

Triple Burden

*Impact of the Financial Crisis on Women in
Thailand*

**Srawooth Paitionpong, Nipanan Akkarakul,
and Sujitra Rodsomboon**

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Foreword

Women play an important role in the economic growth of the nation and also contribute to the well being of family and society. Socially women are not fairly treated, they are faced with many challenges. Their social and economic opportunities are limited while their voices are not properly represented. The impact of the recent Global Economic Crisis on women in Thailand is not an exception. Economically and socially they were the hardest hit.

In order to understand this phenomena better, Oxfam commissioned a research on “Impact of the Financial Crisis on Women in South-East Asia: THAILAND” to Thailand Development Research Institute (TDRI) in 2009. The research reveals how women risk their employment security and suffer from the crisis economically and socially. The research also calls for support, appropriate understanding, and actions from relevant agencies.

Oxfam has been working in Thailand with civil society groups, academic institutions and government agencies in helping small-scale farmers in agriculture and fishery sectors to improve their livelihood and income security. Similarly, Oxfam focuses its work to ensure Thai people have access to medicine, especially ARV to HIV and AIDS infected. Oxfam also works with partners in conflict areas in south in promoting small-scale livelihood, especially for women. Oxfam promotes women as a key actor in bring peace back to the region

We would like to express our sincere thanks to TDRI and women workers in Rangsit area and Om Noi Om Yai who participated in the focus group studies. We hope that the research will be beneficial to agencies working with women, women themselves and the society as a whole.

*Yowalak Thiarachow
Thailand Country Director
Oxfam Great Britain*

Acknowledgements

Thai women have played many significant roles including participation in socio-economic and political activities. They have a very high labour force participation rate compared to other countries' in the world while their roles in the family are not less than anywhere. In addition, Thai women are quite active socially and politically. Nevertheless, they are receiving less than their share with regards to social protection and welfare.

Because of the global financial crisis which has had considerable impact on Thailand, particularly Thai women, Oxfam Great Britain in East Asia (Bangkok office) has initiated a research project on the Impact of the Financial Crisis on Women in South-East Asia: THAILAND. The main objectives of the research are to assess the impact of the global financial crisis on women in Thailand and, based on the impact and response, to develop a set of recommendations for governments, regional institutions, and donors. Thailand Development Research Institute has the honour of undertaking the study.

The authors would like to take this opportunity to express their appreciation of Oxfam Great Britain in East Asia for their financial support as well as the assistance of its staff, particularly, Mr. Cherian K. Mathews, Regional Policy and Campaigns Manager, East Asia Region, Khun Yowalak Thiarachow, Dr. Aphitchaya Nguanbanchong and Khun Suchawalee Sutthikhanueng. The Oxfam team has actively provided technical guidance and participated in parts of research, in particular the focus group discussions with Thai women workers. The authors would also like to thank the AromPongpangun Foundation for its coordinating role in the focus group discussions.

*Srawooth Paitoonpong and team
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Contents

FOREWORD	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	3
CONTENTS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	8
1. INTRODUCTION	10
1.1 Background and rationale	10
1.2 Research objectives	10
1.3 Research methods	11
2. MACROECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THAILAND DURING THE FINANCIAL CRISIS 2008-9	11
2.1 The impact on the financial sector	12
2.2 The impact on the real sector	14
<i>Export of goods</i>	14
<i>Tourism</i>	18
<i>Manufacturing production</i>	19
<i>Capacity utilization</i>	20
<i>Investment</i>	21
<i>Private consumption</i>	22
<i>Government expenditure</i>	23
3. CONSEQUENCES OF THE WORLD FINANCIAL CRISIS ON WOMEN IN THAILAND	24
3.1 The impact of the world crisis on women's employment: empirical evidence	25
<i>Labour force participation of women</i>	25
<i>Unemployment</i>	26
<i>Layoff – large number of women are in trouble</i>	27
<i>Women's employment by industry</i>	29
<i>Wage employment</i>	31
<i>Women's employment by major occupation</i>	32
<i>Hour of work and underemployment</i>	33
<i>Women's earnings</i>	34
<i>Home workers, contract workers, and sub-contractors</i>	35
3.2 The social impact of the world Financial Crisis on women	36
<i>Health</i>	36

<i>Mental Health</i>	38
<i>Education</i>	39
<i>Crimes</i>	41
4. A QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT OF WOMEN WORKERS AFFECTED BY THE FINANCIAL CRISIS	45
4.1 Women's double roles.....	45
4.2 Lives before the Financial Crisis	46
4.3 Wages and welfares.....	46
4.4 Warning signals before businesses close down.....	46
4.5 The impact of Financial Crisis on women's well-being.....	48
4.6 Social security	49
4.7 Provident Fund	50
4.8 Labour union	50
4.9 Government assistance	50
4.10 Assistance needed from the government	51
5. POLICY RESPONSES BY THAI GOVERNMENT AND GENDER	52
6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	56
6.1 Conclusion	56
6.2 Recommendations for government, regional institutions, and donors	61
REFERENCES	62

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Forecast of Thailand's real GDP growth rate, 2008-2010	12
Table 2	Indirect exposure of Thailand's exports to economic recession in G3	15
Table 3	Growth rate of real GDP and unemployment rate	27
Table 4	Employment by sub-sectors in manufacturing risky to layoffs, 2007-1Q2009.....	28
Table 5	Termination of employment (insolvent firms and laid off persons)	28
Table 6	Employment by major industries and gender 2007-2009	29
Table 7	Wage employment by gender and work status	31
Table 8	Employment by occupations and gender, 2007-2008	32
Table 9	Number of home workers by type and gender	35

Table 10	Number of underweight school children in educational year 2006 and 2008	36
Table 11	Number and rate of deaths from suicides per 100,000 populations by gender	37
Table 12	Rate of infants abandoned in hospital (per 100,000 deliveries) and number of orphan, 1994-1998.....	39
Table 13	Percentage of dropouts	39
Table 14	Students graduates by level of education and types of activities, 2006-2007.....	40
Table 15	Selected crimes, 2007-2008.....	41
Table 16	Number of drug addicted patients	42
Table 17	Women and children admitted by emergency home.....	42
Table 18	Sexual harassment cases in court in the whole Kingdom, 2000-2008	43
Table 19	Need for help as reported at Female Foundation	44
Table 20	Marriage and divorce statistics.....	44

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Year-on-year growth rate of gross domestic product at 1988 prices.....	12
Figure 2	Short-term external debts and international reserve, 1996-2008.....	13
Figure 3	International reserve and balance of payment, 2004-2008.....	13
Figure 4	Exports by major industry, 2005-2009	14
Figure 5	Share of exports from Thailand and from trade partners to G3	15
Figure 6	Thai exports to EU (15) by major products.....	16
Figure 7	Thai exports to USA by major products	17
Figure 8	Thai exports to Japan by major products	18
Figure 9	Percentage change of international tourist arrivals to Thailand, 1997-2009.....	19
Figure 10	Manufacturing production index.....	20
Figure 11	Industrial capacity utilization by selected sub-sector	20
Figure 12	Private investment index, 2005-2009.....	21
Figure 13	Growth rate of foreign direct investment inflow by country.....	22
Figure 14	Private consumption expenditure, 2005-2009.....	23
Figure 15	Government consumption expenditure, 2005-2009.....	23
Figure 16	Impacts of financial crisis on women.....	24

Figure17	Labour force participation rate by gender	26
Figure 18	Unemployment rate 1995-2008, Thailand	27
Figure 19	Termination of employment (insolvent firms and laid off 29person).....	29
Figure 20	Share of employment by gender and industry 2007 and 2008.....	31
Figure 21	Average hours per week.....	33
Figure 22	Moderately and severely underemployed persons by gender	34
Figure 23	Nominal average wage income of private employee per month	34
Figure 24	Number of underweight school children in educational year 2006 and 2008	37
Figure 25	Rate per 100,000 populations of deaths from suicides by gender	38
Figure 26	Percentage of dropouts	40
Figure 27	Marriage and divorce statistics.....	45

Executive Summary

The 2008 global financial crisis, which was triggered by the bursting of the United States housing bubble earlier, has considerably impacted Thailand because of her export orientation and reliance on external demand. The poor are hit the hardest as always by any economic downturn. In the South East Asia region, including Thailand, women are the most vulnerable and are likely to be disproportionately affected by the crisis.

Funded by Oxfam Great Britain in East Asia, the study has a primary objective of examining whether and how Thai women are affected by the current global financial crisis. The research objectives *include* assessing the impact of the global financial crisis on women in Thailand; studying and analysing the gendered nature of the Government's response so far; developing a set of recommendations for governments, regional institutions, and donors.

The Thailand country study consists of a macro study based on secondary data and existing studies and a micro study based on focus group discussions of factory workers.

In essence, the study finds that the global financial crisis has impacted on the real sector of Thailand, particularly, the export manufacturing sectors. The tourism and financial sectors are less affected by the crisis. In this connection, women, particularly those employed in the crisis affected sectors are considerably affected. Although their unemployment rate, as well as the men's, virtually did not increase, there is evidence indicating the underemployment, employment shift or lay off, reduced wages and earnings, exploitation, and cheating by employers.

The study also examines the social impact of the global financial crisis on women but the analysis is limited by the dearth of data. It has been found that the crisis has had adverse implications on both the physical and mental health of women. There have been increases in women related crimes such as prostitution, drug abuse and trafficking, rape, pornography, domestic violence, etc.

Two focus group meetings were organized to capture the qualitative aspects of women who are affected by the crisis, particularly those who are being laid off. Workers in one group had already been laid off and were on demonstration in protest to get their unpaid salaries and severance payment, while another group is under pressure to quit working. These women have at least double roles: one to work for income and the other to look after family or parents. Some have even triple roles, taking care of extra dependents at home. They are suffering from pressure to quit and lay off without severance and their salary for 3 months. They lack money and have to rely on various coping strategies for survival. Some women have already taken up part-time home work for extra earnings, by making balls, making artificial flowers, sewing cloths, etc. Most of them had never thought that the situation would become so bad that their employer closed down business. Some women thought of going back home to provinces and starting a small business such as tailor or food shop at home. Some workers are too old to be hired by new companies.

Those workers who have not been paid their salaries for 3 months, have not paid their premiums for the same duration because of not getting a salary. Thus they are not covered by social security benefits. Their reactions on Government instant measures to help them are negative.

The study has found that the Government policy responses are not gender responsive. There is no special provision for women workers.

The study concludes that the impact of the crisis on Thailand is unevenly distributed among different sectors; but it has been anticipated and forecast by many reliable

agencies that the current global crisis will be a short one, with the worst situation in 2009; the impact of the crisis on women in Thailand can be seen and monitored through the labour market; there is evidence that the current financial crisis affects a considerable number of women workers in many ways; Thai women are also vulnerable to other social impacts of the crisis; a qualitative assessment shows that all women workers interviewed have double or triple roles- to gainfully work, to look after their own family and to support their parents back in their home town; Their lives are miserable because of unemployment and reduced income, and the psychological problems due to the unfairness of the employers; There is a gap in social security system; Assistance from the Government is available, but they usually miss the target; and, all of these government response projects and programmes are not gender responsive.

Towards the end, the study has made 9 recommendations to the Government, regional institutions, and donors. An important one reflecting the perceived needs of Thai women workers requesting the Government (1) to set up child day care centres for workers' children in industrial estate areas in sufficient quantity and quality that meet the needs of workers; (2) to give women an adequate representation in tripartite committees, and (3) to monitor the foreign investors over their ignorance of or malpractices to workers, particularly women.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

The Global Financial Crisis of 2008-2009 began in July 2007 when a loss of confidence by investors in the value of securitized mortgages in the United States resulted in a liquidity crisis that prompted a substantial injection of capital into financial markets by the United States Federal Reserve, Bank of England, and the European Central Bank. The crisis deepened in September 2008 as stock markets worldwide crashed and entered a period of high volatility, and a considerable number of banks, mortgage lenders and insurance companies failed in the following weeks. The whole world, including South-East Asia, has been affected by the financial contagion and economic slow down.

The current crisis will severely impact those countries that are export orientated and rely on external demand. The poor are hit the hardest by any economic downturn. During the Asian Crisis, 1.1 million Thais fell below the poverty line as real earnings slumped and jobs disappeared (World Bank, 2000). The poor take much longer to recover, as recovery in real wages and employment takes much longer than recovery in GDP. The experience of Thailand during the Asian Crisis indicates that the labour market needed a longer recovery time than the economy (World Bank, 2000).

In the South-East Asia region, women are the most vulnerable since they are likely to be disproportionately affected by the crisis:

- a) Women are overrepresented in sectors where the crisis has led to large numbers of job cuts, including in export manufacturing, garment industry, and electronics and services;
- b) Women tend to be employed in precarious jobs and are more likely to be dismissed first or experience aggravated working conditions, e.g. as migrant workers and in the garment industry; and
- c) 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 reductions in remittance income.

Whether and how Thai women are affected by the current Global Financial Crisis is the subject of this study which was conducted along with additional studies in four countries, namely, Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines, and Indonesia of the South-East Asia Region (ASEAN) where Oxfam GB is engaged in a number of programmes. The evidence gathered through this research will be used to inform governments in these countries and key regional institutions including ASEAN, ADB, donors, and UN agencies at the regional level.

1.2 Research objectives

- To assess the impact of the Financial Crisis on women in Thailand.
- To study and analyse the gendered nature of governments' responses so far.
- Based on the impact and responses, a set of recommendations for governments, regional institutions and donors will be developed.

1.3 Research methods

The Thailand country study consists of a macro analysis based on secondary data and existing information and a micro study based on focus group discussions of factory workers. The macro study will provide a brief review of the possible impacts of the Global Financial Crisis on the economy of Thailand with an emphasis on the labour market adjustment, possible impact on women, and government responses to the impact as well as its gendered nature. The micro study includes focus group discussions among those who have lost jobs in Thailand. Two focus group discussions in two factory sites have been conducted emphasizing the aforementioned research questions. A sharing workshop will be organised for all five countries before the report is analysed and synthesized regionally.

2. Macroeconomic Background of Thailand during the Financial Crisis 2008-9 ¹

The current Global Financial Crisis began in the United States in July 2007 as the collapse of the US sub-prime mortgage market quickly spread through the financial system. As a consequence, the value of capital was eroded and the creditworthiness of major global financial institutions was undermined, triggering massive deleveraging. Efforts to restore capital adequacy and uncertainty about the underlying value of assets held in the form of sub-prime mortgage backed securities resulted in capital hoarding, which in turn caused liquidity to dry up and ultimately compromised the ability of borrowers to finance transactions in both the real and financial sectors. This led to reduced demand and employment, undermined consumer and business confidence, and triggered a further contraction in world demand (World Bank, 2009, 2). Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS countries (Commonwealth of Independent States, successor to the USSR) were particularly hard hit given their reliance on external borrowings to fuel high credit growth in recent years. For East Asia, the decline in external demand was partially offset by lower commodity prices and a large fiscal package in China, but the region's export dependence has made adjustment more difficult (Ibid.).

Many governments as well as local and international institutions, particularly the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, have watched the impact of the crisis on Thailand closely. A number of forecasts have been made and updated now and then when the related situation changes.

The real GDP growth rate was 5.2 per cent in 2006 and 4.9 per cent in 2007. (Sussangkarn and Jitsuchon, 2009, p.3). It declined to 2.7 per cent in 2008 (World Bank, 2009a). For 2009, it was forecast to be -2 per cent by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (Asian Development Bank, 2009), and -2.5 per cent by the Fiscal Policy Office, Ministry of Finance. For 2010 it is forecast to be 1.7 per cent by the World Bank and 3.0 per cent by Asian Development Bank.

¹ It should be kept in mind that during this period, Thailand also suffered from political instability. An airport closure from 25 November to 3 December 2008 was believed to have negatively impacted Thailand's investment climate, trade and tourism.

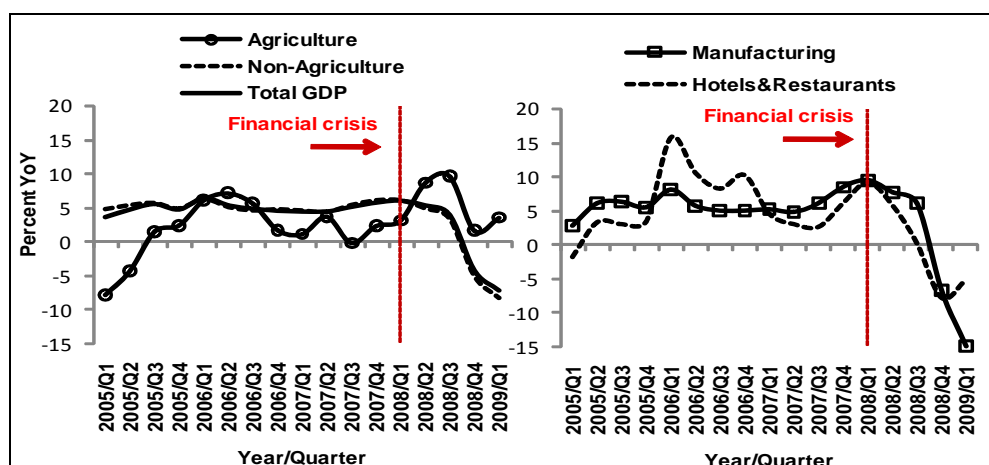
Table 1. Forecast of Thailand's real GDP growth rate, 2008-2010

Year	Real GDP Growth Rate Forecast		
	World Bank	ADB	FPO
2008	2.7	2.6	2.6
2009	-2	-2	-2.5
2010	1.7	3	

Source: (World Bank, *Global Economic Prospect, Forecast Update*, 30 March 2009); Asian Development Bank (*Asian Development Bank Outlook 2009*, 31 March, 2009; and Fiscal Policy Office (FPO), 2009)

The year-on-year growth rate of GDP by selected sectors during the current crisis is shown in Figure 1. Since 1Q08, the year-on-year growth rates of Manufacturing, Hotel & Restaurants and the Non-Agriculture as a whole have declined until 1Q09. Agriculture fluctuated, increasing from 1Q08 to 3Q08 but decreasing in 4Q08 before increasing again in 1Q09. The year-on-year total real GDP growth rate has declined since 1Q08 and was negative in early 4Q08.

