

Barriers to Women's Career Advancement in Indonesian Academia:

A Qualitative Empirical Study

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Abstract—Why is the representation of women fewer than men in the top academic positions in Indonesia? To answer this question, the researcher did an empirical study using qualitative method to explore any possible barriers that have been encountered or faced by women. Twenty-five participants consisted of 19 lecturers (4 men and 15 women) and 6 senior leaders (3 rectors and 3 deans, all men) from 6 selected universities participated in this in-depth interviews. The results showed that female academics face multiple barriers to advance to top positions: family-, organizational-, and individual-related barriers. The family related barriers (e.g. family responsibility and spousal restriction) and organizational-related constraints (e.g. discrimination and masculine culture) were the most frequently mentioned barriers preventing women from achieving both top academic and leadership positions. However, individual-related barriers (e.g. being in a minority position and lacking confidence) only appeared to have a negative effect on reaching top leadership positions. These findings contribute to the knowledge about factors associated with the scarcity of women in top positions in academia, with a particular focus on the Indonesian context. Affirmative action should be provided for women to reduce the gender gap in top positions in Indonesian academia.

Keywords—*career advancement, female academics, top position, Indonesia, academia*

I. INTRODUCTION

Advancements to structural, academic and leadership positions in Indonesian academia require different paths that are based on nationally prescribed policies, regulations, and guidelines [1] and specific to the promotion of higher leadership position there is a political election process. These mechanisms, in theory, provide equal opportunities for women and men to ascend to the highest possible positions. However, recent research found that compared to men, women in Indonesian academia are underrepresented in the higher administrative and academic ranks and managerial and leadership positions, respectively. In the highest position, the gap is even wider. Female professors were only around 15%, while women rectors could not be found in the sample study [2]. These findings are similar to those studied in other countries, which indicate that women

are underrepresented in senior positions in academia in comparison to men, both in academic ranks and leadership positions [3]. Put it simply, women are less likely to reach professoriate levels and the highest leadership positions [4]. These findings raise a concern about unresolved phenomena in academic careers among men and women.

Various factors that could hinder women's career advancement in academia include gender roles and stereotypes [5]; women's possible lack of self-confidence [6]; women's generally greater home responsibilities [7]; and typically masculine organizational cultures [8]. These impeding factors, however, were mostly drawn from studies in Western academia and rarely from developing countries. A previous qualitative study in Indonesian academia using eight interviews found that family is an important factor for women's career advancement; heavy workloads contribute to women's lack of aspiration to pursue the highest leadership positions; the promotion policies favor men; and to become leaders, women have to work harder [9]. Despite being essential, this Indonesian based study was limited in the number of interviews and only focused on women senior academic administrators in Indonesia. Hence, there remains much to be learned about women's career advancement to top positions in Indonesian academia.

This paper presents the results of an empirical study using qualitative method with the aim to explore any possible barriers that have been encountered or faced by women in achieving higher academic ranks and the leadership positions in Indonesian academia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Gender roles-defined as sets of norms prescribing values, attitudes, behaviors, and activities appropriate for women and men can affect all kinds of behavior including choice of work and career advancement [10][11]. Gender socialization prepares men and women for types of activities likely to be required of them to fulfill their prescribed roles for positive outcomes and to be afforded opportunities as

deemed necessary. Through socialization process an individual learns and accepts roles. In current society, these roles are so organized that men are more likely than women to assume roles in the paid economy and to be primary family providers, whereas women are more likely than men to assume domestic roles of homemaker and to be primary caretakers of children [12].

The maintained sex-based roles eventually create gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes refer to characteristics or attributes that are believed to characterize men and women [13]. Gender stereotypes are strong and persistent and, generally, in the performance evaluation, affect women more negatively than men [14]. Active stereotyping of men and women has historically resulted in fewer opportunities for women, and this use of stereotypes in job decisions remains a concern today, particularly for efforts targeting women's advancement. Gender stereotypes such as women's lack of confidence to apply for promotion, not being as assertive as men, and less ambitious or career-minded than men are partly accountable for women's lack of progression to the senior academic positions [15].

