

Journalism and Journalists' Vulnerability during COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia

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Abstract

Journalists are among the workers who continue to engage in journalism activities like news covering despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Journalists facing paradoxical conditions between being productive in news covering and the dangers of virus transmission that can infect at any time. In other hand, journalists need support equipment facilities to avoid virus transmission during news covering process. Moreover, various media companies announce layoffs and salary cuts by asserting business uncertainty. This study aims to describe journalists' vulnerability within journalism activity and journalist as occupation during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This study was conducted with a qualitative method by analyzing the primer data from 50 journalist various region and representatives of journalist's association in Indonesia. Furthermore, we analyze secondary data that provided officially by Alliance of Independent Journalists Indonesia. Authors found that the lack of health insurance, support for preventing the spread of COVID-19, unilateral dismissals by media institutions, and salary cuts place journalists in a difficult position. Aspects of journalism activities that run normally without institutional or structural support legitimize the vulnerabilities experienced by journalists in Indonesia.

Keywords:

COVID-19 pandemic; journalist vulnerability; journalism; media workers

Introduction

Journalists are among the working classes who continue to engage in journalism activities like news covering despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Edmond, (2021) at the 'World Economic Forum' page informs that media outlets have been at the forefront of this fight and, for many journalists, reporting on the pandemic will be the biggest story of their career. In Indonesia, this condition increases the risk of being exposed to a higher level of virus contagion if these activities are not supported by adequate facilities. One of the journalist organizations in Indonesia that have voiced demands for media companies to provide security during news coverage activity is the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) on the website www.aji.or.id on March 2, 2020.

AJI reminded media companies that in the employment law, employers are responsible for the health and safety of their employees, in this case, journalists. In the press release, AJI emphasized that media companies facilitate personal protective equipment for journalists in carrying out news coverage to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

Journalists have been facing multiple challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, including economic pressures on the media industry and companies, as well as health risks associated with their work. Olsen et al., (2020) revealed that from March to April 2020, when COVID-19 was rapidly spreading around the world, most media companies in Scandinavia reported an abrupt 50% cancellation of advertising partnerships, and they believe this

is also happening globally. In case of Indonesia, Ni'matun, (2020) filed a complaint report about the dismissal of journalists, laid off, salaries reduced, or have their salary payments postponed which was attributed to the financial difficulties faced by media companies. Manan, (2020) on *www.aji.or.id* shows the termination of employment (layoffs) in the online media like *Kumparan* in June 2020, *Tempo*, *Jakarta Post*, and *Jawa Pos* in Surabaya in August 2020.

On April 30, 2020, the International Federation of Journalists (IJF) released the results of a survey titled *The Crisis of Journalism in the Face of COVID-19*. This is a survey of 1,308 people from 77 countries, including Indonesia. In these conditions, the researchers identified various factors that increased the vulnerability of journalists while covering events. According to IJF data, the COVID-19 pandemic poses several threats to journalists. This includes wage cuts, layoffs, significant obstacles to carrying out journalistic duties, deterioration of working conditions, and deterioration of journalists' psychological conditions. The survey showed that 65.4 percent of respondents had experienced wage cuts, layoffs, and deteriorating living conditions (IFJ, 2020).

In the case of Indonesia, at least 294 journalists and media workers tested positive for COVID-19 in the news published by *detik.com* on December 28, 2020. Most cases occurred between July and August 2020, with 235 cases. Meanwhile, the Legal Aid Institute Press (LBH Pers) and the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) Indonesia, until July 28, 2020, have received 110 complaints about labor issues (Manan, 2020b). The following labor issues were raised: salary postponement, payroll deductions, dismissal, layoffs with severance pay, and layoffs without severance pay. Employment issues arise in media organizations across all platforms, including print, online, television, and radio. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesian journalists were subjected to this condition. Therefore, to explain this reality, a research process is needed

that can explain in more detail the factors that contribute to the vulnerability of the journalism workers in carrying out journalistic activities during the COVID-19 emergency period in Indonesia.

In the perspective of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), that the failures of several countries to deal with COVID-19 were primarily the result of a tendency to underestimate aspects of public communication related to the current crisis situation. For example, regarding the success of handling COVID-19 in Vietnam, La et al., (2020) explained that the media's response in managing information plays an important role in increasing public awareness of what the community must do to prevent transmission of COVID-19. In disaster and crisis communication, journalism serves as a conduit for communications from public officials and experts to the broader public—which is known as the facilitative role of journalism (Christians et al., 2009). Journalists require a conducive environment to fulfill their facilitative function effectively. Under uncertain and vulnerable conditions, journalists may face challenges in fulfilling their professional responsibilities and contributing to the dissemination of high-quality information related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Journalists' vulnerability places them in a difficult position, as they are both responsible for providing public information and have personal needs, such as ensuring their own safety from the virus, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The question is "what factors contribute to the vulnerability of journalists in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic?" The vulnerable conditions that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic have prompted authors to identify the factors that contribute to the vulnerability of journalists in Indonesia.