Figure 1. Year-on-year growth rate of gross domestic product at 1988 prices



Source: National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)

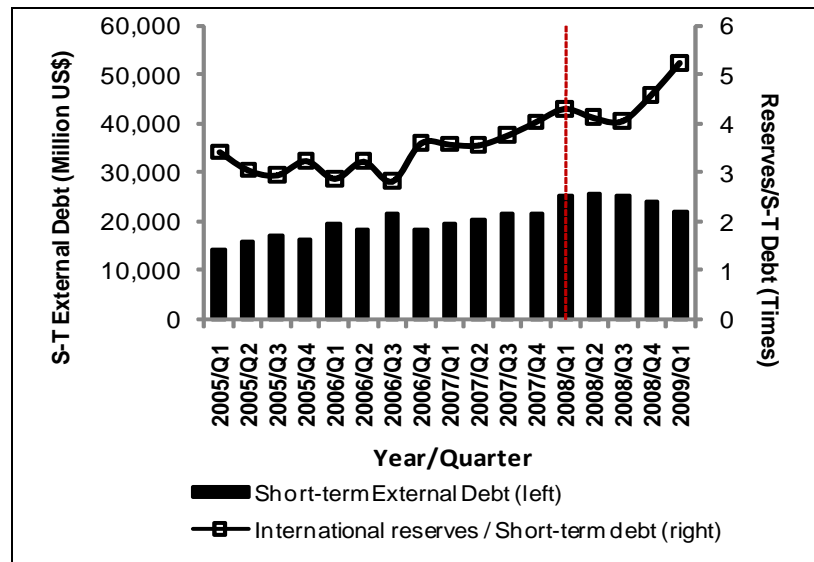
2.1 The impact on the financial sector

There were some short-run impacts of the Financial Crisis on the Thai financial sector; however, these were less severe than in other countries in the region. (World Bank, 2009). Some consequences included a weaker Thai baht against the US dollar;² however, the baht was stronger against a basket of South-East Asia currencies (World Bank, 2009). Moreover, stock market prices declined, and financial costs augmented due to the increasing financial costs in the world market. The main reason why the Thai financial system was less affected is because of the lessons learned from the 1997 Crisis. The Thai financial sector is now much more risk averse than before. Most of the banks had

² However, as of July 2009, the baht has become stronger even against the US dollar (34 baht/US\$).

avoided exposure to the sub-prime assets or were just marginally exposed. Also, being a less sophisticated financial system than those in developed countries, there was not much understanding of what these debt instruments were (Sussangkarn and Jitsuchon, 2009, 3). Furthermore, Thailand has avoided borrowing since the 1997 Crisis; it has an international reserve exceeding \$100,000 million US; and the foreign investment in the security market remains only at about \$3.3 billion US (World Bank, 2009).

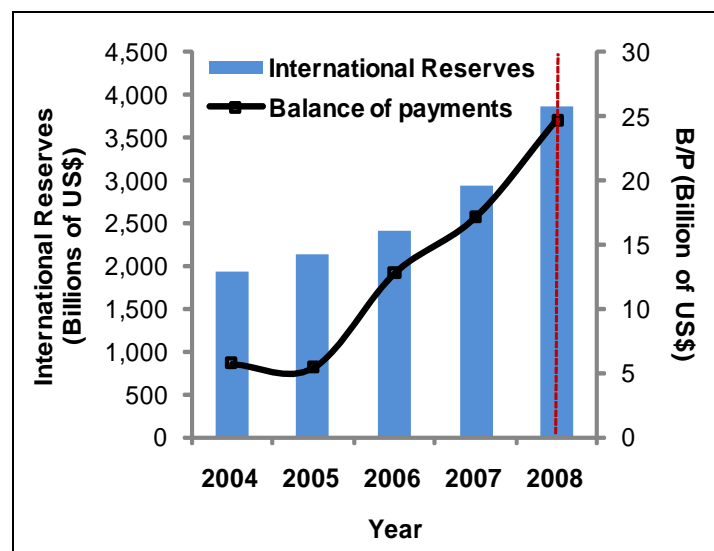
Figure 2. Short-term external debts and international reserve, 1996-2008



Source: Bank of Thailand

As shown in Figure 2, Thailand's short-term external debt increased slightly in 2008, but decreased to the 2007 level by 1Q09. According to the World Bank, Thailand has reduced its short-term external debt since 1998. The international reserve decreased a little in the first two quarters of 2008 and increased in 4Q08 and 1Q09 respectively. At present, Thailand's international reserve is in excess of \$100,000 million US. The balance of payment plunged by \$4,000 million US, but recovered in the end of 2008 and early 2009 (Figure 3).

Figure 3. International reserve and balance of payment, 2004-2008



Source: Bank of Thailand

2.2 The impact on the real sector

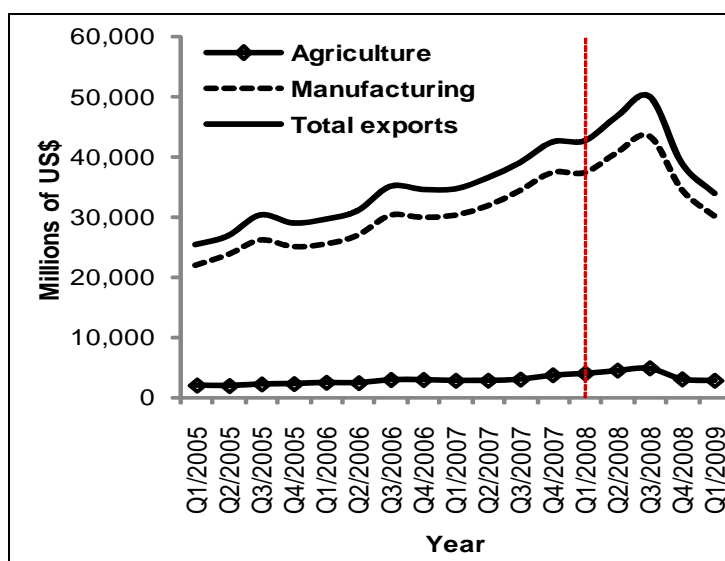
The real sector was hit hard by the crisis. Although the current Financial Crisis has not directly affected the financial sector, Thailand has been considerably impacted through the trade channel, particularly the export of goods and tourism.

Export of goods

As Thailand is highly dependent on exports (the share of exports to real GDP is more than 70%, and the share of net exports to real GDP is about 16%), the Thai economy has been heavily hit by the global recession and resulting decline in world trade. From export growths of more than 20 per cent in the first three quarters of 2008, export declined by about 9.4 per cent in dollar value in the fourth quarter of 2008. Sharp contractions were observed particularly in industries that have been the main drivers of export growth in recent years, namely, electronics and automotive industries. The increase in export value was mainly attributed to the 10.5 per cent increase in prices, accelerated from the previous year (Bank of Thailand, 2009, 2.8.5).

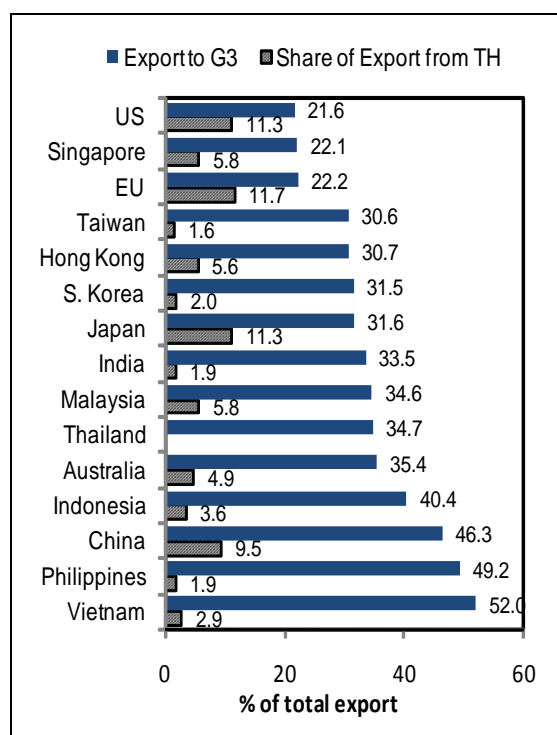
Figure 5 illustrates the extent to which Thai exports were affected by the world markets through the impact of the world Financial Crisis on G3 countries (the United States of America, Europe, and Japan). The fact that there are higher proportions of Thai exports to trading partners together with the higher proportions of their exports to G3 have had repercussions on Thai exports. For example, Vietnam's 52 per cent of exports is destined to G3 countries, but the share of Thailand's export to Vietnam is only 2.9 per cent. The impact of the economic recession in G3 countries with Vietnam is not significant when compared to China. The share of Thailand's export to China is as much as 9.5 per cent, and China has a large share of exports to G3 at 46.3 per cent. Table 2 shows how the total indirect exposure of Thailand's exports to G3 markets can be calculated. Figures 6-8 show details of Thailand's export to G3. In the EU market, garment and precious stone industries have been affected later compared to other products. Their year-on-year growth rate became negative in early 2009. In the US market, the garment industry has been affected since early 2008 and has continued to decline. Rubber products and fish and crustacean were affected later, starting from early 2009. In the Japanese market, electronic circuits and prepared poultry had been performing relatively well until early 2009.

Figure 4. Exports by major industry, 2005-2009



Source: Customs Department (Compiled by the Bank of Thailand)

Figure 5. Share of Exports from Thailand and from trade partners to G3



Source: CEIC/calculated by (Fiscal Policy Office, 2009, 79)

Table 2. Indirect exposure of Thailand's exports to economic recession in G3 (per cent)

Unit: Proportion (%) to total exports

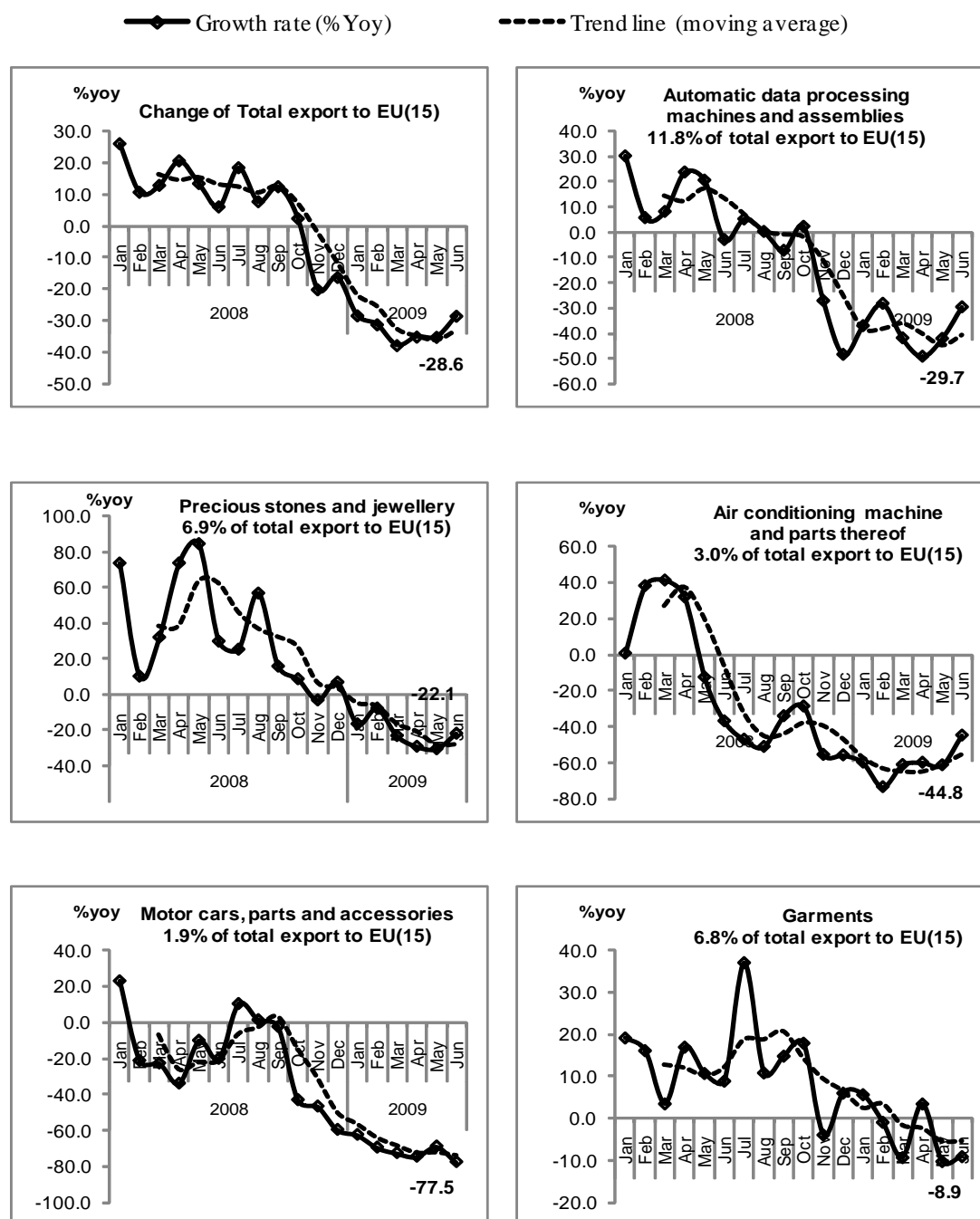
	VN	PH	CN	ID	AU	MY	IN	JP	SK	HK	TW	EU	SG	US
Export to G3	52	49.2	46.3	40.4	35.4	34.6	33.5	31.6	31.5	30.7	30.6	22.2	22.1	21.6
Share of Export from TH	2.8	2	9.1	3.6	5.1	5.6	1.9	3	2.1	5.6	1.5	12	5.7	11.3
Indirect pass through	1.46	0.98	4.21	1.45	1.81	1.94	0.64	3.57	0.66	1.72	0.46	2.66	1.26	2.46
Total indirect exposure	25.3													

Source: CEIC / calculated by (Fiscal Policy Office, 2009, 79)

Note: Indirect pass through = (Export to G3 x share of export from Thailand)/100

Total indirect exposure = summation of all indirect pass through

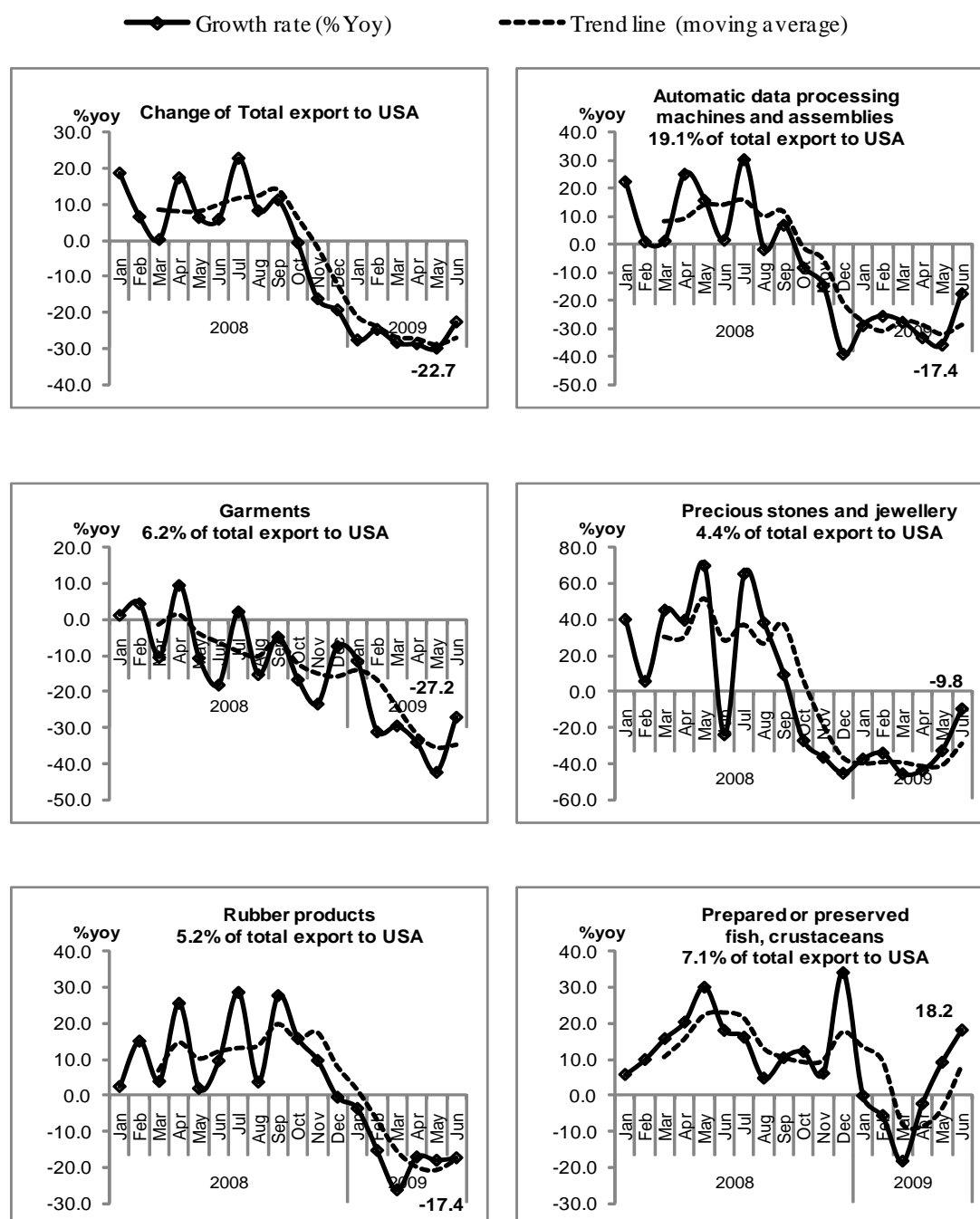
Figure 6. Thai exports to EU (15) by major products



