



## Feminism Study on Marginalized Women in the Effort of Empowerment



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### Article history:

Received: 15 July 2016

Revised: 20 August 2016

Approved: 30 August 2016

Published: 1 September 2016

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### Keywords:

*Feminism;*

*Independent;*

*Marginalized;*

*Empowerment;*

*North Sumatra;*

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### Abstract

This study was conducted to address the problems faced by groups of women in the domestic and public sphere. This research was completed in several villages in two regencies of North Sumatra, i.e. Langkat and Serdang Bedagai. Focus Group Discussion, in-depth interviews, and documentation by recording and writing methods were applied to obtain the data. The result was expected to become a reference for the empowerment of women, socially and economically and it will be a valuable asset to the nation in the development of Indonesia. The theory used was the theory of social culture and feminism. The method used was a qualitative, descriptive and hermeneutic interpretation. Then the data were being analyzed with the circle to get a full understanding. The research team got some information from the women's groups that they received financial assistance and workshops and the training of non-governmental organizations. They were given training in farming, small trade, and home industries. They also received training to manage the credit union which can be a solution to the problem of capital in the public sector. To solve the problem in the domestic domain the women acquired counseling on gender equality of non-governmental organizations for both the husband and the wife on same-gender issues and the result was a significant change in family life, the condition produces communications that are more democratic now.

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### 1. Introduction

The paper was based on a study entitled: "Feminism Studies On Marginalized Women in the effort of Empowerment", the object of the research were marginalized women in their communities who worked in the

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informal sector with a minimum payment as farmers, traders, and workers in the home industries. The problems were divided into two sectors, i.e., in the domestic and the public sector.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study feminist theory was applied where feminist literary critic which focuses on women's struggle for freedom from the dominance of a patriarchal culture. Humm (1986: 12) emphasizes reading for women with the awareness of the role of gender in social development. Women do not only pay attention to biology but also pay attention to ideology and strategy. Not all women are aware of gender equality in the social construction

In social change, people may have a new way of life and a new way of thinking. Previously, a woman may only function as a wife who managed the home, serving their husbands and caring for the children. In this global era where the economy is complicated, the wives also must be responsible for supporting the needs of the family. Therefore, many of them are trying to find a job in the public sector. They faced problems both in the domestic sector and in the public sector. From our interviews with women who were observed in this study, we found out that many women faced physical violence and there were many issues of polygamy in the household. Meanwhile, in the public area, they faced financial problems, lack of capital (money) to improve the product in the informal sector, in agriculture, home industry and small business. This research was conducted to understand and to collect the data from the community of women in both Langkat and Serdang Bedagai Regency. The problems were analyzed to find a concept to empower the women. Different places and condition where the women lived gave them different problems related to social economy of the people.

Currently, there are many women still live in poverty and misery, so this study was conducted to determine the cause of the problems whether it is caused by internal or external factors. In urban areas, there are many women working in the informal sector workers in the factories and traders, cleaning service employees, shopkeepers and work with low payments. These women need the training to improve their skills and to control their capital for small businesses. This study aimed to explore the skills and the women potential so that the researchers can form concepts and models for the women's empowerment.

People who were being observed lived in the two districts of North Sumatra, namely: Langkat and Serdang Bedagai. The results of this study were expected to find the concept as a solution to the problems of marginalized women occurred in the domestic sector and the public. Ideas and thoughts feminism of the West and the East would be applied as a reference to create the concept for the empowerment of women to both the people of both regions. The theory of social change will be used to observe the condition of the people to know the change of the way of life and way of thinking are related to socio-economic conditions they face in the global era.

From the observation in the field, it was found that both communities had formed an informal organization which had coordinated with a non-governmental organization which had given the communities the chance to improve their skill in farming, home industry, and trading. The communities also formed an informal agency to manage their financial problems to get the capital for their business.

## 2. Research Methods

This research applied qualitative method. Ratna (2004: 46) stated that the process of the qualitative method is just the same with the hermeneutic method and content analyses. All the method above used the way of interpretation then the analyses are pretended in narrative form or description. All the method need direct involvement of the researcher on the object observed. The process of interpreting the object was needed to get the total meaning of the object. In the field of social and cultural, the data taken is always in the form of statements, comments, and ideas, that's why they should be collected and classified based on the problems.

The quantitative method can't fit the phenomena of humanity and that's why can't be explained and measured by numbers. Qualitative method tends to use the power of five sense observation to expose cultural realities which are always changes following the era.

According to the qualitative method, the researcher is the main instrument to collect the data and follow the cultural phenomena, so the researcher should flexible, imaginative and reflective. Cultural research needs direct observation and participation from the researcher.

All the elements of tradition and culture should be united to get the total meaning of the object observed. The research for unequal gender is intended to understand the social imbalance caused by gender aspects. The urgency of gender research is to expose women experiences related to gender issues. Gender study should be conducted carefully based on the objectives of feminism ideology that is to improve and develop women resources and to freed them from oppression, domination, and exploitation and to make women live in the same role and position with the man as their work partners.