Literature Review

Defining Journalist's Vulnerability

Vulnerability now enjoys substantial popularity in the lexicon of everyday life

and is frequently used by policy makers, academics, journalists, welfare workers, and local authorities. Birkmann, (2006) argues that social vulnerability can include various aspects and features. The concept of vulnerability should not be limited to social fragility alone, but should also emphasize equality, particularly in terms of people's income, age, or gender. Alwang et al., (2001) explains the discussion of vulnerability in various disciplines. From an economic perspective, vulnerability is conceptualized as the result of a process of responding to risks that are emphasized under certain conditions. Sustainable livelihoods literature refers to the possibility that problems related to livelihoods will cause more stress on the community or household, it can also be seen in the potential for structural poverty. Vulnerability is a general term that can hold on to any issue, not just to be specific on journalist's topic but this condition indicates a person's inability to maintain his ideal condition as a human being caused by factors that are beyond his reach. (Daniel, 2010) assert that concept of vulnerability informs how we manage and classify people, justify state intervention in citizens' lives, allocate resources in society and define our social obligations; it has important implications for ethics, social welfare and, ultimately, everyday life. Lewis, (2020) describe an example such stress and vulnerability, while usually associated with reporting on war zones or natural disasters, is now a broadly shared reality for many journalists.

In this context, discussions about journalists' vulnerability must be linked to the economic and livelihood aspects of a journalist affected by the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. Perreault & Perreault, (2021) argue that journalists working during COVID-19 discursively placed themselves in a vulnerable position within the communication ecology, despite their responsibilities to facilitate relationships. Journalists hence found their reporting difficult during the pandemic. In the

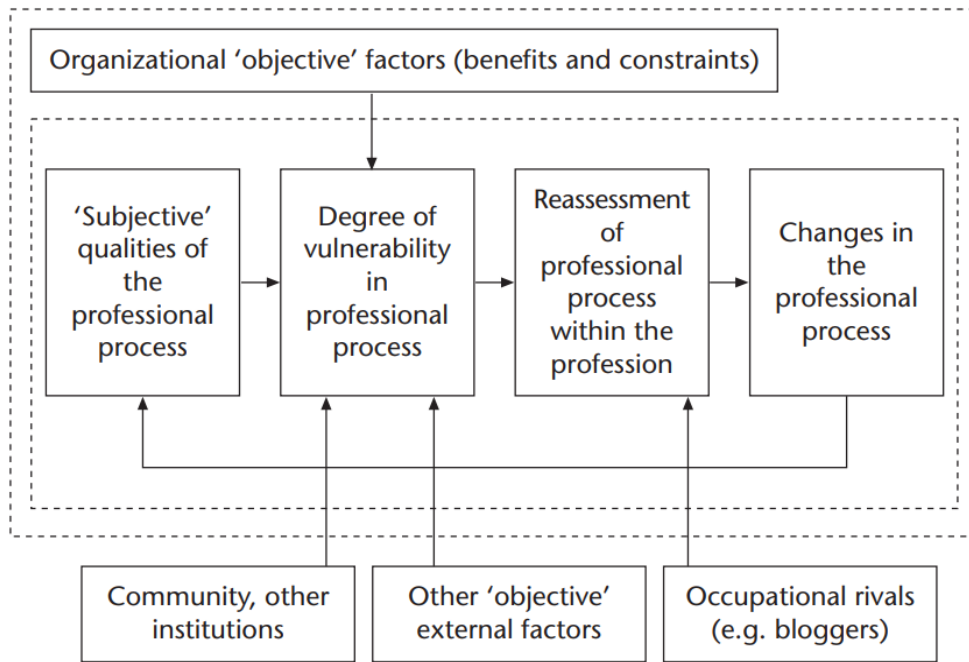
case of COVID-19, journalists had to be vigilant to these changes. However, journalists at the same time sought to hold accountable those who are putting them and those they care for at risk. Some explanation conducting journalist vulnerability need to connect with basic concept and definition. Lowrey, (2006) convey that journalists redefine problems, audience, goals, and even the nature of journalism and journalists. External objective constraints and benefits, such as organizational structure and resources, and legal constraints, affect how vulnerable journalists are and shape journalists' efforts to change professional knowledge and practice.

Based on this perspective, so we can understand that Journalists as basic already have vulnerability sides conducting their journalist's activity.