Source: Ministry of Commerce

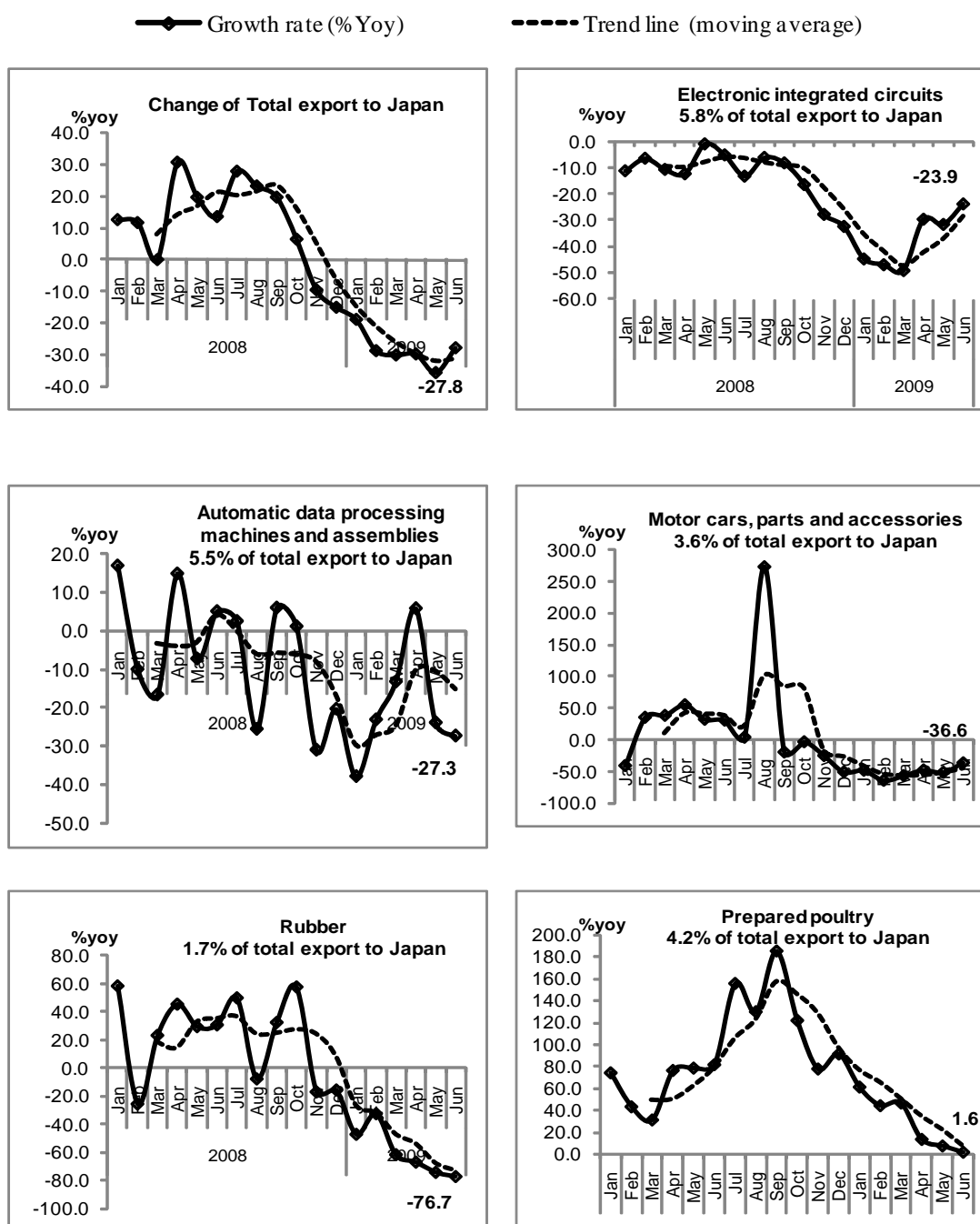
Note: EU (15) consists of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom

Figure 7. Thai exports to USA by major products



Source: Ministry of Commerce

Figure 8. Thai exports to Japan by major products



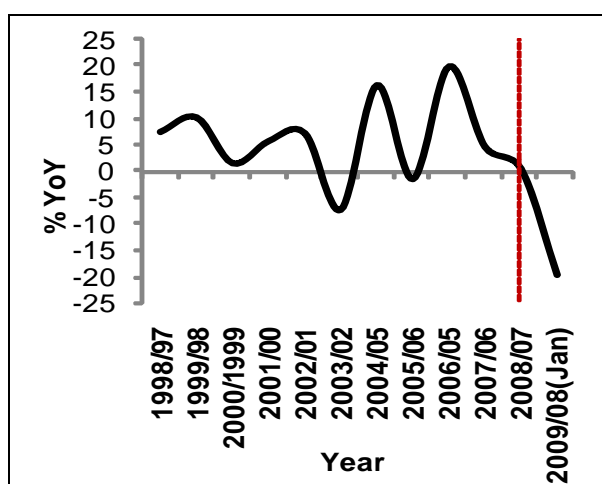
Source: Ministry of Commerce

Tourism

As shown in Figure 1, GDP originating from Hotels & Restaurants has obviously declined since the first quarter of 2008. In the first half of 2008, this industry continued to

expand well from the last quarter of 2007. In the second half of the year; however, the industry was adversely affected by several negative factors. Aside from the Financial Crisis, there were seven bombings in Songkla province in early August as well as political instability that intensified from late August onwards. Political conflicts led to the declaration of a state of emergency in Bangkok; the closure of airports; stoppage of train services in the southern provinces in September; and eventually the closure of the Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang Airports from 25 November to 3 December which severely affected foreign tourists' confidence. The economic slow down in a number of client countries resulted in a sharp drop in the number of foreign tourists in the second half of 2008. As a result, the number of foreign tourist arrivals in 2008 totaled 14.3 millions, contracting 1.3 per cent from the previous year. Nevertheless, tourism revenue from foreign tourists amounted to 588 billion baht, increasing 5.9 per cent (Bank of Thailand, 2.3.1).³

Figure 9. Percentage change of international tourist arrivals to Thailand, 1997-2009



Source: Tourism Authority of Thailand

Note: 1/ Data in year 2009/08 (January) are at Suvarnabhumi International Airport only.

2/ Before year 2006, international tourist arrivals included overseas Thais. Since year 2006, international tourist arrivals excluded overseas Thais

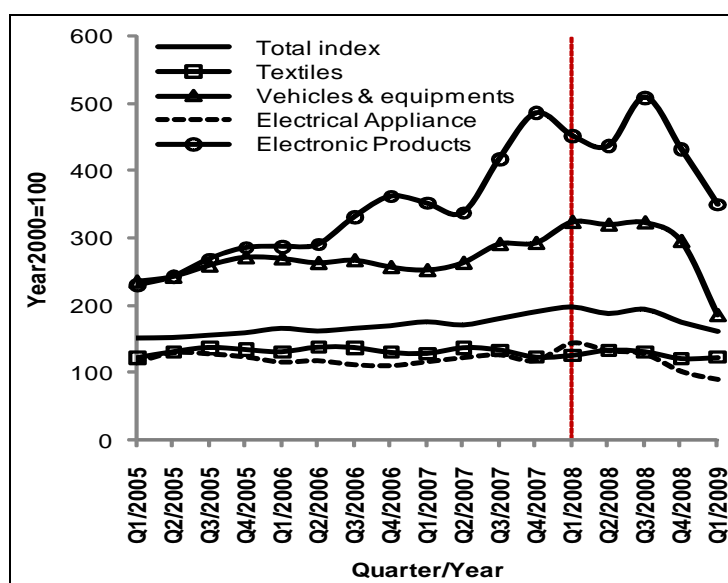
Manufacturing production

The manufacturing production in 2008 grew 3.9 per cent compared to 6.2 per cent in the previous year. The Bank of Thailand Manufacturing Production Index (MPI) also decelerated from the beginning of the year before contracting more sharply in the last quarter of 2008. Accordingly, the MPI grew only 5.3 per cent compared to 8.2 per cent in the previous year. This was in line with the export-oriented industries that were negatively affected by the trading partners' economic slow down. Meanwhile, those industries serving the domestic market accelerated due to the favourable expansion in domestic demand during the first half of the year; hence, the impacts of the global economic slow down remained less severe (Bank of Thailand, 2009, 2.2.1).

³ Data on the number of tourists in 2008 reflect only tourists passing through Suvarnabhumi Airport only. Therefore, one must be careful in comparing the figures in 2008 with the previous year's figures (Tourism Authority of Thailand).

The industries that experienced a slow down from the previous year included the production of electronics, food, electrical appliances, and beverage, while contractions⁴ were observed in the production of leather products, furniture, chemical products, pulp and paper, iron and steel, construction materials as well as tobacco. Only vehicles and petroleum production accelerated from the previous year.

Figure 10. Manufacturing production index



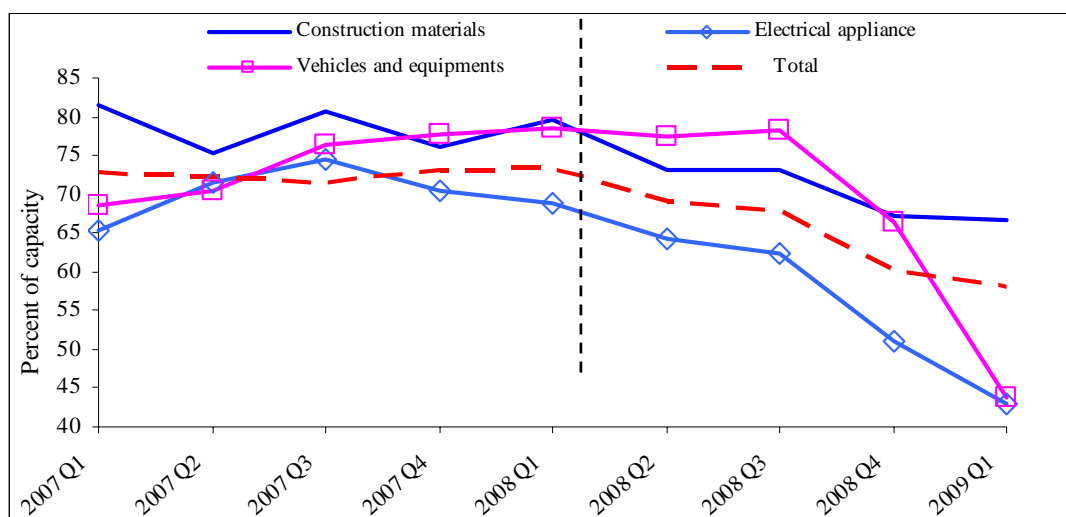
Source: Bank of Thailand

Capacity utilization

The capacity utilization rate in 2008 averaged at 67.6 per cent as it declined from 72.6 per cent in 2007. Industries that experienced a reduction of capacity utilization include leather and leather products (from 53.4 per cent in 2007 to 25.8 per cent in 2008); furniture (from 52.5 to 30.1 per cent); electronics (from 76.5 to 67.5 per cent); electrical appliances (from 70.2 to 61.6 per cent); chemical (from 95.5 to 88.8 per cent); pulp and paper (from 90.8 to 81.0 per cent); iron and steel industry and construction materials (from 55.5 and 78.4 to 50.6 and 73.3 per cent respectively); and petroleum (from 83.5 to 81.7 per cent). There are, however, some industries that saw a slight increase of capacity utilization. These include food (from 58.2 to 60.6 per cent), beverage (from 73.2 to 74.3 per cent), and vehicles and equipments (from 73.3 to 74.9 per cent) (Bank of Thailand, 2009). Figure 11 depicts the patterns of change in capacity utilization in selected sub-industries during the time of the 2008 Crisis.

Figure 11. Industrial capacity utilization by selected sub-sector

⁴ "Slow down" here means decline in growth rate while "contraction" means negative growth.

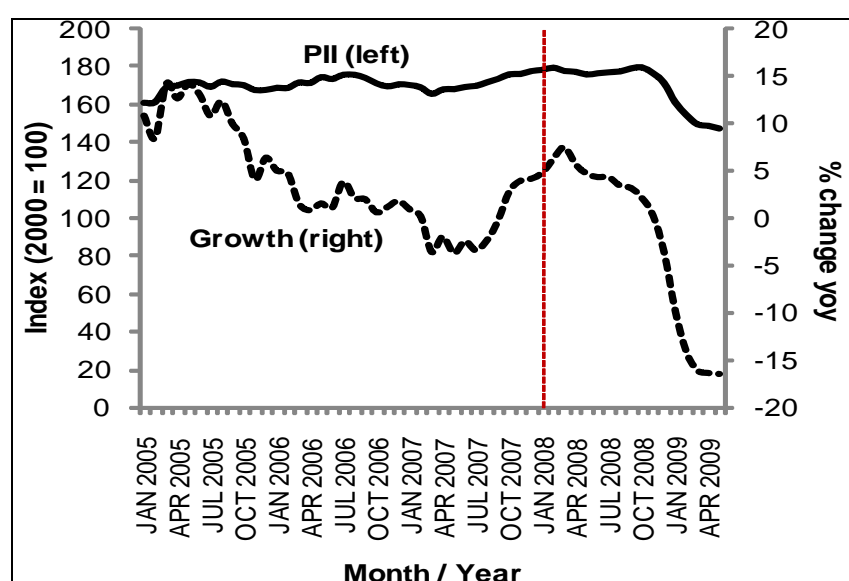


Source: Bank of Thailand

Investment

Private investments have slowed down in the past three years due to political instability. In 2006-2008, investment grew by an average of 2.7 per cent per year, down from 14.8 per cent between 2003 and 2005. According to the NESDB, private investments in 2008 grew by 3.2 per cent. In the first quarter of 2008, private investments continued to grow from the end of 2007, partly due to an improved political climate after the general elections. However, since the second quarter, private investments have declined and contracted by 1.3 per cent year-on-year in the last quarter, mostly due to a slow down in the machinery and equipment category following a deterioration of investors' confidence. The construction category, however, remained at a low level throughout 2008 (Bank of Thailand, 2009). Figure 12 shows the Bank of Thailand's Private Investment Index that increased about 2.7 per cent from 2007 to 2008.

Figure 12. Private investment index, 2005-2009

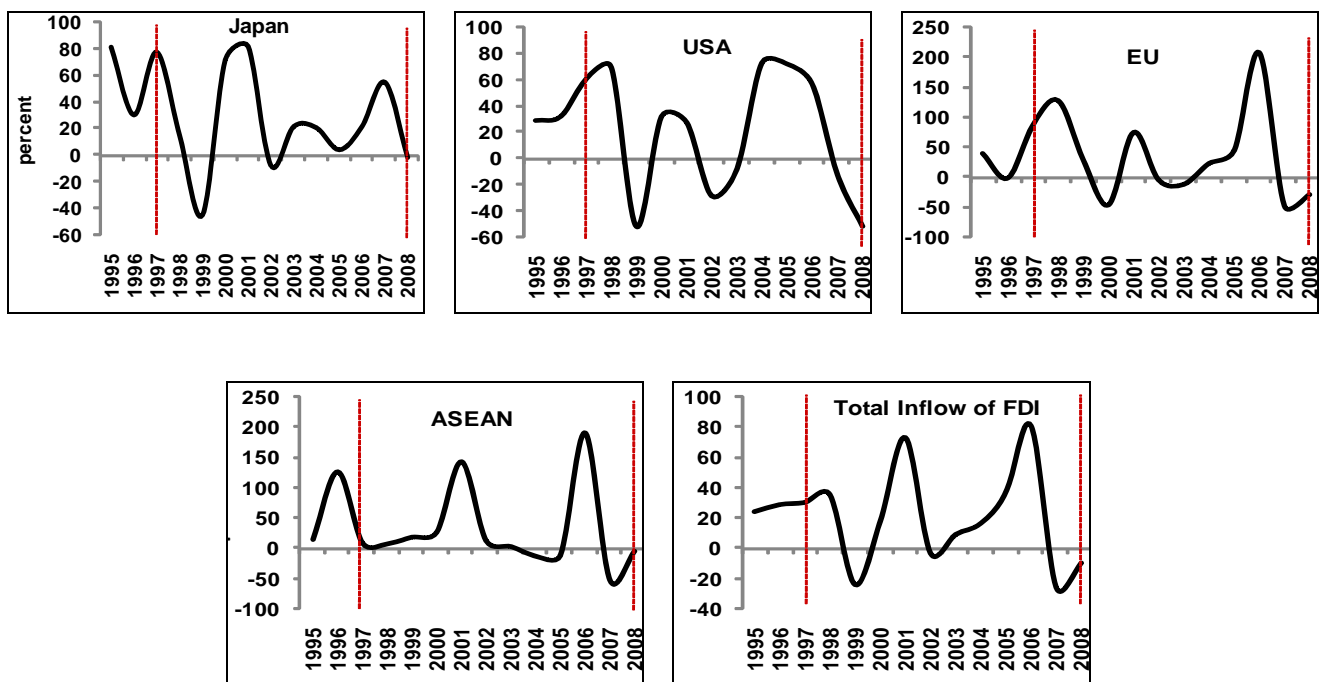


Source: Bank of Thailand

The early retrenchment of investment due to the impact of the Financial Crisis is most notable when the foreign direct investment (FDI) is examined. As gross FDI inflows declined from the 2007 levels, growth of private investments in 2008 came mainly from Thai investors (World Bank, 2009b).

According to the World Bank, Thailand's public investment has been sluggish since the 1997 Crisis. It is, however, expected to increase in 2009 given the improved political situation. The share of public investments in real GDP averaged only 5.7 per cent from 2004 to 2008 compared to more than 10 per cent before the 1997 Crisis. In 2008, public investment contracted by nearly 5 per cent as a result of political uncertainties, which delayed investment decisions (Ibid.).

Figure 13. Growth rate of foreign direct investment inflow by country and year



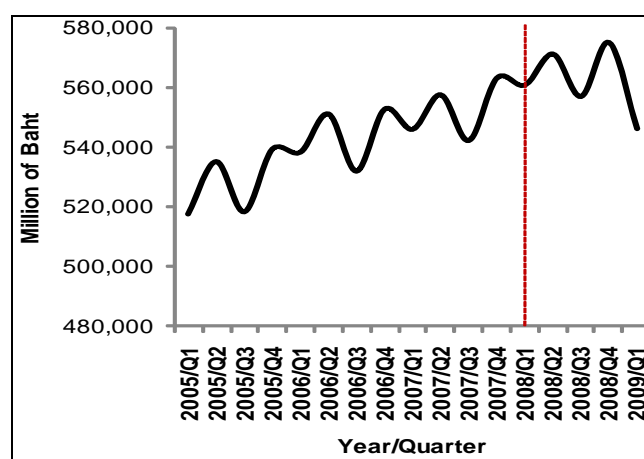
Source: Bank of Thailand

Private consumption

As reported by the NESDB, private consumption expenditure in 2008 grew 2.5 per cent compared to 1.6 per cent in 2007. Household expenditure expanded well during the first three quarters, despite rising inflation from higher energy and raw food prices. This may be due to increases in farm income and minimum wages as well as the government's

stimulus measures.⁵ However, household consumption decelerated in the last quarter of 2008 and the first quarter of 2009 as political tension and the Global Financial Crisis weighed down consumer confidence (Bank of Thailand, 2009, 2.6.1).

