CAREER MEANING FOR INDONESIAN WOMEN: A CASE STUDY OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES IN A FOOD PROCESSING INDUSTRY

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Abstrak

Berkarir bukanlah merupakan hal baru dan tidak dilarang bagi perempuan Indonesia. Namun demikian, apa yang dimaksudkan dengan karir, ternyata sangat beragam dan tidak terbatas hanya pada lingkup kerja dalam dimensi ruang publik. Tulisan ini menggambarkan makna karir bagi dua puluh perempuan pekerja dari berbagai posisi pekerjaan di suatu perusahaan industri pengolah makanan. Makna dan citra perempuan karir terbentuk dan terinternalisasikan berdasarkan pengalaman sejak kecil baik atas pengamatan di dalam kehidupan rumah tangga orangtuanya maupun lingkungan sekitar. Perempuan karir tidak hanya perempuan yang bekerja di sektor publik, tapi juga perempuan yang tinggal di rumah yang bekerja sebagai ibu rumah tangga mengurus anak dan suaminya. Perempuan karir yang dianggap sukses adalah perempuan yang tidak hanya sukses dalam kerja di ruang publik yang dicirikan dengan pencapaian posisi kerja atau jabatan yang tinggi, tetapi dia juga harus sukses dalam membina rumah tangga.

Kata Kunci: Makna karir, karir perempuan, pekerja perempuan

Having a career is not a new issue and not prohibited for the Indonesian woman. Nevertheless, what was meant by career, evidently very heterogeneous and was not only in the scope of the work in the dimension of the public's space. This article depicted the meaning of the career for the twenty female workers representing various job positions in a company of the food processing industry. The meaning and the image of the career woman had been formed and internalized based on the experience since childhood both on observation in the life of their parent's household and their neighbourhood. The career woman is not only the woman who worked in the public sector, but also the woman who worked as a housewife capable of nurturing the child and serving her husband. The career woman who was regarded as successful was the woman who was not only successful in the work of the public that was characterised with the achievement of the high-ranking position, but she must also be successful in managing her household.

Keywords: Career, Career meaning, Women's career, Female worker

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INTRODUCTION

A career has traditionally been thought of as a meaningful progression through a series of related jobs (White, 1995). Meanwhile Douglas Hall (1976) defines a career as an individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work-related experiences and activities over the life-span of the individual. Therefore, notion of 'career' embraces the dimension of time (Adamson, Doherty, & Viney, 1998). Stephen Adamson, Noeleen Doherty, and Claire Viney (1998) claim that the meaning of the career may differ for individual employees.

> For some, it may be the vehicle through which basic economic needs are satisfied. For others, it may provide a sense of social status or social worth. In other cases, the career may (symbolically or even literally) represent an individual's life dream, offering structure, direction, meaning, and purpose to one's daily activities (Adamson et al., 1998: 252).

Christine Coupland (2004) states that the of used term 'career,' is not adequately defined, yet it is used by academics and lay people as it if were. The flexibility of its meaning is demonstrated in the manner in which people describe their work and themselves in the work life context. In her study of 54 university graduates employed by one large company in the UK, Coupland explored how the participants have used the term 'career' in their conversations, both spontaneously and in response to an explicit question about career. Coupland discovered interdependencies within the conversation regarding career and identity, and each contributed to a believable version of the other (2004).

Further, Adamson et al. (1998: 257-258) emphasise "the meaning of career to individuals is constantly being constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in light of personal and organizational change, and development, and importantly, social interaction". Therefore, dynamic relationships exist between individuals, organisations and society. It would appear that the three major dimensions (social, organisational, and individual) are important factors in reference to women's careers.

This paper set out to address what is the meaning of career for Indonesian women. The case studied was conducted in one large food processed industry in Indonesia, which is represented by 51 women employees. Firstly, 51 women employees were interviewed using structured questionnaire to ascertain personal and general information of women's career in the company studied. Based on those data information, the study then followed by undertaking in-depth interview to get more comprehensive knowledge of those women' employees' career meaning. 22 women employees gave consent to participate in the interview, which are representing various level of position.