The framework presented in Figure 1 (Lowrey, 2006) outlines the various factors that impact the professional process of journalism. While Lowrey (2006) focused on the relationship between blogging and journalism, the framework also highlights certain aspects that demonstrate the vulnerability present in journalism. Such an aspect is the degree of vulnerability in the professional process, which can be influenced by organizational objectives, subjective qualities of the professional process, community, other institutions, and other objective external factors. This suggests that journalists may face vulnerability from various sides, providing multiple perspectives on the vulnerabilities experienced by those working in the field of journalism. We can elaborate the perspective of vulnerability by explaining that could be experienced by journalists themselves. For example, out of context journalism (Goodin, 1985) argues that vulnerability occurs when a person's ability to help themselves has been exhausted, and the situation is beyond their control. This concept highlights the actual condition that indicates vulnerability. Furthermore, some aspect that



Figure 1.
Factors influencing the professional process of journalism.



Source: Lowrey, 2006

could be contribute to inability of journalists to help themselves possible to be seen as the issue to analyze.

Drawing from perspective on vulnerability (Lowrey, 2006), which highlights the gaps that exist in the occurrence of vulnerabilities within journalism, we can apply this framework to understand the vulnerabilities experienced by journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic. He argues that journalists' ongoing efforts to address subjective qualities, cover vulnerabilities, and maintain control over news information work are influenced by external "objective" constraints and benefits. Organizational constraints lead to jurisdictional vulnerabilities. These constraints consist of:

1. The need to produce on a mass scale, and thereby attract large audiences and advertisers.
2. The need to let many stories slip through the news net.
3. The need for predictability and safeness

4. The need for a standardized, regularly paced production schedule.

Drawing the context of journalists' vulnerability among the COVID-19 pandemic situation, based on the parameter constraints above. Besides the COVID-19 pandemic situation, journalists always face constraints conducting objective of media companies, like the needs of mass scale or having cooperation with advertisers.

Contradicting the objective of news media companies that need predictability and safeness, COVID-19 pandemic always not predictable and uncertain. This condition just not impacted to media companies but will be impacted to media workers or journalists and their family conducting their occupation. Perreault & Perreault, (2021) argues that journalists discursively placed themselves in a vulnerable position because of the economic consequences of market pressure, given that many were experiencing the effects of the

pandemic in their own communities, families, and careers. In other hand, media companies need for a standardized, regularly paced production schedule. Imagine, the pressure of journalists in pandemic situation must achieve the media objective to present the actual news every day. Many issues and information happened and holding the evidence on news obtaining process, waiting for subject for interview and all of journalist's activity within social distancing condition.

The term vulnerability of journalist in pandemic not just to highlight the journalist as a person but to emphasize the issue in journalism, and information quality that produce by journalists to informing public good along pandemic crisis. Wishart, (2003) sees that the use of the term vulnerability as a concept is intended to focus attention on individuals or groups who do not get the attention of government structures. Perreault & Perreault, (2021) argues that the idea that journalists are themselves able to facilitate these conversations with the public while also serving as a conduit for verification becomes problematic, in that what is attempted is not always what is enacted, given the access to information, abilities, capacities, and desires of journalists themselves. The pandemic presents a gap between journalistic understanding and journalism practice. Lewis, (2020) further noted that journalism research often fails to fully acknowledge the challenges of journalists' lived experiences, particularly when covering crises and trauma while simultaneously experiencing them firsthand.

Media Companies and Journalists Constraints

The Companies or media companies need for the predictability and safeness (Lowrey, 2006), but nowadays media companies facing constraints with digital transformation. The development of the media industry into digital is still ongoing, but changes in the digital industry also play a role in the emergence of a

crisis in the mass media industry. Various social media application platforms now dominate digital advertising revenue, undermining the dominance of the mass media industry. The mass media industry lacks even an ideal business scheme model to support media industry support systems, as existed prior to the digital revolution (Olsen et al., 2020). According to (Lowrey, 2006), the uncertainty in media companies or 'Systemic market failure' in media business (Pickard, 2020), will have an impact not just to the media companies, but also to the journalists as media workers.

During the COVID-19 emergency in the world, the mass media business condition was exacerbated by the decline in economic growth (Olsen et al., 2020), including in Indonesia. This condition also has an impact on the decline in business activity which has an impact on the advertising business that has drastically decreased during 2020. According to (Pickard, 2020), the only effort in facing the market system in the digital era in maintaining the sustainability of journalism and the lives of journalists is public subsidies for information needs. In the other hand, COVID-19 pandemic detains media companies' business and will have an impact to the journalist's occupation, that means a constraint to maintain sustainability.