Figure 14. Private consumption expenditure, 2005-2009



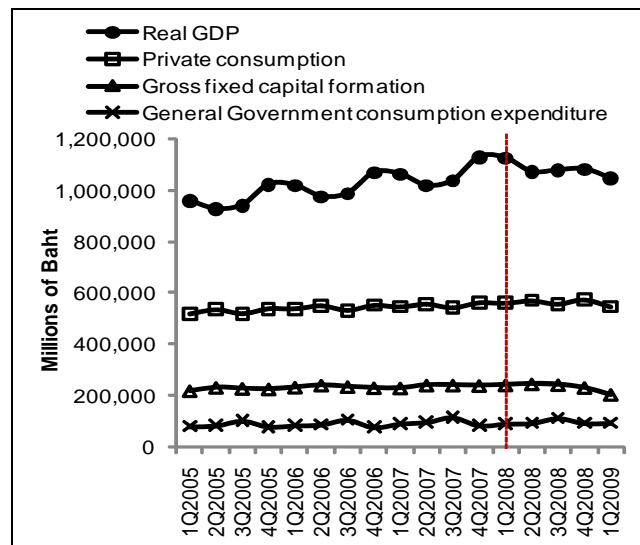
Source: Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)

Government expenditure

During the previous Asian Financial Crisis, the Thai government had, appropriately, adopted a counter-cyclical fiscal policy to support the recovery process. In connection with government spending, public consumption grew by more than 40 per cent in quarter 2 of 1999 on a yearly basis while private investment increased by 7 per cent during this period (Paitoonpong, 2009, 6). During the current World Financial Crisis, the government seems to have had problems stemming from a short budget supply. Government consumption expenditures increased from 83,776 million baht in 3Q07 to 90,650 million baht in 1Q08, 92,413 million baht in 2Q08, and 111,578 million baht in 3Q08. Nevertheless, expenditures dropped to 92,986 million in 4Q08. The slow process of government spending resulted in delays in stimulating the economy.

Figure 15. Government consumption expenditure, 2005-2009

⁵ The government has implemented an expansionary fiscal policy to mitigate the impacts of the crisis: 1.5 per cent of GDP targeted at FY09 and plans for FY10-12 with an anticipated deficits as high as 5 per cent of GDP.

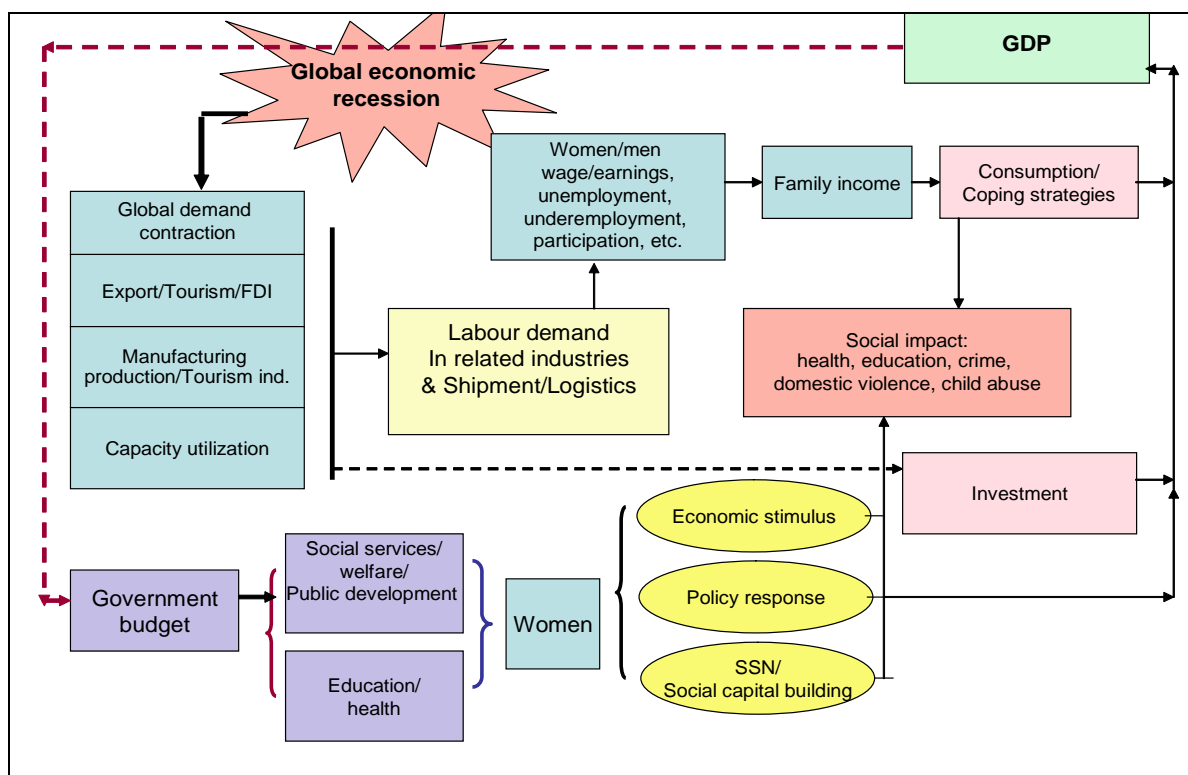


Source: Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB)

3. Consequences of the World Financial Crisis on Women in Thailand

At the risk of oversimplification, Figure 16 illustrates the possible impacts of the Global Financial Crisis on women in Thailand. First, as Thailand has a very high rate of female labour force participation, a major impact of the crisis can be through the labour market. The global demand contraction results in decreased export, tourism, as well as FDI as discussed earlier. In turn, manufacturing production and capacity utilization decrease, which result in decreased demand for labour in the related industries. The labour market adjustment brings in reduced work hours, underemployment, unemployment, and labourers who leave the labour market. Reduced income, and adjustment to the difficult labour market, results in a change in the patterns of consumption and other coping strategies that in turn affect the social conditions of women. How much the crisis affects women in the labour market is an empirical question. The second channel through which the crisis affects women is the decrease in the Government's regular budget on social services and social infrastructure, particularly on health and education. Women are usually more vulnerable due to their dual roles as worker and housekeeper or mother. How much the reduction in government budget affects women is also an empirical question that this study tries to investigate below.

Figure 16. Impact of financial crisis on women



Conceptually, below are possible ways the crisis may be affecting women; nonetheless, there may be other ways as well.

Impact of the Crisis on Women

- There are loss of jobs in export manufacturing and services sectors, such as textiles, electronics, and agricultural exports. During the Asian Financial Crisis, it is estimated that women were 80% of the retrenched in the textile and electronic industries. In addition, they were more likely to be laid off first due to their concentration in precarious forms of low-waged employment as well as employer attitudes that regarded women as secondary earners.
- Women face aggravated labour conditions and/or loss of income, such as in the garment sectors where there is less overtime or women are expected to work harder for the same wages.
- There are impacts on family nutrition, children's education, and health status.
- There are impacts of reductions in aid and public spending since women have to pay for visits to health clinics, schools fees, etc.
- Reduction of remittances affects female jobs and family income in sending countries.
- Possible retraction of micro-credit affects female businesses.
- There is increased labour burden on women from having to take second jobs due to the fact that they have to spend more time on the family/in the household to make up for the lack of social services or lack of income.

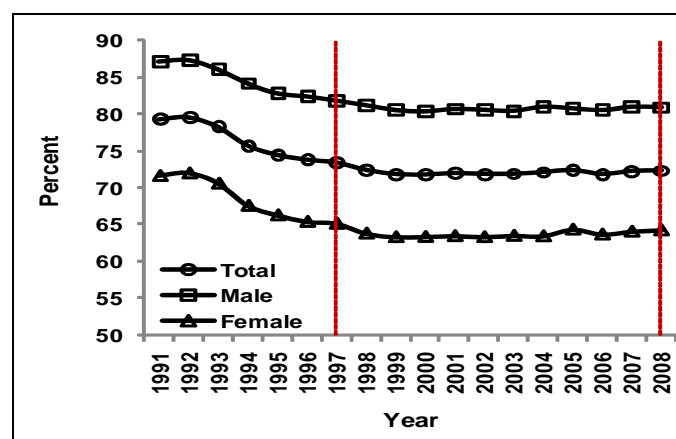
- Exacerbating factors from the food price crisis/changes in commodity prices pose the question whether or not “women have additional costs in their businesses, livelihoods or families?”

3.1 The impact of the world crisis on women’s employment: empirical evidence

Labour force participation of women

The average⁶ labour force participation of Thai women used to be higher than 70 per cent prior to the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. It dropped to about 65 per cent during the 1997 Crisis and has remained below 65 per cent since then. In 2007, the rate was about 64.1 per cent and increased slightly to about 64.3 per cent in 2008. Since women are regarded as being secondary workers, the phenomenon of the increase of the female participation rate corresponds to a very mild case of “added workers effect” where women have to participate more in the labour market to supplement family income which disappeared during the crisis (Figure 17).

Figure17. Labour force participation rate by gender



Source: The Labour Force Survey 1991-2009(Q1), National Statistical Office

Unemployment

According to the Labour Force Survey, the average unemployment rate in 2008 increased very little from 2007. It increased from 1.2 per cent to 1.3 per cent for men; however, it

⁶ Here is the average of the first and third quarters of the Labour Force Surveys.

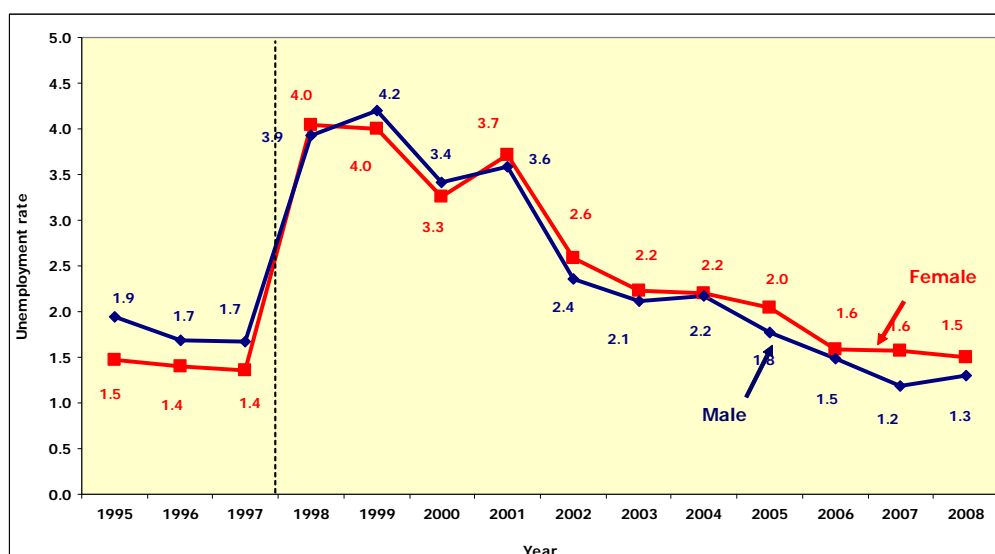
decreased from 1.6 per cent to 1.5 per cent for women. In fact, the unemployment levels for men and women are much lower than in the previous 1997 Financial Crisis.

Even in 1Q2009, GDP contracted by 7.1 per cent, and unemployment was only 2.1 per cent. In comparison to 1Q2005, GDP grew by 3.6 per cent and unemployment was 2.5 per cent (Table 3).

But in Thailand, unemployment is like the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the measurement of the employment problems. The employment figures may be misleading as it may signal that there have been no employment problems. Actually, other employment problems are more serious in terms of the impact on the people's livelihood. They include underemployment, reduced wages and earnings, change of jobs to poorer quality ones ("distress employment: shift to informal employment")⁷ exploitation and cheating by employers, etc. In addition, social impacts resulting from coping strategies of families due to employment problems are also serious. Therefore, there is a need to closely examine employment problems other than unemployment.

At this juncture, however, even the unemployment figures need to be looked at in more details, such as who are the people who have been affected? How and how much have they been affected? What is the duration of unemployment, etc.? Because of time constraints, only some aspects of these dimensions of employment are illustrated.

Figure 18. Unemployment rate 1995-2008, Thailand



⁷ (ILO 2009, 6).

Source: The labour force survey 2538-2511, National Statistical Office (NSO)

Note: Average quarter 1 and quarter 3

Table 3. Growth rate of real GDP and unemployment rate

	2005				2006				2007				2008				2009
	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q
Real GDP																	
(%change yoy)	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																	
(%)	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 from NESDB; Unemployment rate from Labour Force Survey, NSO

Layoff –large number of women are in trouble

A few risky sub-sectors within the manufacturing sector have been hard hit by the global crisis, namely electrical machinery and electronics, textile and garment, motor vehicles and parts, and furniture and decoration. Women dominate these industries. As shown in Table 4, women's employment in the four risky sub-sectors alone declined 12,500 persons from 2007-2008 and 113,200 persons between 1Q 2008-1Q 2009, compared to men's employment declines of 59,800 between 2007-2008 and 201,300 between 1Q08 and 1Q09. It is warned that the decline in employment in these sectors does not necessarily mean layoffs. Some individuals may have moved to other industries voluntarily, or some may have found employment in other industries right after a layoff. This is does not mean that women are not facing any difficulties. The reason that women's employment declined less than male employment could be because their wages are lower than men's or perhaps because in these sub-sectors women are more efficient than male workers. The degree of layoffs in 2008 is however lower than in 2007. The sum of layoffs by quarter in 2007 was 241,499 persons compared to 219,996 in 2008 (Table 5). This number understates the real situation of layoffs by the fact that it includes only those laid off workers insured with the social security system. The total employment registered at the Social Security Office is about 8.5 million accounting for 50.9 per cent of total wage employment and only 23.1 per cent of total employment.

Table 4. Employment by sub-sectors in manufacturing risky to layoffs, 2007-1Q2009

Sector	Gender	Thousand Persons		Growth (%YoY)		Thousand Persons		Growth (%YoY)	
		2007	2008	2007	2008	1Q2008	1Q2009	1Q2008	1Q2009
Electrical machinery and electronics	Total	474.2	448.5	3.0	-5.4	460.1	433.2	0.1	-5.9
	Male	160.8	139.4	13.4	-13.3	156.1	159.8	1.6	2.3
	Female	313.4	309.1	-1.7	-1.4	304.0	273.4	-0.7	-10.1
Textile and	Total	1,158.6	1,133.0	-1.6	-2.2	1207.3	1130.0	-1.9	-6.4

garment	Male	257.7	242.8	0.6	-5.8	250.2	216.0	-6.9	-13.7
	Female	900.9	890.3	-2.2	-1.2	957.0	914.0	-0.5	-4.5
Motor vehicles and motor vehicles parts	Total	259.0	256.1	16.0	-1.1	258.2	220.2	0.8	-14.7
	Male	175.5	175.7	11.3	0.1	174.5	146.7	-2.2	-15.9
	Female	83.5	80.4	27.6	-3.6	83.7	73.5	7.6	-12.2
Furniture and decorations	Total	543.6	525.4	-3.1	-3.3	602.1	543.0	0.2	-9.8
	Male	267.3	243.7	-2.1	-8.8	282.6	252.9	-4.3	-10.5
	Female	276.3	281.8	-4.0	2.0	319.4	290.0	4.6	-9.2
Total (4 Sectors)	Total	2,435.4	2,363.1	0.5	-3.0	2527.7	2326.4	-0.8	-8.0
	Male	861.3	801.5	3.9	-6.9	863.5	775.4	-3.6	-10.2
	Female	1,574.1	1,561.6	-1.2	-0.8	1664.2	1551.0	0.8	-6.8

Source: Labour Force Survey, National Statistical Office

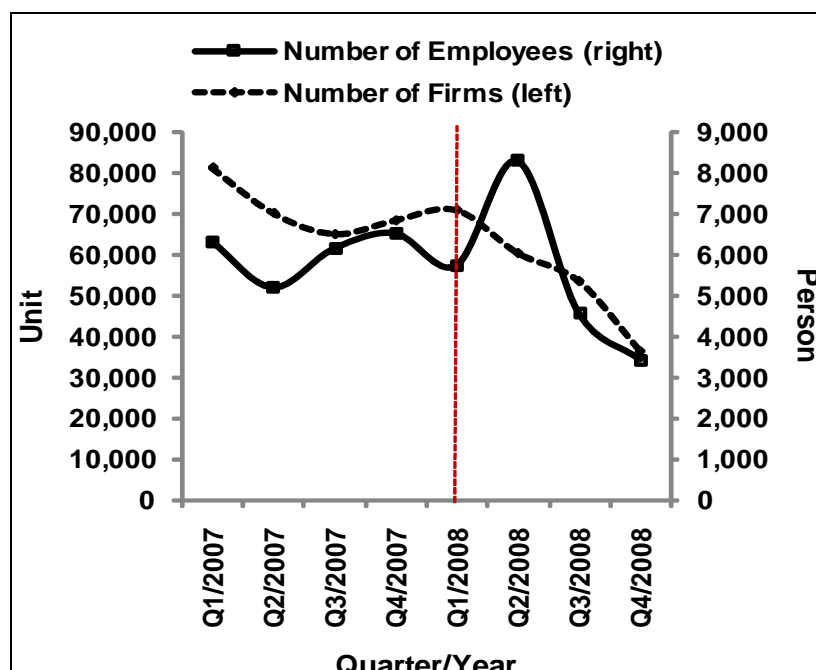
Note: Yearly statistics for 2007 and 2008 is the average of quarter1 and quarter3 figures.

Table 5. Termination of employment (insolvent firms and laid off persons)

Termination of Employment	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q
	2007	2007	2007	2007	2008	2008	2008	2008
Number of Firms (Unit)	8,106	7,005	6,492	6,826	7,078	6,035	5,358	3,662
Number of Employees (Person)	63,152	51,869	61,378	65,100	57,252	82,771	45,627	34,346
Growth (% YoY)								
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)

Figure 19. Termination of employment (insolvent firms and laid off persons)



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

Women's employment by industry

In spite of the Global Crisis in 2008, the total employment increased from 36.19 million in 2007 to 36.83 million, a net increase of 641,000 workers per year with a rate of increase of 1.8 per cent per year. However, because the crisis affects exporting industries more than others, there is one sector with a decrease in employment, Manufacturing, which saw an employment decrease of 178,000 persons, or -3.0 per cent per year. In the Hotel & Restaurant sector, although there was an increase of employment of 39,600 persons year-on-year, the rate of increase slowed down from 4.1 per cent in 2006-07 to 1.4 in the 2007-08 period. The figures in Table 6 give an impression that employment has shifted to Agriculture, Wholesale & Retail Trades and Construction.

