

Precarization of Young Indonesian Journalists During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Wisnu Prasetya Utomo

Departemen Ilmu Komunikasi, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia
Author correspondence: wisnu.p.u@ugm.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the working conditions and vulnerabilities young journalists face in Indonesia during the Covid-19 pandemic. Drawing on in-depth interviews with ten young journalists, it explores the experiences and working conditions faced by young journalists during the pandemic. Through the lens of precarization, this article demonstrates how young journalists are exposed to multiple precarity in the media industry. They entered an industry amid a disruption phase that began before the pandemic, and the pandemic worsened the condition. The result shows that young journalists are under the shadow of precarity in performing their work.

Keywords: Precarity; Precarization; Young Journalists; Covid-19 Pandemic

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membahas kondisi kerja dan kerentanan yang dihadapi jurnalis muda di Indonesia selama pandemi Covid-19. Berdasarkan wawancara mendalam dengan 10 jurnalis muda, artikel ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman dan kondisi kerja yang dihadapi jurnalis muda selama pandemi. Menggunakan lensa prekarisasi, artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa jurnalis muda dihadapkan pada berbagai prekarisasi di industri media. Mereka memasuki industri yang mengalami fase disrupsi yang dimulai sebelum pandemi, dan pandemi memperburuk kondisi tersebut. Akibatnya, jurnalis muda berada di bawah bayang-bayang keterpurukan dalam menjalankan pekerjaannya.

Keywords: Prekaritas; Prekarisasi; Jurnalis Muda; Pandemi Covid-19

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic shows how journalists are increasingly individualized and vulnerable in an increasingly atomized industry (Creech & Maddox, 2022; Waisbord, 2019). In recent years, various works of literature have begun to place employment issues in journalism in the discourse on precarization, which is getting stronger.

There are at least two approaches often used to discuss the precarization process. The first approach, precarity, to precarious work invites us to consider the objective conditions of contingent employment and their consequences regarding income and social protection (Armano et al., 2022). The second approach, precariousness, is leaning toward subjective experience, denoting a condition so extensive that it becomes an 'existential precariousness' which permeates individuals' lives (Armano et al., 2022).

Research by the Indonesian Trade Union for Media and Creative Workers (Sindikasi) illustrates how increasingly individualized problems and solutions occur. In the research, Sindikasi found that many workers who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic did not receive guarantees from the government and employers. Whether workers are laid off or receive reduced pay and work benefits, they have a minimum financial requirement for survival. They use personal savings, borrow money from others, including online loans, and sell off their possessions (Ekarahendy et al., 2020). Journalists have been facing multiple challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic, including health risks also the economic pressures on the media industry and companies (Kalaloi, Fitriawan, Nuraeni, 2023)

Similar conditions and vulnerabilities are increasingly visible to media workers in the media industry context. Before the pandemic, the global media industry was experiencing such a drastic stage of disruption, which hit legacy media the most. In that context, it creates complex challenges for young journalists who want to enter the media industry. The challenges they face are layered; they enter an industry that is currently experiencing a phase of disruption and even threatens the existence of many mainstream media themselves. At the same time, the pandemic has exacerbated this condition.

This condition makes young journalists even more vulnerable, and this vulnerability has not considered other factors faced by young journalists transitioning to enter the media industry. These vulnerabilities change the pattern of employment conditions, increasing the role of individual workers; collect levels of professional risk and stress; increased insecurity and pressures (Vatikiotis, Maniou, & Spyridou, 2023; Lewis, 2020). These problematic developments not only complicate the private lives of journalists, but they also put at risk journalism's key role as a democratic institution (Rick & Hanitzsch, 2023).

Based on the background above, this article further discusses the working conditions and experiences young journalists face in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they impact the media industry. This article will begin by making the case of journalists, precarization, and the Indonesian media landscape. This article offers an essential novelty as an entry point to understand the character and dynamics of the media industry in Indonesia today.

While the landscape of the media industry in the digital era is in a very disruptive transitional phase (Deuze, 2007), at the same time, there is a process of initiation or division of the workforce within it. However, before discussing the precarization process, it is essential to understand precarity and vulnerability in a journalism framework. Precarity is an integral aspect of journalism in the digital era (Cohen, 2016; Deuze, 2007). This aspect explains the experiences journalists face as a consequence of institutional disruption related to work and their work autonomy related to the career development and welfare of journalists.

Precarity or vulnerability faced by journalists includes vulnerabilities in the form of "work", "ability", and "financial" (De Peuter, 2011). One of the causes of this condition is the collapse of the media company's primary income source, which relied on advertising. Journalists deal with the shift in the employment model from a permanent contract to a temporary or freelance one. Regarding capabilities, media companies pay more attention to journalists who can multitask jobs and produce news for various platforms.

