Examining women journalists in Surabaya: a critical ethnographic media portrait study

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Abstract The current scenario in the public sphere sees women's presence, yet certain professions, including journalism, remain primarily dominated by men. This gender disparity not only affects media policies but also perpetuates stereotypes hindering women's advancement in the industry, thus becoming a subject of interest for the researchers focusing on Surabaya's media landscape. This study aims to analyse the portrait of women in the media by focusing on female journalists in Surabaya, Indonesia. This research used critical ethnography and standpoint theory as a foundation for analysing the phenomenon. Based on the results of the researcher's search, the number of female journalists in Surabaya is at most 30% compared to male journalists. This research uses critical ethnography and standpoint theory, which are used as a foundation to analyse the phenomenon. Based on the results of the researcher's search, the number of female journalists in Surabaya is at most 30% compared to male journalists. The results of this study show clearly that society's norms and stereotypes about gender that do not prioritise female journalists are the cause of discrimination. In fact, this discrimination often occurs unintentionally due to factors in the organisational structure and environment that do not support the inclusion of women. This leads to poor representation of women in the media until there is an endless cycle of the system.

Keywords: editorial; female journalists; gender equality; journalism

INTRODUCTION

Currently, the public sphere are commonplace where women are working, however, not in all fields women can easily enter a specific industry or profession (Epstein, 2023a; Rottenberg, 2019; Siltanen & Stanworth, 2023). If we observe some professions or fields of work, the proportion is still mostly filled by men and is considered as a masculine profession, one good example of this is the profession of journalists. Surabaya, as the capital city of East Java province, is one of the areas where the number of journalists is not balanced. This disproportionate number of human resources impacts the position of women journalists in the newsroom (Blumell et al., 2023). Again, Alliance of Independent Journalists (AIJ) data shows that only 6% of female journalists sit as editor-in-chief. This means that 94 per cent or the majority of female journalists work as reporters rather than as decision-makers in the media industry (Lani & Azmi, 2023). In other words, male journalists are still dominant compared to women and few female journalists are at the top of management.

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The small number of female journalists in the editorial office ultimately has an impact on media policies that are less friendly to the needs of women (Leiva & Kimber, 2022; Santos et al., 2022). For example, coverage tasks or wage issues are more favourable for men. In addition, the news often related to victims of violence against women is made to corner women themselves. The media as a social control and the fourth pillar of democracy this ordains the existence of gender bias in this profession.

The question that often arises is the difficulty of female journalists getting promoted to strategic positions. This is due to the inherent stereotype that female journalists are often considered less productive than male journalists (Beasley, 2023; Konow-Lund & Høiby, 2023). Research on the face of women in the media industry has been widely researched by previous researchers such as research conducted by Stahel and Schoen (2020) titled 'Female Journalists Under Attack? Explaining Gender Differences in Reactions to Audiences' Attacks'. In their research, Stahel and Schoen based on mediation analysis of online survey data of 637 Swiss representative journalists, showed that women are more likely to use avoidance strategies than men because women are more stressed by attacks. This increased stress is thought to be due to differences in gender role socialisation. Conversely, although women are more severely affected by attacks than men, this cannot explain their greater likelihood of avoiding attacks. The second study was conducted by Miller and Lewis (2022) with the title 'Journalists, Harassment, and Emotional Labour: The Case of Women in On-air Roles at US Local Television Stations'. In their research, Miller and Lewis showed that women with journalist roles faced four main types of harassment: (1) intrusive in-person harassment, (2) physical and abusive harassment, (3) online harassment as unwanted sexual advances, and (4) online harassment as threats and criticism. The next research is a study titled 'Same Threats, Different Platforms? Female Journalists' Experiences of Online Gender-based Violence in Selected Newsrooms in Namibia' conducted by Zviyita and Mare (2024). In their research, it shows that female journalists experience various forms of online harassment such as name calling, body shaming, trolling, verbal abuse, sex blackmail, sharing intimate images without consent, photo manipulation, cyberstalking, doxing, hacking, receiving unwanted and offensive sexual messages. While these findings are true in some newsrooms in Northern countries, there is an absence of systematic research examining the experiences of women journalists in specific newsrooms in Africa in general and Namibia in particular. Based on data obtained from interviews with female journalists in selected newsrooms in Namibia, overall, the research findings suggest that cases of gender-based online violence against female journalists are still negligible when compared to other contexts, but they do occur. This emerging phenomenon goes largely unreported.