Table 6. Employment by major industries and gender 2007-2009 ('000 persons)

Industry	2007				2008			
	Total	Male	Female	F/M	Total	Male	Female	F/M
Total	36,187.3	19,659.9	16,527.4	0.84	36,828.3	19,998.0	16,830.3	0.84
%Share of total	100.0	54.3	45.7		100.0	54.3	45.7	
1. Agriculture	14,119.3	7,965.7	6,153.7	0.77	14,431.5	8,222.9	6,208.6	0.76
%Share of total	39.0	22.0	17.0		39.2	22.3	16.9	
2. Manufacturing	5,851.4	2,808.5	3,042.9	1.08	5,673.4	2,663.6	3,009.8	1.13
%Share of total	16.2	7.8	8.4		15.4	7.2	8.2	

3. Wholesale & Retail Trades	5,622.6	2,933.4	2,689.1	0.92	5,745.0	3,020.9	2,724.1	0.90
%Share of total	15.5	8.1	7.4		15.6	8.2	7.4	
4. Hotel & Restaurants	2,338.8	808.8	1,530.0	1.89	2,378.4	818.8	1,559.5	1.90
%Share of total	6.5	2.2	4.2		6.5	2.2	4.2	
5. Construction	2,190.1	1,845.1	345.0	0.19	2,233.3	1,890.3	343.0	0.18
%Share of total	6.1	5.1	1.0		6.1	5.1	0.9	
6. Others	6,065.1	3,298.4	2,766.7	0.84	6,366.8	3,381.5	2,985.3	0.88
%Share of total	16.8	9.1	7.6		17.3	9.2	8.1	

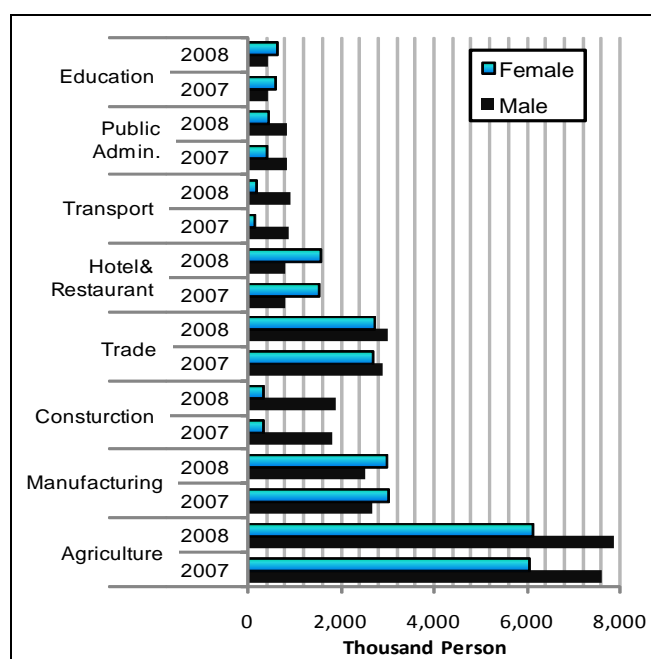
Source: NSO, Labour Force Surveys, various years

Note: Yearly statistics for 2007 and 2008 is the average of 1st quarter and 3rd quarter figures.

Table 6 shows that men dominated employment in three major industries: agriculture, wholesale & retail trades, and construction (F/M ratio are less than 1). Women dominated employment in manufacturing, and hotel & restaurant. This employment structure by gender is consistent between 2007 and 2008. That is, the employment structure by gender in 2008 has changed very slightly, particularly in manufacturing. The employment in manufacturing decreased from 5,851.4 thousand in 2007 to 5,673.4 thousand in 2008, with a decrease in employment of 178,000 jobs. As a result, the share of employment in manufacturing has dropped from 16.2 per cent in 2007 to 15.4 per cent 2008. The number of women exiting this sector between 2007 and 2008 was 33,100⁸ compared to 144,900 men. This resulted in an increase of F/M ratio from 1.08 to 1.13. Surprisingly, employment in the hotel & restaurant sector increased for both men and women, with more women absorbed (29.5 thousand women compared to 10.0 thousand men). This phenomenon probably can be explained by the Bank of Thailand's data that although the number of foreign tourist arrivals in 2008 contracted 1.3 per cent from the previous year, tourism revenue from foreign tourists amounted to 588 billion baht, increasing 5.9 per cent. However, although employment in this sector still increased, its growth rate is less than it was in the previous year. Figure 17 shows the share of employment by gender in eight industries in 2007 and 2008. It shows that women's employment is also concentrated in the education sector.

Figure 20. Share of employment^a by gender and industry^b 2007 and 2008

⁸ This number is less than 125,700 women who left the four risky sub-sectors because of intra-sector mobility. This means or implies that out of 125,700 women leaving the four risky sub-sectors, 33,100 women moved out of Manufacturing.



Source: Labour Force Survey, National Statistical Office

Note: ^a Average quarter 1 and quarter 3

^b There is over a million total employed persons

Wage employment

The number of people in wage employment was 16.4 million in 2007, increasing to 16.7 million in 2008, an increase of 1.9 per cent. Women accounted for 44.3 per cent of those in wage employment in 2007, but this figure increased slightly to 44.7 per cent in 2008.

Table 7. Wage employment by gender and work status

	2007			2008		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Total wage employment	16,411.9	9,144.9	7,267.0	16,721.7	9,245.0	7,476.8
%Share of total	100.0	55.7	44.3	100.0	55.3	44.7
1. Government employee	2,830.7	1,546.1	1,284.6	2,940.7	1,550.4	1,390.3
%Share of total	17.2	9.4	7.8	17.6	9.3	8.3
2. State enterprise employee	339.9	237.0	102.9	352.7	241.0	111.7
%Share of total	2.1	1.4	0.6	2.1	1.4	0.7
3. Private employee	13,241.1	7,361.1	5,879.4	13,428.1	7,453.1	5,974.8

	2	8		3	5	
%Share of total	80.7	44.9	35.8	80.3	44.6	35.7

Source: NSO, Labour Force Surveys, various years

Note: Yearly statistics for 2007 and 2008 is the average of 1st quarter and 3rd quarter figures.

Women's employment by major occupation

According to Table 8, Thai women's employment is concentrated in four occupations: professionals; technicians and associate professionals; clerks; and service and sales workers. Between 2007 and 2008, women were still concentrated in these four occupations although there were slight changes in the F/M ratios. The F/M ratios of professionals and technicians increased, which means that the proportions of women in these occupations have increased compared to men's. At the same time, the F/M ratio of clerks and service workers decreased which means that the proportions of women in these occupations have decreased compared to men's.

Table 8. Employment by occupations and gender, 2007-2008 ('000 persons)

Occupation	2007				2008			
	Total	Male	Female	F/M	Total	Male	Female	F/M
Total	36,187.3	19,659.9	16,527.4	0.84	36,828.3	19,998.0	16,830.3	0.84
%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
%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
%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
%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
%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
%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
%Share of total	34.8	19.5	15.3		35.0	19.8	15.2	
7. Craft and related trades workers	4,124.0	2,774.7	1,349.3	0.49	4,392.6	2,989.8	1,402.7	0.47
%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

%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
%Share of total	12.3	6.3	6.0		12.5	6.4	6.1	

Source: NSO, Labour Force Surveys, various years

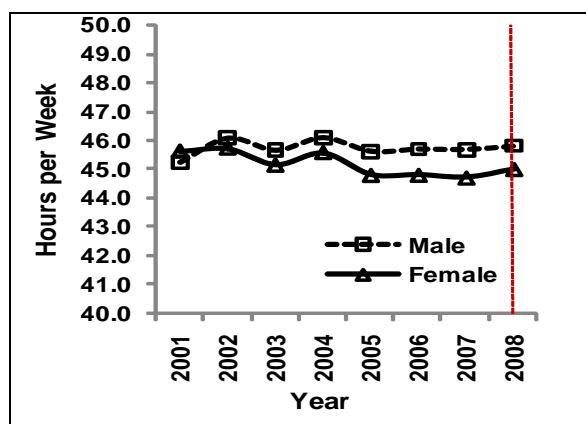
Note: Yearly statistics for 2007 and 2008 is the average of 1st quarter and 3rd quarter figures.

During 2007-2008, there were shifts of women workers to more difficult but lower paying jobs in three occupations. The proportion of women in services workers and sale workers increased from 9.2 per cent to 9.9 per cent; in craft and related trades workers from 3.7 to 3.8 per cent; and in elementary occupation from 6.0 to 6.1 per cent. In terms of numbers, the increase of women in services workers and sale workers occupations alone was as much as 319,000 persons (Table 8).

Hours of work and underemployment

Whether or not women are more likely to be asked to work reduced hours can be seen from Figure 21 which shows the trend of work hours per week between women and men. From 2001 to 2008, women's hours of work became increasingly fewer than that of men's. This fact is in line with comments by a few speakers at a seminar on "Impact of Economic Crisis in 2008 on Women Workers" at Century Park Hotel, Bangkok, on 5 March 2009. According to Alice Chang (Arom Pongpangan Foundation, 2009), women are more at risk of being laid off than their male counterparts. Besides, one female worker at the same seminar told her story that she was laid off and found that it was difficult for her, compared to men, to find a subsidiary job. According to Plernpis Srisiri (Ibid.), a number of women workers in Ayuthaya, Nakorn Pathom, Pathumthani, and Choburi have already been laid off. These women worked in the textile, electronic parts and computer industries. Many women workers were divorcees and had to take care of their children. Without work and income, they experienced depression (Ibid.).

Figure 21. Average hours per week

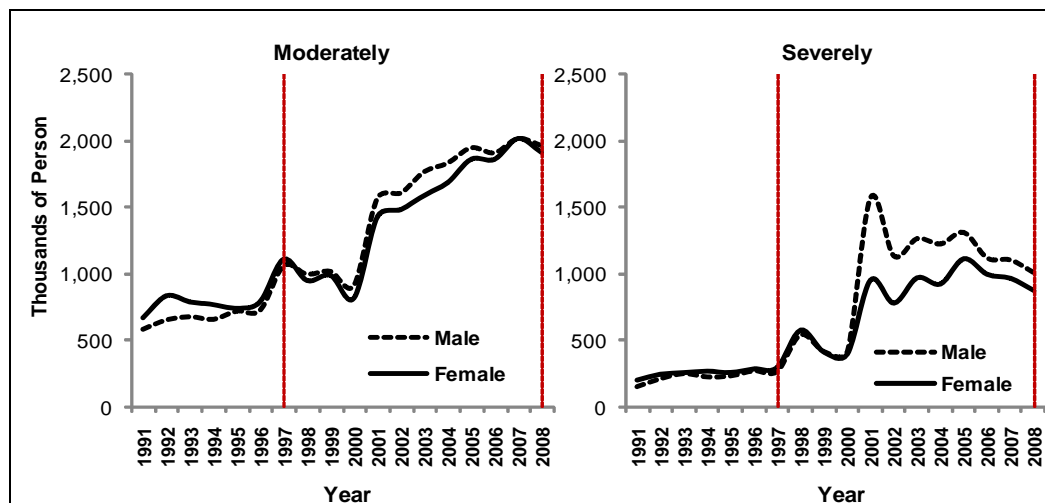


Source: Labour Force Survey, National Statistical Office

Note: Hours worked mean 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 is taken as the hours worked (NSO, 2009).

Figure 22 shows the trend of underemployment 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 women's underemployment during the current global crisis is much higher than during the 1997 Crisis although the trend dropped a little from 2007 to 2008, particularly severe underemployment.

Figure 22. Moderately and severely underemployed persons by gender



Source: Labour Force Survey, National Statistical Office

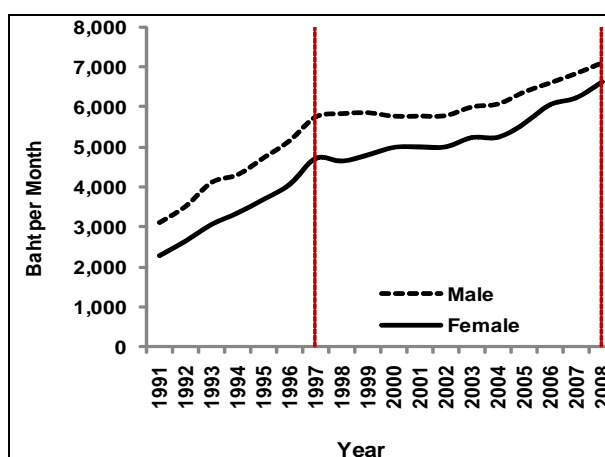
Note: Moderately underemployed means 20-30 hours per week of work is performed.

Severely underemployed means that less than 20 hours per week of work is performed.

Women's earnings

As shown in Figure 23, the nominal average wage income per month of private employees has been increasing constantly before the 1997 Crisis and the increase obviously slowed for a few years after the 1997 Crisis. It has increased again since 2005. The wage of women private employees is constantly lower than that of men's. This data should be interpreted with caution. First, this is the nominal wage. The real wage may not have increased. Second, the data is only for women private employees under the survey conducted by the NSO. Women in the informal sector's wage may not be at this level or may not have increased at this speed.

Figure 23. Nominal average wage income of private employee per month



Source: Labour Force Survey, National Statistical Office

Home workers, contract workers, and sub-contractors

These groups of workers are basically home workers. According to surveys conducted by the NSO, in 2007 the number of women home workers was 337,526 out of the total of 440,251, accounting for 76.7 per cent of the total. The number of women home workers declined from 419,680 in 2005. However, the average growth rate of women home workers is 3.8 per cent per year during 1999-2007. There is no data for 2008; therefore, it is difficult to predict the impact of the global crisis on women home workers.

Table 9. Number of home workers by type and gender

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

Type	Gender	1999	2002	2005	2007	Annual Growth (%) (1999-2007)
	Male	25.7	30.7	33.6	34.7	3.9
	Female	74.3	69.3	66.4	65.3	-1.6
Subcontractors	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
	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 survey, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (various years)

3.2 The social impact of the world Financial Crisis on women

The analysis in this section is limited by the dearth of data on social impact due to delays in processing and reporting. Therefore, only selected empirical evidence of the current World Financial Crisis is presented. However, to capture some ramifications of the social impact of the Financial Crisis on women, some examples from the previous crisis are also presented.

Health

Physical Health: The crisis affects the health conditions of the people, even in the short run. The increased burden, more work for less money, change in work conditions, tension, etc., could result in health problems. In addition, the expected decrease in health expenditures overall by household was realized, as people spent significantly less after the crisis than before on health services. Expenditures on public and private services have both reduced. Expenditures on medical services declined steeply, but self-medication expenses rose slightly. During the 1997 Financial Crisis, there was also a shift from using medical services of private hospitals to clinics in order to reduce health care expenditure (Sauwalak, 2000, 57). During the current crisis, at least 125,700 women (in four exporting industries) were subject to being laid off or moved from decent work to more depressed employment, and about 319,000 women have moved from professional and technical occupations to services workers and sale workers. In addition, in 2008 1.91 million women were moderately underemployed and 0.88 million were severely underemployed. This implies that these large numbers of women are at the risk of health problems and coping strategies.

Table 10. Number of underweight school children in educational year 2006 and 2008

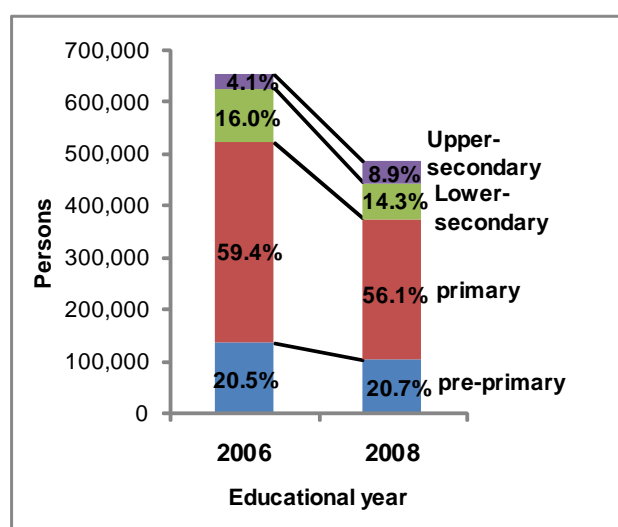
Educational level	Amount (persons)		Share (%)	
	2006	2008	2006	2008
Pre-primary	133,128	100,446	20.5	20.7
Primary	386,648	271,931	59.4	56.1
Lower secondary	104,395	69,469	16.0	14.3
Upper secondary	26,631	43,038	4.1	8.9

Total	650,802	484,884	100.0	100.0
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Source: Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education

Underweight children or malnourished school children are an indicator of the mother's health and well-being. Children of poor women or women of poor health are likely to be associated with poor health as well. The poor had the lowest rate of access to prenatal and child delivery care. Their infants have the highest rate of low birth weight. Health expenditure has declined in all income groups, and private hospitals have been affected by a drop in the number of patients (Sauwalak, 2000, 57).

Figure 24. Number of underweight school children in educational year 2006 and 2008



Source: Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education

During the 1997 Crisis, it was found that the number of malnourished school children had declined since 1990, but rose again in 1997 and 1998 (Paitoonpong, 2009). During the current crisis, however, the number of malnourished school children declined from 650,802 persons in 2006 to 484,884 persons in 2008 (Table 10). This phenomenon does not necessarily mean that the current crisis does not affect women. It could mean that there has been much improvement in the country's health programme or other factors could be attributed to this improvement.

Mental health

Stress caused by economic hardship, loss of job, decreasing wage and earnings among other factors result in mental health problems with some complications on a person's physical health condition. The worst case of mental health problems is suicide. During the 1997 Crisis, it was found that the number of suicides per year rose (Paitoonpong, 2009). During the 2008 Crisis, women's suicide rate increased by 8.6 per cent while that of men's declined 0.9 per cent (Table 11).

