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Problems Faced By Women Journalists In Indonesia

By

Ninuk Mardiana
I'd never dreamed to become a journalist, not even in my family had a dream that one of the family would become a journalist. So when I applied to the advertisement that the national newspaper looking for a young journalists, they became puzzled. Why should I choose that profession, especially I was the eldest and only daughter in the family. My mother was the one who openly objected my desire to become a journalist.

Fortunately I have a democratic father and fiance, who let and urge me choose what I think is best for me. As a matter of fact, my fiance (now he is my husband) was the one who urged me to become a journalist. He himself, was a press campus activist when he was in the college. He urged me to became a journalist because he knew that I could gain a lot of experiences, could became a more independent and more mature person.

I myself, never had a vision what kind of profession journalist was. In Indonesia, person who has a college education is still an exclusive position. So for many people, and I experience it more when I meet people during my work, it seems ridiculous that such an exclusive position be wasted in the journalist profession. People do not appraise journalist as a prestige profession.

But it is not the problem facing by women journalists only. It is faced by all journalists. And it seems people more and more appraise journalist profession since the big newspaper/magazine corporation need more and more educated journalists to fulfill the rising demand of good, accurate information and depth report.

On the first day in the newspaper I had been assigned to have an interview on Sunday evening at 19.00. I felt rather awkward because I had never went out alone in the evening. So my father and brother waited for me outside the newspaper office. Of course I asked them to go home, because I haven't finished my work. When at least I arrived at home around nine thirty in the evening, my father still waited for me.
The story I told above described part of the problems faced by women journalists in my country. Since we are bringing up in the east cultural surrounding, we are still stick to the east norm. I don’t mean that women in Indonesia can not gain their career the same as men. But still we are women have our limitation from the culture and natural law.

When I got married, I didn’t have any problem with my husband, since he was the one who urged me to enter the journalist profession. It was usual for him to arrive first at home then me. It was also usual for me to have a reporting assignment outside the Jakarta for days. My family, my neighbour and my friend could accept the fact that I usually went home more late than any usual wives came home from work. (In Indonesia, there is still a bad rumour among the neighbour when a woman comes home late in the evening).

But that privilege changed when I became pregnant and have a child. I have to go home earlier and I can’t do the outside town reporting. It is also ask more for my energy, share it between home and office. Sometimes I had a debate with my husband, wether I could go on with my profession or I should stop for a while and brought up our child. After that I could continue my old profession as a journalist, or may be else which didn’t need time as journalist profession.

Indeed it is a hard luck to make a choice between a journalist and ‘only’ a mother and stay at home. Because I feel more and more loved this profession. It gives the freedom feeling. Free from the formal office regulation which almost another offices have.

Fortunately, until now I still can harmonise between my profession and home affair. But I must admit that sometime I feel I can not go on with my profession, especially when my son is almost two years old. It is an age that a child need more mother caring than when he is still a baby.

Other than my husband, I must thank my newspaper company for giving so much understanding. When I gave birth to my son, I have three months leave with full salary. I also could be back to my old position as a journalist in agricultural economic. The editor gave
the permission to leave early in the afternoon as soon as I finished my reporting/job. He didn't also assigned me to do the night reporting.

I also had been chosen to act as a science and technology editor while the former editor continued his study in London.

Of course not everything going smooth all the time. There is also a pro and contra about having a women journalists in the newspaper. The reason is clear, although I think not too fair. A woman journalist can not be assigned to report the fire, for example, in the middle of the night, because security reason for the journalist. The women journalists' productivity, once they have a family, will become lower comparing before they have a family. There is also a few of our source persons which differ their acceptance between women and men journalists. What are their real reasons, never clear to me.

Almost all of Indonesia newspaper accept women journalists as their valuable assets. They give the same opportunity for the men journalists and women journalists to gain their career and achievement. It can be seen in the same salary and other facilities gain by men or women journalists.

They also can tolerate the limitation of a married journalists. Because the women journalists themselves can compensate their limitation to other field that need a little travel outside the town or need a late evening reporting. For example my task now in the science and technology desk. Almost all of the reporting can be done from behind the desk, or just inside the city if I need to interview someone.

The big problem I still faced, and I think it is faced also by other women journalists in Indonesia who has the same ambition with me, is how to share between my ambition as a good and professional journalist and at the same time become a good mother and wife. For some women journalists, they prefer not to have a family at all. Or they prefer to work for the weekly or monthly magazine, which has a looser deadline time.

The conclusion is, there is the same opportunity for men and women journalists in Indonesia to gain their achievement.
It is in the the different field from the men journalists. But unless the editor or all the system in the newspaper give the conducive work atmosphere for women journalists, women journalists cannot achieve their ambition as a professional journalists. Maybe if the women journalists have more knowledge in newsroom management, they have more opportunity to compensate their limitation to other field. *** (Ninuk Mardiana, Indonesia)