This condition explains why, for example, nowadays, journalists are not only required to be able to write news but also to produce news in multimedia form (Deuze & Witschge, 2017; Deuze, 2019). Furthermore, producing news is not a boundary that marks the work of a journalist, and there is a demand to interact and maintain engagement with their audience on social media. This character did not exist in the media ecosystem before the digital era. While many consider the changes brought

about by this technology as positive, it exposes the vulnerability of existing journalists or media workers. Journalists responded with “hopeful, must be accepted, afraid, and cynical” in an uncertain situation characterized by high layoffs and burnout (Ekdale et al., 2015).

The higher process of precarization in journalism has consequences for the decreasing role of journalists as guard dogs for power. They find it challenging to demonstrate their democratic role because they are facing a situation where they must survive in mediocre economic conditions. Unsurprisingly, this condition also has consequences for the increasing blurring of the boundaries between journalism, public relations, and marketing (Hayes & Silke, 2018).

During a complex crisis, modern journalism faces a number of vulnerabilities (Waisbord, 2016; Waisbord, 2017; Zelizer, 2015). Many journalists and media workers agree with this condition. A study on young journalists in Indonesia states that the journalists she interviewed understand vulnerable working conditions as “a consequence that journalists should experience.” Interestingly, even though they admit that it is a consequence of work, they perceive it to be different from the initial expectations they imagined before entering the media industry (Maudy, 2022).

Lorey refers to the condition above as self-initiation, where workers normalize their conditions and even carry out the internalization process (Lorey, 2015). Massive structural problems due to technological developments that make workers vulnerable are seen as something that must be accepted. Not only being accepted, but problems arising from these conditions must also be faced with individual solutions that often address existing problems or challenges (Brown, 2015).

Regarding precarization, Lorey (2015) refers to this as a structural problem rather than a personal problem. Precarization occurs when various political instruments create uncertainty and make citizens vulnerable (Lorey, 2015). The uncertainty as an awareness of what we do to know, where that resides, and how it is articulated varies (Dunwoody, 2020). In this situation, the internalization carried out by workers is a logical consequence that occurs. The internalization process in the media industry can be seen from the normalization of the casual contract system and the emergence of freelance journalists as the “new normal” (Gollmitzer, 2014). Forms of casual employment contracts in the media industry can also be seen from the increasing number of contributors or stringers who help cover coverage, especially in areas far from the head office of a media.

METHODS

This study is built upon ten semi-structured interviews with young journalists, six women and four men aged 21-26, with a 1-3 year working period. The interview results were analyzed using the step-by-step coding procedures and constant comparison of the grounded theory framework (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Using this method, I explored the experience faced by young journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic and their perspective on precarity in the journalistic field.

The informants of this research started working in the media before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Of the ten sources, six people work in media companies, and four are freelancers. Two of the four freelancers had just been fired by the media company where they worked when the interview was conducted. More detailed information about informants can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. Informants Identity

No	Informant	Gender	Working Status	Working Period
1	Journalist 1	Male	Freelance	2-3 years
2	Journalist 2	Female	Contract	Less than 1 year
3	Journalist 3	Male	Contract	2-3 years
4	Journalist 4	Male	Contract	Less than 1 year
5	Journalist 5	Female	Freelance	Less than 1 year
6	Journalist 6	Female	Contract	2-3 years
7	Journalist 7	Male	Contract	2-3 years
8	Journalist 8	Female	Permanent	Less than 1 year
9	Journalist 9	Female	Contract	Less than 1 year
10	Journalist 10	Female	Contract	2-3 years

All interviews were transcribed and translated for manual coding. The coding process was structured by open, axial, and selective coding. The first open coding process formed the basis for the first set of themes and categories, allowing for a more open-minded interpretation of the data. Next, I looked for recurring and prominent themes and created a codebook to code the data further.

The codebook was used for the subsequent phases of focused and axial coding. Similarities and differences in concepts were assessed into specific themes or categories. These overarching concepts are categorized into four major themes: Status and work relations, job search process during a pandemic, conditions, workload, and type of profession.

In quoting significant findings, sources will only be identified by initials, and media names are not shown here because sources are more flexible in explaining their working conditions if the identity of their place of work is not mentioned. The interviews took place from August 2020 – April 2022 and were conducted using the Zoom platform, each lasting 45 – 90 minutes.

