Women’s Career Advancement Barriers in A Matrilineal Society: The Case of Minangkabau

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to examine and to compare the patterns of women’s and men’s career advancement in a municipal government located within traditional area of the biggest matrilineal society in the world, the Minangkabau. This research employed a qualitative approach through a case study and suggests that the higher the position, the less the number of women occupying it. Further, this study also aims to explore the barriers that impede career advancement of the female employees. Women face barriers that become more significant as they climb the hierarchical structure, including lack of experience, job segregation, work-family conflicts, and stereotypes. Applying new policies such as a quota system and flexible work arrangements can be implemented to address these issues. This research only studied one municipal region within the Minangkabau. Future and more extensive research can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the situation by observing more local governments.

Keywords: women, career advancement barriers, local government, Minangkabau, matrilineal society

INTISARI

Penelitian ini mencermati dan membandingkan pola kemajuan karir pegawai wanita dan pegawai pria dipemerintah daerah yang berlokasi didalam area tradisional masyarakat matrilineal terbesar didunia, suku Minangkabau. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi kasus. Hasil penelitian ini menemukan bahwa semakin tinggi tingkatan jabatan maka semakin sedikit wanita yang mendudukinya. Lebih lanjut, penelitian ini juga menggali hambatan kemajuan karir para pegawai wanita tersebut. Wanita menghadapi hambatan-hambatan yang semakin sulit ditembus seiring dengan makin tingginya tingkatan hirarki dari jabatan tersebut. Hambatan tersebut diantaranya kurangnya pengalamalan, pemisahan pekerjaan, konflik pekerjaan-keluarga, dan stereotip. Untuk mengatasi masalah tersebut dapat dilakukan dengan menerapkan kebijakan kebijakan baru seperti sistem kuota dan pengaturan kerja yang fleksibel. Penelitian ini hanya mempelajari satu daerah administratif saja diantaranya beberapa daerah administratif yang dihuni oleh masyarakat Minangkabau. Diharapkan pada penelitian selanjutnya ada lebih banyak daerah administratif yang bersinggungan dengan wilayah Minangkabau yang dapat diteliti, sehingga mampu memberikan gambaran yang lebih baik lagi mengenai pembahasan ini.

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1. Introduction

Women have made extensive progress in the work domain in the last 20 years (ILO, 2018); however, they are still underrepresented in terms of their numbers in the field—according to The World Bank, the female labor force accounted for 39.29% in 2017. Similar conditions are observed in Indonesia; the World Bank data in 2017 showed that although women constitute for approximately half of the total population (49.658%), the employment-to-population ratio is relatively low compared to men and respectively accounts for 48.75% and 78.25%. Moreover, when it is highlighted more specifically in the public sector, the number of women working in governmental sectors account for 49.31% of 4.37 million civil servants in total (BKN, 2018). Despite women constitutes for almost a half of the total number of civil servants, the number of women occupying higher level positions is only constituted by 12.59% (BKN, 2018). This pattern indicates that the higher the positions, the less probable it is that a woman occupies it. This implies that even though there are almost the same number of men and women participating in the public sector, women’s career advancement is not as substantial as men’s (Allen, French, & Poteet, 2016); this further indicates towards the presence of barriers impeding their progress on the career ladders.

Several studies have been published on the barriers to women’s career advancement. Newman (1993) divided the barriers into three categories: human capital model, sociopsychological model, and systemic model. Furthermore, she argued that some barriers are entrenched in cultures. The Glass Ceiling Commission of US Department (1995) makes reaches conclusions, arguing that there are three levels of impediments hampering women’s career advancement; one of the barriers is closely related to culture. A more recent study conducted by Allen et al. (2016) suggested that greater the status in the government is held by men compared to women.

By emphasizing that the situation persists across all cultures, they argued that culture is one factor that significantly influences women’s career advancement. In a broader perspective, Chongvilaivan & Kim (2015) suggested that cultural factors may also be a root cause of gender inequality. A study conducted by Bain & Cumming (2000) located that the glass ceiling—invisible barriers that hamper women from climbing to the top positions—is rooted in cultural factors that vary among societies.