INDONESIAN WOMEN'S CAREER

A career for Indonesian women is not always meant as a related to paid job. But it could be simply mean as doing something worthy for others. Meanwhile, in the paid job it self, career covers a range meaning of producing income (money), increasing job level/position, increasing job grade, and also of course includes doing something worthy for the company.

EARNING MONEY AS A CAREER

Almost all women interviewees stated that a career is not only a job that provides an opportunity for career advancement, but it must also allow for an increase in income. Although earning money seemed not to be a priority for female employees at the higher-level positions, this does not mean that money is unimportant to them. The capacity to earn a high salary was usually viewed as an important consequence of having a career.

As stated by Intan, a middle manager, "Career can also simply mean working outside the house and earning an income". Further, she said, "It is better to have work and an activity outside the house than just spend money".[1] Prima, a middle manager, considers her job to be a career because it produces money. "My job is a career because I get money from it." However, she further added, "If your job position is not advancing, it means that your career is stuck".[2]

Therefore, earning money is an initial incentive for career participation. This aim was admitted by some employees, especially when they were still young and began seeking work. Berlian, an upper-middle manager, stated "When I was young I just wanted to get a job and have lots of money. Because my mum is a working woman, I view working as a way to earn an income, and having my own income is enjoyable. It can help to improve the quality of life".[3]

Many workers seemed to dream of having a job position that provided a high salary. Therefore, positions that are perceived to involve easy tasks but that pay a

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[1] A similar opinion that having a career was an activity outside the house that produced money was also mentioned by some female operative workers such as Susi (lab technician) and Tatik (production staff).

[2] Prima is ethnic Chinese with a lower level of education. She is married and has two children. Prima has worked in the company studied for 14 years, beginning with joining management trainee scheme before being placed at the staff level, followed by supervisor, then manager. She aims to reach a senior manager position within her current department.

[3] Both Berlian's mother and father finished Junior High School and worked as civil servants. Due to their low educational levels their job positions were not senior, therefore their incomes were low. It seemed Berlian's mother's income was necessary to support the family's lifestyle. This may be the reason that Berlian believed an income was essential for improving the quality of everyday life.

higher salary can create jealousy among other workers. Ade, a product supervisor, said, "People are jealous of my position because this type of job is physically easy but pays more money".[4]

These statements show that earning money is an essential component of career status and is also a product of career advancement. Although it is not a priority, it cannot be denied that it is hoped that increasing position levels will be followed by an increase in income, and vice versa. But, again, an increase in salary is not a real signal of having a career unless this is followed by an increase in position level.

HAVING A HIGH POSITION AS A CAREER

Part of the definition of 'having a career' includes the possibility of increasing one's job position or climbing the ladder of the organisational structure. This apparent in the statements of women interviewed. For instance, Suli, a quality supervisor said, "A career is a kind of work that provides an opportunity to reach a higher position". Therefore, having a career in a company implies that it is possible to achieve a higher job position. Parti, a junior manager, said "There are developments in the production of a career; there are steps that have to be passed progressively".[5] Apparently, increasing job position or climbing the ladder of the organisational structure is defined as having a career. As stated by Emi, another junior manager, "Working for progressive career advancement, so job-level promotion is a career".

The notion of career as an increasing in job position was also declared by Ela,[6] an administration staff member, "Career is a position, therefore career can mean a job which has the chance to develop".

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[4]Ade is ethnic Chinese. Although her colleagues may not know her true income level, the fact that she is Chinese may create jealousy and a suspicion that she receives privileged treatment.

[5] Parti has been working in the company for seven years. When she commenced with the company she was placed as a production supervisor at a supervisory level. After six months she was transferred to another production section, where she worked for four years as a supervisor. While she was at the supervisory level she also received an upgrade in level, until she reached her current job position as a junior manager under the production department. As her position is rises, she consequently receives a higher salary and greater responsibility.

