

Motherhood and Academic Careers in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Most literature on the effect of family and parenthood for gendered academic career and the continuous underrepresentation of female academic staff among senior academics demonstrates similar findings. Commitments such as family and child rearing have been identified as an obstacle to academic career advancement for women, though far less so for men. This article argues that women in academic careers in Indonesia accept double burden of working as lecturers and doing their domestic works voluntarily to balance practicing their religious principles, societal norms and commitment for their career as their aspiration for modern life. Using in-depth interviews of 15 female academics from two universities in Jakarta, this study finds that women in academia have accepted the co-existence of motherhood and academic careers. An academic career is considered the best profession that enables women to play their dual roles as professionals and mothers.

Keywords: Academic career, gender gap, motherhood, religious values

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INTRODUCTION

This article discusses how female academics in Indonesia balance motherhood to their careers. In general, research findings show that gendered institutions within academic careers are still maintained, and this is observed in a variety of ways (Maliniak et al., 2013; O'Connor, 2014; O'Connor et al., 2015; Turner & Mairesse, 2005; van den Brink & Benchop, 2012; van der Lee & Ellemers, 2015). A gendered

academic career has been associated with an unequal recruitment process, and lack of transparency and accountability (van den Brink et al., 2010). Unlike other careers, an academic career requires a PhD degree and most female academics complete their PhDs after 30 years of age, and this coincides with childcare responsibilities (Pyke, 2013). Some female academics choose to accept the challenges and risk their career by having a family and children although they know how disruptive it can be to their careers (Beddoes & Pawley 2014).

Child-rearing pose a tremendous challenge for academics as it is time consuming and will have an affect on time for research (Beddoes & Pawley 2014; Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). Despite the availability of numerous policies recommended from previous studies to improve the situation, Beddoes and Pawley (2014) argued there had only been insignificant changes.

Generally, neo liberalism has intensified gendered university and academic career, wherein male professors are expected to engage in academic work without any disturbance from other activities such as domestic job. Academic career and family may both be considered as “greedy institutions” since they both require full commitment and “undivided and exclusive loyalty” (Coser, 1974, as cited in Wendel & Ward, 2006). Women usually consider their family as their main priority with their careers coming in second place, and they are more likely to be expected to choose family commitments than men do. An academic career, to a certain extent, is only appropriate

for those capable of providing practically all of their time and interest for academic work.

While there have been many studies of women and gendered academic career, these studies mostly focused on the western context and developed countries (Beddoes & Pawley, 2014; Cervia & Biancheri, 2017; Mason & Goulden 2004; Walsh & Turnbull 2016; Wolfinger et al., 2009). There are still a limited number of studies on gender, motherhood and academic career advancement from non-western context such as Indonesia. The available studies on Indonesia, for instance, is a study from Kholis (2012) that examined the effect gender had on career productivity and success. The study concluded that women and men differed substantially only for publication. Additionally, Murniati’s study (2012) asserted that senior female lecturers were capable of reaching some of the highest positions in university leadership as a result of their individual commitment, strong determination to succeed, and personal initiative. However, the extent to which women deal with double responsibility both in academic and domestic life in Indonesia are still lacking. This study, therefore, aims to fill the gaps in the literature by exploring women’s experiences in balancing their motherhood role and academic career.

The paper is structured as follows. The first two section focuses on the introduction of the study and overview of academic careers in Indonesia. While the third section focuses on the method of the study, the fourth and fifth sections discuss the results of the study. The results are presented in

three sub topic of discussion, following three sub topics developed for the interview. Finally, the last section provides conclusion of the study.

ACADEMIC LIFE AND ACADEMIC CAREERS IN INDONESIA

In comparison to liberal countries' higher education systems and academic career advancement, Indonesia has developed quite a different system of universities, academic life and academic careers. The current secular higher education system is managed and governed under the Ministry of Research & Technology and Higher Education (MoRTHE) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA). In addition to this arrangement, the education system is further separated into public and private institutions (Wicaksono & Friawan, 2011).

