

**Forms of Violence on Women Workers at Indonesia's Shoe Factory: A Sociological Perspective**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study analyzes forms of violence towards female workers in industrial sectors based on Simone de Beauvoir feminist, existentialist perspective. According to Beauvoir, there is different "biological data" in patriarchic society and as the result, the dominant side becomes "subject" and the submissive side becomes "object." The setting of the study is a shoe factory in Tangerang. The qualitative study used observation and interview as data collection methods; 11 female workers and 6 male workers become the interviewees. The study gives evidence that female workers suffer from physical and non-physical forms of violence committed by male workers. Violent acts across gender can be traced back to role of female in domestic domain and are related to Indonesian Labor Acts. The male workers confessed that they committed violent acts against female workers become the victims due to lower bargaining position of female in the society.*

**Keywords:** *violence against women, physical and non-physical violence, shoe industrial sector*

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In relation to violence against women, Noerhadi (as cited in *Jurnal Perempuan* 2000:30) states that violence against women is a concept where act of violence is committed against women using particular phenomena that put women in more disadvantageous positions such as stereotype, restricted opportunity, double duty, rights for reproduction, authority, power, violence as well as norms and regulations that become obstacles. One of the phenomena mentioned by Noerhadi is stereotype that refers to public judgment that puts female in lower bargaining position compared to male. The stereotype results in women being placed in lower position compared to men in domestic domain and industrial sector.

During the 2006-2015 Asian Decent Work Decade, the International Labour Organization or ILO recorded male and female stereotypes.

**Table 1. Male-Female Stereotype**

Female	Male
Submissive	Authoritarian
Emotional	Rational
Weak	Strong
Soft-spoken	Outspoken
Neat/ clean	Dirty
Artistic	Athletic
Housewife	Bread winner
Language and literature-oriented ("soft" topic)	Mathematic and scientific-oriented ("hard" topic)

(Sumber: [www.ilo.org-documents/wcms\\_203586](http://www.ilo.org-documents/wcms_203586))

Using the stereotype list as reference, Bubeck (1995:187) mentions job classification for women namely housework, childcare and caring work. The classification explains how female should be responsible for all domestic chores such as taking care of children and household or any tasks that do not have economic compensation. Such condition becomes the reason for capitalists to recruit female workers; tasks within domestic domain are considered secondary job after husband's job in public domain as well as women's responsibility that should be fulfilled voluntarily. It results in a discrepancy in male and female payment system.

**Table 2 Discrepancy in Male and Female Salary**

Year	Male	Female
2007	1,141,308	854,052
2008	1,031,348	773,979
2009	1,165,697	873,103
2010	1,222,368	953,927
2011	1,640,472	1,275,653

(Source: Indonesian Bureau of Statistics for the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection)

Based on a number of previous studies, female workers become the victims of violent acts due to their gender. A study conducted by Widanti (2005) where female workers in Bawean, Central Java became the objects described that female workers were vulnerable to physical acts of violence by working in a room full of kapok that may cause respiratory issues and engine vibration that may have negative effect on their reproduction anatomy. In addition, they also suffered from non-physical violence such as sexual abuse.

Daulay (2006) states that being in gender-bias society/ working environment, female factory workers become the victims of patriarchic value in industrial sector. These female workers are treated as productive means of production while at home they should be obey their fathers and/ or husbands.

A study conducted by (2008) revealed the discrepancy and how powerless poor female who live in the urban areas is. These women decided to live in the cities to support their families financially. However, their financial independence did not automatically make them equal to men and to the society.

High cases of violence acts committed to female migrant workers, as indicated in a study by Siahaan (2006) in Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur, Port Klang and Johor Baru), show lack of government attention for migrant workers especially during their departure. There is lacking attention for migrant worker's level of education (both formal and non-formal education) as well as when the female migrant workers become the victims of violent acts at work.

Sumardi and Setyowati (1999) reported that female workers should bear physical and psychological pressure that disturb their families as the effect of sexual abuse they suffered from.

Even though there are previous studies analyzing violence against female workers, the study should be conducted for two reasons. The first is that there is an increasing number of female workers. In 2012, The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection stated that there was 29.9 to 37.9% increase of female workers between 2002 and 2004.