[6] Since Ela's motivation for work is to reach the supervisory level, she believes that to have a career she must reach the supervisory level. She is now only placed as an administration staff member, meanwhile her educational background is S1. Although she has been working in the company studied for eight years, she believes that achieving a supervisory position is only a matter of time. However, she observed that males have more opportunities to reach this position. Ela believes that her male colleague arrives quickly at decisions and is more loyal to his boss. Further, she believes that males are always available to work because they suffer no disruption caused by family affairs.

The notion of career as having the opportunity for advancement in seniority was also realised by Titi, another administration staff member.[7] She surmised that her current job could not be considered to be a career as her low educational background made it impossible for her to be promoted to a higher level. She understood that today the chance to be promoted was more competitive as more women had received a higher education. Titi said, "It seems too far away for me to get a promotion, since the company mostly requires employees who have graduated, unlike me who only holds a high school qualification, so it is too far away".

Although my studies were not based on a structured instrument, neither used statistical analyses that examine the strong correlation between gender and their aspiration to obtaining a higher position. On the other hand, Indonesian culture is very different to Anglo-American/Australian culture, the phenomena, however, support Still's (1988) and O'Connor's (2001) studies. Leonie Still (1988) argued that people with clear career directions avoid jobs that simply fill in time before marriage and children. They aim for jobs that have a future, that lead to the top of the management hierarchy. She claims that most women do not have a clear career goal. She posits that women are socially conditioned to believe that their 'real' career is that of wife and mother, therefore many working women are only filling in time until they can begin to undertake their 'true career'. Consequently, these women often work in the same position (a stationary career) or in different positions at the same level (a lateral career). Very few of these women plan to move up through the promotional hierarchy. Victoria O'Connor (2001) postulates that some women are less interested than men in reaching senior management ranks. She proposes that differences in the proportion of women and men who wish to be senior managers may be explained by differences in the way that they choose to have their needs met.[8] Further, Wood & Lindorff (2001) propose that although male and female managers have similar aspirations to obtain senior management positions, women are less likely to expect a promotion. My findings, however, indicate that not only males aspire to reach a higher position regardless of their current level position, but women's aspirations to reach a higher job position, on the other hand, tend to be more influenced by their current level position. This phenomenon also indicates that not all women considered developing their careers in the company studied in terms of reaching top positions. Those women who were not ambitious with regard to climbing the organisational ladder were not necessarily

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[7] Titi has been working in the company studied for 14 years. She started as a helper for three years before being promoted to the production staff. Since her educational background is only Senior High School, she believes that she may not get the chance to be promoted to a higher level.

[8] Postulates that the need for affiliation, achievement, power and self-actualisation in men and women are, in general, met in different ways. Further she emphasises the importance of equality of opportunity rather than numerical equality. It is still necessary to remove barriers for those who have managerial aspirations. They need to be encouraged to strive for self actualisation (O'Connor, 2001).

dissatisfied since their needs were to maintain a balance between paid employment and their family responsibilities. These women often worked to support their family lifestyle and may have preferred to stay at home if their spouses could earn sufficient income to support the family's lifestyle.

HAVING VALUE AND STATUS IN THEIR JOB AS A CAREER

An employee perceives different respective values in every level of career position. Although the manager position was perceived to be the highest and most prestigious position, employees in lower positions nonetheless considered that other job positions had a different significance and were valuable.