Prior to 1999, the state exercised control over the recruitment process, duties, and wages of permanent academic staff holding academic tenure in public universities who all unquestionably were Indonesian civil servants. The promotion system for academic staff is based on regulations that are aligned with civil service ranks and regulations pertaining to members of teaching staff. According to government regulation no.12 year 2012 they will initially be employed bearing the rank of III b at the very least as it is afforded based on their education qualifications. They will sequentially rise in rank to III c and d, then continues to IV a,b,c, d, and e. Additionally, cumulative credit points (KUM) also serve as the basis of civil servant promotion

covering three main activities: teaching, research, and community service (Clark & Gardiner, 1991).

In 1999 and 2009 the Indonesian government issued the following policies: BHMN/*Badan Hukum Milik Negara* (State Owned Legal Entity) and BPH/*Badan Hukum Pendidikan* (Education Legal Entity) respectively. The government had reduced subsidies and made four prominent public universities into BHMNs. However, in 2010, the Constitutional Court declared the BHMN and BPH as unconstitutional, yet Lawno.12 year 2012 on higher education reinstated the policy and renamed the BHMN and BPH into PTNBH/*Perguruan Tinggi Berbadan Hukum* (State Higher Education Legal Entity) (Susanti, 2011).

RESEARCH METHOD

A method of using in-depth interview was applied in this study, wherein data were collected to gain information in an unstructured way, therefore, the prompts consisted of a list of opened-ended or closed questions. There were at least three topics for the interview: *first*, the influence of culture, norm, and religious belief for motherhood and family life, *second*, experience and perception on academic career in comparison to other careers such as how they start and choose their careers, *third*, perception and experience on motherhood penalty and women as secondary earners.

This article is based on in-depth interviews conducted with 15 participants from two notable state universities in

Jakarta, with a variety of criteria pertaining to age and school/department and 60% of them are from the religious university. Those universities (Syarif Hidayatullah State University and University of Indonesia) are chosen to represent two criteria of university in Indonesia: religious and secular university, organised by Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) and Ministry of Research & Technology and Higher Education (MoRTHE) respectively. However, this focuses only on public universities because they have clearer academic career advancement system by following civil servant system. Both are in Jakarta as I believe Jakarta as the capital city is a very important location to shape a more progressive female academic careers and life than other cities.

Although the conducted interviews included academic staff members of a secular university, most of the respondents were unsurprisingly Muslims. The participants interviewed for this study represents the age group of between 40-50 years old and they generally occupy middle or senior positions in their academic careers respectively. The fact that this research focuses on participants who had undergone the experience of promotional procedures had inevitably led to this limitation (the age structure my participants are clustered in).

RESULT

Perceptions on Religious Values, Motherhood and Domestic Role

Women's expectations concerning their position in the family indicates the need to

adjust modern aspirations to accommodate the religious values they adhere to. As an example, many women undoubtedly believe they are obligated to submit to their husband and that it is imperative for them to obtain the husband's consent in pursuing their career. This is particularly the case for female academic staff who are employed at a university with religious affiliation. As one 40-year-old respondent stated,

"I personally have determined to implement religious teaching from God and the Prophet Muhammad, and I always try to contemplate on what I have and have not done."

The permission given by a husband allowing his wife to pursue her career is stipulated as one of the fundamental tenets of Islamic teaching for women. This belief stemmed from Islamic teachings concerning the rights husbands and wives are entitled to, and it is based on the prophetic tradition, known as Sunnah, that forbids wives to leave their house without their husband's consent.

The woman above provided a specific note that her commitment to practicing her religious teachings and beliefs did not prevent her whatsoever from being critical to some of those beliefs and from engaging in a rational assessment of religious matters. However, she had ultimately decided not to adhere to her rational mind as God's instruction was, in her opinion, clear and well-defined.