The second is Labor Acts about the rights and responsibility of labors such as *UU No.13 tahun 2003*, 1979 CEDAW and 1995 Beijing Declaration does not stop acts of violence against female workers.

Using types of physical and non-physical acts of violence against female workers, the study analyzes types of violence that involve immediate contact, intimidation, injury and other forms of violence.

Based on female workers' experience who constantly suffered from violent acts, the study portrays the dominant side or the "subject" and the submissive side or the "object." Simone de Beauvoir's feminist existentialist perspective is used to understand female workers in industrial sector's experience. Getting to know their experiences is pivotal to record and capture reality as criticism against theories as well as to develop alternative constructions. In line with the perspective, Hendarso (2008:17) emphasized that an approach can be categorized as gender perspective when the theory can be used to create understanding towards and change status quo that puts female in disadvantageous position. The status quo about the female worker's experience involves family, education, religion, industrial sector and the government.

Beauvoir (1957) explained that the world created by male culture puts male as subject, the one who makes decision and defines various elements within the world while female as object. Beauvoir began her theory by evaluation about the "biological data" of female body that uterus is the place for the union between sperm and eggs in order to preserve generations on behalf of male. Female position as "object" continued for a long time resulting in inferior position of women compared to men. Female inferiority is seen how dependent a woman is towards men in decision-making although the decision is closely related to her.

The analysis aims at describing forms of violence against female workers in shoe factory. It is expected that the findings of the study are relevant as input for the authority to develop Acts of Labor that put correlation between job description and female need into consideration. Therefore, female workers no longer become object of violence that can put themselves as working individuals.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

Shoe factory is selected as the setting of the study because shoe-making requires a long continuous process. The process requires patience and accuracy and as the effect, female workers should sit down or stand for eight hours. As the result, the female workers are exhausted and sleepy; these may be dangerous for them. The setting of the study is a shoe-making factory in Tangerang, Jawa Barat Province, and the city well-known for industry. The study is a qualitative study where observations and interviews become the data collection methods. The informants are 17 factory workers who consist of 11 female workers and 6 male workers.

### *Data Collection Technique*

Based on Creswel (2014) that observation refers to a process where researchers take a closer look to particular phenomenon on the field using their five senses with the help of instruments for scientific purpose, data collection technique in the study is carried out through direct observations of female workers' activities during lunch break and their activities outside working hours.

The purpose of interview is to find out an individual's idea, opinion and perception towards certain topic so that there is good communication between researchers and informants. A number of female and male workers are interviewed in some places namely outside the company during their lunch break, certain female workers' houses and GSBI office outside the company.

#### *Data Analysis Technique*

Data analysis refers to process to seek and systematically arrange all the data. The researcher adopted Creswell (2014:254-274)'s spiral strategy of data analysis where the data obtained by previous researchers are organized in several files and converted into texts. During the data collection process, the researcher also adopted Haberman dan Miles (1994:73)'s analysis since the method allows researcher to analyze the data that have been obtained and at the same time develop some strategies to gain data for corrections of unsolved information. In qualitative research, conclusion does not refer to general conclusion; instead, it is drawn based on subjective experience, one that is different from other people's experiences.

### **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### *Forms of Violence Acts against Female Workers by the Company*

Based on the findings of the study, there are 6 (six) forms of violence acts against female workers committed by the company.

#### *Low Wage*

Based on both male and female informants, there is no discrepancy in the amount of wage received by the male and female workers. Wage depends upon position at work such as supervisor and head of unit as well as type of job such as operator, quality control and mechanics. Form of violence in terms of wage can be seen by female workers' inability to pay off her debts and low purchasing power their families have. Related to her debts, Nina stated that:

"You (researcher) should conduct a study that helps us paying off our debts to the cooperatives and other people. Until now, we are unable to pay off our debts. We have more than one creditor. If you make soap opera (based on our debt), it will have a lot of episodes (laughing)."

