

## Women's Sense of Security at Work: Maternal Role and Fear of An Uncertain Future

*Marsael Michael Sengkey<sup>1</sup>, Tellma Monna Tiwa<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1,2</sup>Faculty of Science Education, Universitas Negeri Manado

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**Abstract.** Women's participation in the work space is needed, however, the workplace's ability to provide a sense of security for women is still not optimal, especially when pregnant or breastfeeding. This study aimed to explore the construction of female workers' sense of security when carrying out their maternity roles. This study used qualitative approach with thematic analysis methods to construct a sense of safety variable. The respondents were eight women who cleaned and skinned fish in fish processing companies. The results showed that female workers have concerns and fears when carrying out their maternal roles (pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding), which hinders the formation of a sense of security work. Little or less sense of security felt by female workers comes from three major themes, namely physical demands at work, a work environment that is not conducive and uncertainty in work relationships that raise concerns in carrying out their maternal roles. Security for working women is not only determined by physical security, but also by the degree of certainty or uncertainty in the work relationship.

**Keywords:** maternity; sense of security; workers, women

One of the phenomena accompanying the dynamics of Indonesian labor is the increasing contribution or participation of women in the work field. Reviewing BPS data, in 2017 the female participation rate in the labor force reached 55.04%, much higher than in 2000 which was 29.95% (BPS, 2017). The increase in women's participation was largely contributed by the industrial sector, especially the textile industry and textile processing, electronics, processing industries or small industries.

The increase of women's participation in various industry sectors raises optimism

that there will be more opportunities for women to be productive, to develop themselves and especially in building self-reliance. However, in contrast to male workers, female workers face their own challenges in working, namely when the woman is working and at the same time going through pregnancy, giving birth or breastfeeding babies.

Interpreting a sense of security as one of the basic elements in work (Jerome, 2013), there are differences between men and women, especially women who are carrying their expected role. According to Kinnvall (2016), ideally, there are supports and opportunities for women in carrying

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<sup>1</sup> Address for correspondence:  
[mmsengkey@unima.ac.id](mailto:mmsengkey@unima.ac.id)

out these two roles, but the reality shows otherwise. Study by Wusana, Widyawati and Pratiwi (2017) found that there are cases of discrimination, negligence and even dismissal of the maternity rights of female workers by companies, which in fact create a sense of insecurity.

Security, according to Maslow (1987), is one of the five hierarchies of human needs, which can be realized only when a person has succeeded in fulfilling their physiological needs. The need for security was defined by Maslow (1987) as a picture of self-confidence, security and freedom from fear and anxiety, related to efforts to meet current and future needs. However, in their critique to Maslow's theory, Fallatah and Syed (2018) conveyed the many limitations of placing human motivation, including a sense of security in the pyramid hierarchy. However, the critical adaptation that places Maslow's theory as the initial foundation remains one of the most widely recognized theoretical frameworks (Francis & Kristonis, 2006).

A sense of security at work is one of the main studies in modern organizational development, which is marked by the development of a transformational paradigm, which emphasizes the solidity of teamwork and leaders. In general, a sense of security at work can come from an individual's assessment of things that can physically injure or threaten them, the situation or climate surrounding work, to the presence of psychological security that allows someone to develop themselves and innovate (Jerome, 2013).

The organizational behavior approach in the last few decades has increasingly emphasized the importance of psycholo-

gical safety for employees/workers, as a basis for building effective and open teamwork, and increasing personal abilities, as well as strengthening one's involvement in the big goals of the organization. Kahn (1990) defined psychological safety as a psychological condition when employees are not worried about self-image, position and negative impact of work, are able to express themselves and show different egos in different contexts. Brown and Leigh (Jerome, 2013) broadened the scope of psychological security from the individual level to the organizational level, and defined organizational psychological safety as employees' perceptions of the characteristics of organization's environment, which contain several aspects; management support, clear job roles and freedom of self-expression.