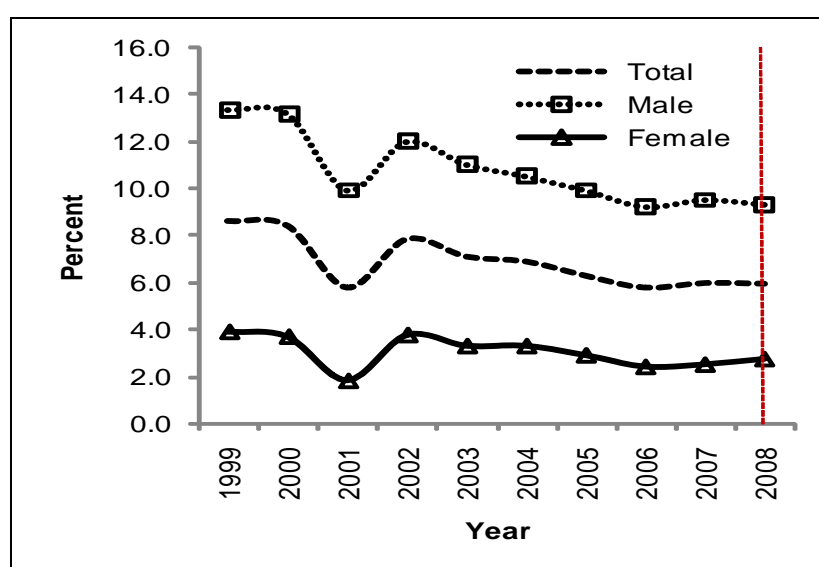
Table 11: Number and rate of deaths from suicides per 100,000 populations by gender

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Number (Person)										
Total	5,29	5,18	4,80	4,90	4,48	4,29	3,94	3,61	3,75	3,79

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
	0	9	3	5	6	6	1	2	5	2
Male	4,080	4,038	3,666	3,715	3,426	3,253	3,033	2,856	2,943	2,916
Female	1,210	1,151	1,137	1,190	1,060	1,043	908	756	812	882
Growth (% YoY)										
Total		-1.9	-7.4	2.1	-8.5	-4.2	-8.3	-8.3	4.0	1.0
Male		-1.0	-9.2	1.3	-7.8	-5.0	-6.8	-5.8	3.0	-0.9
Female		-4.9	-1.2	4.7	-10.9	-1.6	-12.9	-16.7	7.4	8.6
Rate per 100,000 Populations (%)										
Total	8.6	8.4	5.8	7.8	7.1	6.9	6.3	5.8	6.0	6.0
Male	13.3	13.2	9.9	12.0	11.0	10.5	9.9	9.2	9.5	9.3
Female	3.9	3.7	1.8	3.8	3.3	3.3	2.9	2.4	2.5	2.7

Source: Health Information Unit, Bureau of Health Policy and Strategy

Figure 25. Rate per 100,000 populations of deaths from suicides by gender



Source: Health Information Unit, Bureau of Health Policy and Strategy. (Data from Table H2)

During the 1997 Crisis, there were high incidences of infants abandoned in hospitals. This could be because their mothers were under mental pressure and were suffering from the economic difficulties. Whatever the reason may be, this case illustrates the social impact of the economic crisis on women and how it affects the mentality of mothers. Table 12 shows the rate of infants abandoned in hospital and the number of orphans. Between 1997 and 1998, the rate of infants abandoned in hospital increased from 90 (per 1000, 000 deliveries) to 120. A proportion of the increased number of institutionalized

orphans may be related to the AIDS epidemic, in particular the increasing number of HIV-infected mothers, the coincidence with the onset of the crisis suggests that economic pressure may have played a role in this manifestation of family cohesion (World Bank, 2000, 17). The growth in the number of abandoned children, particularly in Bangkok, is also worrisome as it reflects the weakening of the family institution. There is a possibility that the current crisis could have a similar impact, but there is no data available.

Table 12. Rate of infants abandoned in hospital (per 100,000 deliveries) and number of orphan, 1994-1998

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Rate of infants abandoned in hospital	90	100	100	90	120
Number of children placed in orphanages	1,365	1,524	1,449	1,458	1,765

Source: Department of Social Welfare

Education

There has been concern over the impact of the global crisis on education, particularly for girls and women. Unfortunately, there is no updated data on the number of students who dropped out of school or related educational phenomena by gender. However, a study of the previous crisis shows that the percentage of dropouts during 1998/99 academic year remained very much the same for the primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels. The only obvious change was found with vocational education where the dropout rate rose from 9.39 per cent in the 1997/98 academic year to 16.07 per cent in the 1998/99 academic year (Paitoonpong, 2009, 17).

A survey by TDRI in 1998 examined how urban unemployed families managed the problems of their children's education and found that about 32 per cent of the children suffered cuts in expenditure on education, especially for high school education. About 10 per cent of them were moved to public schools, particularly those in primary and high schools. About 9 per cent said they might not be able to pay the tuition fees for the next semester, and about 5.6 per cent have asked others to take care of this burden. About 3.6 per cent of the children had already left school (Ibid.).

Table 13. Percentage of dropouts

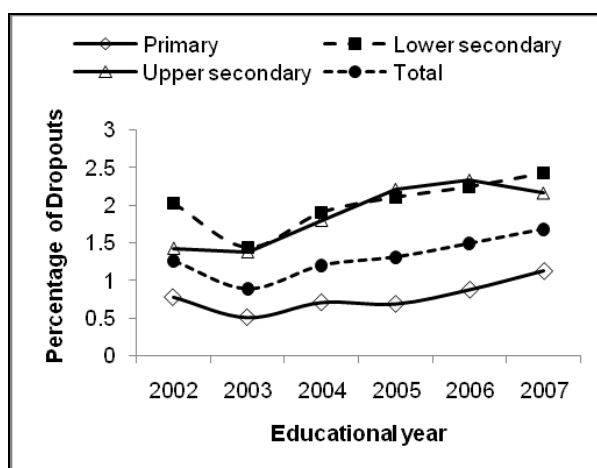
Educational level	Educational year					
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Primary	0.78	0.51	0.71	0.69	0.88	1.13
Lower secondary	2.03	1.45	1.91	2.11	2.25	2.43
Upper secondary	1.43	1.38	1.80	2.21	2.33	2.16
Total	1.26	0.89	1.20	1.31	1.49	1.68

Source: Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education

At the micro level, there is evidence to indicate a change in school enrollment patterns. For instance, private schools experienced a 7.2 per cent decline in enrolment while government schools only saw a 1.8 per cent decline. This may indicate that the economic crisis led some parents to move their children from a relatively more expensive private school to a less expensive government school. However, at the macro level there is no

clear evidence that the aggregate school dropout rates statistically increased as a result of the economic crisis.

Figure 26. Percentage of dropouts



Source: Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education

As income declined, enrolments at private schools were expected to decrease given their higher costs. An ADB financed study compared planned with actual enrolments at private institutions and found declines at all education levels. Actual enrolments in 1998 compared with actual enrolments in 1997, however, were slightly lower only at the primary level (where the discrepancy between public and private education costs is greatest), but about the same at other levels (Ibid.)

Table 14. Students graduates by level of education and types of activities, 2006-2007

	Ed.year 2006		Ed.year 2007		Ed.year 2008	
	persons	%	persons	%	persons	%
Lower secondary (Matthayom3)						
Total graduated student	671,966	100.0	699,236	100.0	658,732	100.0
Continue to study	627,478	93.4	652,420	93.3	603,738	91.7
Work	38,189	5.7	40,668	5.8	44,341	6.7
Ordination	6,211	0.9	4,924	0.7	352	0.1
Other	88	0.0	1,224	0.2	10,301	1.6
Upper secondary (Matthayom6)						
Total graduated student	263,158	100.0	280,645	100.0	280,432	100.0
Continue to study	225,882	85.8	246,293	87.8	247,046	88.1
Work	25,753	9.8	25,427	9.1	25,633	9.1
Ordination	60	0.0	35	0.0	25	0.0
Other	11,463	4.4	8,890	3.2	7,728	2.8

Source: Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education

Whether the current crisis will affect women's education in Thailand is a subject for more investigation. Education is usually a long-term decision. If the current crisis recovers in a short time, the impact on women's education may be minor. As shown in Table 13, dropouts are common. The average dropout rate between 2002-2007 was 1.3 per cent and the trend was rising even before the current crisis. In Table 14, the trend of education transition encompasses lower secondary education graduates and upper secondary education graduates. The transition rate of the lower secondary education dropped from 93.3 in 2007 to 91.7 in 2008 while the transition rate of the upper secondary education increased from 87.8 in 2007 to 88.1 in 2008. The increase in transition rate of the upper secondary education graduates may be due to "the discouraged workers effect" of the crisis. This is because at this level of education, graduates have to make decision on two important choices: to continue their education in colleges or to enter the labour market. During the economic slowdown, many decided not to enter the labour market.

Crimes

During the 1997 Crisis, arrests for property crimes increased. This coincidence of events again suggests that economic pressures on household and individuals led to this upsurge in property crimes, but as with the case of drugs arrests, other factors could be involved, including more effective police work, changes in the law, and evolving norms and values not linked to the crisis. It is also possible that the surge in property crimes is related to the surge in drug use, rather than the changes in economic conditions (World Bank, 2000, 13).

A particular type of crime, which involves women, is prostitution. Although the number of prostitution cases between 2007 and 2008 declined from 36,042 to 34,197, the year-on-year comparison between 1Q2008 and 1Q 2009 shows an increase from 10,507 cases to 12,562, representing an increase of about 20 per cent.

Table 15. Selected crimes, 2007-2008

	2007	2008	2008 (Jan-Apr)	2009 (Jan-Apr)
Prostitution	36,042	34,197	10,507	12,562
Change (%)		-5.1		19.56
Narcotics	150,464	213,717	64,432	76,976
Change (%)		42.04		19.47
Rape	5,155	4,644	1,619	1,537
Change (%)		-9.91		-5.06
Rape & murder	8	2	1	5
Change (%)		-75.0		400.0
Pornography	2,247	2,170	594	455
Change (%)		-3.43		-23.40
Gambling	252,826	221,013	84,149	70,254
Change (%)		-12.58		-16.51

Source: Police Authority of Thailand

During the 1997 Crisis, drug abuse and trafficking increased significantly, possibly due to the supply factors. There was especially an increase in drug trafficking (amphetamines in particular). This could possibly be due to the fact that drug trafficking is an easy source of income for those who are bold enough (and those who are in desperate need of extra income, including women). In villages, in schools, and in the alleys, amphetamines could be obtained. There was a dramatic increase in arrests related to the possession of amphetamines during the previous crisis. There was, however, some degree of correlation between the rise in arrests for drug-related crimes and the economic crisis. To a certain extent, some of the increase in arrests may be attributed to other factors, such as increased efforts made by the police to crack down on the offenders and the government's strengthening of enforcement legislation (World Bank, 2000,13).

Recently, a female TV comedy actor was arrested for possessing or consuming drugs (TV news, various channels). She pleaded guilty and confessed that she was depressed because of the lack of work due to the economic slow down. In fact, many women have been arrested for drug dealing. Table 15 shows that the number of narcotic drug cases which increased from 150,464 in 2007 to 213,717 in 2008 while Table 16 shows that the number of female drug addicted increased from 1,101 in 2007 to 1,172 in 2008.

Table 16. Number of drug addicted patients

Gender	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
(Persons)					
Total	4,446	7,335	5,538	6,072	6,436
Male	3,505	6,034	4,631	4,971	5,264
Female	941	1,301	907	1,101	1,172
%yoy					
Total	-	65.0	-24.5	9.6	6.0
Male	-	72.2	-23.3	7.3	5.9
Female	-	38.3	-30.3	21.4	6.4

Source: *Thanyarak Institute, 2009*

Other social impacts in connection with the crisis also include domestic violence, divorce, rape, human trafficking, sexual harassments, etc. These impacts are summarized in Tables 17-20 below for easy reference. Because of time and space constraints, no analysis is provided.

Table 17. Women and children admitted by emergency home

Types	Amount (person)						
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
1. Family problems	508	301	309	309	237	286	310
2. Illegitimate pregnancy	149	155	161	149	138	133	123
From husband/boy friend	-	-	-	-	118	155	111
- from rape	-	-	-	-	20	17	12

Types	Amount (person)						2008
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	
-from prostitution	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
3. Domestic violence	30	63	62	68	69	51	52
- by husband	-	-	-	-	65	49	50
- by parent	-	-	-	-	3	1	-
- by desertion	-	-	-	-	1		-
- by brother	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
- by employer	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
4. Unemployment	-	-	32	18	2	33	5
5. No shelter	-	-	38	34	30	-	-
6. children contacted with HIV/AIDS	41	30	32	27	20	17	17
7. Rape	2	11	20	14	13	14	17
8. Health problems	-	-	26	15	16	12	10
- Physical	-	-	9	-	3	3	6
- Mental	-	-	17	-	13	9	4
9. Wandering and loss	-	-	9	12	7	5	1
10. Other problems	15	110	40	13	14	9	28
- Legal	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
- Economic	-	-	-	9	11	1	16
- Human trafficking	-	-	-	-	1	-	6
- Elderly	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
- No care taker	-	-	-	-	-	8	5
- Disable	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
							1,13
11.Phone-in consultations	-	-	-	-	-	-	5
							1,70
Total	745	670	729	659	546	562	0

Source: Emergency Home, Women's Status Promotion Association (ref. in www.gdrif.org (Gender and Development Research Institute))

Note: The declining statistics on violence to women and children is due to declining numbers of channels to file complaints. Places to receive complaints have been reduced from many places in the past to only one: the Association.

Table 18. Sexual harassment cases in court in the whole Kingdom, 2000-2008

Case	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Rape	4,291	4,061	4,896	7,039	8,181	8,946	9,653	10,224	9,664

Sexual harassment	1,996	2,429	2,246	1,512	1,924	2,600	2,082	2,011	1,354
Total	6,287	6,490	7,142	8,551	10,105	11,546	11,735	12,235	11,018

Source: Judicial Information Service Center, Ministry of Justice

Table 19. Need for help as reported at Female Foundation

Type	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Female and children migrant workers	183	380	373	332	285
Domestic violence	99	114	108	39	53
Human trafficking					
Thai	20	6	5	95	87
Foreigner	113	130	208	82	63
Illegitimate pregnancy	43	43	35	12	26
Domestic juvenile delinquency	20	20	17	11	13
Sexual violence	21	21	22	10	19
Lay-off/economic	11	11	9	3	2
Others	6	6	17	9	2
Health	13	13	6	2	2
Returning workers from abroad	-	-	-	3	167
Request for information to go abroad	-	-	-	45	172
Total	529	744	800	558	891

Source: Female Foundations

Table 20. Marriage and divorce statistics

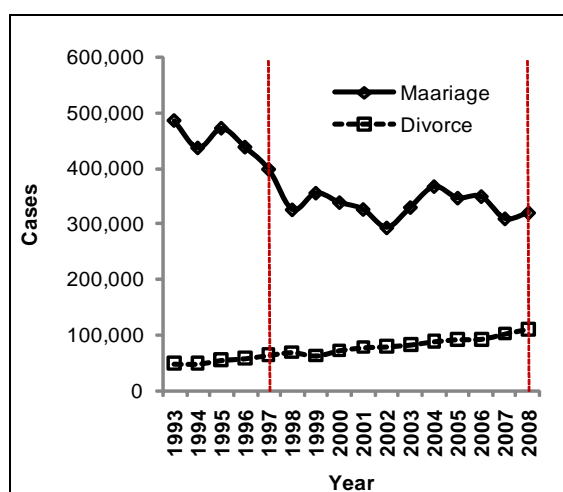
Unit: cases

Year	Marriage	Divorce
1993	484,569	46,953
1994	435,425	46,903
1995	470,751	53,560
1996	436,831	56,718
1997	396,928	62,379
1998	324,262	67,551
1999	354,198	61,377
2000	337,140	70,882
2001	324,661	76,037

Year	Marriage	Divorce
2002	291,734	77,735
2003	328,356	80,886
2004	365,721	86,982
2005	345,234	90,688
2006	347,913	91,155
2007	307,910	100,420
2008	318,496	109,084

Source: Ministry of Interior

Figure 27. Marriage and divorce statistics



Source: Ministry of Interior

4. A Qualitative Assessment of Women Workers Affected by the Financial Crisis

Macro data on the situation of women affected by the world Financial Crisis may not be able to capture the qualitative aspects (troubles) of women who have been affected by the current crisis, particularly those who have been/will be laid off. To give a human face to the macro data, the author organized two focus group meetings in June 2009 with women factory workers, one in Pathumthani consisting of ten women workers who faced reduction of work days and hours and were subjected to be laid off within the next six months. These women workers worked at textile factories (two from Pratumthani and three from Samuprakarn): two from a toy factory, one from an electronic and automobile parts factory, one from a motorcycle factory, and one from a plastic ware factory. Another group consisted of ten workers, eight women and eight men. All came from a garment factory in Samutsakorn. This group consisted of people who have already been laid off and have been involved with demonstrations for their unpaid salaries and severance pay.

4.1 Women's double roles

The average age of the focus group informants is 36 years, ranging from 25 years old to 62 years old. Most of them only have a primary or secondary education. In the first group (Pratumthani), six women are single, three are married and one is divorced. In the second group (Samutsakorn), five are single and five are married. For those who are married, they have one to two children with a maximum of four children. No matter whether they are single or married, it seems that these women have at least two roles: working for income and looking after their family or parents. Women support their parents according to the Thai custom that a daughter is responsible for the support and care of her parents. However, in the women's view, the responsibility to support parents is not regarded as being representative of gender inequality. On the contrary, they deem that this is an acceptable task because their younger and elder brothers have to support their own wives and children. These women also receive the full support of and understanding from their husbands:

Supporting parents is a matter of sharing responsibility. My husband's younger sister also sends remittance to her parents while my husband does not. My husband does not need to send remittance to his parents because he has to bear all expenditures of our family and to look after our children.

These women workers' second role is to look after their own children and husbands' parents. Some of them have to take care of a disabled husband; some have a paralysed elder brother; some live together with a grandmother and a niece in Bangkok; and some send remittance to support parents in the provinces.

4.2 Lives before the Financial Crisis

On average, these women have worked for ten years. The fewest years of work experience is one and the longest is nineteen. Before the economic crisis, they were already poor due to low income, high expenses and origins from poor families. Under Thai culture mentioned above, it is the responsibility of daughters to support and take care of their parents. This does not affect unmarried daughters much, but it is very tough for those who are married because they are expected to support both their own families and their parents. Some of them also send remittance to their husbands' parents, but only once in a while. In fact, for married women, they are not only expected to assume two roles, but there are actually three roles. For this reason, they do not have money left for savings:

It is difficult as I have a low salary. For this reason, I have to borrow at 20% interest in order to cover all my monthly expenses. I have debt to credit cards, such as AEON and EASYBUY.

Our salaries can only last month- to-month.

4.3 Wages and welfares

At the beginning, women's wages and welfare were the same as those provided to men. However, a raise is dependent on their diligence, their individual working capacity and their employment record according to the number of absences, leaves, and tardiness. The number of women workers is higher than that of men in almost all industries represented at the focus group. Men dominate in certain industries, particularly the automobile industry which requires more skills and strength than other sectors. Women workers in the automobile industry can only paste car tinted film, a task which is more appropriate for women.

4.4 Warning signals before businesses close down

Before retrenchment or insolvency, there are signals from employers such as reduced overtime, reduced shifts and/or normal working hours, and pay and welfare cuts, all of which put pressure on workers to resign voluntarily. The (garment) company (where they were laid off in Samutsakorn) had tried every way possible for two years to pressure workers to resign before the onset of the economic crisis. This is a trick to pressure workers to resign or do wrong so that the employer does not have to pay severance payment or avoid being accused of unfairness if their employees are laid off. The factory even recruits new workers to replace those leaving the factory. The factory in question has already pressured 400-500 workers in two years to resign. Before the close down (insolvency) of the factory, there were eventually only 41 workers left. Finally, the business was immediately closed without any advance formal announcement. During the two years of intense pressure, workers noticed that the company announced job vacancies everyday, so they had never thought that the situation would be so critical to the point that the factory would close down.