Gender stereotypes reproduce gender schemas, the implicit, largely non-conscious beliefs about sex differences [16]. Gender schemas 'affect our expectations of men and women' and our evaluations of their performance, and influence the way we interpret the same action(s) taken by a man or a woman. The 'most important consequence [of this] for professional work is that men are consistently overrated, while women are underrated' [16]. Thus, professional women are at a slight disadvantage in every interaction, and these disadvantages cumulate over time to large differences for men and women in terms of promotion rates [17].

Another effect of gender stereotypes is the incompatible perception of leadership qualities and women's attributes. Role congruity theory suggests that, 'perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: (a) perceiving women less favorably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and (b) evaluating behavior that fulfills the prescriptions of a leader role less favorably when it is enacted by a woman' [12]. Women are stereotyped as having communal attributes, such as being interpersonally sensitive, nurturing, kind, helpful, and concerned about the welfare of others; whereas men are stereotyped as having agentic attributes, such as being aggressive, forceful, self-confident, self-sufficient, and in control. At the same time, people generally believe that leadership requires more agentic and less communal qualities [18]. As a result of these competing attributes, women have less access to leadership roles [19], are negatively evaluated when occupying leadership roles [20], and when successful in their leadership, they are subjected to negative perceptions such as being more deceitful, pushy, selfish and abrasive than successful male managers [5]. Accordingly, unlike most men, women are forced to use diverse strategies and thoughtful resolutions in order to realize their leadership goals.

B. Family responsibility

The labor force participation of married women has been growing in most countries since the 1960s, despite the fact that women still have more care and housekeeping responsibilities than men [7]. Working married women are striving to balance work life and family life; thus, managing the work-family interface is central to most women's lives [21]. Nonetheless, a high degree of commitment to both work and family may result in work-family conflict [22]. Work-family conflict (WFC) is defined as a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from work and family are not compatible with each other [23]. Work-family role conflict can emerge because work interferes with family (i.e. work overtime cancels home duties) or because family interferes with work (i.e. a child's illness prevents one from attending the work) [24]. When it comes to conflict between work and family, women are likely to prioritize family. In addition, time conflict in relation to family and work is most frequently felt by working mothers [25].

Although academic work provides an enormous amount of flexibility [26], having to balance work and family responsibilities has been found to be an important barrier to women's career progression in academia [11][27][28][29][30]. Women are still more likely to be the ones who interrupt their careers to handle work/family trade-offs, compared to men [5]. Overwhelmed by caring responsibilities, female academics may put their career on hold to look after their children [31]; they may have less mobility [32]; and they may have less time for academic activities than men do, including doing research, writing papers, and other academic-based networking. Furthermore, women may view their work as secondary to their family livelihoods when compared to men [33]. As a result, women may be unable to meet the requirements necessary for academic advancement and leadership positions. In addition, because of caring responsibilities, working mothers in particular are perceived as even less competent in academia, whereas all parents are perceived as less flexible and committed [34]. In sum, not only do women hold more family responsibility than men, family responsibility affect women's career more negatively than men's.

C. Organizational culture

The concept of organizational culture is important in understanding barriers faced by female professionals [11]. Organizational culture is a system of meanings, values, beliefs and practices shared by the group that set behavioral norms within the organization [35]. The workplace organizations have been male dominated for a long time; thus, they are organized around and support men's work styles and life cycles, even those that appear to be 'gender-neutral' and meritocratic [36-37]. This leads to the so called 'old-boys' networks, which are reluctant to let women join in [38], and often ignore and discourage women from

seeking senior managerial positions and other leadership roles within universities [39].

Kanter [40] argues that organizations engage in 'homosocial reproductions' and tend to evaluate people on the same criteria as existing senior managers –thus, minorities and women become evaluated in terms of 'white, upper middle class men' criteria. The criteria used in hiring and retaining workers are heavily dependent on existing organizational composition. Such organizational cultures and practices account, in part, for the slow career advancement of women [41]. Compared to men, women would feel less attracted to management positions, especially top management positions; not because of their ability, but because of their organizational (male) culture preferences [42].