This phenomenon raises a big question about the sense of security for female workers. This study sought to explore the construction of a sense of security for female workers when carrying out their maternal roles. The study by Kinvall (2016) emphasized that the approach to the construction of sense of security needs to be put within the boundary of women's day to day contexts, which will shape their respective characteristics. In the Indonesian context, studies on women and their subjective aspects are still very limited. One of them is Torianto's (2015) review of the sense of security of agency workers, which did not specifically examine women. The study by Wusana et al. (2017) which focused on gender-based violence in female workers put more emphasis on legal and labor rights aspects. So exploring the construction of a sense of security for female workers has its own urgency, firstly

in an effort to lay the foundation of knowledge about the sense of security in women, and second is in revealing what might hinder the feeling of security in female workers, especially in Indonesia.

Wusana (2017) in his study stated that not all companies comply with the maternity rights of female workers according to the provisions of the law. Realities faced by some female workers are; limited supporting facilities for workers who are heavily pregnant, no change of workload during pregnancy, termination of the contract due to pregnancy or childbirth, unpaid maternity leave, and no lactation room to pump or store breastmilk while in the factory.

One of the prominent findings in the study by Wusana et al.(2017) was that there is no reduction in the workload for pregnant or breastfeeding women. Physically, the absence of a reduction in the workload for pregnant workers can certainly lead to excessive fatigue that endangers the mother and her fetus (Lee & Jung, 2012). Fatigue can also cause stress, which directly affects the emergence of risks in pregnancy, such as premature birth of a baby (Lilliecreutz, Larén, Sydsjö and Josefsson, 2016; Celikkalp & Yorulmaz, 2017). Likewise with the term employment status, the non-permanent nature of the job relationship, for example workers with short contract status, certainly underlies the high uncertainty of future work. Especially when the company prioritizes workers who are not or will be pregnant. As a result, female workers often face worry or fear when carrying out their maternity roles, for their own security, their children and also about the future.

This psychological safety perspective of workers is in line with the legal point of view of the Manpower Act, which emphasizes the company's obligation to guarantee and protect the maternity rights of female workers.

"Female worker is entitled to rest for 1.5 (one and a half) months before the time to give birth to a child and 1.5 (one and a half) months after giving birth ... Female worker / worker who experiences a miscarriage has the right to get a break 1.5 (one and a half) months .. "

(Article 82, Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 13, 2003)

"Female worker whose child is still breastfed should be given appropriate opportunities to breastfeed her child if it has to be done during working hours ..."

(Article 83, Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 13, 2003)

Reviewing legal provisions in Indonesia, it is stated that a female worker has the right to continue carrying out her maternity role in a safe, healthy and protected manner. So in this case, examining the sense of security of female workers cannot be separated from the relationship of contextual elements, such as employment status, length of work contract and the existence of certain regulation/policies. The framework for sense of safety in female workers certainly not only includes the physical aspects, but also the psychological aspects of security as well as the reduction of the uncertainties faced. Thus, the present study intended to answer the following questions (1) Can female

workers who are carrying out their maternity roles feel safe? (2) How is the construction of feelings of security in female workers who are pregnant or breastfeeding?

**Methods**

This study used a qualitative approach to explore the construction of female workers' sense of security when carrying out their maternity roles, to explore the construction of a feeling of security for working women when carrying out their maternity roles. The approach was chosen because it was considered the most appropriate to answer research questions in-depth. Respondents in this study were women who worked as fish peelers and cleaners in the Bitung area, North Sulawesi. The selection of interview participants was done by using the snowball technique until saturation was reached, which means that the data obtained could truly represent the phenomenon being studied.

Eight female workers underwent in-depth interviews. The participants had experiences of being pregnant, giving birth and breastfeeding while working in fish processing facilities in 2017-2018. Two respondents in this study were fish processing workers in medium-scale industries, or not in large companies. This is considered important considering that the fish processing industry in Bitung is also a model for small and medium enterprises that is quite prominent in North Sulawesi.

This study emphasized volunteerism and confidentiality of informants, so that the names and identities of female workers who were being interviewed are concealed to ensure the continuity of their work. The

complete overview of research respondents is in the Table 1.