When discussing cultural factors that may emerge as barriers to women’s career advancement, it is quite interesting to review the phenomena in a matrilineal society where women’s roles within the society are more dominant compared to the women in a patriarchal society. Only a few societies in the world follow a matrilineal system; one such community is the Minangkabau in West Sumatra, Indonesia that is also considered to be the biggest matrilineal society in the world (Kato, 1977). The areas traditionally occupied by Minangkabau intersect with the municipal area of the West Sumatra province. This research is restricted to one of the three primary areas occupied by Minangkabau, the Luhak Limopuluah Koto, which also intersects with the area under the Payakumbuh local government. Although a plethora of studies have already been published on the topic of barriers to women’s career advancement, these are still limited to the area of public organization, especially with regards to matrilineal societies. In order to bridge this gap, this study seeks to examine and compare the patterns of women’s and men’s career advancement in Payakumbuh local government. By comparing and examining the pattern of women’s and men’s career advancement in the municipalities that is located within the Minangkabau is expected to describe how the career of women developed in matrilineal societies. Moreover, finding of the career pattern—women lacks in advancing their career compare to men’s—guides this study to move further by exploring the barriers that impede the career advancement of female employees in the local government.

2. Theory

2.1 Women’s Career Advancement

Women have made significant progress in terms of career advancement; on the global level, female representations in the managerial level has increased in the recent decade (Osituyo, 2018). Moreover, Bowling, Kelleher, Jones, & Wright (2006) have argued that women have gained substantial attention due to the trend of substantial female presence in responsible governmental positions. Their study found that in the United States, women have made identifiable and significant progress in term of their presence in the leadership position and this is especially located within the bureaucracy—from only six percent in the 1970s to 22% in the 1990s. Organization in Denmark host 14.5% female managers but only 5% of this population were top managers; Japan has 7.5% female managers but only 0.3% occupied positions in top management in the private sector (Reskin & Padavic, 1994).

Comprehensively understanding the condition of women’s career advancement leads to the assumption that there are barriers that impede their efforts to attain top positions. Several of these barriers have been analyzed by previous scholars; in order to simplify it, this paper classifies the barriers into two categories—the formal barriers and the glass ceiling. The formal barriers refer to the obvious barriers that individually hamper one’s career; these barriers are applicable to both men and
women in general. Among these categories, Newman (1993) listed education, training, ability, experience, and productivity as the underlying cause of differences in career advancement. Supporting the Newman’s list, Osituyo (2018) suggested that women’s capability in handling managerial tasks has insignificant positive correlation with their career progress. Additionally, Rodriguez (2011) suggested that women’s professional achievement is diminished because they voluntarily decide to invest less in their human capital or choose investments with lower rates of return. Therefore, lack of education, training, capability, experience, and productivity are among the formal barriers that can hinder women from advancing their career.

Meanwhile, the glass ceiling refers to the invisible barrier that impedes women who are trying to advance their career to higher-organizational-hierarchies (Powell, 2012), irrespective of their qualifications or attainments (Gupta, 2018). The glass ceiling affects the career advancement of women as a group. Job-segregation is one the barriers among this category. Rodriguez (2011) argued that organizations are gendered because they reproduce occupation-specific labor markets that are gendered. For example, in the field of Information Technology that is dominated by men, women are less likely to occupy senior position (McGee, 2018). Furthermore, women also tend to be occupied in less authoritative jobs and converge in emotive work such as health and human service profession, public education, and most support position (Guy & Newman, 2004). Work-family conflict is another impediment. Hoobler, Wayne, & Lemmon (2009) suggested that women have more significant work-family conflict compared to their male counterparts. Other studies also argued that marriage appears to restrain women’s career development (Newman, 1993; Rodriguez, 2011; Allen et al., 2016; Osituyo, 2017; Gupta, 2018). The work-family conflict leads to gender-role perceptions. Some studies suggest that the perception has a negative impact on women’s career progress that eventually affects their performance assessment and promotability (Hoobler et al., 2009; Allen et al., 2016; Osituyo, 2017). This negative perception is commonly called a stereotype. Another stereotype is the “think manager, think male” stereotype that affects women's career progress (Sabharwal, 2013:1). Stereotypes towards women also impede their career achievement (Newman, 1993; Rodriguez, 2011). Sexual harassment is another glass ceiling to women’s career advancement (Newman, 1993; Rodriguez, 2011; Yu, 2018). It is defined as unwelcome sexual attention that creates a hostile work environment (Adler, 2002). This glass ceiling is caused by a power imbalance between men and women in the workplace that manifests in sexual violence against women (Newman, 1993).