She further mentioned that she had completed her master's degree, despite

having to struggle to convince her husband that she remained a good wife and mother. Her husband never prohibited her from pursuing a master's degree, yet he was constantly concerned that gaining a higher degree would lead to waning respect for him. She was, eventually, able to prove to him that she was capable of maintaining her religious values that concerned affording her husband the respect and treatment he had in the family as an *Imam* (leader). His extended family would provoke him at times by mentioning that better education led women to have lack of respect for their husband.

As a result, she genuinely felt grateful to her husband for allowing her to work, earn money, and had a career. Without his given support she would not have been able to work at the university and became a member of the academic staff. She had no desire of working without his permission, as she did not intend to divorce him. Since she was able to convince her husband that she would remain pious when she took her master's degree, it was not difficult for her to gain her husband's permission and full support for pursuing her PhD.

Traditional gender relationships are still observed to be the dominant form of familial relationship for female academics. This is in accordance to the pattern of domestic work that is predominantly based on hierarchical-male domination. A participant from a religious university stated:

"I am not concerned about what others say since I still consider husbands, as men, have a more elevated status than wives. As a couple, I regard my husband as a

friend, yet I still afford him respect as the leader in our family."

Most of the female academic participants were aware that they and their husband shared domestic duties respectively. Their husband would on occasion give them a hand, especially in cleaning and washing, but very seldom in cooking or ironing. In numerous cases observed, a number of husbands still expected to be afforded with special attention denoting their superior familial status, whereas wives were obligated to fulfil their duty of cooking and serving the entire family, simply to demonstrate the authority a husband has over his wife. Wives might occasionally feel happy to meet all those expectations, but they would at times find them to be burdensome.

In general, all of the informants bearing the role of wife and mother, who are thus responsible for domestic work in their families, receive support and assistance from a domestic worker or an extended family member. A thirty-nine-year-old academic from an Islamic state university reported,

"I usually cook before going to the university. I employ a domestic worker to clean the house and wash clothes. I would rather cook and enjoy my role as a queen in my own home. When my domestic worker comes to work in the morning, I make sure that all the dishes have been washed. My husband, as the breadwinner and head of the family, is a remarkable partner for me. I am overjoyed that my spouse and I co-operate and work together to

properly carry out these chores. My husband cleans the house while I prepare breakfast. He can do all the house chores, other than cooking, washing dishes, and ironing.”

Married male academics in Indonesia, on the other hand, are able to focus on their career since there is no need for them to spend time on domestic work. By and large, a reinforcement of both gender and class positions with which women seem comfortable/complicit is obviously present. They are in alignment to gender stereotypes and in some cases they further extend those stereotypes.

Academic Careers as an Ideal Career for Women in Indonesia

Findings of the study indicate that an academic career in Indonesia has the potential of being considered as a “family-friendly occupation” for female academics and a “low income profession” for male academics. The following excerpts taken from participant interviews suggest that many women, given the support of their partner, choose to become civil servants. Both spouses expect to maintain the traditional division of labour and to adopt modern values in such a way that women are still able to secure additional income without neglecting their main priority, which is family life. A forty-year-old female lecturer at a secular university told her story as such:

“Prior to choosing to pursue an academic career, I had worked in another field (private sector). When I had planned to get married, my fiancé suggested that I seek an academic career since working in the private sector

would require us to work from about 08.00 in the morning until 04.00 or 05.00 in the evening. My fiancé mentioned, “if you work very hard all day long in such a way, who then will take care of the family and kids?”

The idea of maintaining both family and career is highlighted by a participant from a religious university who is slightly above 50. In her opinion, women should have a career aside from their role as homemakers, in spite of the belief in Islam that generating income is not an obligation that applies to women. However, she further asserts that income is considered as a symbol of social dignity (particularly those obtained from a white collar and skilled job) and it also strengthens one’s confidence; it makes women radiate intelligence and have better character, and it can also help women avoid nonconductive activities such as chatting or gossiping.