In March and April, when COVID-19 quickly spread to various countries, many media companies in Scandinavia reported the sudden cancellation of 50% of advertising deals in the planning process, which is also experienced by media companies around the world (Olsen et al., 2020). On the other hand, during the COVID-19 pandemic, media institutions, particularly local media, are still active in providing information and data on the development of COVID-19 in order to directly assist the community in protecting themselves, just as they did previously during Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2011 (Anthony & Sellnow, 2011). This reality

exemplifies the work of journalism, which always plays a central role in emergencies, but on the other hand, the crisis also threatens the work of journalists who work in the mass media industry system. This occurred particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which threatens the welfare of journalists in the deteriorating media industry economic condition, as is happening in Indonesia.

In case of Indonesia and Southeast Asia (SEA) in general, the issue of the journalistic business model is salient. The character of the media system, the role of journalism, and the journalistic paradigm have a huge impact and contribute to the vulnerability of members of the journalism system itself, such as media workers and journalists. Conducting the media system business model in Southeast Asia, (Estella, 2020) illustrates that the reality of media in Southeast Asia presents a case that contradicts the 'hegemonic model of liberal journalism' which is rooted in western democracy. The problem arises when the fact that the social ecosystem and the characteristics of media consumers in Western and Southeast Asia are different and so are consumption behavior, audiences' attitudes to news, and a gateway to news (Newman et al., 2020). This condition is ongoing and, in a pandemic state, makes media workers or journalists more vulnerable to the failure of the media business under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic economic crisis. This condition increases the vulnerability that occurs on journalists and media workers, especially in Indonesia. This fact illustrates the condition that the SEA community is struggling to achieve a decent life in their journalism work.

Journalism and COVID-19 Pandemic

In case of journalists vulnerability (Lowrey, 2006) mention such as external objective like uncertainty or pandemic crisis contribute it happen. In other hand, public need media to obtain good information to reduce

infodemic, while the journalists also need support from any sector or government policies to support them. Such the constrain is the fact that issue of journalism is frequently attributed to media and communication policies, rather than being considered as a matter of public policy (Napoli, 2020).

Frequently, I am reminded of a slogan that my colleagues who work in media policy advocacy have been using for years to try to broaden their constituency and form strategic partnerships with organizations working in other fields of policy advocacy: whatever your primary area of policy concern is, media policy should be your secondary area of policy concern amid the coronavirus pandemic (Napoli, 2020, pp. 691–692).

The reality has shown that the government should prioritize media policy because, during the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation and misinformation about the virus spread much faster than the virus itself and occurred almost everywhere in the world (Frenkel et al., 2020). With so much information available on COVID-19, society struggles to stay updated on the developments with many unclear on how the virus spreads, their risk of infection, and the preventative measures that they can take (Mohamad & Azlan, 2020). The fact is that various platform institutions are aggressively preventing and dealing with the spread of misinformation (Zuckerberg, 2020). With so much information available on COVID-19, the general public is finding it difficult to keep up with the latest developments, with many people still unsure about how the virus spreads, their risk of infection, and the preventative measures that they can take.

Failure to manage information in public discussions related to the COVID-19 pandemic will cause uncertainty of information, and this results in failure to educate the public on

COVID-19 prevention information. Dunwoody, (2020) suggested that uncertainty as an awareness of what we do to know, where that resides, and how it articulated varies. According to (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982), uncertainty is divided into two domains, external and internal uncertainty. External uncertainty captures the limitations of evidence in the external world, while internal uncertainty is reflected in our personal judgement about the risks around us. On the other hand, (Kampourakis & McCain, 2019) share uncertainty as an epistemic and psychological approach, the meaning of which is suggested in relation to (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982). Basically, media policy or support from the government will have a major effect in two ways. First, a positive media policy will support the work of media and journalism to manage public information in the response to COVID-19. Second, support in the form of media policies and journalism will also have an impact on journalist workers who work to find and gather facts, in the context of keeping the media business as stable as possible.

Methods

Research Design

This study aims to describe the vulnerability of journalists in Indonesia at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic between March-December 2020. Based on issues and information related to the conditions of journalists who are working amidst the COVID-19 pandemic emergency. The situation of journalists in a crisis situation that is full of uncertainty, from the implementation standards for preventing the spread of the virus to the uncertainty over the fate of journalist workers, some of whom were laid off unilaterally by media companies, based on information and demand from Journalist Associations. This study was written based on a qualitative study with the goal of exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups to a social or human problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018),

with journalists and journalist organizations in Indonesia serving as resource persons.