2.2 Matrilineal Society and Women

Matrilineal refers to familial relationships that can be traced through a female (Scheider & Gough, 1961). A matrilineal society, thereby, is a society that embraces the matrilineal principle. Although currently the ideal matrilineal society does not exist (Narzary & Sharma, 2013), it is commonly agreed that the following three fundamental elements of matriline exist in present-day matrilineal societies: descent through mother, i.e., family name through mother; matrilocal residence system i.e., where the husband lives in the wife’s residence; and inheritance of parental property by daughters (Tanius in Narzary & Sharma, 2013). Matrilineal societies exist in various forms among the tribes of African countries, native American, Maldives, in some parts of South East Asian countries, and among a few communities in India. One of the largest matrilineal society in the world is The Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Indonesia (Kato, 1977).

The roles of women among the matrilineal societies are varied according to their tribes (Mattison, 2011). Compared to patrilineal societies, the role of the father is often diminished in matrilineal societies. Moreover, it is argued that gender roles in matrilineal societies are more flexible compared to the more clearly defined ones in patrilineal societies (Ellena & Nongkynrih, 2017). In the social context, gender roles in matrilineal societies are different from patrilineal societies. However, the work domain is plagued by gender role stereotypes that negatively affect women’s career advancement and thus, the working world tends to adopt patriarchal values. In addition, gender inequality does not automatically follow in matrilineal societies despite the difference of gender roles (Sanday, 2002). Giving these two opposite values, matrilineal in the social sphere and patriarchal in the workplace, women’s career advancement can be different.

3. Research Method

The research is conducted on the local government of the Payakumbuh municipality located in the West Sumatra province of Indonesia. Payakumbuh city is located in the heart of Luhak Limopuluah Koto, which is one of the three traditionally occupied areas of Minangkabau.

This study is a field research and used primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through the distribution of questionnaires to 161 respondents who were selected by random sampling. 132 valid responses were obtained and analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Besides the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with the eight informants to complement the primary data. The interviews were conducted with four women who occupied the highest-level positions as well as the head of the Civil Service Agency of the study area; non-structured interviews with
a Minangkabau traditional leader and retired officials who work for the organization since its early establishment were conducted to complement the civil service data that is available only from 2007. The qualitative data is used to complement and provide the explanation for the results gained from the quantitative data analysis.

Along with the primary data that is obtained through the responses to the questionnaires, a descriptive quantitative analysis of the secondary data that contains personal data is also conducted. Personal data retrieved from the Application System of Civil Service Management and National Civil Service Statistics is also used in this study to complement the data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Matrilineal Society and Women

Managerial position of civil service in Indonesia is divided into three levels—the supervisor position, administrator position, and high leadership position, arranged from the lowest to the highest level. In order to examine the career pattern of civil servants in Payakumbuh local government, the history of the high and middle level positions occupied by men and women were analyzed. The analysis includes their age, years of service in the lower level position before they are promoted, and the number of positions they occupied in each level position. The result of the analysis is showed in Table 1.