With these data elaborated with existing literature, this study is intended to achieve two things. The first is to build a frame of mind to explain the vulnerability experienced by young journalists working in the media industry, which is currently undergoing disruption. Second, to describe and identify the conditions experienced by young journalists during the COVID-19 pandemic, how the adaptation process during the transitional period took place, and what possibilities will emerge in the future.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The pandemic situation and the wave of misinformation have harmed journalism and the media industry. However, while there is often a focus on the implications of the contractions of media on society and politics, less is known about the fate of those who work in the industry, especially journalists, editors, photographers, and other news workers (Geldens & Marjoribanks, 2015). There are also the implications of ongoing job loss and precarity for them.

The process of precarization of journalists runs more quickly. The reality of business closures led to drastic ad revenue cutbacks and, therefore, additional painful layoffs, halt in promotions and hiring, unpaid furloughs, and pay cuts (especially for the top earners), not only at newspapers but also at top digital media outlets. Some newspapers resorted to cutting their print sections or reducing the number of days of print publication.

In Indonesia, like many other industries, the local media industry has also been hard hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. The problems faced by journalists and the national and local media in Indonesia during the pandemic are apparent (Utomo, 2020). Among them is the economic problem, which determines how journalists do their coverage. The Press Companies Union (SPS) said that 71 percent of print media companies experienced a decrease in turnover due to Covid-19.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused a general decline in revenue for print media, online media, and local television. Without the pandemic, the print media would have been under pressure due to a shift in audience interest, which prefers online news through digital media rather than print newspapers. However, the use of new media does not fully benefit media companies because they only get about 20 percent of their income from digital advertising (Manan & Ningtyas, 2020).

In addition, around 80% of media members of the Indonesian Cyber Media Association (AMSI) canceled their plan to recruit new members, and almost 100% did not recruit new workers. In addition, there was also a decrease in revenue for almost all members. About 20% of media companies that are members of AMSI admit that they have cut their employees' salaries. In general, salary reductions are compensated by reduced working hours. This situation shows how the economic crisis due to the pandemic hit journalism so hard. In effect, journalists are increasingly vulnerable in carrying out their journalistic work.

Several studies on the condition of journalists in Indonesia in recent years have focused more on how journalists and the media adapt in the digital era, including during a pandemic (Adzkie, 2015; Kencana & Meisyanti, 2020; Nurlatif & Irwansyah, 2021; Parahita, 2021). Studies related to the working conditions experienced by journalists are mostly carried out by journalist professional associations such as the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI). Most recently, in 2022, AJI Jakarta released the standard living wage that journalists should receive. Hasyim, head of the Advocacy and Employment Division of AJI Jakarta, as quoted by Liputan 6, stated that a journalist's living wage in and around Jakarta is Rp. 8,064,581 (Rozie, 2022). The number is calculated by considering the

regional minimum wage and other variables such as food, housing, and clothing costs. This research is rather a form of hope than a reality because many journalists still earn low wages and are yet to have their rights fulfilled.

Regarding low wages, more comprehensive data can be seen from AJI's survey on living wages in 2011. Even though it is quite dated, at least it can provide an overview of the working conditions of journalists from a living wage perspective. In a 2011 survey conducted in 16 cities, AJI found that journalists receive low wages evenly in various regions. Ironically, AJI mentions that the findings are not too surprising. In this research, AJI explains that the growth of new media in various regions did not positively correlate with the level of welfare of journalists. The welfare of journalists has a critical relationship related to how they carry out their profession.

The situation described above is essential to be further observed. As explained by Romano (2003), during the New Order era, Indonesia witnessed the growth of a culture of envelope journalists who received money from their sources, which influenced how journalists wrote their stories (Romano, 2003). Moreover, one thing that allows this to happen is the lack of welfare guarantees journalists get. Of course, this is very dangerous for democracy when journalists compromise their news because their welfare is not guaranteed.

Another study related to the working conditions of journalists was conducted by Wendratama et al. (2021) regarding the work risks female journalists face in various places in Indonesia. In the survey, out of 1,256 respondents consisting of female journalists, 1,077 respondents (85.7%) of them had experienced violence during their journalistic career. Violence in this context can be physical or digital violence, which is disturbing because it correlates with working conditions and threats to press freedom in Indonesia (Wendratama et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, a recent study that identified the working conditions and vulnerabilities of journalists in the digital era was conducted by Maudy (2022). In her study, Maudy states that the development of digital technology, apart from its many positive impacts, has a vital role in shaping the experience of young journalists, including making the working conditions of journalists in the digital era more vulnerable. As explained by Maudy, journalists and their journalistic work are often only seen as "profit centres for advertisers" and "success in selling shares," which, of course, only benefit the owners of capital who control the media (Maudy, 2022).