From the three studies above, it is known that various types of obstacles are faced by female journalists, one of which is in the form of sexual harassment both offline and online, this is due to gender stereotypes that occur in their work environment. The researcher sees that there is a research gap that is then built by the researcher, whether these things are also experienced by female journalists who in the context of this research are journalists in Surabaya. Through this research, researchers will provide recommendations to policy holders in the media industry to be fairer and increase the quantity of female journalists. The writing presented by the media can also be fairer and in favour of women's interests.

Based on the background above, the researchers are interested in examining how the face of women in the media when studied with critical ethnography on women journalists in Surabaya media. The researcher chose the city of Surabaya because the researcher saw that Surabaya is a big city in Indonesia and many media and media representatives are based in this city.

METHODOLOGY

The method used in this research is qualitative with a critical ethnographic approach. In qualitative research, data analysis is carried out carefully without including personal assumptions so that the data obtained from the field can be narrated properly. In that way, the research results can be explored in depth in accordance with qualitative principles (Yulianty & Jufri, 2020). The researchers used a critical paradigm with a critical ethnographic research approach. In this study, standpoint theory is used. According to Harding, standpoint theory sees that a person will have a point of view in seeing social phenomena. These social phenomena are formed based on demographic characteristics, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual attraction, and economic status.

According to Guzman (2018), standpoint theory is the focus of feminist studies because it can offer and present thoughts not only from the perspective of individuals, but also society as different experiences and perspectives will make a person realise the consequences of this.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The term 'gender' is common in society. Gender and sex are often equated, but they are very different (Giudice, 2021; Tripp & Munson, 2022). There are two genders in this world: male and female. Look at how these two sexes differ physically, for example, women menstruate, give birth, and breastfeed, while men do not have these traits. Meanwhile, the concept of gender is not necessarily about physical differences (Rioux et al., 2022). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), gender refers to the socially and culturally constructed characteristics of women, men, girls and boys. However, in general, the term gender does not refer to the physical sex between men and women (Reale et al., 2023; Regitz-Zagrosek & Gebhard, 2023; Sullivan, 2022). The term gender refers to differences in the characteristics of men and women based on social and cultural constructions, relating to their nature, status, position and role in society (Butler, 2020).

Furthermore, gender refers to the way humans view or perceive women or men that is not based on biological sex differences (Colineaux et al., 2022; Conley & Klein, 2022). Gender in all aspects of human life creates differences between women and men including the social creation of women's lower position than men (Williams, 2023). For example, women are known as gentle, beautiful, emotional, or motherly. While men are considered strong, rational, male, and mighty (Zereen & Muna, 2023). The traits themselves are interchangeable. This means that there are men who are emotional, gentle, maternal, while there are also women who are strong, rational and mighty (Graham, 2022). From the various opinions above, the researcher concludes that the term gender refers to social values that apply in society based on gender.

The concept of gender is an inherent trait of men and women as a result of social and cultural construction, such as women who are considered to be meek, beautiful, emotional, maternal and so on (Riaz, 2023). Meanwhile, men are considered as strong, rational, virile and mighty (Laughren, 2022). However, these traits are not absolute, because there are also women who are strong and rational while there are also men who are meek and emotional. We can also see this from the era and class of society, for example in certain times and tribes where women are stronger than men. Thus, the characteristics of women and men are interchangeable and change over time, according to the place and class of society (Fakih et al., 2020).

This gender conversation is closely related to the concept of equality. Gender equality is contained in the Annex of Presidential Instruction No.9 of 2000, stating that gender justice is a process to be fair to men and women. Gender is intended to address the gender injustices that occur which include marginalisation, subordination, stereotyping, violence, and workload (Newman et al., 2023). Each of these manifestations of gender injustice is inseparable, interrelated and dialectically influential. The existence of gender studies basically aims to reduce and eliminate these gender injustices. In other words, gender studies aim to realise social justice, and social justice cannot be realised without gender justice in society. Gender justice usually refers to the application of social justice in terms of providing equal opportunities between men and women. Justice here does not mean that men and women are equal in all respects, but it does mean that the provision of an opportunity or access is not dependent on gender differences. Gender justice thus means that men and women have the opportunity to realise their rights and potential to contribute to political, economic, social and cultural development, and can equally enjoy the results of that development.