#### *Facilities to Related to Female's Need*

An aspect related to workers that enhance production is factory worker's health. One method to keep the workers healthy is to provide drinking water for the workers. However, the company does not provide drinking water for the workers. Instead, the workers should buy it themselves. Mustopa stated that:

"The company once provided drinking water for the employees. There used to be water dispenser for the employees. Recently, the company does not provide drinking water for the employees anymore so employees should buy drinking water or ask friends to take care of it. It is too much work taking drinking water from home."

The workers limited the amount of water they drink because they have limited budget for buying drinking water. It may cause dehydration, weaken the workers and avoid them from working hard. In general, the female informants experienced some sort of pain on their waists due to minimum amount of water they drink.

#### *Menstruation Leave*

The company claimed menstruation as hindrance for female workers to meet their production targets because they will get tired more easily having worked at home before coming to the factory when they have their menstruation. During their menstruation, the female workers feel nauseous, lose their appetites, look pale and may lose consciousness. Female workers' inability to meet their production target will influence their wages. The female workers are embarrassed asking for menstrual leave because of unethical requirements.

The company shows Simon de Beauvoir's "biological data" discrepancy; the indication is that the company assumed menstruation leave has negative effect towards production and expenditure depends upon how much efforts company make to meet the demand. To compensate for these conditions, the company will find substitute for female workers taking menstrual leave. From the economic perspective, the company should allocate some amount of money to hire substitute workers, an amount of money the company will not have to spend when the female workers do not take their menstruation leave.

#### *Different Job Description and Position*

Violent acts also take place in terms of position; higher number of female workers works as operators while smaller number of female workers works as supervisors or head of unit. Jati explained that:

"... Most female workers work as operators. Many work as supervisors and head of unit too. The number of male and female workers working as supervisors and head of unit is similar."

Jati's statement indicated that the number of male and female supervisors or heads of unit is similar. However, that is not the case when we look at the total number of female workers in the factory. 80% workers in the factory are female workers so the number of female supervisors and heads of unit is lower than male supervisors and heads of unit. It indicates that the company tends to give higher wage for the male workers because supervisor's and head of unit's wages are higher than operator's. The lowest position in the company is operator, the position given to most of the female workers in the company.

Acts of violence against begin with assigning jobs and working system in the factory. Female workers should sit in or stand for eight hours while working with highly electrocuted engine. Sitting or standing for eight hours cause pain on their body. This pain and one on their stomach occur more often during menstruation.

Muscle cramp (arm and abdomen) occurs frequently when the female employees should operate big machines that require a lot of manual labor such as giving pressure for pattern-cutting machine. The female workers are not as strong as the male ones. Jati, one of the labor union members explained that:

"The female worked very hard; it did not suit them.

They frequently complained that they had to deal with heavy machines but at the same time they had to meet their targets. It is what it is."

In other words, being strong physically enables male workers to meet or even exceed their working targets; as the effect, it is more likely for them to get incentives.

*Level of Education*

The female workers also suffer from violent acts because the society thinks their level of education is lower than that of male workers. It results in them getting lower wage as stated by Richard Anker and explained by Tee Kian Wie (as cited in Fericcha, 2011:184) that education and wage altogether can determine productivity at work.

Since the level of education between male and female workers are the same, job description and position are parts of loyalty and achievement at work. Sari revealed that:

"I am happy that I am a university graduate. That has become my dream. College degree can change my way of life even though I have been working as operator for one year."

*Working System and Working Process*

Similar to technology, company needs labor since labor is one of the vital elements that increase production. Company gains profit by paying female workers lower salary compared to male workers. Hiring female workers can reduce production cost because when company hires male workers, it has to pay for spousal and children support since men are the major bread winner in the family.

Table 3 summarizes forms of violence against female workers committed by the factory.

**Table 3. Forms of Violence against Female Workers by the Company**

Forms of Violence	Forms of Violence by the Company
<b>Physically, women are less stronger and more vulnerable to certain health issues than men</b>	Having to sit down and stand for eight hours makes female workers more vulnerable to some health issues especially when they are pregnant, have monthly period or nursing.
<b>Male worker's wage is higher than female worker due to overtime, incentive and working position</b>	The male and female workers receive the same amount of wage. However, their take home payment is different due to overtime, incentive and working position: 1. It is more difficult for the female workers to meet or exceed their targets due to menstruation and two-day menstruation leave they have. As the result, they are unable to get overtime or incentives; 2. The percentage of male supervisors is higher than female supervisors. The supervisor gets higher wage and annual raise compared to the operators.