The following section will describe and discuss the results of in-depth interviews by dividing them into several categories as explained by Maudy (2022), namely status and work relations, the job search process during a pandemic, conditions, workload, and the type of the profession.

Status and Work Relations

One of the characteristics of the vulnerabilities that journalists face in the digital era is status and work relations. This relates to how much an employee will work for a media company. This is the basis for forming permanent/unlimited employment status and limited/fixed time (Maudy, 2022). In this study, out of ten journalists interviewed, six worked in the media with five contract worker statuses and only one permanent worker status. Meanwhile, four are freelancers, and two were previously contract workers who were fired halfway.

This contract status made most interviewees feel insecure because they could not envision a long-term career. One example is mentioned by Journalist 6. She began to work at the end of 2019 in a recently established online media as a Surabaya-based correspondent. She said that after a probation period, she was immediately signed for one year and extended for another year. She did not receive adequate training from her office during her trial period.

Furthermore, she only receives a basic salary and allowances during the holidays, even though she had to cover such a large area alone. Even so, she revealed that until now, she was still able to endure as she said, "Instead of having no work at all, this condition should be grateful for." Another informant also said that the contract status was reasonable. For example, as mentioned by Journalist 2, who has only worked for less than six months at an online media in Jakarta:

"This is my first work experience, so there are few expectations, and I think the one-year contract system is still reasonable."

Meanwhile, workers with freelance status are also dealing with pressure. Even though they enjoy this position, especially those who deliberately choose to do freelance work, they admit that their status also requires them to network and seek coverage projects independently actively. This condition makes them physically and mentally vulnerable because they are constantly under pressure. As Journalist 10 mentioned:

“Health problems are a significant issue, especially mental health. As far as I know, almost no office is willing to cover mental health issues. Even when I worked for a media company, I had to pay for it myself if I went to a psychiatrist or psychologist. While on the other hand, it should be covered by the company because it should be seen as part of the job risk.”

The only informant who has become a permanent employee is Journalist 8. He did not expect to become a permanent employee even though he had just started to work for a few months. Moreover, he had yet to receive a precise evaluation of his performance, so he did not know whether his performance met the company’s standards. One of the parameters he learned later is when he is assigned to cover or cover a reasonably significant issue or event. As a journalist often assigned to write advertorials, assignments to cover major events will only be given to journalists deemed able to provide satisfactory performance. At this point, even though Journalist 8 is already a permanent worker, a form of vulnerability begins to appear due to the lack of a clear standard for measuring performance, which leaves the worker needing clarification about whether he is doing a good job.

Finding Work and Vulnerabilities in the Middle of A Pandemic

While various data show that many media companies have laid off their employees due to the pandemic (LBH Pers, 2022), the informants in this study found no significant difficulties when applying to work. Three of the ten informants started working as journalists in late 2019 or early 2020 before the pandemic, and seven others entered the media industry during the pandemic.

Journalist 7, for example, has worked for two media outlets at least twice during the pandemic.

“First, I worked for the national media and became an assistant producer for the Solo branch. For this job, I was offered by my senior at the university, and here I only lasted about nine months. After that, I decided to work for an online media based in Jakarta after receiving information about official recruitment and being accepted by the normal recruitment process.”

In addition, all interviewees said that being a journalist or media worker was a profession they had envisioned since they were still in college. They have made working in the media their primary goal, not a side profession.

Journalist 4, who graduated in mid-2020, also worked for two media during the pandemic. He said that after graduating, he had a few months of “rest” before deciding to register in a new media that specifically discussed economic, research, and financial issues. He only lasted about seven months here because his working conditions did not suit him. He then decided to apply for jobs in online media that discussed economics and business and was accepted to work there in November 2021.

When asked about vulnerabilities, the informants did not mention much about salaries or facilities. The answer regarding this matter can be better observed in the long-term framework. What challenged the informants were the obstacles they faced due to the pandemic. This challenge is related to the minimum offline interaction they experience with sources and colleagues in their profession, both in the media company and other companies.

First, in the context of relations with sources, they feel that the lack of interaction with sources can reduce the quality of the coverage they produce. Before the pandemic, journalist-resource interaction could occur offline, enriching journalistic coverage’s nuances. For example, journalists are used to conducting doorstep interviews with their sources. Even though the sources did not provide satisfactory answers, at least they could see the gestures and facial expressions of the sources, which are also important in the news production process. Something was missing during the pandemic because they could only interact in a limited way via chat or telephone. Journalist 5, for example, explained that she has to cover the sensitive issue of sexual violence. As he put it:

Covering sexual violence requires patience. Approaching and convincing sources to share their stories is also not easy, and this condition is further complicated by the online work system, which limits interaction.