Talking about gender equality, some people think that this problem has been solved. Women are now given the opportunity to go to school as high as possible or work in the field they love (Cordua & Netz, 2022; Epstein, 2023b; Hancock, 2023). At first glance, this is true, but the issue of gender equality is an issue that is not exhausted to be discussed, until now. The problem of gender inequality is not only about domestic roles that are considered the nature of women and public areas that are the domain of men (Wandi, 2015). As stated by Norberg and Johansson (2021) in their research that although there are many opportunities for women to work in the industry, a deeper analysis of this shows that women who enter the industry are faced with gender-biassed attitudes, discrimination, and unrealistic demands. Not only that, in media coverage there is often a construction of gender bias. In news texts, it is still common to find

controversial gender bias occurring. In addition to controversial gender bias, cases of sexuality are also often found in a media where online media tend to put themselves in the position of the perpetrator and have not prioritised women as victims of sexual violence. This case makes it difficult for women to pursue their career even though they have the same rights, so continuous efforts are needed from various fields in society, such as education, work, and politics.

Based on the researcher's analysis, gender-biassed media coverage and the tendency to use diction that corners women is due to the lack of female journalists in the media so that the news made is not gender-perspective (Setiawan, 2011). Media as large as Kompas daily which has a total of 114 journalists, only 37 are female journalists and 77 are male journalists. Likewise, out of 64 editors, only 18 are women and the rest are male editors (Kompas R&D Data, 2023). Female journalists have an equally important role as male journalists in the media industry. A journalist, whether male or female, becomes a conduit in conveying information to the audience. As for the organisational context, female journalists still get restrictions on the scope of their development. This is due to the fact that there are still few women in the media world, causing obstacles regarding the fulfilment of rights that still need to be perfected and the discrimination received. Meanwhile, in the industrial sphere there is often still gender discrimination against women. The social reality that has been formed in which women are considered as weak figures causes differences in treatment between women and men in the workplace. Discrimination that occurs within the scope of the media is generally not far from how the media views its female journalists.

The lack of women's participation in journalism not only impacts the small number of female journalists, but also results in their lack of presence in the highest management positions in the media industry (Cunha & Lúcio Martins, 2023). The stereotype that women focus more on family matters and are less productive than their male counterparts remains a significant barrier. In the context of media companies, where worker loyalty is considered paramount, taking maternity and breastfeeding leave is often perceived as an unfavourable burden on the company.

The quantitative aspect of the shortage of female journalists is not limited. It also leads to an imbalance in gender representation in leadership positions. This underrepresentation can lead to policies and regulations made by the media not fully reflecting the interests and views of women. Furthermore, this imbalance may violate journalistic ethics, which say that the media should convey the various perspectives and interests of society.

In addition, the number of women working as journalists can have a negative impact on the type of news that is produced. If newsrooms need more diversity, it is likely that issues relating to women, or the general public will be ignored or not get the attention they deserve. This can lead to the production of news that is unbalanced and does not pay attention to important issues that directly affect women. Therefore, it is important to understand that maintaining gender equality in the workplace and supporting women in journalism is part of making the media fairer, balanced and in line with the needs of the general public.

Domestication of Women Journalists in the Editorial Room

The practice of life in the media industry, of course, professionalism is seen from the productivity of female journalists in covering and writing news. So that late permits or absences for domestic reasons are often considered unprofessional. On the other hand, based on the construction of a patriarchal culture rooted in this country, women must play a role in the care and supervision of the family. According to Simone De Beauvoir, women actually live in a myth formed by men (de Beauvoir, 2013). Here we can understand that the meaning of women becomes shallow because the media industry hinders the existence of women in the public sphere and makes a barrier to the scope of women's activities based on male formation.