Table 1: Women’s and Men’s Career Advancements

|                  | Women   | Men     |
|------------------|---------|---------|
| Average years of service in a certain level of position before getting promoted |         |         |
| High leadership positions | 11 years 5 months | 7 years 7 months |
| Administrator positions | 10 years 5 months | 8 years 11 months |
| Supervisor positions   | 3 years 5 months | years 11 months |
| Average age when first taking the position (in year) |         |         |
| High leadership positions | 50 | 47.6 |
| Administrator positions | 42.05 | 40.55 |
| Supervisor positions | 31.69 | 31.56 |
| Average number of positions occupied |         |         |
| High leadership positions | 1.75 | 3.32 |
| Administrator positions | 3.63 | 5.21 |

Source: Analytical result, 2019

Women and men assumed their first positions as supervisors at approximately similar ages. However, they occupied this position for considerably different number of years. Men occupied the supervisor position for a shorter period as compared to their female counterparts before they were promoted as administrators; women were employed as supervisors for one and a half years more before being promoted. This pattern exists for the promotion from the administrator position to the high leadership positions, but the gap is even bigger; women spent three years and ten months more as administrators before they were promoted to high leadership positions. The higher the positions, the more the years of service that women spent in these positions before promotion. Meanwhile, such a pattern does not emerge for men. Men spent less time as administrators compared to the time they spent as supervisor before they were promoted to a higher leadership position.

Moreover, on average, women have occupied more positions as supervisors compared to men; however, the pattern is reversed in the administrator and high leadership positions. This indicates that women have more experience occupying some positions within the supervisor position, but this is also congruent with the length of time they spent in that position level. On average, women spent a slightly longer period occupying a certain position as supervisors—2.59 years—compared to men—2.36 years. Furthermore, discrepancy is higher in the administrator positions and women spent 3.15 years while men only spent 1.46 years in a certain position within administrator positions. Even though women spend a longer time as supervisors and administrators, thus, this does not necessarily imply that they gain more experiences in occupying various positions at each level. On average, men switch positions more often and women remain in a position for longer periods.

Furthermore, there are more women who are eligible to occupy administrator positions because there are more women occupying supervisor positions. Therefore, they are able to obtain the required rank as administrators. However, the pattern is reversed for high leadership positions; fewer number of female administrators implies that fewer women can occupy high leadership positions. Therefore, the number of men who are eligible to occupy high-level positions exceed their female counterparts. Based on the interview, the number of women in managerial positions has increased over time from less than 10% in 1976 to approximately one-third in 2003. Moreover, based on the civil service data since 2007, the percentage of women occupying each level has fluctuated. Especially in high leadership positions, there was a significant decrease in 2015 due to the small number of women occupying this position. However, comparing the number of women in high leadership position, in 2007 there was only one female leader and that number increased to five in 2019.

Additionally, the pattern of career advancement of women in the Payakumbuh local government is quite similar as that at the national level; the higher the position, the less the number of women occupying it.
However, although the patterns are similar, the percentages are higher than at the national level. This is especially significant in the supervisor and administrator positions. Moreover, there are more women than men in the Payakumbuh local government who occupy supervisor positions. They comprise for 52.60% of the workforce (more than a half). At the national level, however, their concentration is only 37.04%.

![Figure 1 Percentage of women occupied occupying each level position in the Payakumbuh local government (as of March 2019) and national governments (as of Dec. 2018)](Image 38x516 to 284x652)

Source: Created by the author from Payakumbuh’s civil service data and BKN (2019)

This result seems to confirm the theory that the glass ceiling can be rooted in the culture. Although the civil service is managed nationally by a set of formal rules and regulations, the matrilineal values of the Minangkabau community appears to influence women in the way they progress in their careers in the Payakumbuh local government. However, it only decreases the gap and does not reflect the representativeness.

### 4.2 Women’s Career Advancement Barriers

This section aims to explain the findings of this study regarding women’s career advancement barriers in the Payakumbuh local government. Among the formal barriers, in the case of the Payakumbuh local government, lack of experience is one impediment that emerged from the data. Meanwhile, other barriers were not evident. Female civil servants in Payakumbuh local government have less experience compared to their male counterparts. Women spent a longer period occupying a certain position within the supervisor and administrator positions. However, the fact that women are employed for longer periods as supervisors and administrators does not necessarily mean that they gain more experience in occupying various positions in each level of position. On average, men switch positions more often while women remain their position for a longer period. The formal barriers related to education, training, and capability do not appear in Payakumbuh local government. As previously discussed, more than half of the highly educated official who possess a bachelor’s or higher academic qualifications are women.