According to the same informant, middle class women mostly adhere to principles pertaining to a noble life that is grounded upon religion, in which marrying and having children are key. This may mean that a woman is able to anticipate and plan for a job once they are married, but under the condition that family will always be the top priority. In line to this pattern, some of the participants consider academic career as the ideal type of occupation women can pursue due to the fact that time management in such a job allows room for flexibility, affording women with the desired outcome of having both a career and a family. One of the respondents, a thirty-nine-year-old women academic who works at a religious university put it this way:

“I consider the academic environment to be very children friendly. When I was breast-feeding, I was able to provide breast milk to my children unrestrictedly, I was able to take them to the university, or return home anytime I like since my home is not far from the university. When my children are grown, I would still be able to accompany them in their learning. I think teaching activity is highly flexible.”

Several reports were obtained from the participants that their decisions in choosing academic career were influenced by their husband, otherwise the decision may have been due to their having a baby or young children rendering them unable to manage their time if they had continued pursuing their career in the private sector.

Many people consider an academic career with civil servant status as a low paying profession, and the difference in salary among the ranks under the civil servant system is not considerably significant. Career in academia requires high education level as one of the requirements for employment, yet the basic salary received is not very different from other civil servant positions—such as a teacher or administrative staff in various ministries or public institutions—whose education qualifications tend to be much lower.

Another female academic staff interviewed acknowledged that the salary she initially received from working at the university was merely half her salary at her former office in the private sector. However, she had numerous ample opportunities to gain income from various projects outside

the university. It has previously been argued that additional work for academic staff, especially non-administrative work, can substantially boost their income (Clark & Gardiner, 1991). A forty-year-old from a secular university expressed the transition she experienced in the following:

“I considered my salary to be quite low during my initial year, as it was approximately half to what I got at the private company, yet I currently think that I earn quite a substantial sum compared to those working in private companies. This is due to the fact that we have numerous projects, working with companies, conducting consultation work, so I gained extra money from those activities.”

The income academics earn, in her opinion, is dependent on each individual’s efforts in generating income from activities related to their personal expertise concerning their particular field of study at the university.

Perception on Motherhood Penalty and Women as Secondary Earners

The discussions in the above passages show that female academics decided to pursue an academic career because of its flexibility in relation to time arrangement, and the feature of the occupation which is considerably family friendly. It can, thus, be assumed that the wage gap, the motherhood penalty, and gender inequality in income are inevitable. The motherhood penalty suggests that having children and raising them will have an effect on the accumulation of women’s

human capital, which subsequently leads to women getting lower salaries than men. This matter is substantiated as several female respondents had stated that they do not seriously consider planning their careers with the aim of achieving the academic rank of professor. Women academics in Indonesia would most likely give priority to their family or their husband's career and strive to maintain the traditional relationship they have with their husband. A thirty-eight-year old female academic described her position as follows:

"I prioritize my family over my career... because if I were to achieve the highest career position possible, yet incapable of managing my family, for me, it will be a matter of grave concern. I must be responsible for my children's accomplishments at school."

Similarly, a senior female academic in her 50s, who was deeply involved in issues relating to women movement, chose to support her husband's wish to obtain higher education and she had sacrificed her opportunity as she thought that her family would consequently have a better life by allowing her husband to acquire a higher level of education.

The motherhood penalty has been found to be harsher for the 20 to 30-year-old age group, and it eventually becomes less profound by women in their 40s to 50s (Kahn, et al., 2014). Likewise, Agüero et al. (2012) contended that the motherhood penalty in developing countries was greater for women employees with infants and

young children. The situation changes, however, when daughters become into adolescents, particularly among the low-educated sample group, due to the fact that an older daughter may provide positive contributions to lowering the motherhood wage penalty as they stay home and are, culturally, obligated to assist in carrying out domestic work.

One of the informants working at a religious university who was thirty-nine had this to say:

"I think I have to admit that... even though my husband never prohibited me from doing something, or never not let me participate in some activities, during the night I still need to take care of my son, by putting him to sleep, something which he (my husband) rarely does, or he does only during the weekend. Although I know it is not time for work, but I sometimes still use that family time to do some work. Ideally, when we are at home, we should do something else, not work, but it also difficult to finish all the work during working hours."