The problem of the limited number of female journalists certainly has an impact on the difficulty of women occupying important positions in various media. One of the lucky women to occupy a good position in a big media like Kompas is Agnes Swetta Pandia. Agnes's career started as a female journalist in Medan (her hometown), then moved to Surabaya, rose to become an editor at the Nusantara desk at Kompas headquarters in Jakarta, and is currently the bureau chief of Kompas East Java. Based on the results of the interview, Agnes stated that her career as a journalist was not constrained because of the strong support system from her family. However, not all female journalists accept this. She said that many female journalists seem to be

less professional because domestic affairs constrain them, so they often get late permits or even do not work.

The domestication of women journalists, in its broader context, is a complexity that is not only limited to the double burden stereotype attached to their role. One aspect that complicates this situation is the inequality in assignment of coverage locations, which ultimately impacts career development and diversification of reporting. In general, there is a tendency for the media to favour male journalists when dealing with coverage that is considered 'risky' such as sports, conflict areas, or crime. In contrast, women are often directed to topics that are considered 'safer' such as lifestyle, entertainment, or business economics.

A concrete example of this inequality can be illustrated through the experience of Retna Cresta of the Daily Disway, who revealed that when tasked with covering football matches in the country, she was not allowed to do so due to security considerations. This situation reflects inequalities in the allocation of responsibilities in the field, where matches deemed 'high risk' are more often assigned to male journalists, while women are more often directed to coverage deemed as 'safe'.

In addition, the burden of female identity is a real obstacle for journalists who are ambitious to engage in coverage of topics that are considered 'masculine'. Stereotypes of physical appearance that are considered 'too feminine' often limit their opportunities to engage in coverage that is considered more 'heavy' or 'serious'. In fact, the criteria for assignment and assessment of news quality should more focus on the technical capacity and insight of journalists, not just views on identity or physical appearance.

To address these complexities, concrete steps are needed to create an inclusive and supportive work environment for women journalists. This could involve changes in editorial policies, active engagement of media leaders to eliminate gender bias, and the provision of training to help women journalists overcome barriers they may face. Only with these concerted efforts can we realise a more equal journalism industry that more fairly represents the diversity of society.

The Lack of Involvement of Women Journalists in Professional Organisations
It cannot be denied that in an organisation, male dominance is still deeply rooted. In fact, women also have the ability to lead an organisation like men. It's just a matter of opportunities that are often not given. This also happens in the professional organisation of journalists, such as PWI (Indonesian Journalists Association) East Java where out of 60 administrators only 6 women sit as administrators (PWI R&D Data, 2023). And the top leaders in the organisation are all male. This shows the fact that women's leadership roles are still in the lower position in various fields, including in organisations.

This is as reported by the gender-sensitive indicators for the media published by UNESCO, that to build a gender-perspective media climate, women also need to be involved in professional journalist organisations. Based on a report from the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), 66 percent of female journalists are not involved in professional organisations at all (Magdeline.id, 2023). This data is in line with data released by PWI where out of a total of 585 members of the PWI organisation, 532 are men and 53 are women (PWI R&D Data, 2023). Based on the data above, it can be seen that professional journalistic organisations still show their inclusiveness towards women. Whereas the organisation should be a space to forge women to be free to express their opinions and participate. If many female journalists are not involved in the management of the organisation, it is certain that gender equality in the media will be difficult to achieve.

Various considerations are given as reasons for the dominance of male journalists in the editorial ranks. Such as the availability of time and energy (Eckert & Assmann, 2021; Lee & Kim, 2022). It is embedded in the minds of these media workers that male journalists are considered to be able to dedicate more time in total from morning to midnight for work and editorial purposes, which not only think in terms of news editorial but also media profitability. In contrast to female journalists who are considered totality for their work in terms of time and energy. There is still a strong assumption that female journalists who are married and have children (Guo & Fang, 2023), the time dedicated to work will be very limited and no longer want to develop. In addition, there is still a strong negative stigma from society for women who are out of the house until late at night and are considered unsafe (Madriz, 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). From this