<b>Working facilities that do not accommodate female's need</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The female workers should work in a cramped, hot working space along with machinery and materials for shoe-making which may result in respiratory disease;</li> <li>2) The workers do not have standardized equipment at work because the company refused to allocate more budgets for the equipment;</li> <li>3) The company canteen is dominated by the male workers for meal and taking a break;</li> <li>4) Clinic functions only to check whether female workers have menstruation or not; Klinik cenderung berfungsi untuk pemeriksaan masa haid;</li> <li>5) More male workers come to the praying room than the female workers for praying and taking a break;</li> <li>6) The male workers come to the labor union office in the factory every afternoon for a break; in other words, the female workers do not have active participation in the union;</li> <li>7) The employees should buy their own drinking water and carry it to the water dispenser available in each working unit.</li> </ol>
<b>Difficulty to ask for menstruation leave</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The female workers get menstruation leave once they have had approval from the health staff in the factory clinic. Examination includes asking the female workers to take off their under wear.</li> <li>2) The company prefers the female workers not taking menstrual leave due to the amount of money the company has to spend for substitutes (substitutes have higher wage than the average workers);</li> <li>3) The supervisors have authority to submit the operator's proposal for menstruation leave to the head of the company or the head of unit. The authority is related to supervisor's responsibility to ensure the unit she or he supervises meets the production target. The supervisors have to do the same work as the operators do when the flow of work is considered too slow.</li> </ol>
<b>Different job description and position between male and female workers</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Operator's job that requires them to deal with machinery may affect the female worker's health condition because the female workers are less stronger than male workers especially when they have menstruation;</li> <li>2) Various violent acts against female workers in industrial sector is evidence that companies do not take female's condition into account in assigning job.</li> </ol>
<b>Male and female worker's level of education</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Level of education does not influence working position although the female workers have the same or even higher level of education than the male workers;</li> <li>2) Working position is based on loyalty, working experience and achievement.</li> </ol>
<b>Working System and Process</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The shoe-making factory applies continuous working system. When one part of production works slowly, it will affect the following parts of production. As the consequence, the female workers have limited time to drink or to go to the toilet more particularly when they have their period.</li> </ol>

*Forms of Violence by the Company*

Some male workers also committed violent acts against the female workers; the examples are as follow:

*Menstruation Leave*

Some of the male workers that financial independence changes working female are behavior. These women work because they have to support their families. As an addition, the female workers feel afraid or embarrassed when they got divorced. In other words, working in a factory, being financially independent as well as bread winner does not change the female worker's perspective towards herself. They keep putting themselves as objects. The condition does not mean a woman can decide her marital status by her willingness to get divorced or having to leave her child/children.

The form of violent acts against the female workers is evident in the male worker's opinion towards menstruation leave. The male workers think a two-day paid menstruation leave is not fair because the company does not pay the male workers when they are taking a leave.

Although a two-day menstruation leave for female workers has been stated in Indonesian Acts of Labor, the male workers channeled their disapproval towards the regulation to the female workers. Teddy, a supervisor explained his disagreement towards menstruation leave because as supervisor, it has become one of his responsibilities to find a substitute to meet the production target; the company needs at least 500 substitutes every day. Such condition puts the company in a disadvantageous position because it has to spend more money to pay for the substitutes' wage. The substitutes are paid twice the wage of average workers.

Standard of loyalty towards the company is determined and controlled by the company and as the consequences the female workers should constantly please the company by working hard to meet the production target and being submissive the entire time. The female worker's inferiority is also shown by the amount of wage they receive; they cannot work overtime, and cannot get incentives as the result. They are also afraid to be on the opposite side of the company because they are afraid of getting fired. It is relatively easy for the company to hire new female workers.