Intan, a middle manager, claims, "a management level position holds great interest for many employees, but few dare to face the risks inherent in management level responsibilities" The level of responsibility and the stress of a manager's duties were also reflected in the statement of Suli, a control supervisor, who said, "I am afraid to be a manager as I may have more responsibilities". Afi, a production staff member, was also not confident of being able to perform at the managerial level. Although she held an S1[9] educational background, she commenced employment in the company studied as a helper because she only cited her high school background when she applied for the position. After working as a helper for eight months Afi applied for a better position, this time using her S1 background. As a result, she was placed as a production staff member in another department for four years. Afi was always willing to accept any offer of transfer providing it promised her a better position. However, Afi considered that she did not have managerial potential, even though she possessed a broad knowledge (*berwawasan luas)*, because she believed that to be a manager one must have graduated from university. Statements such as this demonstrate the attractiveness of, and prestige attributed to, managerial positions, but also illustrate that many women fear that this senior level of position also involved overwhelming responsibilities. This is because they have internalised sexist ideology and believe that they, as women, are less able to take on such responsible positions.

Parti, a junior manager, did not consider managerial duties to be demanding. In contrast, she believed that tasks required of managers were easier than those required at supervisor level because a manager's position is essentially a 'desk job'. As she said, "Working at the managerial level is easier than at the supervisory level because as a manager we do not need to go to the field (plant site) any more and only have to do administrative jobs". On the other hand, an employee with at least a university (S1) educational background must gain experience at the supervisory level before being posted at the manager level. Therefore, the supervisory level was a compulsory stepping

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[9] Graduate S1 is equivalent with first degree of four years University

stone for those who aspired to work at managerial level as expressed by Suli, a control supervisor, "Supervisory positions are a starting point if you want to be a manager". In addition, it was possible for an employee at the supervisory level to enter salary negotiations, although this was dependent upon her supervisor. As stated by Surti, an accounting supervisor, "Those in a supervisor position may bargain for her salary, but this is dependent on her boss".

As achieving a managerial position seemed to be the objective of many female employees, the position of supervisor was also coveted as it was a prerequisite for achieving a managerial position. However, it was not only managerial and supervisory positions that were considered to be important and valuable. Other positions also had significant meaning attached to those working at various levels. As a secretary to the head of division, for example, Semi[10] sensed the importance of her position. As she was often requested to perform various tasks that were considered to be outside the usual range of secretarial duties she considered her job to be a career. She also considered her position as a secretary to be an asset for her career development as she was able to develop a close professional relationship with her boss, who wielded considerable power within the organisation. Semi said, "Having a job as a head of division's secretary is a career. I am frequently asked to do quite various tasks beyond normal secretarial duties. Because I am very close to the power [boss], I can get value from my position, including career development".

The value of secretaries' positions was also shown by the study of Kennelly (2002) in the US. She found that many secretaries in her sample enjoyed their work and ascribed value to themselves due to the distinctive contributions that they felt could only be made by women. They believed themselves to be a vital part of their workplace organisation and also believed that they had opportunities to grow and learn new skills.

In my case study, the opportunity for a secretary to improve her position appeared to be linked to their boss's position in the organisational hierarchy. As Semi explained, "My position is highly desired by other employees. To become a secretary of head of division I simply followed my boss. When my boss was a junior manager, I was his junior secretary. Therefore my position level has always followed my boss's position level". Semi's case indicates that although her position is only that of a secretary, she still feels that she had some power. It does not matter to her that her power is derived from her boss's power. She, of course, considers herself and her job to be important.

Those values of the positions that women held in their job either they considered to be their career or merely job will of course determine their work satisfaction.

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[10] With her D3 in Secretarial department educational background, Semi began working in the company studied in 1991 as a junior secretary (Secretary of Junior Manager). She has been transferred four times as a result of the transformation of her boss's position.

MANAGING FAMILY AS A CAREER

As has been previously mentioned, a career is not only perceived to be related to the paid job. In this matter, managing family is also considered to be a career. Therefore, for a woman who gets married, the family situation will of course determine the extent to which her career will develop. A large number of studies have focused on the family's role upon women's careers, in Western as well as Asian countries including in Indonesia (see Brett, 1997; Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Parasuraman & Greenhause, 1997 ; Rotter & Evans, 2002 American cases); (Edwards & Rothbard, 1999 for various of ethnicities in an American case); (Lo, Stone, & Ng, 2003 in Hong Kong; Tsung-Kuo, 1992 in Taiwan case); (Bhatnagar & Rajadhyaksha, 2001; Komarraju, 1997 Indian case); (Gan, Samaratunge, & Smith, 2000 a Malaysian case); (Adler, 1993-1994; Aziz, 1996; Bianpoen, 2000; Budiati, 1997 Indonesian cases).

