b>2,766</b>	<b>2,572</b>	<b>-0.7</b>
	Male	1,679	835	925	1,476	-1.6
	Female	1,046	2,136	1,841	1,096	0.6
<b>Share (%)</b>						
<b>Total</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	Male	20.0	21.9	23.7	23.3	2.0
	Female	80.0	78.1	76.3	76.7	-0.5
<b>Contract workers</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	Male	18.3	19.6	21.3	21.3	1.9
	Female	81.7	80.4	78.7	78.7	-0.5
<b>Unpaid home workers</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	Male	25.7	30.7	33.6	34.7	3.9
	Female	74.3	69.3	66.4	65.3	-1.6
<b>Subcontractors</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
	Male	61.6	28.1	33.4	57.4	-0.9
	Female	38.4	71.9	66.6	42.6	1.3

Source: The home worker surveys, various years, National Statistical Office.

- Women tend to be employed in precarious jobs where they are more likely to be dismissed first or where they experience aggravated working conditions, such as in the garment industry or those populated by migrant workers;
- Women tend to be responsible for their family's welfare, so they will be adversely affected by cuts in public spending on safety nets and any reduction in remittance income.

The impact of the current crisis on women in Thailand can be observed in the labor market, as the proportion of women in the labor market is very high and gainful employment is their major source of income. The contraction in global demand has led to a decrease in exports from Thailand, and tourism to the country, as well as FDI. In turn, manufacturing production and capacity utilization have declined, which has resulted in decreased demand for labor in related industries. Labor market adjustments have resulted in reduced work hours, underemployment, unemployment and people who had to leave the labor market. Reduced income and adjustment to the difficult labor market are some of the reasons for the changes in the patterns of consumption and other coping strategies, which in turn affect women's social conditions.

The study has provided evidence that the current financial crisis has affected a considerable number of women workers in many ways. While the number of unemployed women remains more or less the same (1.5 percent of the total workforce compared with 1.3 percent for men in 2008), at least 125,700 women (in four exporting industries) were subject to being laid off or having to move from decent work to jobs with more depressed employment conditions (female employment in the four risky sub-sectors alone declined by 12,500 persons between 2007 and 2008, and by 113,200 persons between the first quarter of 2008 and the same period in 2009).

In addition, between 2007 and 2008, 319,000 women from other occupations were forced to take work as workers in services and sales. On the other hand, the level of female underemployment during the current global crisis is more than double that resulting from the 1997 crisis, although the trend dropped somewhat from 2007 to 2008, particularly for the severely underemployed group.

In 2008, the number of women moderately underemployed was 1.91 million and severely underemployed 0.88 million. Many women are home workers. According to surveys by NSO, in 2007 the number of female home workers was 337,526, out of the total of 440,251, accounting for 76.7 percent of the total. This

type of worker is vulnerable to declines in exports because their work is not permanent and depends on transitory demand.

According to a qualitative assessment, assistance from the government is available, but it usually misses its target because the aid programs and projects do not solve the problems of workers. Many workers and union leaders have commented that the results of such projects and programs do not meet their expectations. Most of all, these government projects are not gender responsive. Although women have been recognized for their triple roles and the multiple hardships they face, as well as their vulnerability, social protection for women is still lacking in Thailand.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This paper is an excerpt (with slight modifications) of a study by the authors entitled "Impact of the Financial Crisis on Women in South-East Asia: Thailand," which was initiated and funded by Oxfam Great Britain in East Asia (Bangkok office). Oxfam's permission to publish it in the TDRI Quarterly Review is greatly appreciated.
- <sup>2</sup> The average of the figures for the first and third quarters of labor force surveys.
- <sup>3</sup> ILO (2009): 10.
- <sup>4</sup> This number is much smaller than the 125,700 women who left the four risky sub-sectors because of intrasector mobility, which implies that, of the 125,700 women leaving those sub-sectors, 33,100 women moved out of manufacturing.

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