imbalance in the number of female journalists compared to men, it creates the impression that the world of media and the journalistic profession is a man's world because men's power and control over the media is more dominant. Referring to research conducted by Herawati, women media workers interpret themselves as: 1) women who have differences with men but are not interpreted negatively, 2) women who are the same and equal even with men, 3) women who are treated fairly in families and schools, 4) stronger or have advantages over men around them, 5) the task of taking care of children is a woman's job and 6) if there is a conflict between taking care of children and working in the office, women choose to stop working (Herawati, 2016). Based on the above analysis, the condition of women in the journalist environment can be depicted in Figure 1.
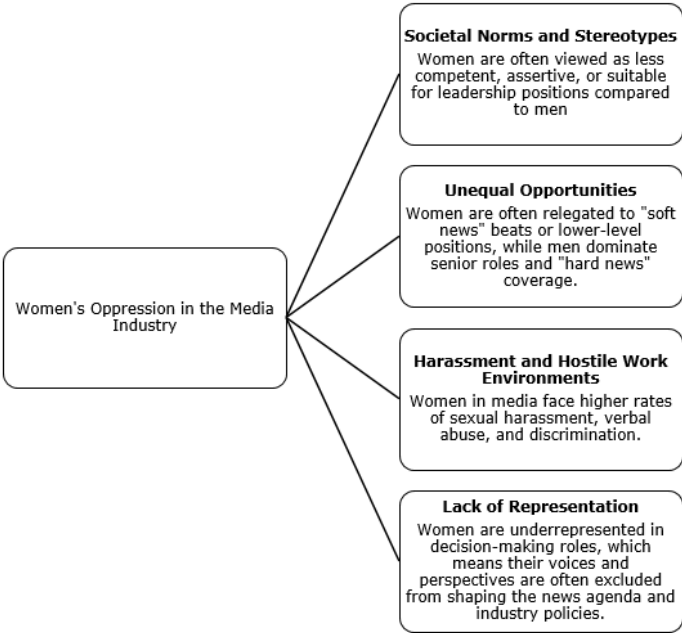

Figure 1. Women's Oppression in the Media Industry
(source: research documentation, 2024)

It can be seen that the discriminated condition of women journalists occurs based on the existence of societal norms and stereotypes towards gender that focus on women. In fact, based on the researcher's investigation, many of these biases occur unintentionally due to the influence of the environment and organisational structures that do not support the existence of women. In addition, one of the things that needs to be highlighted is that some female journalists are unable to speak out for fear of reprisals. The underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles leads to news agendas that ignore women's issues and problems. This, of course, if repeated, can shape viewers' perceptions of reality and contribute to the internalisation of discriminatory beliefs. Thus, there is a systemic cycle that cannot be stopped. Therefore, government policies are needed to address this issue. Some of the things that the government can do based on the results of in-depth analysis are first in the context of rules, the government can establish and enforce laws prohibiting gender discrimination in the workplace, including the media industry. Second, the government needs to create a mechanism for compliance with the law. Third, it needs to take actions that encourage media organisations to adopt the policies that have been determined, especially in terms of promoting gender equality. Fourth, increasing public awareness about gender equality, this can be through the learning curriculum so that people are introduced to gender education from an early age. Finally, support the independence of journalists and other media organisations, so that discriminated journalists, especially women, are not afraid to speak out without thinking about the repercussions of speaking out. The problem of discrimination against women journalists is not limited to Indonesia but is a global phenomenon. Solutions require a multi-faceted approach that involves not only government action but also the efforts of media organisations, civil society, and individuals.

CONCLUSION

Although women play an important role in the media industry, they are still far outnumbered by men, especially in key positions and coverage topics that are considered 'risky'. This is due to gender stereotypes, patriarchal culture, women's double burden, biassed editorial policies, and lack of support. As a result, reporting is unbalanced and does not represent society fairly. To overcome this gender gap, efforts need to be made such as increasing the number of female journalists, providing equal opportunities in all fields, changing editorial policies, providing training, and encouraging women to get involved in professional organisations. Thus, the media industry can become more inclusive and fairer for everyone, and women can have equal opportunities to work and occupy important positions in the media industry.

Although there have been many studies on the roles and challenges of women journalists in the media industry, there are still many things that need to be studied further. Here are some recommendations for future research: first, research on the impact of gender representation in the media on audiences. This research can analyse how gender representation in the media, both in news and advertisements, affects the perception and behaviour of audiences, especially women. Next, research on strategies to increase women's participation in journalist professional organisations. This research can identify factors that hinder women's participation in journalist professional organisations and formulate strategies to overcome them. Research including this research is expected to make a significant contribution to efforts to achieve gender equality in the media industry.

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