Nevertheless, according to some of the respondents, being in a traditional relationship does not prevent them from having the confidence to move up in their careers. Younger female academics in their late 30s still embrace the attitude of respecting and giving priority to their husbands as the family head and leader, but they most likely receive considerable support from their husband concerning their

goal of obtaining the highest educational qualification. They are more assured and confident of their career and they are able to clearly say that at a certain point in time they will ultimately achieve a professorship. A number of female academic respondents in their 40s do not feel that their articles they write are undervalued in comparison to those written by men. A young (thirty-eight-year-old) female academic at a religious university mentioned that she would be able to apply for a professorship within five years:

“I feel quite confident and I think that I am quite proficient in this profession. I believe that within 5 years I would be capable of applying for my professorship with all the requirements ready.”

Some female academics do not take the wage penalty or motherhood penalty into much consideration because they remain under the support of their husband. A thirty-eight-year-old respondent from a religious university feels that she is fortunate to be holding her position as an academic staff member, and she is of firm belief that her occupation is not being maintained solely for economic reasons, as her husband provides sufficient financial support for their family.

“I am grateful to God that my husband has a good salary, so that my work is more for self-actualisation, for providing others, aside from myself and my closest family, with assistance.”

In the same line as the above, a forty-year-old informant from a secular university has not once shared her salary with her husband due to her adherence to the cultural norm that the husband is the breadwinner of the family, and that he does not have authority over the income his wife makes. That income is for her to do as she please.

“Concerning money, my husband still supports our family, and I have never handed my salary to him. My salary is for myself, and I consider that as consequential to the promise he made of not expecting any income from me.”

DISCUSSION

Not different from other Indonesian women, female scholars in Indonesia live with male domination in every facet of their lives (Blackwood, 1995; Robinson, 2009; Sohn, 2015; Suryakusuma, 1996). The obstacles to female academic careers in Indonesia are more apparent (Haeruddin, 2016; Murniati, 2012). They struggle in negotiating their beliefs concerning their rights of participating in career development. Religious and cultural values control them, both individually and socially (Aisyah & Parker, 2014; Dunn & Kellison, 2010). Even so, most female academics accept these restraints, which may be regarded as obstacles to the advancement of one's academic career including the traditional division of labour and motherhood, and they have made it obvious that they believe they have voluntarily embraced these constraints (Afiyanti & Solberg, 2014; Corfield, 2010; Murniati, 2012; Utomo, 2004).

Such situation indicates that there is a majority of female academics in Indonesia who construe their relationships with their husbands and male academic counterparts within a functionalist theoretical framework. Female academics abide to the principles in which the family has a distinctive function different to other institutions, particularly economic institutions. It is common understanding that an economic institution tends to be grounded on rational exchange and calculation, whereas contrastingly, the development of family life is established upon emotional and effectual behaviour, a type of social action driven by non-material interests (Weber, 1978).

In this study, academic career enhancement in Indonesia tends to be nearly similar to career promotion in the civil service system (Azmi et al., 2012). As of late, more and more women are challenging their spouse and family, and are negotiating with them to assure them that they are capable of managing both a career and family. This indicates that women's determination of upholding traditions in Indonesia does not necessarily imply that they entirely accept patriarchal culture. They may be resistant to it albeit with more subtle and non-radical strategies. Additionally, this research reinforces former studies demonstrating that numerous women gain advantage from family support and their socio economic status when advancing their careers, although they do need to put in twice the effort men do to achieve better positions in their career (Murniati, 2012; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011).

Despite traditional gender relationship remaining robust and strong, this study reinforces Luke's findings (1998, 2001) that domestic jobs among the middle and upper class are often onerous. In the case of Indonesia, routine familial tasks and domestic responsibilities are relatively easy to manage by women from the middle and upper classes because of low wage domestic worker availability. The presence of domestic workers in Asian families has led to less work-family conflict among career women because they can rely on the workers to conduct their routine household chores (Caparas, 2011; Murniati, 2012; Utomo, 2004). Accordingly, the fact that decisions women make rely on the given consent of her husband does not necessarily impede women from improving their skills. Support women acquire from parents and relatives allows them to leave their children while pursuing their study away from home.