All of these studies show that, across a range of societies, women are likely to face more problems in advancing or at least concentrating on their careers in the public sphere as they have additional responsibilities as homemakers and frequently internalise societal expectations that their primary role is that of homemaker. Although women may have similar positions or ambitions as their husbands, a greater burden of domestic responsibilities falls to women who frequently also see their homemaker roles as primary.

Society establishes roles that define men as achieving in the world of work beyond the home and women as nurturing in the home (Nieva & Gutek, 1981). Women's activities are perceived to be confined to the home, while men monopolise the public sphere, these perceptions then play an important role in relegating women to lowly positions in the paid labour market (Blau & Ferber, 1992). Men's work in the public sphere, that is, outside the family, has usually enjoyed higher status than women's domestic work within the family circle.

By working outside the home, women might re-establish their identities based on their occupations. In this respect, work choices outside the home are becoming increasingly central concerns in women's expressions of their values and their personal and professional fulfilment (Blau & Ferber, 1992).

In Indonesia, being a good mother does not merely mean taking care of the children, but also includes serving her husband. Sometimes the care of the husband takes priority over the care of the children, for the sake of religion.[11] Although it is a common practice for Indonesian family to have servant in their household to help

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[11] Although Islam, which is based on the Holy *Qur'an* as the main guide for human relations, does not discriminate in favour of one sex over another, the interpretations of Islamic leaders (*Ulama*) are, of course, greatly influenced by their culture and position males as the leaders and masters of females. However, as Aihwa Ong remarked (1995), all great religions, whether they be Islam, Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism, are patriarchal and have a substantial investment in women's roles as wives and mothers. The Muslimah (Moslem Women) International Meeting conducted in Jakarta on 3 April 1999,

their families' life running well, it is still wife's responsibility to monitor the task of the servant. This situation is caused by ideological religious constructs of womanhood, which are culturally and socially produced and reproduced by cultural institutions and the state.

The internalisation by women of the ideology of womanhood in Indonesia is reflected in the statements of some informants. Based on in-depth interviews with 22 female employees in the manufacturing industry, this study indicates that being a successful career woman requires a woman to competently manage her 'dual roles'. It seems that these women are always subjected to the double burden, since they are supposed to have the capacity to develop job skills and also balance their household duties. These values are clearly evidenced by the female employees' statements. The ideal of a 'good' mother was described by both married women and unmarried female employees.

Ade, a product supervisor, commented: "A career woman has to be able to both run her household and do her job". As a single woman, Ade believed that if she marries she must be able to perform both domestic and workplace duties. Therefore, she believed that remaining single will be of most benefit to her career development and that being married would restrain her career. She believed that, as a woman, she must work hard to pursue her career and that a woman's weakness is caused by femininity itself. This statement also demonstrates that the ways in which women manage their domestic and public duties affect their perceptions about 'career' and their identity as 'career women'.

Rini, an administration staff member, agreed, "As a woman it is better to have both a job and the responsibility of educating her child". Unlike Ade, who is single, Rini is married and has one daughter in the second grade of primary school. Although Rini could count on her sister in-law's help to take care of her daughter and could also invite her parents to help if her sister in-law was not available, she still considers that she would be a 'good' career woman if she could also educate her daughter very well. Rini even enrolled in an English course up to basic III level so that she would be able to teach her daughter and help her daughter with her English homework.