Furthermore, a significant portion of the female and male respondents agreed that the same opportunity for training is available for both genders at 93.02% and 89.03% respectively. With respect to capability, though the female percentage is higher, the questionnaire’s results indicate that most female (93.03%) and male (76.09%) respondents believe that both genders can perform the task with equal proficiency. These findings suggest that among some formal barriers to women’s career advancement, lack of experience is the only impediment that emerged.

However, apart from the formal barriers, the glass ceiling might exist and hamper the career advancement of women in the Payakumbuh local government. Work-family conflicts and stereotypes are two barriers that might be strongly influenced by the matrilineal values of the Minangkabau society. Some questions in the questionnaire examined the respondents’ views regarding these barriers. A majority of the respondents, both women and men, agree about the presence of work-family conflict. Women comprise of a smaller percentage in all the three types of responses. Women, furthermore, are more resistant to overtime work and business trips—especially those that require staying overnight. Furthermore, they are also observed to not being willing to work until midnight at the office. More than half of the female and male respondents agreed with the first and third statements. The percentage of female respondents who agree with the second statement is the highest, even though they are only less than a half. Supporting the finding from the questionnaire, all female interviewees occupying high leadership positions mentioned work-family conflict as a barrier to women’s career advancement.

Closely related to the work-family conflict, stereotype is one of the barriers than can hinder women from climbing the career ladder. However, the stereotype is not only limited to gender perceptions; women’s characteristics are also a part of it. In order to examine the existence of this barrier, opinions on five statements were sought in the questionnaire: women have more responsibility in taking care of the household; men are more assertive; men produce more rational decisions, women make decisions emotionally; and men are more suitable to be leaders. More than half of the female and male respondents agreed with all statements. This finding suggests that female employees of Payakumbuh local government face the stereotype barrier.

One interesting finding is that both men and women perceive that they are more suitable to be leaders. 80.44% male respondents agree with the fourth statement—men are more suitable to be leaders, meanwhile the percentage of female respondents who agreed with it is only 62.79%.
The pattern is reversed in the response to the last statement—Minangkabau women’s characteristics are suited for leadership positions. 71.77% female respondents, as opposed to 47.83% male respondents, agreed with the claim. Moreover, in the cross tabulation conducted to this question, it is observed that the larger percentage of the agreed responses from female respondents belonged to older women and those who occupy higher-level positions. Even though a majority of both genders agree with both questions, based on the percentage, it is suggested that women and men believe themselves to be more suitable to be leaders. However, despite their perception of themselves, it can be stated that the stereotype appears to be a part of the glass-ceiling blocking women’s career advancement. Confirming this finding, a female interviewee mentioned that stereotypic exist and hamper women’s career advancement. Women who have other roles aside from being housewives, are still seen as incompetent to carry out official duties, regardless of whether their education is high, even if the ability and willingness are not inferior to that of men at work (Interview with 1-2, June 29, 2018).

Job segregation is another impediment to women’s career advancement. It is said that women tend to be assigned less authoritative jobs and converge in emotive work such as health and human services, public education, and most support positions (Guy & Newman, 2004). An interviewee mentions this barrier in their response.

Among the issues creating a glass ceiling, sexual harassment is one barrier that is less probable to appear in the Payakumbuh local government. None of the interviewees mentioned sexual harassment when they were queried about the barriers impeding women’s career advancement. This is also confirmed by the questionnaire results. A majority of the respondents, women and men, disagree with the question regarding sexual harassment. The percentage of respondents who disagree amount to 58.69% and 52.94% respectively for men and women. Therefore, it is suggested that sexual harassment is not among the barriers that hamper women in advancing in their careers in the Payakumbuh local government.