Overt gender discrimination is prohibited in most countries by legislation, including in Indonesia [43]. However, this does not mean that gender discrimination has vanished, but rather it may have changed form and become more subtle, covert, systemic and difficult to perceive. Monroe *et al.* [44] identify two subtle forms of discrimination in academia: (1) 'gender devaluation, a process whereby the status and power of an authoritative position is downplayed when that position is held by a woman; and (2) penalties for those (women) agitating for political change'. Such subtle discrimination may take the form of higher standards set for women compared to men in the promotion process and the placement of women in the positions 'most suited' to being a woman [45].

The practice of leadership selection in academia via political election may also be a form of subtle discrimination. To succeed as senior leaders in the political environment of higher education political astuteness is an inevitable and indispensable requirement [46]. However, in many societies, women are encouraged to take on the supportive and nurturing roles instead of the competitive and aggressive roles; they are socialized not to desire power and tend to be less trained in the skills needed to play the political workplace games [28]. As the result, many women may not only view words such as 'politics' and 'strategies' as dirty, but may also feel uncomfortable talking about them openly, and are likely to lack confidence and competitiveness when it comes to the political game [47]. Thus, the political selection of leaders could limit women from striving for a leadership position; on the other hand, it paves a wider way for men since they are the majority and more accustomed to the politics.

III. METHOD

The aim of the study was to explore possible barriers to women's career advancement in the Indonesian academic context. Informants in this study were selected based on theoretical sampling [48]. Lecturers, rectors and deans were considered the most important figures able to provide relevant information and were therefore selected as

informants. These informants would hold differing perspectives on the central phenomenon because of their varying status, lived experiences and gender background. The informants were 25 people: 19 lecturers (4 male and 15 female), 3 rectors and 3 deans (all male) from 6 state universities in Indonesia. Twenty-three informants were married with children and 2 were single (both female lecturers). The educational qualification of lecturers was Masters (10) and PhD (9), and their academic ranks were Lecturer and Head Lecturer (17), one Professor and one Expert Assistant. Their age ranged from 32 to 58 years and they had worked between 11 years and 35 years. Four rectors and deans held PhD and two held Master's degrees. The rector's academic ranks were Professors and those of deans were Head Lecturers. The age of rectors and deans ranged from 47 to 62 years and they had held these positions for up to 3 years.

The semi structured in-depth face-to-face interview was used as a data collection technique and was considered as an appropriate approach commonly used in a qualitative enquiry [49]. The interviews were guided with interview protocols. The questions were about career making in academia in Indonesia in general, and specifically about factors likely to affect the career advancement of women academics to both top academic and leadership positions. Most interviews lasted between one hour and one and a half hours, which is congruent with the common practice of qualitative enquiry using interviews [50]. All interviews were tape-recorded with the participant's consent.

The results of interviews were transcribed, coded, and interpreted. The coding schemes were developed using a combination of a priori coding based on existing theory, as well as by using a grounded approach. The interviews were interpreted using a thematic framework, that is, the conversational data were analyzed for recurrent themes and the relationships between these themes, which are brought together into categories based on their similarities [51]. For ethical reasons, in this article, all references to university and names of participants were eliminated.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interviews revealed at least 34 recurrent statements pertinent to 10 main themes of perceived barriers for female academics to advance to top academic and leadership positions. These themes may be categorized into family-related barriers, organizational-related barriers, and individual-related barriers. Due to the limitation of pages, the original statements from the interviews are not included in this paper. In the summary of the main findings below, the statements from informants are coded such as Int.1/M/F-30 where Int. =Interviewee, 1=Reference code of interviewee, F/M=Female/Male, and 30=Age.

A. Family-Related Barriers

Competing work-family times. The first category encompassed competing work-family times (Int.16/F-35;

Int.15/M-40; Int.14/F-40). Only women participants mentioned conflicting times when it comes to work and family life. When the competing work-family times occur women said they were more likely to prioritize family over their career and its effect is apparent in that they may reduce the time and energy for their career activities. Although they would not give up their professions, all female participants reported that having a family poses challenges in terms of their career. They indicated that they want to have both roles, even if they are finding it difficult to combine them. Indeed, those who have small children were sometimes compelled to bring their children to campus in an effort to combine their dual-roles, work and family. Even before pursuing careers, some female participants reported having considered the effects of marriage and having children on their career, and they perceived this as an important consideration.