For many of the women in my study, it was considered that having a career in the public sphere should not be more important than a woman's household duties. It was stated that, as a career woman, a woman must obtain a higher job position in a company (as a sign of career development), but should not neglect her duties as a mother. Dewi[12], a marketing supervisor, said, "Although we give our careers great

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made a commitment to reject the dual-role concept for women. Instead of the dual-role concept, that they assumed created dichotomies that manifested as discrimination against women, they proposed the concept of a universal comprehensive role which would apply to both males and females, giving each similar degrees of responsibility as agents of maintaining truth and fairness (Kompas, 1999).

[12] Dewi has one daughter and she admires her parents' arrangements for the division of labour; her mother performs all the domestic chores while her father undertakes paid employment and is the problem solver in her parents' household.

priority, we must not neglect our family responsibilities. Therefore, we must manage our time". These comments portray Dewi's ideas about working mothers and also express the ways in which the ideology of womanhood has been internalised by women themselves.

However, it is no simple matter for a woman to advance her career while bearing full responsibility as a homemaker. Therefore, some women give priority to their careers and overlook their responsibilities as mothers. Surti,[13] an accounting supervisor, said, "As a career woman, she might prioritise her job and be so busy that she forgets about her family business". Surti does not consider herself to be a career woman because she believes that her role at home is more important than her career. Even though she considers her job to be a career as she has been upgraded several times, her idea of a career woman is a negative one of a workaholic woman who neglects her domestic responsibilities.

Some women do not want to advance their careers if it means they are required to leave their family or reprioritise their family responsibilities. Prima,[14] a middle manager, said, "Most women are reluctant to advance their careers if they are required to sacrifice their families". Prima stressed that: "A career woman is always working. She leaves the house in the morning and goes back home at night". Therefore, being a career woman means that a woman may not have enough time to perform her family duties, such as preparing the family's meals (although a servant may do actual cooking, it is wife's task to arrange the menu) and helping with the children's study.

These cases show the strength of women's attachment to the dual responsibilities of career and family. A woman considers herself to be an 'ideal woman' only if she is able to manage both her career and her domestic duties. On the other hand, a woman who cannot manage both often chooses the role of housekeeper/wife. This choice is affected by women's internalisation of social and cultural values that idealise women as homemakers.

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[13] Surti has two young children whom she cannot bear to leave without her supervision for long periods (more than normal working time hours: 8.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.). She does not consider herself to be a career woman even though her educational background is $S1$ and her job provides her with the potential to pursue and develop her career. Surti employs a babysitter and a domestic helper. Her husband's position and income is much higher than her own, and she regards her job as a means to provide financially for her children's needs. Her elder child frequently asked her to come home soon from the office.

[14] Prima is married and has one son. Her husband's level of educational background is lower than her own and the same situation applies to Prima's parents. However, Prima was taught by her mother that her father's position was considered to be more important than anything else. Although Prima's parents wanted all of their children to finish university, they did not require this qualification for their children's spouses. Provided their sons-in-law had a stable business (good entrepreneur) like Prima's father, they could gain respect through their higher income. Prima was taught to be a humble and compliant woman.

Therefore, a woman can only be considered to be a successful career woman when she succeeds in managing her job as well as performing her role as a wife, mother and/or daughter. It is almost impossible for a woman to develop her career without family support.

CONCLUSION

A career is a multi-factor concept. Since every person is affected by gender, racial/ethnic, and class-group experiences, which, in turn, affects their working life in many different ways individuals, may generate different career notions, orientations and strategies.

Indonesian societal norms, to some extent, determine women's career direction; thus, the internalisation of those norms and of organisational values will determine their career notion, career orientation and career strategy. In due course, although the meaning of a good wife and a success career woman can be overlap, it is only applicable for woman who pursues her career in the paid work, not for a homemaker. It is a must for a career woman to manage both her duties in her office as well as her duties in her household. On the other hand, it is good to be a woman who has no career (a job in the office) but well manage of her household duties and she still considers herself as a career woman.

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