4.3 Women’s Career Advancement Barriers within Minangkabau Society

This section aims to elaborate the changing of the Minangkabau society from a matrilineal to an Islamic and bureaucratic one and how this change affects women’s career. Initially, according to the Tambo (traditional historiography), the matrilineal system was adopted in the Minangkabau community due to the disappointment of the two founders of Minangkabau in their sons. So, they bequeathed all of their property to their nephews instead of their sons. There are four identifiable characteristics of the Minangkabau traditional system; lineage is based on the female line, communally-owned properties are possessed by the lineage, authority within the lineage is in the hands of the maternal uncle and not the father, and the duo-local residential pattern (Kato, 1978). Some traditions of Minangkabau that are not in accordance with Islamic principles eventually caused conflict between traditional leaders and religious leaders after the emergence of Islam in the region. The two leaders reached a consensus and since then, Islamic teachings have become the source of rules in Minangkabau (Edison, 2018). This notion was confirmed by a traditional leader of Minangkabau.

The Dutch came to West Sumatra and introduced important changes in the Minangkabau society. The society was introduced to bureaucracy, the modern organization (Kato, 1978). Meanwhile, due to its characteristics for policy development and implementation, bureaucracy is almost impossible to be controlled. Instead, it tends to be preponderant and rules the society (Farazmand, 2009). This notion is in line with a statement by an official responsible for placement and promotion in the local government whom also have been interviewed for this study.

Bureaucracy is a different system that has its own characteristics and cannot be controlled by values that exist and hamper women’s career advancement. Women who perform dominant roles within society compared to women in patriarchal societies, the values of Minangkabau cannot intervene with the bureaucratic system in the Payakumbuh local government. Similar to most organizations, some impediments persist against women’s career advancement in the local government. However, comparing women’s career patterns in the local and national governments, the entrenched Minangkabau values might indirectly influence the bureaucratic system, which in this case is the civil service management.

Based on the data collected through this case study, it has been observed that not all the examined barriers appear as impediments preventing women from climbing up the career ladder. Among the formal barriers, only lack of experience appears. Meanwhile, there are three invisible barriers that seem to quite strongly inhibit women’s career advancement—work-family conflict, stereotype, and job segregation. However, sexual harassment does not appear therefore it does not negatively affect women’s career advancement in this society. Based on the literature, the glass ceiling can be entrenched in the culture and varies between societies (Newman, 1993; Bain & Cumming, 2000; Allen et al., 2016).

Based on the findings in career pattern, the matrilineal values of the Minangkabau community influence women in the way they climb their career ladders in the Payakumbuh local government though it
only lessens the gaps and is not sufficient to reflect representativeness. Furthermore, there are two different systems that bind the civil servants in the Payakumbuh local government—the social system under the Minangkabau culture and the bureaucratic system that is managed nationally by a set of formal rules and regulations. Even though the Payakumbuh local government is located within the Minangkabau community and the majority of employees are Minangkabau in origin, the formal rules that have been regulated nationally cannot intervene with the local wisdom. Nevertheless, the entranced Minangkabau values might indirectly influence the bureaucratic system.

5. Conclusion

This study seeks to explain women’s career advancement barriers in local governments within the matrilineal Minangkabau society. The finding shows that the pattern of women’s career advancement within a matrilineal society, in this case the Payakumbuh local government as part of Minangkabau, is not significantly different from the pattern in positions at the national level. The higher the position, less are the number of women occupying it. Not only is it more difficult for women to be promoted up the hierarchies within their workplaces, but women also face barriers that become greater as they move up the hierarchy. Their lack of experience is one of these impediments. Despite the formal barrier, women within the Payakumbuh local government are also hindered by the glass ceiling—work-family conflicts, stereotypes, and job segregation are such hindrances. These kinds of barriers are the obstacles that are rooted in cultural factors and vary among societies. This could explain the cause of the greater percentage of women occupying the positions of supervisors and administrators in local governments compared to the national average, despite the same career pattern. An accurate understanding of the overt and subtle impediments to women’s career advancement is required to dismantle the glass ceiling apart from the strategies that are currently employed to overcome these barriers. Enforcement of policies by the government as well as new policies such as quota system and flexible work arrangements can be implemented.

This research only studied one municipal region within the West Sumatra province inhabited by the Minangkabau community—the Payakumbuh local government. Future research will provide a better understanding when more local governments are observed. Additional research is required to further understand the comparison of women’s career advancement and the barriers between organizations in matrilineal societies and patriarchal ones.

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