1st May (2009) was a holiday. We returned to the company on 2nd May and were so surprised to see a poster announcing the closing down of the company instead of the usual job vacancy announcement.

The workers who had quit earlier have now got new jobs. We had never thought that the business would be closed as the production was running at high speed everyday.

The rest of the 41 workers who have not yet got any severance pay and 3 months of unpaid salary are now demonstrating in front of the company to fight for their earnings.

We have kept watch on the company's gate all day and night, and as soon as the door opens, we will take all assets inside to sell and share the money.

For other manufacturing industries (in Pathumthani), the warning signals appeared in 2008. Many employers applied Article 75 of the Labour Protection Law 2541 (more details below) to their workers, citing the economic crisis which resulted in decreased purchasing orders and asked some workers to stop working. Both men and women were treated the same. However, women were impacted more because a larger number of them worked in the industry, and their responsibility to support their own parents, husbands, and children. By applying Article 75, employers were able to pay their workers only 75% of the total wages, giving the excuse that they do not have enough money for workers' bonuses.

The employer said that there was no work as sale orders had decreased. In fact, we still worked at the same production capacity from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. with exactly the same production target that must be achieved on the same day without overtime pay.

We were allowed annual leaves, but we had to double our work right after the leave. For example, if we used to produce 2,000 pieces a day, we must make 4,000 pieces. This means that, virtually, we did not have any vacations. Our annual leaves are without pay.

Workers in some factories even locked their employers up which resulted in new negotiations and agreements.

Article 75 under the Labor Protection Act B.E. 2541 stipulates that an employer can order workers to stop working for a certain period of time and pay 75 per cent of wages during such a period. Thus, some opportunist employers took advantage of this Article to

reduce working hours and order workers to stop working for 3 days, 7 days or 1 month. It is illegal and against the labour law if workers moved to work at other companies. During such a period of work suspension, some workers engaged in hawking or small informal businesses to earn some cash. Yet, most workers could not afford to do that because of a lack of funds, skills or they simply did not dare to venture out on their own.

Employers applying Article 75 to workers in a production line included:

1. Employers who employed sub-contractors to work in the place of regular workers who had been laid off because the employer did not provide overtime pay. The dismissal is based on how long the person has worked with the firm, and the employee is given only one week prior notice;
2. Workers are fired almost every month, yet the firm still post for new recruits.
3. Any worker who had a record of absences, leaves, or late arrivals would be dismissed;
4. Any worker who was over 35 years of age would be dismissed;
5. Any worker with few years of working experience; and
6. Any worker who is willing to resign.

Article 75 is used only as an employers' excuse. *"Because of the economic crisis, the factory needs to reduce the number of workers"*. Actually, the factory had dismissed workers before the crisis and replaced them with sub-contractors in order to reduce production costs, labour costs, which include social security premiums, compensation, severance pay, and other welfare benefits. Presently, there are only some companies that have been affected by the economic crisis. Regardless, there are no authorities to verify if these factories indeed face decreasing sale orders and losses.

The workers are indirectly squeezed in various ways, such as reduced working hours and overtime pay cuts. When the workers do not have adequate income, they cannot stand working under such conditions, so they have to resign without receiving severance pay from the company

Article 75 was passed to protect employers. When workers claim for their pay, the government authorities will say to our faces: 'why are you making such claims in such a time of economic crisis'?

The employer blamed the economic crisis and asked workers to take annual leaves every Saturday until we run out of annual leaves. Later, they referred to Article 75 as an excuse for not giving us pay raises for six month even though the company could make a net profit of up to 2,200 million baht.

4.5 The impact of Financial Crisis on women's well-being

The Financial Crisis has resulted in reduced income. Workers have had to be more aware of their finances to meet the high costs of living. Ways to economize include:

- 1) Walking from home instead of taking a taxi or riding a motorcycle;
- 2) Moving children from a private school to a public school in order to save on tuition fees, but this might not be easy for some children who may feel embarrassed in making such a move;
- 3) Keeping track of household expenses and trying to trim unnecessary expenditures;

- 4) Taking free public buses;
- 5) Reducing entertainment activities;
- 6) Not buying unnecessary clothes or cosmetics;
- 7) Buying second-hand dresses/outfits;
- 8) Asking brothers/sisters to share the responsibilities of supporting parents and telling parents about their financial difficulties. Due to their lower income, they have to spend more economically;
- 9) Decreasing personal expenses in order to be able to continue to support their parents; and
- 10) Getting loans from loan sharks.

Women of the closed-down garment factory are now waiting for an agreement from their employer within 30 days. Therefore, they cannot look for new jobs. They have to keep demonstrating in front of the company to negotiate further even though there are some other companies willing to hire them. If they move immediately to another company, they will receive no compensation consisting of their salary for three months and severance pay. During their demonstration, they have hired security guards to protect them day and night, as well as a cooking team. Some of them have left to work at new companies during the daytime and come back at night to guard the demonstration site.

It was like guarding our own belongings. We just waited for the door to open, so we could get in to take things from the factory

We have lists of the company's assets in hand, but it was found that 2 buttonhole-making machines, valued at 2 million baht each, had disappeared. No one knows when the employer took them. However, the remaining assets are worth about 6.6 million baht, and after deducting depreciation they should be worth at least 3 million baht. As a result, with the number of assets, the employer should be able to pay us our wages and compensation, which is about 2.4 million baht.

Some women had been aware of the problems and have already become part-time workers at home in order to earn some extra income, by making balls, artificial flowers, sewing cloths, etc. Most of them had never thought that the situation would reach the point of the employer closing down the business. Some women thought of going back home in the provinces and starting a small tailoring business or food shop at home. Some workers are too old to be hired by new companies. Meanwhile, some of them did not dare to start up a new business because there are plenty of mongers in the markets, and they do not want to risk losing any money.

4.6 Social security

Those workers who have not been paid for three months have also not paid their social security premiums for the same duration because they did not receive their pay. Moreover, their employer has also not paid his/her share either. As long as the workers cannot find new jobs, they will not be able to pay premiums to the Social Security Fund. However, the labourers had checked directly with the Social Security Office and found that the employer had not paid the premiums for three months.

The officer at the Social Security Office said that the employers were expected to clear an outstanding balance of their labours' premiums for four months in total, including three months before the closing of the business and one month

after. If employers do not remit premiums continually for over 6 months, the privileges provided by the Social Security Fund will be terminated

The Social Security Fund may not provide much protection, but we should be members

We receive lower level of service and quality of medicine when we show our social security fund member cards.

Some employers collect the premiums from workers, but never remit them to the officer. The workers happened to find out this fact when they visited the doctor. When workers complained about this at the Government office, they were asked such questions as: "Would you like your employer to be arrested and you will be unemployed?" This is appropriate for a government officer. Some women who give birth to their children cannot claim their maternity benefit because the employer omitted their premiums. At present, workers have filed complaints. Many women agree that the "Government officers and the Social Security Fund are not helpful."

4.7 Provident Fund

The women workers understand that the provident fund is a fund collected from their monthly pay combined with an equitable contribution from their employer. After they retire, they will receive a refund consisting of a lump sum amount of their savings (inclusive of the employer's contribution and interest). Provident fund is mostly available in large companies. Some workers want to resign after their provident fund reaches a certain amount that will enable them to set-up their own businesses. However, some are not confident that they can run a business of their own. They have learned from their colleagues who had quit their jobs and set up their own businesses. These colleagues did well at the beginning, but eventually they suffered a loss and had to return to the company. One of workers said

"The workers who expected a lump sum from the provident fund and resigned from the company should be those who have already owned a private business. Workers who are unsure about their own skills, competences, or exact future direction are not daring enough to leave and start up their own businesses."

4.8 Labour union

The founding of a labour union is complicated, as it has to be registered and is subject to rules and regulations; for example, a labour union cannot be established if it only has one member, and members of a union must not be those working at the executive level. Labour unions are normally founded in large companies. It is impossible in small or medium enterprises.

Women workers expect that a labour union can advise them or provide information on labour issues. They think that government authorities do not understand labour unions. Sometimes, union leaders are laid off and the labour union collapses. Union leaders are always at the top of the list of those who will be laid off

Kick out the hardheaded first. Find fault with them. As a consequence, no one dares to lead the union.

4.9 Government assistance

Assistance from the Government is available, but it usually misses the target, in other words it does not solve the workers' problems. The campaign of "2,000 baht for national rescue" was of little help.

Everyone received it, but spent it all in one day, buying necessary stuff for their parents and paying for water and electrical bills, rent, and baby food. Some workers had their debtors waiting to take their cheques right there.

To answer the question whether or not I received the money, I said 'yes'. But asked if this could satisfy my exact need, I can answer 'no'. The government should contribute this amount of money in terms of hospital expenses, so workers will not have to bear the full cost of medical expenses for a certain period, for examples 6 months or 1 year.

The campaign dealing with employment services is also good, but the vacancies on offer usually do not match the workers' skills or competences. Often times, the new place of employment is too far from workers' residences. Workers have to look for and move closer to their work. Moreover, they did not have enough money to pay the deposit for a new residence. Therefore, the background information of workers should be collected first.

We went to the Employment Office or the Social Security Office asking for help in finding new jobs; unfortunately, we sometimes had difficulties travelling to work because the new workplace is far from our present residence. We had to pay more travelling expenses, to get up earlier at 4 a.m., and to change our children's.

Regarding the government's skill trainings programmes, women who had been laid-off from insolvent companies took a course on 'Thai Dessert Cooking' for ten days. During the course, each of them received a daily allowance of 120 baht per day for ten days. Now, they have completed the training course, but have not yet started up their own businesses due to the lack of funds.

Does 'Ton kla ar-cheep (vocational sprout)' really work? My younger colleague had already attended and completed a training course, but she has not yet received any allowances, not even one baht, from the training director. For this reason, she had to invite a news reporter to publicise what happened to her. Of course, she was scolded by the director. I think this campaign is feasible, but there is no market for the products we make.

Another government's measure is "loans for workers". A collective group of ten workers receive a loan of 50,000 baht each. Women workers in the focus group think this is not easy because banks have to check their credit and liabilities. Every worker has debt of different amounts. Most of them have credit cards to withdraw cash even though the interest rate is extremely high. Some of them secured loans from the Savings and Credit Cooperatives of their own companies with information from the labour union.

On the government campaign for free education; although schools do not charge tuition fees, there are still other costs such as food, transportation, etc. Some schools collect contribution from students of 600-800 baht. Therefore, this campaign does not help workers to save money.

On the campaign of monthly "Old-age Allowance" of 500 baht for older members of society, a member of this focus group noted that their old parents in the provinces have not yet received any money and do not know when they will be paid. This campaign seems helpful for workers to save on the expenses to support their parents. However,

parents of many workers are under 60 years of age, so they are not yet eligible to benefit from the campaign. What they can do is just ask their parents to economize, as they can no longer afford to send remittances every month.

4.10 Assistance needed from the government

Women workers would like to request the government to pay more attention to workers who are employed by foreign investors in large companies. Those foreign employers should have a heart and take good care of their workers. *“Not like when you need us, you hire us. But when you finish your business, you just leave us behind”*. Responsible government authorities should carefully screen foreign employers. When workers make a complaint, the authorities usually said, *“Why do you complain so much about this? What would happen if there are no foreign investors in the future?”*

With regard to Article 75, which states that workers are subject to a wage cut of 25%, workers believe that the government can reimburse the same amount to them. Why can the Government give the enterprise low interest (soft) loans? The Government should also check carefully whether the employer suffers a loss from decreased sale orders as we still work at the same speed of production everyday, or even more on some days. This is contradictory to what employers said.

5. Policy Responses by Thai Government and Gender

The government's responses to the crisis, up to now, can be roughly divided into three major phases, namely the early stage (1Q2008 – September 2008, under Samak Sundaravej's regime), the second stage (September – December 2008, under Somchai Wongsawat's regime), and the third stage (17 December 2008 – present, under Abhisit Vejjajiva's government).

Because of political instability and lack of concrete policy to respond to the Financial Crisis in the early stages, the review of government's responses in the first stage is not presented. However, it can be noted that during the period before November 2008 (the cabinet approved an economic package to stimulate the economy), the government had responded to the Financial Crisis through macro economic policies worth more than 1.2 trillion bath (Department of Employment, 2008). The government was more active vis-à-vis its policies and measures in responding to the Financial Crisis. Its impact on the labour market were particularly evident during the last quarter of 2008 when the Financial Crisis became more serious.

During the second stage (September –December 2008), the Ministry of Labour (MOL) initiated two major measures:

1. **Measures before lay-off.** Two Task Forces were appointed: Task Force to Monitor the Labour Impact of Lay-off and Provincial Sub-Committees to Monitor the Economic Situation and Layoffs to report the situation to MOL; and
2. **Measures to provide assistances after layoffs** include:
 - Assisting laid-off workers to receive compensation and severance pay;
 - Financial assistance through Workers Assistance Fund;
 - Skills training or upgrade training for self employment;
 - Setting up a War Room to monitor the economic situation and impacts on the labour market by surveying and analysing economic analyses by academicians

or research institutes that appear in the mass media and seminars along with employment data from private enterprises. The War Room is also task with analysing current situations and trends, conducting unemployment surveys, and monitoring possible layoffs. Lastly, the War Room cooperates with the Federation of Industries of Thailand and the Thailand Chamber of Commerce in monitoring the labour market.

- The Social Security Office (SSO) extends the coverage period of unemployment benefits of unemployed workers from 180 days to 240 days; and
- The SSO plans to arrange an MOU with commercial banks to deposit 10,000 million baht (of which 4,000 million belongs to insured workers and 6,000 million baht belong to employers) in an account. The deposit will be for the commercial banks to lend to eligible workers (who must be laid-off or want to change jobs), and to employers on the condition that they do not layoff workers.

In addition, MOL also initiated a Plan to Prevent and Mitigate Unemployment Problems resulting from the World Financial Crisis. The main targets of this plan are the 3,000 enterprises, 700,000 laid-off workers, and 8,000 new graduates who enter the labour market. The Plan includes:

1. Development of monitoring mechanisms or systems to follow up on the situation concerning laid-off workers and inform responsible agencies for an appropriate course of action including providing counselling and assisting the laid off workers to receive their compensation or severance pay. Information will then be conveyed to the MOL headquarter.
2. Conducting surveys of those who were laid-off or the unemployed. The survey should employ new graduates as labour volunteers to conduct surveys of the laid-off and the unemployed as well as their need for help from the government. This scheme should mitigate the problems of new graduates who are in search of work.
3. Creating new occupations for those who were laid-off and the unemployed.
4. Creating public works to provide transitory jobs for those who are suffering from the Financial Crisis and cannot find employment. These jobs would provide enough income to meet their living expenses.
5. Skills development for those who are laid-off and the unemployed to upgrade their skills and to increase their opportunities to find new jobs. The skills development includes language-training courses to build the language capacities of those who are seeking employment overseas.
6. Short-term vocational training programmes for those who were laid off and the unemployed for the promotion of self-employment.
7. Increasing the liquidity of enterprises to continue their operations without closing down or laying off workers.

On 4 November 2008, the cabinet approved a national budget of 1.835 million millions baht, inclusive of an additional economic package of 100,000 million aimed at stimulating the economy battered by the World Financial Crisis. The main targets of the economic package were farmers and the poor.

According to the Minister of Finance, Suchart Thadathamrongvej, the economic package budget is aimed at creating employment with the following major conditions:

- The money has to be spent very quickly;
- Activities have to be in the form of projects, such as

- Village and Urban Community Fund;
- One Tambon One Product (OTOP);
- Small, Medium and Large Village Fund (SML); and
- Projects must be completed in one year (2009) (Matichon, 2008).

The MOL submitted ten projects containing the aforementioned measures for approval on 17 November 2008:

1. Employment of New Graduate Volunteers in three Southern Provinces and Songkla (765,591,800 baht);
2. Creating New Occupations for the Laid –off due to the Financial Crisis (67,500,000 baht);
3. Skills Development to Delay the Impact of Those Who Will be Laid-Off (126,000,000 baht);
4. Promotion of Language Skills for Overseas Employment for the Laid-Off (45,000,000 baht);
5. Capacity Building for Personnel in Tourism and Services to Prevent an Economic Crisis (61,000,000 baht);
6. Vocational Training for the Alleviation of Problems Associated with the Economic Crisis (148,000,000 baht);
7. Workers Assistance Fund to Help Laid-off Workers due to the Financial Crisis (270,000,000 baht);
8. Development of Labour Union Leaders to Mitigate the Financial Crisis (5,400,000 baht);
9. Development of Human Resource Managers to Mitigate the Financial Crisis (19,600,000 baht); and
10. The Safety of Workers in Agriculture to Mitigate the Financial Crisis (27,951,000 baht).

The present government, under Abhisit Vejjajiva, in the third stage of the government's responses, has implemented the policies and measures approved by the cabinet during the second stage. Some policies and measures come under different names. Some policies and measures have also been added during the third stage. In essence, however, the labour market policies and measures remain the same as the ones initiated in the second stage. Thus, our review is focused on those seven policies and measures mentioned above.

Obviously, all of these government response projects are not gender responsive. There is no special provision for women workers. In fact, Thai women workers do not ask for many concessions. For example, on 8 March 2008, the Women Workers Integrated Group and Civil Societies, private sector development organization on women and workers, as well as a network of four slum areas in four regions, together making up a group of about 500 workers demonstrated and submitted a petition to the Prime Minister. The petition regarding women workers was made to request the government (1) to set up sufficient numbers of quality child day-care centres for workers' children in industrial estate areas that meet the workers' needs; and (2) to allow women to be adequately represented in tripartite committees. On the International Women's Day, March 9, 2009, the same group and women members of the State Enterprises' Labour Unions, also submitted the same petition to the new government under Abhisit Vejjajiva (Bandit, 2009, 22-23).