Following Hakim (2006), female academics in Indonesia have preferences similar to many women elsewhere, i.e. becoming a woman figure who is adaptive and prefers to combine work and family. They see certain occupations that facilitate work-family balance as desirable. In this regard, working as a civil servant is regarded to be the best choice, as Azmi et al. (2012) found that various benefits were provided through the public servant system such as child care and time management flexibility. Additionally, being a civil servant affords high job security and guarantees a long career-path from initial employment to retirement, it also

has fewer occupational demand than the private sector and employees rarely face dismissal. Concerning salary, men and women are treated equally by the civil servant system and they are not expected to undertake high geographic mobility to secure promotion throughout their career. Civil servants, especially academic staff, most likely remain in a single institution until retirement, unless they deliberately propose to be transferred to another region for family reasons. Meanwhile, it is highly common for private sector personnel to undergo regional relocation, as it is not uncommon for promotions to entail the need of relocating to another area.

Women do make decisions in moving from the private sector to an academic career in public institutions, despite having to accept substantial salary reduction. This confirms Utomo's argument (2012) that women would most likely choose an occupation that allows them to maintain the balance of family life, which may entail working in a less demanding occupation with a stable income. As secondary earners, women are able to adjust to the moderate income received as a civil servant. As Filmer and Lindauer (2001) found, civil servants with high school qualification or lower receive higher income than private sector employees with similar educational qualifications. Conversely, civil servants with higher educational qualifications (diploma and above) receive lower salary in the civil service system than employees bearing similar qualifications in the private sector. However, according to the World

Bank (2003, as cited in Kristiansen & Ramli, 2006), various benefits (such as monthly certification, monthly remuneration based on attendance, or remuneration for professorship) have recently started to be given to Indonesian civil servants, as a consequence, their occupation should no longer be categorised as being underpaid. Female academics represent a group of women who are often not centred on the home (Hakim, 2006). Although their priority remains towards family life and their children, they still want to work without having to fully be committed to their career.

Women with an academic career, in the Indonesian context, is quite unique in comparison to those pursuing the same goal in developed and liberal countries. Child rearing and familial commitments have been specified as a barrier to academic career advancement for women, though far less so for men (Baker, 2012). Indeed, having a family would more likely increase social capital for male academics as the family will be inclined to prioritise a male's (husband's) career over that of a female's (wife's) (Baker, 2010). Monosson (2008) posited that some female academics wanted both career and family, but the academic environment was established upon male and masculine values, wherein female academics were thus expected to behave like their male academic counterparts. Recently, Baker (2012) argued that being childfree had become a more common phenomenon among female academics than male. Grottenthaler (2003) observed that many female academics had postponed

motherhood until they felt considerably secure in their careers only to find it was too late for them to have children. Female academics remains to have a tendency of bearing greater responsibility in domestic work than males do (Baker, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Given the influence of strong religious beliefs among female academics in Indonesia, female academics rarely critique issues relating to unequal division of labour in their families. They prefer to compromise and negotiate with their husbands rather than opting for other alternatives that may have unfavourable impact upon their family life. Additionally, they hardly ever choose separation when confronting their husbands with problems that are caused by their choice to pursue their career.

This indicates that the pattern of female academic in Indonesia is quite different from that of the West. In the West, one of the most prevalent characteristics of female academics wanting to progressively advance their careers is being single, unmarried or childfree. According to past literature it may be concluded that women without child are more likely to have better education, better income and better jobs (Baker, 2012). On the other hand, being single or childfree remains to be a rare occurrence in Indonesia as the bond of marriage (which implies child-rearing) is still regarded with utmost importance (Situmorang, 2007).

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