Table 1.  
Overview of Respondents

Respondent	Age	Length of Work	Workers in Industry
N	35	4	Large
I	28	3	Medium
Is	32	6	Large
P	38	18	Medium
M	25	4	Large
S	29	3	Large
My	27	6	Large
F	26	8	Large

The interview data were then interpreted using thematic analysis, namely a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis in this study was done in a contextualist paradigm, which places the experiences, meanings and reality of the informants, as the main components to be integrated with the context or social discourse influencing the values and framework of these meanings.

**Results**

The implementation of a production activity uses a lot of human labor, and every production activity is strongly influenced by the conditions of the workers. Workers who also encompass of female workers must have a sense of security when carrying out their work tasks, especially if they are carrying out their maternity roles as women.

Being a fish processing worker, for the eight women in this study it was not a choice based on personal interest. Fish

processing work situations are perceived as harsh, unpleasant and surrounded by pressures to fulfill work target. Respondents mentioned economic needs and limited access to other jobs underlied their choice of working in the fish processing industry.

This study found several major themes in the area of industrial relations, namely wages, situations of economic deprivation, and high uncertainty due to employment status. Wages, as one of the main variables in assessing the level of economic welfare, are in fact difficult to implement in achieving a decent life. For example, one of the respondents in this study was a female worker aged 35 years, with three children, who had worked for more than four years at the same company, but only received wages equal to the minimum wage. This caused the respondents to worry about the future of their children, especially those who were still babies, because her income and her fishermen husband combined was considered insufficient for themselves at that moment.

Economic insecurity seemed to force respondents to keep working. The belief that she had an important role in the family causes woman to put herself at risk, such as fatigue, stress, work accidents, and reduced free time with family (Donnelly et al., 2016). Even respondents who were female workers in the middle-tier fish processing companies experienced higher pressure, especially from the absence of health insurance covered by the companies.

The next thing that hindered the development of a sense of security for fish processing workers is the high uncertainty of employment status. The short-term

contracts or even the absence of work contracts presents a bigger threat to female workers, that they can easily lose their jobs because of the contract expiration, or even because of certain mistakes. This situation illustrates that it is difficult for women fish processing workers to feel psychological safety at work. The organization, in this case, had not created a foundation for the emergence of employee involvement and self-growth by failing to provide certainty of employment status.

Furthermore, the main theme was developed from the process or stages of the maternal role of working women, namely the period of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. The period of pregnancy is one of the periods considered to be the most worrying for the respondents. Working women in this study put more emphasis on the emergence of anxiety and fear, the high level of risk faced at work, or the inability to build certainty for supporting situations, such as health services, financial capacity or knowledge related to pregnancy. Judging from the results of the study by Cihan, Gumus and Erkenekli (2017), this situation can be categorized as a woman with a high level of risk.

Some of the problems faced by women fish processing workers were the unavailability of specialized facilities for pregnant women, which can ease work, or provide better accommodation. The absence of additional rest periods, for example, was said to cause the accumulation of physical fatigue during pregnancy. The problem related to fatigue was explained by two study respondents who decided to stop working when they entered the seventh month of pregnancy, not because of health reasons, but because they felt they could

no longer overcome work pressure. Quitting job was considered to reduce risks during pregnancy, even though on the other hand, they might have to deal with financial problems. This situation explains the high structural vulnerability of women fish processing workers, and conversely represents the lack of security for pregnant women in working.

The respondents called childbirth a stressful period, especially for three out of eight respondents who had their first child. Apart from concerns about the success and safety during childbirth, the main concern of female workers is the availability of adequate and affordable health service facilities. From eight respondents, five respondents managed to access social security during childbirth, while three respondents stated that they chose midwife services without social security, citing convenience and trustworthiness. Mainly in the form of fears about the quality of health services provided, not creating sufficient care since pre-delivery and concerns about costs. For the three workers who did not use social security, the problem of childbirth costs became a source of stress and anxiety.