Data Collection

In order to obtain an overview of the vulnerability experienced by journalists, we collected data in two processes. In the first Process, we performed online interviews with 50 journalists from South Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, Papua, Surabaya, Jakarta, Bandung, Cirebon, Borneo. Furthermore, from July-August 2020, we conducted interviews with several journalists in Central Java by filling out our question-list within Google Docs, utilizing the communication network of Indonesian journalistic organizations to find empirical information as a basis for explaining causal conclusions in qualitative research. The question contained a summary of statements concerning factors that contribute to journalists' vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic. Authors classify the journalists' responses in two ways. The first is about the work of journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic. The second is the material and formal support given to journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second process, we conducted an interview with representatives of journalist organizations in Indonesia. By online interview, authors conduct with the Chair of Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI) West Java region, Hilman Hidayat, the Chair of Indonesian Television Journalists Association (IJTI) West Java region, Iqwan Saba Romli, and the Head of Independent Journalists Alliance (AJI) Bandung region, Ari Syahril R, on August 15, 2020. This process is carried out to obtain broader information from parties directly related to this situation, the informant can provide the main information to the researcher about the addressed research object (Yin, 2018).

To enrich the discussion in this study, we also used secondary data. Secondary data refers to existing data collected for other purposes. Such data may be very useful for one's research

purposes (Allen, 2017). To add the context of journalist vulnerability, the authors gathered data from press releases on *www.aji.or.id* pertaining to reports of journalist vulnerability in Indonesia. The process is carried out with documentation from the AJI Indonesia website in period August-December 2020.

Data Analysis Technique

In the data analysis process, we carried out three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2020). Data reduction was carried out for classifying and organizing data, verifying the answers of the sources, and the results of statements obtained from the search results with the media of the interview to the journalist sources. Presentation data is used in the process of compiling data in the analysis process; while drawing conclusions is an attempt to explain the context of the data and present conclusions based on the context of the data being analyzed.

Research Novelty

Our study offers a more specific view in looking at the condition of journalists in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The issue of information uncertainty throughout 2020 has become a hot topic in public discussions in general. One of the main topics of discussion is the role of journalism in mediating public information in order to reduce information uncertainty during the pandemic (Napoli, 2020). The relationship between media companies and media workers is reflected in their policies in treating media workers in crisis conditions due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The attention and concern of government-capable media companies to media workers has a relation with the professionalism of journalists' performance and their contribution to journalism work in supporting the prevention of COVID-19 in Indonesia.

However, depending on the specific topic of journalism, there may be less emphasis on

discussing journalists as individuals and media workers condition. Lewis, (2020) further noted that journalism research often fails to fully acknowledge the challenges of journalists' lived experiences, particularly when covering crises and trauma while simultaneously experiencing them firsthand. Surugiu, (2013) mention of case in Romania, research on journalists has focused mainly on professionals working for national newspapers, radio and television chains, less of the talking about journalists in local area. More discussion about journalism and media issues like Olsen et al. (2020) discuss the condition of media during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on discussing how the media survived in a pandemic situation and financial crisis. Dunwoody, (2020) reviews journalism during a pandemic from the perspective of science journalism in reducing uncertainty. Again, their focus is on the work of journalism as a subject. There are not many journalism types of research that review the perspective of journalists as the object of study, the starting point, and the smallest structure in the discussion of journalism studies and the mass media industry. Hanitzsch, (2005) in an article titled *Journalists in Indonesia: educated but timid watchdogs*, discusses the relationship between journalism and journalists as media workers in depth. He expressed his views on the orientation of journalists to the application of ethics in the work of journalists in Indonesia, as well as the character and demographics of the majority of Indonesian journalists. In this study, author emphasize the issues of journalists as labor on media companies struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic situation and what the factors that contribute to journalists vulnerability in pandemic situation in Indonesia.

Results

Journalist's Vulnerability during COVID-19 Pandemic

With the increasing number of COVID-19 cases, various preventive information began to be disseminated, urging people to stay at home and

avoid activities in public places in order to prevent the virus from spreading in Indonesia. In other words, the condition does not apply to journalists who work by gathering information at the site of news coverage. Journalists, as information collectors, play an important role in educating the public about the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Reynolds & Seeger, (2005) concept of Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) state that information distribution plays a significant role. The call to stay at home, on the other hand, does not apply to journalists who rely on news deposits to the media office where they work. This condition increases the vulnerability of journalist workers infected with COVID-19. Conversely, the pandemic conditions that severely affected the economy also had an adverse impact on the media industry, impeding its progress and operations. Olsen et al., (2020) revealed that during the COVID-19 emergency in the world, the mass media business condition was exacerbated by the decline in economic growth. This condition then exacerbates the vulnerability of journalists in Indonesia. In addition to the obligation to cover vulnerable people infected with COVID-19 because of interactions with various news sources, financial problems faced by media companies threaten journalists with the act of termination of work, salary cuts, or delays in payment of salaries.