The company management that unfortunately is dominated by the patriarchic ideas established rules and regulations using male workers as the standard even though the company keeps recruiting more female workers. The company also is not willing to bear the consequence as the effect of different "biological data" between male and female workers for instance operating heavy machinery that requires physical strength while physically the female workers are not as strong as the male workers.

The male workers maintain their strength by having adequate amount of food and enough rest. On the other hand, during menstruation, the female workers cannot enjoy their food as they usually do due to nausea and reducing appetite. Furthermore, having to do house chores prevents the female workers from getting enough rest at home.

In terms of public and domestic domain, assigning house chores to female and responsibility to earn money outside the house to male has long been the patriarchic pattern for job assignment and the patriarchic relationship between men and women. In patriarchic society, man is the leader of the family who is responsible for his entire family members. The responsibility refers to the rights the husbands have to maintain and determine the rights and responsibility of his family members. The husband's right in the family is again reflected by the management of the company to the female workers. Although there are rules that maintain rights and responsibility of the male workers in the company, there are some rights of the female workers not being acknowledged by the company.

#### *Participation in the Labor Union*

Form of violence against the female workers by the male workers is also evident during participation in the labor union. None of the labor union members are family. Based on the significance of the labor union, the female workers should be interested in being participants or one of the members along with the male workers. However, based on the interview, there is not any female worker interested in being the members of GSBI, the labor union. The female workers are hesitant to participate in GSBI due to their domestic chores and cheating accusation by their husbands.

Based on the result of the observations and interviews, the female workers are reluctant to have active participation in the labor union due to the patriarchic perspective against women; women are considered as submissive and obedient individuals. The image of women as submissive and obedient individuals force them to remain silent despite of various issues they encounter such as inadequate amount of wage to support financial condition of their families. Hary stated that the image of women as submissive and obedient individuals are sometimes confusing for husband. The female workers become rebellious and outspoken individuals during their interaction with their husbands or male co-workers but turn into very quiet ones when they have interaction with the management of the company. He further explained that the male workers consider the female workers as rebellious individuals because they earn their own money and most of them become the major bread winner in their families because they have higher income compared to their husbands. The men whose wives are factory workers confessed they have difficulties to understand their wives conflicting characteristics; their wives become obedient individuals at work but turn into out-spoken ones at home. They are not hesitated to have disagreement against their husbands. The husbands think that

the female workers are afraid of the companies but not afraid of their husbands; divorce is not something the female workers are afraid of any longer.

Lack of knowledge puts the female workers as second-class individuals that prevents them from being an active participant or the members of the labor union. GBSI, the labor union, has established a class about organization for the female workers but they responded it negatively. It is related to their domestic chores. Besides that, the female workers are not interested in joining the class during their working time due to their responsibility to meet the production target.

The statement is supported by other GSBI members like Mustopa dan Maman based on their observations and the confessions of the male workers whose wives also work as factory workers. The members of GSBI state that the female workers are afraid of being accused as disobedient wives such as cheating on their husbands because of their participation in GSBI. Rahayu confirmed that generally the female workers avoid having arguments with their husbands about having an affair.

**Table 4. Forms of Violence against Female Workers by Male Workers**

Form of Violence against Female Workers	Forms of Violence against Female Workers by Male Workers
<b>Abuse towards menstruation cycle</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The male workers disagree with menstruation leave because the female workers are still paid despite of having a two-day menstruation leave. It is different from what happened to the male workers when they are taking leave;</li> <li>2. The female workers get verbal abuse when they frequently take menstruation leave.</li> </ol>
<b>Lack of appreciation for female worker's participation in labor union</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The male workers assume that financial independence the female workers have turned them into a fussy and rebellious individual. These are used as the bases for not inviting the female workers to participate in the labor union;</li> <li>2. The female worker's husband prevents them from being member of the labor union due to some adultery cases and role of female in domestic domain (at home).</li> </ol>

### 3. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that female workers suffer from multi-layer violence, violent acts committed by the factory and male workers. The acts of violence against female workers by the company are in the form of absence of rules that accommodate female's basic need. Furthermore, owners of company, management and supervisors refuse to acknowledge female's basic need as one of the bases of job assignment. The male workers committed violent acts against female workers in the form of abuse towards the nature of woman and their physical condition.

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