The results of this study indicate that female workers do not place the company as one of the parties contributing to the childbirth process. The process of giving birth is seen as a personal and familial responsibility, independent of the role in the company. This assessment was even stated by female workers who did not receive compensation for maternity leave. The strategy developed by female workers was to optimize family support to help solve the problem of childcare. The physical exhaustion faced by female workers

during breastfeeding period was described as a mother's "duty or obligation" by the respondents.

The success of undergoing childbirth, with the baby born in healthy condition, was recognized by respondents as a catalyst for happiness and meaningfulness as a woman who succeeded in carrying out her role. On the other hand, women who are working, who do not receive wages and maternity leave, caring for and breastfeeding babies actually experience an elevated uncertainty due to increased needs (McGinn & Oh, 2017). Two respondents who stopped working before giving birth had to exercise more efforts to be able to work again, with lower wages to make ends meet.

The results of this study generally illustrate that the feeling of security in female workers when carrying out their maternity roles is a compensatory construct for the lack of support and involvement from the company. The workplace is more often seen as a source of worry and even physical threats, for example due to injury, fatigue, illness which cannot be avoided due to economic constraints.

## Discussion

Referring to the Law BAB XA (Human Rights, Article 28), a female worker has the right of protection, to feel safe and protected in exercising her human rights, and to be free from all forms of unfair or discriminatory treatment. So as a worker, a woman is still entitled to carry out her maternal role in a free, safe and protected manner (ILO, 2014). However, the findings of this study did not represent such description. Women who work in the fish

processing industry generally face personal and job constraints due to the lack of company support and protection during pregnancy, childbirth or while breast-feeding.

This finding confirmed that the sense of security of female workers is far from ideal; with strong anxiety, worry and even fear for themselves, the fetus/baby and the future.

Reviewing the analysis by Kornelsen and Grzybowski (2005), the situation faced by female fish processing workers in Bitung showed non-guaranteed economic adequacy and a sense of psychological security. Associated with Maslow's basic theory (Francis & Kristonis, 2006), limited livelihoods and high uncertainty over the fulfillment of basic needs clearly dismiss the assumption of a complete sense of security, and on the contrary, indicate personal and structural vulnerabilities in industrial relations (Vidal, 2007).

Looking at Maslow's hierarchical approach to human needs (Francis & Kristonis, 2006; Fallatah & Syed, 2018), a sense of security is obtained after achieving the underlying physiological needs. Conversely, failure to create certainty for the fulfillment of physiological needs, in Zeab's (2014) review can be interpreted as a sign of insecurity or insecure situations in today's life. One of the big problems in constructing a sense of security for female workers is that there is no certainty about the capacity to fulfill basic needs (physiological), so that female workers in this context still experience high level of uncertainty, related to fulfilling the (basic) needs of the family, the livelihood of the fetus or babies and insurance for the health needs of mothers and children. This

situation, not only reduces the sense of security, but also hinders the development of a sense of security in female workers.

The concept of psychological safety in an organizational perspective which can be described by the presence of positive perspective of workers towards the organization so that workers do not feel anxious and are able to express themselves (Frazier, Fainshmidt, Klinger, Pezeshkan, & Vracheva 2017; Ran, Chen, Gao, & Zheng, 2015) apparently cannot be used to explain the sense of security of women fish processing workers. Working women in this study still faced issues of physical security, regarding health and safety, as well as economic adequacy.

Maslow's approach explains that the sense of security of female workers is also challenged with the assumptions of unresolved physiological drives and needs. The reproductive approach in the review of Schaller, Kenrick, Griskevicius and Neuberg (2010) is considered to be more flexible in explaining changes or adjustments to human needs based on certain preferences, which allows someone to pursue the fulfillment of several needs at once. The construction of a sense of security is inseparable from the interpretation of the perceived threats. At this point someone will develop their own motivation to face them, without having to first meet physiological needs. Schaller et al. (2010) explained this as an effort to protect oneself, and for the success of achieving it, then a person can achieve a sense of security. This means that sense of security is adaptive, in relation to efforts of protecting oneself from threats or uncertainty, then the interpretation of the value of threats and opportunities (to gain

security) is very crucial in reviewing how a person builds a sense of security (Schaller, Neuberg, Kenrick & Maner, 2004).