Spousal permission and restrictions. An issue mentioned by both female and male participants was the permission and restrictions from spouses (Int.12/M-40; Int.13/F-34; Int.25/M-53; Int.18/F-37). Few male participants stated that many married women seek permission from their husbands before deciding to concentrate on their career and that there is no guarantee their husbands will always provide this permission. Moreover, some women who had small children experienced career restriction by their spouse who suggested that their work would not fit with their home responsibilities, and the women felt obliged to comply. Permission and restriction have resulted in some women being unable to participate in personal development such as training because their husband would rather they looked after their child. In contrast, permission and restriction does not appear to be experienced by male participants and they are able to make decisions about their careers without having to discuss, let alone ask for, permission from their wife. Most of the male participants mentioned that they would rather take advantage of collegial networks in making their career decisions and advancements than involve their family.

Effects of child rearing. Another challenge facing most of the respondents was child rearing and its effects on their career (Int.15/M-40; Int.18/F-37; Int.13/F-34; Int.14/F-40; Int.12/M-40; Int.22/M-51). About 90% of female participants felt that having small children was the major cause of delay in continuing their study, rank advancement, and ambition to pursue leadership position. Those with small children acknowledged the difficulty in continuing their study and career advancement, because they felt compelled to care for their children during this time. Some felt these were even impossible. The continuing study was perceived as even more stressful if it involved moving to a different place. In response to the question about why female participants have experienced slow progression and difficult continuing their study, various reasons were given but most were connected with the difficulty in combining child rearing and work roles.

All of the female respondents and some male respondents also reported that having young children was major consideration for women in pursuing leadership positions and even leading not to pursue at all. It also appeared to negatively affect women's ambition to strive for leadership positions. All participants viewed that leader-related activities require extra hours and are often conducted after office hours. This perception has made married women with children think twice before considering pursuing a leadership position. They might not apply for it because they are afraid of being accused of neglecting their children and creating a tension in the family. In contrast, male academics reported that delaying or canceling their PhD were due to holding leadership position, close to retirement, enjoying a privileged already held, too busy with extra jobs and none related to family concerns.

Perceived complimentary income earner. Some of the barriers were associated with gender roles in marital life (Int.09/F/41; Int.14/F-40). All female participants suggested that family is a shared responsibility, but they share the value that married women are not obliged to earn income for their family; hence, they may view their work as complimentary to that of husband. Although they believed that leadership position entails extra income and reward, women interviewed seemed less driven to strive for these positions because they feel they are not the main income earner.

Women's career advancement in Indonesian academia is strongly confronted with family-related issues, such as the need for family care, time conflicts, spousal restrictions, and being perceived as a secondary income earner. The first three issues are felt to have resulted in women deploying little of their time and energy to those activities necessary for academic advancement, such as continuing education, research and scholarly work. The last issue has led to women's hesitation in applying for leadership positions. Literature suggests that women still have more care and housekeeping responsibilities than men [7]. This is particularly so in the Indonesian family structure in which the wife is expected to function as a household manager and the husband is the breadwinner [52][53].

To maintain their academic careers, the women in this study say they feel compelled to balance their career with their goals of motherhood [54]. Nonetheless, such balancing often results in greater time conflicts for women than for men [25]. Some women may place a stronger emphasis on family issues, especially their spouse, children and domestic responsibilities, resulting in a lack of the professional activities necessary for academic advancement [31]. This is particularly true for research activities and publications [55]. Lack of research activity may be due to limited personal budgets, abilities and the interests of a particular lecturer as well as the time needed to undertake research.