There is also feedback from workers on the Government's measures as noted by Bandit (2009, 115-6) as follows:

- 1) The Government's measures and projects are initiated by government agencies without prior consultations with labour organizations and without consideration of workers' needs. Government agencies formulate projects in a rush in order to request a budget from the Government.
- 2) Some projects have a hidden political agenda, for instance to address the security needs of the government rather than to solve the problems of those who have been laid-off. An example is the project to hire new graduate volunteers to work in the three southern provinces and four districts in Songkla.
- 3) The project on Creating New Occupations for the laid-off should take into account the detailed background, market situation and needs of the laid-off and their families so that those who undergo the training can find new jobs or can be self-employed. Do not provide training at ease or at random or use defensive measures just to solve problems at hand or to recruit trainees just for the sake of recording that a certain number of people have signed up for the project.
- 4) The project on Safety of Workers in Agriculture is doubtful. What is it and why the safety of workers in agriculture? This project should be the responsibility of agencies that deal with safety instead of the MOL.
- 5) The government and the Board of Social Security should improve the bureaucratic procedures of the Social Security Office and extend the coverage of social security benefits, particularly those which directly concern laid-off workers. For example, the SSO should give "child assistance money" to the laid-off families with children aged 6 to 15 years.
- 6) The workers also recommended that the government should consider other measures such as:
 - Introducing soft or low-interest loans or other measures to mitigate the problems of the private sectors to survive the Financial Crisis. Measures to promote investment should be adjusted to promote those who use domestic resources and who intend to have sustainable employment.
 - Increasing the number of scholarships for learning and vocational training in occupations where there are shortages or which are in demand by the private sector.
 - Increasing the workers' assistance fund for laid-off workers to meet the rising costs of living.
 - Prioritizing government investment projects and procurements to include laid-off workers. This measure could seek cooperation from the private sector.
 - Campaigning to encourage private enterprises to abide by the Government's guidelines to mitigate the problems of employee layoffs. Layoffs should be the employer's last measure (Bandit, 2009, 115-6).

Meanwhile, the government has also issued instant measures to mitigate the impact of the Financial Crisis in the short term called the "6 Measures 6 Months for Every Thai to Fight the Financial Crisis". The measures were set to cover the period of 1 August 2008 to 31 January 2009, but have been extended for another 6 months. The instant measures include:

- Reduction of excise tax on gasoline;
- Control of the price of cooking gas;

- Free use of the water supply not exceeding 50 cubic meters/month;
- Free use of electricity not exceeding 80 units, and half price for those who use between 81-150 units;
- Free public buses up to 800/day; and
- Free rides on 3rd class trains.

A NGO dealing with labour issues, Committee on United Thai Workers, conducted a feedback survey of workers in Bangkok and its vicinity on “How Do Workers Benefit from the Government’s 6 Measures for Economic Stimulation” between August – September 2008. It received a total of 217 responses. The findings concluded that the 6 measures did not meet the needs of the labourers. All measures did not pass the test except the free electricity measure that almost failed. The main reasons why the measures did not meet the needs of labourers include:

- Most workers do not have a car, so they do not benefit from tax reduction.
- Most workers do not cook in their daily lives as they buy prepared food. Therefore, few of them benefited from the price reduction of cooking gas.
- A large number of workers reside in living quarters provided within the factory or in rented townhouses that have different ways of charging for the use of water or electricity. Many share one water or electricity meter. Therefore, few workers benefited from this measure.
- A number of workers live in the suburban areas. They do not commute by bus, but by motorcycles or trucks. Thus quite a few workers do not benefit from the free bus scheme.
- Most workers in Bangkok and the vicinity usually do not commute by train, so they do not need free trains.

The Committee concludes that for the low-income workers, the government’s Instant 6 Measures do not really work (Background document of the Committee on United Thai Workers, session 11/2551, 7 December 2008 quoted by Bandit 2009, 38-39).

In addition, the Government is now in the process of passing another economic stimulus package 2, the details of which had not been released when this report was drafted.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The current Financial Crisis started from the United States in 2007 and the crisis deepened in September 2008 as stock markets worldwide crashed and entered a period of high volatility. This was followed by the failures of a considerable number of banks, mortgage lenders and insurance companies in the subsequent weeks. The whole world, including South-East Asia, has now been affected by the financial contagion and economic slow down. For Thailand, the current crisis will severely impact the country due to its export orientation and its reliance on external demand.

The impact of the crisis on Thailand is unevenly distributed among different sectors. The Financial Crisis has not greatly affected the country, partly because of its experience from the 1997 Crisis. The real sector has been hard hit as Thailand is highly dependent on exports (share of exports to real GDP is more than 70% and share of net exports to real

GDP is about 16 %). Exports declined by about 9.4 per cent in dollar value in the fourth quarter of 2008. Sharp contractions were observed, particularly in industries that have been the main drivers of export growth in recent years, namely, electronics and automotive industries. Tourism has also been affected not only because of the crisis, but because of many negative factors such as bombings in Songkla province in early August; political instability which intensified from late August onwards; political conflicts which led to the declaration of a state of emergency in Bangkok; the closure of airports and train services in the southern provinces in September; and eventually the closure of the Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang Airports from 25 November to 3 December 2008. As a result, the number of foreign tourist arrivals in 2008 totalled 14.3 million, contracting 1.3 per cent from the previous year. Nevertheless, tourism revenue from foreign tourists amounted to 588 billion baht, increasing 5.9 per cent.

It has been anticipated and forecast by many reliable agencies that the current global crisis will be a short one taking a V-shape, with the worst situation in 2009. The real GDP growth rate decreased from 4.9 per cent in 2007 to 2.7 per cent in 2008. It has been forecast to be around -2 to -2.5 per cent in 2009. For 2010, the World Bank has forecast that the economy will recovery with a 1.7 per cent growth rate. The Asian Development Bank, however, predicts that the GDP growth rate will reach 3.0 per cent.

In the South-East Asian region, women are the most vulnerable. It is believed that they are likely to be disproportionately affected by the crisis.

- Women are overrepresented in sectors where the crisis has led to numerous job cuts, especially in the following industries: exports manufacturing, garment industry, electronics and services;
- Women tend to be employed in precarious jobs where they are more likely to be dismissed first or experience aggravated working conditions, e.g. as migrant workers, and in the garment industry; and
- 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 reduction in remittance income.

The impact of the crisis on women in Thailand can be seen via the labour market as the proportion of Thai women in the labour 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, tourism, as well as FDI. In turn, manufacturing production and capacity utilization has declined, which result in decreased demand for labour in related industries. The labour market adjustment has resulted in reduced work hours, underemployment, unemployment, and people who have to leave the labour market. The reduced income and adjustment to the difficult labour market were some reasons for the changes in the patterns of consumption and other coping strategies that in turn affect women's social conditions.

There is 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 per cent compared to men's 1.3 per cent in 2008), at least about 125,700 women (in four exporting industries) are subject to being laid-off or moved from decent work to more depressed employment (women's employment in the four risky sub-sectors alone declined 12,500 persons between 2007-2008 and 113,200 persons between 1Q 2008-1Q 2009).

In addition, between 2007-2008, **319,000 women from other occupations were pushed to work as services workers and sale workers.** On the other hand, the level of **women's underemployment during the current Global Crisis is more than double** what occurred during the 1997 Crisis although the trend dropped a little from 2007 to 2008, particularly the severe underemployment group.

In 2008, the number of women moderately underemployed was 1.91 million and women severely underemployed was 0.88 million. This number, however, decreased from the 2007 levels. This phenomenon could be explained by the “added worker hypothesis” which implies that women try to work longer hours during economic hardships to supplement their family income. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that in 2008, women’s working hours per week increased to an average of about 45 hours.

Although the NSO survey indicates that the average nominal wage income of women employees in the private sector increased during the crisis, the women’s real wage may not have increased and the wages of women in the informal sector are not known.

Many women are home workers. According to surveys by NSO, in 2007 the number of women home workers was 337,526 out of the total of 440,251, accounting for 76.7 per cent of the total. This type of worker is vulnerable to a decline in exports because their work is not permanent and depends on transitory demand.

Thai women are also vulnerable to other social impacts of the crisis, but the assessment of social impact of the current Financial Crisis is difficult for three major reasons. First, there is a dearth of up-to-date data on the changing social conditions (such as health, education, crime, etc.) as related to women. Some indicators may be used, but they cannot give clear-cut conclusions. Second, when data are available, they are not classified by gender; thus, it is difficult to assess the impact on women. Third, the impact of the Financial Crisis on women’s social condition is usually hard to interpret mainly because of their complex structure and interaction among the variables. Thus, when reading empirical results of the crisis’ impact on women, these limitations should be kept in mind.

The crisis affects women’s health condition, even in the short term. The increased burden, more work for less money, changes in work condition, tension, etc., could result in health problems. In addition, the expected decrease in health expenditures overall by household was realized, as people spent significantly less after the crisis than before on health services. Expenditures on public and private services were both reduced. Expenditures on medical services declined steeply, but self-medication expenses rose slightly. During the 1997 Financial Crisis, there was also a shift from using medical services of private hospitals to clinics in order to reduce health care expenditure. Considering the employment situation of women mentioned above, there is a great risk of health problems among them. A few obvious examples of women’s social problems during the current crisis are illustrated below.

During the 2008 Crisis, women’s suicide rate increased by 8.6 per cent while men’s suicide rate declined 0.9 per cent.

The trend of education transition is a blend between lower secondary education graduates and upper secondary education graduates. The transition rate of the lower secondary education dropped from 93.3 in 2007 to 91.7 in 2008 while the transition rate of the upper secondary education increased from 87.8 in 2007 to 88.1 in 2008. The increase in transition rate of the upper secondary education graduates may be due to “the discouraged workers effect” of the crisis.

Although the number of prostitution cases between 2007 and 2008 declined from 36,042 to 34,197, the year-on-year comparison between 1Q2008 and 1Q 2009 shows an increase from 10,507 cases to 12,562, an increase of about 20 per cent.

Some of the most serious cases of social problems during the crisis are drug addiction and drug trafficking. The number of narcotic drug cases increased from 150,464 in 2007 to 213,717 in 2008 while the number of female drug addicts increased from 1,101 in 2007 to 1,172 in 2008, an increase of about 6.4 per cent.

Other social impacts in connection with the crisis also include domestic violence, divorce, rape, human trafficking, sexual harassments, etc. Data on these incidences have been provided in the text.

A qualitative assessment of women workers affected by the Financial Crisis has been conducted to capture the qualitative aspects (troubles) of women who have been affected by the current crisis. Two focus group workshops were organized in June 2009 with women factory workers, one in Pathumthani consisting of ten women workers who are facing reduction of work days and hours and are subject to being laid-off within the next 6 months. Another group consists of ten workers, eight women and two men. All are from a garment factory in Samutsakorn. This group has already been laid off and is protesting to obtain their unpaid salaries and severance payment.

All of these women workers have double or triple roles. They are gainfully employed, provide for their own families and financially support their parents back in their hometowns. Some of them have to take care of a disable husband; some have a paralysed elder brother; and some live together with a grandmother and a niece in Bangkok. Many send remittances to support parents living in the provinces.

Most of those interviewed maintained that their lives after the crisis are not considerably different compared to before the crisis because they are still poor. Nevertheless, many stories were told about their increased difficulties during the crisis. Many have been pressured by their employers who have reduced overtime, reduced shifts and/or normal working hours. The employers have also cut pay and welfare payments. The (garment) company (where they were laid-off in Samutsakorn) had tried, for two years, a number of ways to pressure workers to resign even before the onset of the economic crisis. The workers said this is a trick to avoid having to be responsible for severance pay. Also, this will help the employers avoid being accused of unfairness when the labours are laid-off. The factory at the same time recruited new workers to replace those leaving the factory. The factory in question has already pressured off 400-500 workers in two years. Before its closure (insolvency) of the factory, there were eventually only 41 workers left. Finally, the business immediately closed without formal notice. During the two years of intense pressure, the workers had noticed the company's announcements for job vacancies everyday, so they had never thought that the situation would be so critical to the point that the business would be closed.

Their lives are miserable because of unemployment and reduced income, and the psychological problems due to their employer's unjust treatment. The laid-off workers have not been paid their salaries for three months and nor have they received their severance pay. When they made complaints to government officials, they were ignored or even scolded. Many of them cannot afford to send remittances home as they themselves are starving. These women have employed various coping strategies. Some women thought of going back home in the provinces to start a small tailoring business or food shop at home. Some workers are too old to be hired by new companies.

There is a gap in the social security system. Those workers who have not been paid their salaries for three months have not paid their social security premiums for the same duration because they did not receive a salary. Moreover, their employer did not pay their premiums either. Many complaints have also been made about the poor service of the social security system. On the other hand, provident fund is mostly available in large companies. These workers do not have or cannot afford these kind of savings.

Some women viewed that a labour union is complicated as it has to be registered and is subject to many rules and regulations. They think that government authorities do not understand labour unions. Sometimes, union leaders are laid-off and the labour union collapses. Union leaders are always at the top of the list of those who will be laid-off.

Assistance from the Government is available, but it usually misses the target because it does not solve the problems of workers. The campaign of "2,000 Baht for National

Rescue” is of little help. The Government campaign of employment service is also good, but offered vacancies do not usually match workers’ skills or competences. Many times, the new work place is too far away from workers’ residences. Workers have to look for and move to a nearer one. Moreover, they did not have enough money to pay the deposit for a new residence.

The Government’s skill training programmes do not ensure job opportunities. Women who had been laid-off from insolvent companies took a course on ‘Thai Dessert Cooking’ for ten days. During their training, each of them received a daily allowance of 120 baht per day for ten days. After their training was completed, they have not yet started up their own businesses due to the lack of funds.

The “loans for workers” measure is not working. A collective group of ten workers received a loan of 50,000 baht. Women workers in the focus group thought this is not easy because banks have to check their credit ratings and liability. Every worker has debt of varying amounts.

On “free education”, although schools do not charge tuition fees, there are still other costs such as food, transportation, etc. Some schools collect contributions of 600-800 baht from students; therefore, this campaign does not help workers to save much.

The monthly “Old-age Allowance” of 500 baht for older persons was commented on by many women as not being effective. Their old parents in the provinces have not yet received any money and do not know when they will be paid. This campaign seems helpful for workers to save expenses in supporting their parents. However, parents of many workers are under 60 years of age, so they do not yet benefit from the campaign. What they can do is just to ask their parents to economize, as they can no longer afford to send remittances every month.

Women workers would like to request the Government to pay more attention to workers who are employed by foreign investors in large companies. These foreign employers should have a heart and take good care of their workers. They come and go, leaving workers behind, not adequately protected. In addition to this group of women’s request, there has been a strong demand expressed by many women workers groups that the Government set up child day-care centres for their children.

The Government’s responses to the Financial Crisis started in early 2008 through macro economic policy worth more than 1.2 million millions baht (Department of Employment, 2008). More active government policies and measures to respond to the Financial Crisis, particularly its impact on the labour market, were seen during the last quarter of 2008 when the Financial Crisis became more serious.

Meanwhile during the middle of 2008, the government also issued instant measures to mitigate the impact of the Financial Crisis in the shortterm. It is called “6 Measures 6 Months for Every Thai to Fight the Financial Crisis”. The measures were set to cover the period of 1 August 2008 to 31 January 2009, but have been extended for another 6 months. The instant measures include: reduction of excise tax on gasoline; control of price of cooking gas; free use of water supply not exceeding 50 square metres/month; free use of electricity not exceeding 80 units and half price for between 81-150 units; 800 free buses /day; and free 3rd class train rides.

A NGO dealing with labour issues, Committee on United Thai Workers, conducted a feedback survey of workers in Bangkok and its vicinity on “How Do Workers Benefit from the Government’s 6 Measures for Economic Stimulation” during August – September 2008. It received 217 responses. The findings in the conclusion were that the 6 measures did not meet the needs of the labourers. All measures did not pass the test, except the free electricity that almost failed.

On 4 November 2008, the cabinet approved a national budget of 1.835 million millions baht, inclusive of an additional economic package of 100,000 million baht aimed at stimulating the economy from the World Financial Crisis. The main targets of the economic package were farmers and the poor. The economic package budget is aimed at creating employment with major conditions that the money has to be spent very quickly; activities have to be in the form of projects; and the projects must be completed in one year (by the end of 2009).

MOL has submitted 10 projects containing the aforementioned measures for approval on 17 November 2008.

The present government under the leadership of Abhisit Vejjajiva who assumed the duty of Prime Minister on 17 December 2008 has implemented the policy and measures approved by the cabinet during the second stage.

While many workers and union leaders have commented that the results of these projects do not meet their expectations, **all of these government response projects are not gender responsive**. Women have been recognized for their triple roles and hardships as well as vulnerability.

6.2 Recommendations for government, regional institutions, and donors.

1. The government, regional institutions, and donors should work together closely in a collaborative manner and/or share information on the situation of women, particularly during the crisis.
2. The government, regional institutions, and donors should try to understand women's situations and provide assistance based on up-to-date information and assessments of their problems.
3. There is a lack of timely survey data and studies on the current crisis; as a result, there is not much information and data on women and the impacts of the current World Financial Crisis. Information, such as the social impacts and coping strategies of families and individuals, should be collected and disseminated as quickly as possible. Most failures to provide assistance to the crisis victims are due to the poor, inefficient, unreliable data and absence of a database. The list of crisis victims should be broken down by gender, age, and location.
4. The government, with assistances from regional institutions and donors, should respond urgently to the needs of women workers. At least three of which can be identified: (1) the setting up of child day-care centres for workers' children in industrial estate areas so that there are sufficient numbers and at the quality that meet the workers' needs; (2) allowing women to be adequately represented in tripartite committees, and (3) monitoring foreign investors' ignorance and maltreatment of workers, particularly women.
5. The government should strengthen or improve the quality and effectiveness of the design and implementation of measures to respond to the crisis. This includes the identification of targeted victims to more efficiently reach the right or deserving targets. For example, there are a few questions in regards to the 2000 baht social allowance such as who should receive it, how and how much to distribute? Moreover, training programmes that face difficulties in recruiting trainees should be examined along with opportunities that trainees have to apply the skills they acquired after their training. Other problems of government measures expressed by workers should also be reviewed as soon as possible. Regional institutions and donors should set some conditions for the Government to meet this endeavour.

6. The Government should give priority to strengthening women's security which should include at least five components: employment security, income security, health security, family or home security, and security from violence and crime. Women are more likely to be laid-off, receive reduced overtime (OT), and be replaced by sub-contractors. This results in income insecurity, health, and family problems.
7. Many Thai women are playing triple roles as they are their family's and their parents' social safety nets. In the event of a crisis, the role of women should be strengthened and empowered. In particular, employment promotion during a crisis should be pro-women.
8. In the short term, a call centre should be immediately set up to register those in trouble. In the rural areas, the Tambon Administration Organization may be encouraged or ordered to set up a help centre to deal with both financial and social problems. Women can be employed to serve at the call centre, while women can be given a priority to receive public assistance.
9. In the long run, a more systematic and efficient income security system should be developed which places emphasis on helping women. At the same time, education and training should be made available to crisis-affected women together with follow up measures to ensure they can become employed again.

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