The results of this study explain that women fish processing workers while carrying out their maternity roles have not been able to build a sense of security. High uncertainty encourages a sense of security as a success in avoiding the most dangerous perceived risk. In the context of pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding workers, local perspectives on the noble role of mother encourage a strong meaning of women's central role. On the other hand, industrial relations, which ideally guarantees the protection of women's rights, is not yet understood as one of the aspects that ideally underlies the feeling of security of female workers.

This study had several limitations, both methodologically and in its scope. Methodologically, the limited number of respondents had not been able to fully describe the lives of women fish processing workers as a whole, including industry scale (large, medium or small) that female workers are engaged in. Conceptually, this study had not succeeded in finding a strong foothold in representing a sense of security in female workers. A sense of security is assumed to be formed in terms of limitations, which are unique. A review of cultural values and internalization of specific values should be able to provide additional analytical strength to the results of this study.

### **Conclusion**

A sense of security is not easily obtained by working women when carrying out

their maternal roles. Security for working women is not only determined by physical security, but also by the degree of certainty or uncertainty in the work relationship. Working women in the fish processing industry have various concerns and fears when carrying out their maternity roles (pregnancy, giving birth and breastfeeding babies), which hinders the development of a sense of security while working. The sense of security for working women in carrying out their maternity roles is an elaboration of various dimensions or aspects of life, namely personal aspects including health and belief, security and rights, as well as contextual aspects of the job. On the other hand, the feeling of insecurity for female workers comes from three major reasons, namely physical demands at work, a less conducive work environment and uncertainty in working relationships. So doing a maternal role, for women fish processing workers, can be associated with increased vulnerability, as a result from lack of protection of the maternity rights in female workers.

### *Suggestion*

The results of this study raise the need to further explore how the strategies of working women to overcome obstacles, limitations and uncertainties in their lives in order to create a sense of security as an adaptive strategy. Further research, it is suggested to explore the social representation of female workers' sense of security in an authentic way, broaden the scope of research in a range of other industries. It is also suggested for future research to use quantitative approach to measure the psychological aspects of female workers, such as anxiety, stress or coping strategies



in dealing with work pressure and uncertainty. In addition to quantitative approach in examining the psychological dynamics of female workers, a cultural approach is also highly recommended, especially to explore cultural values that play roles in encouraging or strengthening working women to face the problems in their lives, as well as how the meaning of being a mother is built by female workers despite facing situations of structural vulnerability.

A threat that is strongly perceived by female workers is the highest level of job insecurity, that is, the non-permanent employment status that causes a deep concern about the future of employment. They could be terminated from work without notice, especially when they make mistake. This employment status at the same time has an impact on the limited wages or income received by female workers. This phenomenon is a source of greatest concern for female workers regarding their future, that the increased needs of their families cannot be guaranteed by their current jobs.

This research is expected to provide a foundation for the importance of systematic efforts in building healthy industrial relations and protecting women. Without this foundation, female workers do not only experience anxiety when they find themselves pregnant, but also get put in vulnerable positions, both personally; such as stress, health problems due to fatigue; and the inability to guarantee a future for themselves and their children. As a preliminary study, it is still necessary to have a more specific look at the characteristics of industry in Indonesia, especially North Sulawesi, to be able to analyze

in detail the effect of work situations on women's empowerment, and how the strategies of female workers in creating a sense of security in their lives.

This research is expected to be able to encourage policymakers to review the implementation of labor law, especially in terms of protecting the maternity rights of female workers. Reviewing the readiness and willingness of employers or companies to accommodate and protect workers is a recommended step for local governments and the Office of Manpower.

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#### *Conflict of interest*

There is no potential conflict of interest.

#### *Orchid id :*

Marsel Michael Sengkey:  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6370-5487>

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