Some women academics experience spousal permission and restriction in relation to their careers. This may be

connected with the gender role relationship outlined in the marriage law in Indonesia, in which the husband is obliged to provide financially for their family, and the wife is the manager of domestic matters [52][53] and traditional culture which views women as subordinate to men, as merely companions to and followers of men, and there to serve and provide pleasure for men [56]. In more traditional societies the division of domestic labor is more clearly pronounced and women are expected to perform all domestic duties, whereas in less traditional societies women carry the majority of domestic work [57]. The role of financial provision for men, combined with culture may result in the husband's power over his wife; this can be demonstrated in the limitations he puts on his wife's activities, including career opportunities. .

Furthermore, socio-culture and religious-based values have placed married women in the role of secondary income generator [53][58] which may result in women's lower motivation to gain greater rewards within an organization by moving into the managerial or leadership domain. The heavy workloads of being a leader combined with strong domestic responsibilities, contribute to women's relative lack of aspiration to pursue top leadership positions as voiced in interviews [9].

B. Organizational-Related Barriers

Sex discrimination. The prevalence of sex discrimination was also acknowledged by respondents (Int.14/F/47; Int.18/F-37; Int.14/F/47; Int.17/F/32). Some female participants reported they were asked a question not posed to any prospective male candidates during a job interview. For example, if her husband moves to another region what she would do and if her boyfriend works outside her city what she would choose. If a potential female candidate prefers to follow her (future) husband she would not be accepted. Interestingly, while acknowledging that such questions are unfair and reflect gender bias, respondents indicated that it was normal for the university to ask such questions to know more about their personality, assess their commitment to work and to preserve the energy and resources for staff intake.

Masculine culture. The persistent masculine culture in academia was one of the repeatedly mentioned themes by participants (Int.19/F-41; Int. 18/ F-37). All female participants described the masculine culture associated with leadership and the existences of prejudice towards women. The masculine culture produces the sense of uncertainty about being led by women; hence, people prefer to have male top leaders and this prevents women from aspiring to leadership positions. Women aspiring to top leadership positions face this cultural boundary and prejudice, and thereby their chance of being selected is reduced.

Lack of specific treatment for work-family balancing. Another issue addressed the lack of work-family balancing facilities (Int.11/F-40; Int.14/F-40; Int.14/F-40). The majority of female respondents reported that their

universities had not considered meeting specific needs of female academics in relation to family-work integration. The facilitation instead was mostly related to work and family matters are considered individual business. As a result, those having special needs find it difficult to fit their caring responsibilities with their work hours, such as when breastfeeding. In addition, female lecturers often incur higher costs when performing office duties outside campus if they bring their babies too, because no extra cash is provided for them by the university.

Lack of specific empowerment. One of the acknowledged barriers was the absence of specific empowerment for female academics (Int.22/M-51; Int.18/ F-37; Int.21/M-48). Such absence might be due to perceived practices related to equal policy and regulations which are implemented impartially. However, all female academics interviewed felt that empowerment and affirmative action are important in accelerating their advancement because they recognize that they face various barriers. On the contrary, their management holds contrasting a view that it is not necessary to provide empowerment specifically for female academics. The majority of the leader participants (male) expressed the view that providing specific empowerment for female lecturers could be perceived to undermine the capacity of women.

The Indonesian women academics face organizational-related constraints such as discrimination, masculinity, and lack of empowerment, and these have affected women's decisions to pursue leadership positions. Overt gender discrimination may not be blatantly expressed, but it does not disappear. Indeed, it may have changed form and become more subtle, covert, systemic and difficult to perceive. Such subtle discrimination may be reflected in discriminatory organizational practices, through managerial recruitment and selection processes, training and development opportunities, performance evaluation procedures, and promotions [59].

Organizations have been male dominated for a long time; thus, they are organized around and support men's work styles and life cycles, even those that appear to be 'gender-neutral' and meritocratic [36][37]. For example, leadership has been associated with more *agentic* qualities [18], which are commonly perceived characteristics of men. On the other hand, women are stereotyped as having *communal* qualities that are perceived incongruent with leadership roles [12]. Organizations may also apply hiring criteria based on existing organizational composition (a male majority) [40]. Due to organizational masculine culture, organization members may ignore and discourage women from seeking senior managerial positions and other leadership roles within universities [39]. Even if women have the necessary ability and are willing to apply for top leadership positions, their colleagues (mostly men) would discourage them, as they are not yet considered suitable for the position. Furthermore, male superiors feel uncertain and

insecure about women in leadership positions and therefore there is a preference for men.