Warner, (2007) explains that defining vulnerability is not as simple as a general understanding of this notion. Vulnerability cannot be simply defined as something that requires strengthening or the implication of government weaknesses. In the context of journalist vulnerability, the reduction in emphasis on health insurance rights for journalists, particularly those working in regional mass media, legitimizes this approach as relevant to being classified as a journalist. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the risk of virus transmission, endangering not only the health of journalists but also their families. In an interview via Zoom,

Iqwan Saba Romli, Chairman of the Association of Indonesian Television Journalists (IJTI) for West Java, explained that the situation of television journalists, particularly those charged with reporting targets, is quite alarming. Due to the COVID-19 transmission factor, most news actors, particularly executives, are difficult to locate. Meanwhile, the coverage is carried out outside, for example, by visiting 'red zone' areas such as traditional markets and mass concentration centers, even though some of them do not have Health insurance guaranteed by TV stations.

The concerns of television journalists are, among others, that there is no health insurance guaranteed by the office. Meanwhile, during this pandemic, we always cover in crowded areas because of the need for drawing materials, for example during the mass-demonstration of the Omnibus Law on October 28, 2020. The moment was good but on the other hand we were afraid of being infected and transmitting it to our children and, 20200. (Interview with Iqwan Saba Romli, Chairman of the Association of Indonesian Television Journalists (IJTI) for West Java)

In this context, vulnerability can also be seen in the absence of policy alignments in ensuring the safety and security of journalists in Indonesia, both economically and social interaction activity. A policy approach may be able to regulate the mechanism for managing information evenly. Therefore, collaboration between the government and the mass media is not only established with giant media companies based in Jakarta but can also be evenly distributed in all official regional mass media in various regions. Ni'matun, (2020) convey that on a meeting held on July 24, 2020, between the Minister of Communication and Informatics, the Minister of Finance, and

Table 1.
Journalists Informant of Interview

	Media Type							
	Print Media		Online Media		Television		Other	
Informant	11 Journalists		23 Journalists		12 Journalists		4 Journalists	
Job Duration	< 1 year = 2		< 1 year = 4		< 1 year = 2			
	>5 years = 9		> 5 years = 18		> 5 years = 9		> 5 years	
Employee Status	Contributor	2	Contributor	10	Contributor	3	Contributor	3
	State Employee	9	State Employee	11	State Employee	9	State Employee	0
	Freelance	0	Freelance	2	Freelance		Freelance	1

Source: Obtained from primary data

the Press Council to offer incentives to media companies to support journalists, the program has not been able to provide assistance to all media companies in the regions. Perreault & Perreault, (2021) argues that journalists working during COVID-19 discursively placed themselves in a vulnerable position within the communication ecology, despite their responsibilities to facilitate relationships.

Epidemiologist from Griffith University, Dicky Budiman on (Murti, 2020), predicted Indonesia would experience the peak of the first wave of COVID-19 at the end of June 2021. In July-August 2020, we conducted online interviews with 50 journalists from various regions and various type of media like, Print media, online media, TV, in Indonesia. Authors learn about their perspectives on the conditions encountered during the first wave of COVID-19 in Indonesia. Two things are the focus of our questions. The first relates to the journalism activities they carry out during the COVID-19 emergency period in 2020. The second concern is the support of media companies in protecting journalists from the risk of contracting COVID-19 during the news reporting process.

Journalist Activity Amid COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020

Majority of the respondents reported that the declaration of a pandemic emergency in Indonesia resulted in an increase in the news

coverage tasks of editorial staff, including field coverage that required leaving their homes during the social distancing period. This is understandable considering that journalists work based on the frequency of issues discussed, the more issues the public wants to know about, the media always tries to meet the demands of information. Based on the responses of various media companies to the author's questions, it was found that most journalists faced similar challenges related to the lack of health and safety facilities during news coverage. However, a few journalists who were permanent employees at national television media reported that they had relatively better access to health and safety facilities, including those provided by their media companies to support their reporting process. We also confirmed this condition during an interview via Zoom on August 15, 2020, with the Head of the West Java Region of the Indonesian Journalists Association (PWI), Hilman Hidayat.

So far there has been no model or guide for reporting from home like some office workers. If factory employees give some employees a day off, we journalists continue to work as usual. If asked we are worried, yes of course we are worried. This virus is invisible, so it is impossible to avoid.

Referring to the press release of AJI Indonesia, throughout 2020, 294 journalists

In defining vulnerability, the researchers underlie this argument with the situations and conditions experienced by journalists associated with the role of journalists in conditions that require information certainty, especially in the process of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Journalists are expected to collaborate in organizing public information, educating the public on new health terminology, and preventing virus transmission. La et al. (2020) explained how good information management can help the COVID-19 response process in Vietnam. The reality of the conditions experienced by journalists in this study became the basis for our thinking in legitimizing the conditions experienced by journalists in the first wave of COVID-19 in Indonesia in terms of vulnerability.