Qualitative data are always in the form quite long sentences and can be collected by direct observation, interview, documentation or recording. In the analyses there are three stages that can be done they are data reduction data presentation and taking conclusion or verification. This is clearly explained by miles and Huberman in *Qualitative Data Analysis a Sourcebook of New Methods*. We consider that analysis consists of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and so conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the “raw” data that appear in written up field notes (Miles dan Huberman, 1984: 21).

### 3. Results and Analysis

#### 3.1 Women’s Problems in Domestic Area

Many women experienced discrimination and oppression in the domestic area because the institution of marriage is considered as the embryo where patriarchal culture grow and constructed by society. Women stereotypes made by society are emotional, passive and physically weak. Based on the label mentioned above, women are put into the domestic area and do the houses hold chores such as cooking, cleaning, caring for the children and serving the husband. In public area, if a man is a doctor a woman is a nurse, in other words, the man is the boss and the woman is the subordinate.

Nowadays, there are many women who have enjoyed high education like the men do. They have the same rights to get education and jobs to improve their quality of life, intellectually, and morally and that’s the way to be free and independence can be achieved, financially and socially.

A woman who received knowledge and skill may work in public sector, but when they got married they should ask permission from their husband. But the husband may forbid the wife to work for the classic reason that the wife is responsible for the running of the family, to care for the children and the house. The husband is said to be responsible for the whole family. In this case, there are many potential that women would be “trapped” and hide under the shadow of the husband. There are many women who are not willing to stay at home but society claim that a woman should get married and stay at home. It makes them unable to apply the knowledge and the skill they got to give their contribution to the welfare of the society. Another reason to put a woman in “a cage” is that the husband is rich enough to feed all the family members meanwhile the wife can’t give any material contribution for the family, therefore, she can’t have an equal position with the husband. She can be treated just like a subordinate in the family. If a woman can take care of her own money, she will be respected by the husband and will not be treated like a servant in her own house. Taylor stated that a woman can have self-confidence and respect if she can give a material contribution to support the finance of the family (Tong, 2004: 25).

There are two women communities observed for this research, they live in Langkat Regency and Serdang Bedagai. After the interview, it is known that they got training from one non-governmental organization about problems in the domestic area such as physical violence and unequal gender issues. Some families are facing problems of polygamy and betrayal. Some of them plan to get divorced. The communities share ideas and experiences with the members of the groups supported by the informal organization. The husbands are invited to talk about compromise and household work in the family. The husband should understand the double burden that the wife should do, after working hard outside, she should also do the household work at home such as cooking, cleaning, washing clothes and other works.

For a domestic problem like physical violence, a wife can report to the police to investigate the case. Then the husband can be punished if he is found out of doing the crime like beating and hurting the wife. For the problems of betrayal and polygamy, both the wife and husband are advised to think it over before deciding what they want to plan for their future.

#### 3.2 Women’s Problems In Public Sector Related To Social Economy

A woman should help herself to defend her fundamental rights even though society has put them in a subordinate position. All the good chances and opportunities are designed only for men as the agent of power. The government is also dominated by the men so they are free to plan everything for their interests.

According to the theory materialist determinism by Karl Marx, people and their culture have material and economic basis and the principle of materialism also happened in the family life. according to Engels, a husband is considered as “*borjuis*” and the wife is the oppressed side. Marx and Engels determine the existence and values of someone based on the later it gives power to someone. The process of industrialization causes the condition of

women become worse because it separates between home and public. Working in public sector earn money but working at home never produces money.

Engels gives solution for women to be free from oppression in the family by working in public sector. By having money or material, a woman may have a better offering for the men. Marx and Engels even suggest women leave the family because it can create capitalism. Further, the ideology of Marx and Engels is adopted by Socialist Feminism to make realize that they are the oppressed class. The women are expected to raise their emotion and braveness to face the oppressor. The power of the struggle is hoped to win the conflict worth the dominant patriarchal culture (Nugroho, 2008: 74).

Dealing with the condition of developing country like Indonesia, the problems of women are related to economic life, when the country is poor, the women are also poor. The women live in poverty and misery when they are discriminated in education and job. When they want to be an independent woman, firstly they should be free from the male domination and have their basic rights and after they get education and job.

Discrimination can happen in domestic and public areas. In the family, a woman can not have the same portion of heritage from the parents, and always under the “protection” of father and husband. In the public sector, they may experience sexual abuse, physical violence, unfair treatment and others. By the progress of technology, the work of women can be replaced by a high-tech machine. Some of them lose their jobs.

An expert in sociology gives his statement about gender issues and stereotype of women as follows:

The concept of gender attached to men and women is constructed socially and culturally by society. Women are considered passive, emotional and weak while men are regarded as aggressive, rational and powerful (Fakih, 2005: 8). Capitalist ideology claim that men are borjuis and women are proletar and this happens because men work in public sector and get money while women work in the domestic area and get no money. When women are weak and have no money, no power, she will be dominated and lose her basic rights, that’s why socialist feminism suggest women work in the public sector and get money. Further, more women can have self-confidence and become independent.