The organizations in this study appear not to provide specific support for women in coping with family-work balance and career development. Instead, this has been left to the individual to overcome. This may be related to the implementation of statutory legislation on equal opportunities for all public servants [1]. The absence of this particular support could seriously and permanently affect academic women's lives [60]. This is why a supportive spouse and family are more crucial for women's academic advancement [61] than for men. Indeed, family support and/or having domestic servants are very important for women to combine both professional and domestic roles [9]. However, this support may only be a partial influence in the leadership arena; other persistent barriers remain to be conquered by both the individual and the organization.

C. Individual-Related Barriers

Being in a minority position. Participants felt that being in a minority in both number and status is an obstacle to women in achieving top leadership positions (Int. 16/F-35). Participants reported this to be phenomenon commonly encountered in their organizations. Despite the acknowledgement that some female academics are capable of being leaders; currently many are not eligible for top positions because they are in junior positions. The opportunity of becoming a leader may officially be equal to men and women; but since men outnumber women and hold more senior positions, women are especially underrepresented at higher levels.

Lack of political intention and confidence. Women's lacking political intention and confidence was one of barriers for pursuing leadership position (Int.16/F-35; Int.22/M-51; Int.19/F-41; Int. 20/M-50). All respondents reported that the selection process of top leadership is political and involves conflict. However, women reported that their political intention is lower compared to that of men and that they tended not to be involved in political conflict and challenges. They appeared to avoid conflicting situation and prefer to work in a non-hostile environment. Even though they felt qualified and capable of being leaders, women reported to lack of confidence in the political game of leadership selection process. Because of lacking confidence, women appeared not to advocate themselves for becoming leaders or to demand for leadership share. Lack of confidence in the political arena holds women back from striving for leadership competition.

Being in a minority and lack of confidence in leadership positions were felt not only to impede women's leadership aspirations, but also to lead to defeat in the leadership selection process. The leadership selection process in Indonesian academia, i.e., for rectors and deans, involves a degree of politics in which network support is crucial for the winning candidates. However, women are less in number and less represented in the bodies in charge of selecting

leaders, and they generally hold lower positions; thus, men still dominate the networks making it difficult for women to participate [38][39]. Being in a minority discourages women from the leadership competition, diminishes supporters, and decreases bargaining capacity [62].

This condition is aggravated by the fact that many Indonesian women lack political experiences, still view politics negatively [63], and apparently lack confidence in their ability to lead [6]. Perhaps, women's lack of confidence in the leadership may be equated with that in an engineering career, both of which are currently male dominated. In engineering careers, women are found to lack *professional role confidence*, compared to men, reducing their likelihood of remaining in engineering majors and careers [64]. The minority status and lack of confidence in leadership positions make women passive supporters, rather than active participants, in the leadership process.

V. CONCLUSION

Although career advancement in Indonesian academia is based on national policies women academics are severely underrepresented in the higher academic ranks and leadership positions. The present study concluded that women in Indonesian academia appear more likely to face various barriers in their career advancements compared to their male counterparts. The major barriers are categorized into family related barriers (e.g. family responsibility and spousal restriction), organizational-related constraints (e.g. discrimination and masculine culture), and individual-related barriers (e.g. being in a minority position and lacking confidence). Some barriers affect women's advancement to both higher academic ranks and leadership positions and some only leadership positions. This study contributes to the better understanding of obstacles faced by women academics in their career advancement particularly to the top academic ranks and leadership positions. It suggests the development of affirmative action to widen opportunities for female academics to advance more quickly and in greater numbers. Affirmative action might include strategies to improve the work-family balance, provision of specific incentives, mentoring systems, and the creation of gender-friendly work environment. In addition, leadership mainstreaming program could help female academics in making the necessary preparations for future top leadership position.

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