Indonesian Journalists Challenges Amid COVID-19 Pandemic

In order to analyze these conditions, we gathered press release data and reports from the Indonesian Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), which gathered the aspirations of journalists in various regions of Indonesia regarding the vulnerabilities they encountered, both in terms of the security of the coverage

process and the threat of potential job losses. We summarize the report data as well as the press release in the AJI press release data throughout 2020 as follows:

Another issue with the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) press release data was the vulnerability of journalist workers during the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia since 2020. According to the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic, several media companies are terminating employment to their journalists. A survey conducted by AJI Indonesia and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) on 27 October-13 November involving 792 respondents noted that 53.9% of journalists experienced a reduction in incentive fees, 24.7% experienced salary cuts, 5.9% experienced dismissals (PHK), and 4.1 % temporarily laid off by media companies. The data disclosed on the sites *www.aji.or.id* include termination of employment (layoffs) in the online media *Kumparan* in June 2020, *Tempo*, *Jakarta Post*, and *Jawa Pos* in Surabaya in August 2020. In addition to termination of employment, media companies reduce employee rights, which range from salary delays, Holiday Allowance (THR) delays, royalty deductions, and salary nominal reductions. According to

Table 2.
Reports of Alliance of Independent Journalists Regarding the Vulnerability of Journalists

No.	Press Release Title	Time
1	Call for Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI): Pandemic Should Not Be Justification for Layoffs and Trimming Employee Rights (Ni'matun, 2021)	January 20, 2021
2	AJI Jakarta: Media Must Pay Attention to Journalists' Safety During COVID-19 Case Coverage (AJI-Jakarta, 2020)	March 2, 2020
3	AJI Indonesia Appeal: Public Needs Reliable Information, Avoid Layoffs or Delays in Salaries of Media Workers (Febrina, 2020b)	March 31, 2020
4	Fulfil the Rights of Journalists and Media Workers in the during the Pandemic (Febrina, 2020a)	May 1, 2020
5	Economic Incentives for The Press during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Ni'matun, 2020b)	May 15, 2020
6	The Press Council Must Protect Media Workers from Arbitrary Layoffs (Ni'matun, 2020a)	July 29, 2020
7	Government Ignores Journalists' Safety from COVID-19 (Ni'matun, 2020c)	September 22, 2020
8	AJI: Stop Arbitrariness of Media Companies in the Middle of Pandemic (Manan, 2020a)	October 26, 2020
9	AJI Reminds Media Companies of Responsibility for COVID-19 Case (Manan, 2020b)	December 25, 2020

Source: Obtained from *www.aji.or.id*

AJI Indonesia, this policy of layoffs would continue in 2021. This has occurred in several media companies, including *The Jakarta Post*, *Suara Pembaruan Daily*, and *Viva.co.id*, which decided to temporarily deactivate some of their employees and lay off workers in early 2021. Another issue is the indication of a layoff process carried out unilaterally by media companies to their journalists via phone and private chat without any letter of dismissal or official notice (Manan, 2020a)

Discussion

The first examines vulnerability from a policy standpoint, where vulnerability is used to define a situation or condition that requires special attention. In this case, the policy becomes the emphasis in reducing the vulnerability experienced by individuals or groups. This emphasis is also the basis for arguments based on the situation experienced by journalists in the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Indonesia. The second approach is to define vulnerability in terms of Oppressive, Controlling, and Exclusive. This approach is critical in defining vulnerability as a result or impact of oppression, or in using vulnerability issues to control the situation, or in viewing vulnerability issues from an exclusive or priority perspective. Views related to exclusivity can be related to this study based on the objectives that we want to convey regarding the function of journalists as one of the main resources in journalism activities. The vulnerability condition that we pinned is based on the situation and conditions that journalists in Indonesia have faced. Therefore, it can become an exclusive issue and the concern of all parties in improving the quality of democracy in general, particularly in its role in collaborating with various parties in the process of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. According to (Napoli, 2020) that any potential policy interventions to help journalism survive the current economic crisis can easily be

rhetorically recast as a steep and slippery slope toward government interference with press freedom. Third, vulnerability is defined based on its role in legitimizing resources. When the authors examine this topic, authors believe that the conditions experienced by journalists in various situations, the difficulties, and problems they face, can open our eyes to the fact that this situation requires attention if we hope to improve the quality of information in the public sphere.