Furthermore, Marx and Engels asked women to leave the institution of marriage and enter the public sector to get money. Socialist Feminists agreed to the ideas of Marx and Engels that’s why they should fight to face the enemies. The fight which goes on in a long-term may break down the dominant patriarchal system (Nugroho, 2008: 74).

In a developing country like Indonesia, the problems of women are always related to economic problems like poverty and lack of jobs, the first victim's pf the poverty is the women. According to Liberal Feminism emphasized on the freedom of women to determine what they want to do and freed themselves from patriarchal oppression. And to be an independent woman, she should get an education and good job.

Women may experience oppression in the domestic and public sector. The problems in the domestic area are polygamy, physical violence and no money inherited from the family. In the public sector, a woman may experience sexual abuse, low wages, unfair treatment and many others. The concept of unequal gender treatment is given by an expert as follows: “the concept of gender is a social construction as a model for men and women to be had in society. A woman should be polite and soft and a man should be strong, rational and independent (Fakih, 2005: 8).

According to the thoughts of capitalism, the men can be regarded as “*borjuis*” and the women as “*proletariat*”. This may happen because men work in public sector and get money while women work in the domestic area and get no money, then the women are oppressed because they have no money. That’s why Socialist Feminism suggests women work in the public sector to get money. By having money and job, a woman may feel stronger and has a self-confidence.

The field research was conducted in two locations, they were Serdang Bedagai Regency and Langkat.Regency there were two communities of women’s being observed. Most of them work in informal sector like small farmers, traders, working for home industry, making cookies and some other kinds of snacks. In the public sector, the women faced financial problems that were a lack of capital (money) to cover the problem they made a local corporation, collecting money for all the members. They may save and borrow money in the local operation. It was more helpful than borrowing money from a bank because there was no tax at all or paying for administration for borrowing the money. The union was only intended to help the members. This community was helped by a nongovernmental organization called Bitra to train the women in farming and industry (home industry). They also gave counseling for managing money and share their experience and problems. The union for saving and loan was very helpful to solve their financial problems. To start the union, all the members should pay some contribution, they began with a small sum of money then later it became bigger and bigger.

In the beginning, the member could borrow from five hundred thousand rupiahs until one million rupiahs because they got quite a lot of money. The group which consisted of twenty-five women got sixty million rupiahs, it was quite a lot of money for them.

The union was made by their own efforts that's why they do not pay the tax and administration. There were many simplicities that may be enjoyed by the members, among others are, no requirements for borrowing money, they should only pay 3% credit union, there is no loan guarantee, they can trust all the members. So this union is really the answer for their economic problems. The union was established by them and to get the benefit for themselves.

### **3.3 The Concept of Women Empowerment as the Solution for Their Problems**

As has been analyzed in the previous chapter, the problem in the domestic sector is highly dominated by a patriarchal culture that still held fast by the people of Indonesia where a very strong dominance of the husband exists... He always showed his power in the family as the boss and decision maker, especially when he is the only one responsible for obtaining money. Physical violence also occurs in the family. When the wife works outside the home, he might also have a double burden, because she might also responsible for doing the household chores. They get counseling from the community of non-governmental organizations to help them. They can learn about gender equality for their families. Therefore, they can live in harmony with each other to help each other, even to do household chores together. All community members can share their thoughts about violence and polygamy. They give advice to members who are in conflict with their family. A serious violence can be reported to the police, but if the community could help mediate the problem, they do not have to go to the police or the courts. By getting counseling for gender equality, step by step the husband would change their treatment of wives. Now, they have the rights and the same responsibilities in their families. Wife also can give their opinions and their ideas for welfare and improve the quality of family life. With their rights and the same responsibilities, women will feel more confident.

## **4. Conclusion**

From the analysis of the three issues in this study, we can find the concept of empowerment of women to solve their problems in the domestic sector and the public domain. First, they gathered together in the informal group on social activities to help each other, the activities of the union to develop a model that can solve the economic problem to get more capital for their business. There are many things they can do in their informal groups; they can share their experiences of the group members. They receive training in agriculture and trade, in a simple way; they can learn how to manage their business and how to develop skills and the ability to get better performance. The most significant of those efforts was the creation of the union for members. They may save and borrow money from the union, they start with a small amount of money, and then the contribution becomes bigger and bigger. Unions differ from banks. They manage the union for the benefit of their members. Now, they have enough money to run their business for the welfare of the family. Although they work in the informal sector such as agriculture and trade they could do better than before. By getting counseling, they have the knowledge to solve problems in their families therefore now they have a better life for their families.

### **Acknowledgments**

My thanks are extended to the head of the Research Institute of North Sumatra University, Prof. Ir. Harmein Nasution, MSIE who has arranged the acquisition of this research, provide information; check out the proposals and other information. I am also indebted to the dean of the Faculty of Cultural Science of North Sumatra who has given consent for my research. My thanks go to all the teamwork that has prompted me to do some research by providing advice and suggestions to complete this research.

Best regards, Siti Norma Nasution.

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