In the context of Indonesia, the general situation of journalists' safety is still concerning, due to weak structural support like coordination among government policies and journalistic stakeholder (Parahita & Nyarwi, 2020). In the COVID-19 crisis situation, journalists are one of the most important working communities to ensure the flow of information, the accuracy and timeliness of reporting developments on COVID-19 issues, and their role in reducing disinformation in society. Weak of government policies support and journalistic stakeholder legitimizes the vulnerabilities described by the authors in this study. Forms of vulnerability that have been reported in various press releases, such as the dismissal of several journalists by media companies, have occurred in violation of labor regulations on the grounds that the condition of media companies was deteriorating due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Apart from layoffs, some journalists in Indonesia also experienced temporary layoffs, salary cuts, and postponement of salary payments. These are the factors that contribute to journalists' vulnerability and implicate journalism activities in combating COVID-19 in Indonesia. In general, one of the most important aspects to dealing with public criticism on poor of government's public communications is the successful management of COVID-19-related information and public education. Research related to the success factor of COVID-19 prevention in Vietnam revealed that one of the actions taken was the concentration on

the information and communication sector involving the media and journalists. Media response is very helpful in promoting public awareness about the virus and how the public protects itself and those around it (La et al., 2020). The Indonesian government's efforts in managing public discussions related to COVID-19 have been unsuccessful. This is evident in government discourses, which frequently contradict the discourse proposed by epidemiologists or civil groups (Eriyanto & Ali, 2020). Weissert & Leimire, (2020) argues that to prevent potential misinformation from becoming part of the information trusted by the public, the government must make appropriate policies in responding to the situation. The precarious circumstances under which journalism operates are compounded by economic, social, and health vulnerabilities. It is difficult for the government to manage the process of public information and education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Parahita, (2020) explained that the challenges of journalism activity in the COVID-19 crisis are becoming more severe, while the government is unprepared to respond to the crisis. It includes poor of coordinate with various journalistic stakeholder or media companies from among the country. The country's leadership crisis and bureaucratic chaos add to journalists' burden of overseeing government intervention to counter COVID-19 and its derivative policies.

Another factor that contributes to the vulnerability of journalists in journalism work during the COVID-19 pandemic is the safety factor in avoiding the transmission of COVID-19 in the coverage process. This was also noted in a press release voiced by the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI). In this study, we conducted a closed survey in identifying the conditions experienced by journalists in Indonesia. We ask questions related to journalism activities conducted by journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic, to see the process of adapting the activities of

journalists during the pandemic and how media companies ensure the safety of journalists in such activities.

The circumstances described above are a reality for many journalists and contribute to journalist's vulnerability, ultimately impacting the profession of journalism as a whole. This condition must be considered in the context of broader policy objectives and take place of journalists and journalism issue not just is discussion on media policies but also to consider it to public policy (Napoli, 2020). The policies and economic approaches of media institutions have always been a priority in the discourse of communication and regulatory policies in journalism and media companies, but they have escaped discussion of media workers (Kalaloi, 2020). We argue that to address the impact of COVID-19 on journalism workers, governments should implement policies that prioritize the protection of journalism workers and reduce their vulnerability.

Conclusion

This study bases the terminology of vulnerability on journalists in Indonesia based on two approaches. The first is related to the activities of journalists who continue to run in the crisis situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. The experiences of journalists during pandemic COVID-19 are truly apprehensive. Perhaps some journalists who work in reputable media companies did not experience this condition. However, this study finds that various journalists in regional areas, particularly in urban areas, are suffering from the condition described in this study. This is a paradoxical situation in which journalists, who interact with audiences and others on a daily journalism activity, are living in fear of being infected with COVID-19, while also having to consider erratic income.

The second is concerned with the support of media institutions and structural support that should be capable of strengthening the role of journalists or ensuring the safety and

well-being of journalists as individuals. The dismissal or temporary layoffs from media companies overshadow their day-to-day work, which largely went unnoticed by media companies that hired them without health insurance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many journalists in Indonesia experienced this irony. COVID-19 is more than a pandemic for journalists, but any obligation to them for contribute produce information to support the government policies mediated to the citizens in all the problem faced. It is a disaster that takes jobs and endangers their health as human beings. The lack of structural support increases journalists' vulnerability in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Insurance and personal health security kit, like poor of health equipment facilities support issues that are not emphasized as institutional responsibilities of media companies to journalists, or the absence of structural support to evaluate mass media institutions and provide policy support in the context of improving the quality of public journalism to support public communication problem, can be classified as vulnerabilities for some. To be understand together, that most of the journalists worked in Indonesia still in lower-middle media companies across the country.

Misinformation that continues to create uncertainty in public information should be a concern for the government both upstream and downstream. The government should develop a policy that separates politics from dealing with COVID-19 because it is important to avoid misinformation. We argue that one of the significant factors in managing this policy is the participation of journalism supported by government policy. The government should be concerned about journalists' vulnerability and social-economic conditions, at least during the COVID-19 first wave period March-December 2020. Therefore, the government can take participating to support media company and journalist's relations for the purpose of information

control in the COVID-19 prevention in Indonesia. The authors encourage more research into various factors that can explain the situation faced by journalists and media companies. It is crucial to promote the transformation of professional journalism to address the fundamental issue of labor in journalism, as journalism is one of the pillars of democracy. By fulfilling its facilitative role, journalism can contribute to the betterment of society.

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