From the sources interviewed, only Journalist 7 claimed to have worked in the field full-time. In his office, he was assigned to cover legal issues and corruption. Because of this, he often reports to the Corruption Eradication Commission’s office. This condition is still dangerous for journalists or media workers themselves. As happened at the beginning of the pandemic period, many positive clusters of Covid-19 were experienced by journalists. Based on data compiled by the Alliance of Independent Journalists, from March 2020 to June 2021, 381 journalists were exposed to COVID-19, and 9 of them died (Wicaksono, 2021).

Journalist 9 mentioned similar concerns; before being fired from the English-language media where she worked at the end of 2020, she was distraught because she still had to be assigned to go out

into the field. The condition exacerbates this concern that when the pandemic conditions were worsening, the media where they worked did not even provide their journalists with minimal medical equipment such as PPE or personal protective equipment. As a journalist who had only worked for one year, she felt very anxious, which disturbed her health.

Meanwhile, the second problem relates to the need for more interaction with professional colleagues at similar and other media companies. Most informants mentioned that one of the characteristics of journalists is their extensive network. However, starting work in the pandemic era means they cannot go straight to the office and interact directly with their colleagues. This interaction is needed to speed up the adaptation process for new journalists.

Journalist 2 said that the lack of direct interaction made her sometimes doubt the quality of the articles she produced. She said that direct interaction would make discussing and getting feedback on the work easier. Such interactions could not be replaced with communication via gadgets because, during the pandemic, almost everyone was exhausted by excessive screen time. Unnecessary interactions or small talk that can sometimes familiarize one another had become a complicated affair.

Journalist 6 said she was the only contributor from his media for the Surabaya area. Meanwhile, her media headquarters is in Jakarta, meaning she has to build networks with journalists from other media.

“The pandemic has complicated networking, and I cannot focus on one issue. So, you cannot quickly get along with journalists from other media. This also makes me go unnoticed, for example, by government public relations. Once, some government official accused me of working for fake media just because I was rarely seen at the local government office and suddenly appeared to cover a story.”

Conditions and Workload

The workload experienced by the informants was quite diverse, but interestingly, almost all did not complain about this. The workload felt by young journalists can be summarized into at least two categories—first, the workload with a predetermined target. Several informants were given different targets within one day or one week. Journalist 1, for example, is required to submit six stories a day. If he fails to deposit precisely six pieces of news, it will have consequences for the allowance and salary he gets. Journalist 6 has a load varying between 3-8 news per day. Meanwhile, Journalist 2, according to the character of the media and the rubric it is responsible for, has the burden of submitting at least two articles a week. Second, the workload is based on the development of issues. Media companies give no specific targets to their workers, which is another loophole that makes workers work overtime. Journalist 7, for example, is not burdened based on a certain amount but based on issues.

“So, for example, if the issue I cover is major, I can work on 13 stories in one day because I have to write from many points of view. However, if the issue is trivial, I just do what I can.”

Journalist 7 also gave an example: because he was assigned to cover corruption issues at the KPK when the KPK carried out a Hand-Catching Operation (OTT) against corruptors, he could stay at the KPK building until dawn and only finish reporting the following day. This is similar to Informant 8, whose burden to write articles will depend on the existing issues or events. The load was light at one time, and he just came and worked in the office. However, at other times, when there is a specific event, he must be ready to be assigned to cover the issue thoroughly, including out of town.

“Although almost all work with a 5-day system and two days off, the hours and working days vary. Some work five days in Monday-Friday and two fixed days off, Saturday and Sunday. There are also those whose days off are not fixed on these two days. Usually, this will be determined in a time set at the beginning of the month.”

Another interesting finding is when the informants mentioned that their workload was manageable. When asked about the salary and facilities they get, on average, they say that what they get is not worth the burden. Whether the salary is too minimal or lacks benefits, they feel that what they get is enough for the time being but not for the long term. They should be able to get a better salary or benefit and support for their performance.

Young journalists who feel that their salary is sufficient, on the other hand, claim to experience unpleasant treatment. This was told by Journalist 1, a former journalist at the Jakarta-based media, who said he was a contract worker suddenly fired just before Eid Al-Fitr 2022. He said he did not have too many difficulties at work and could follow the workflow well.

“I was fired abruptly without warning, with no idea what I did wrong. After figuring it out myself, I thought this was due to a working system that was not explained to me initially.”

Journalist 1 further explained that his dismissal occurred because he worked for a media company with different online and print platforms. Every day, he has to work on coverage for different platforms and with different bosses or editors. This means that in a day, he can do different coverage for different editors. Some of his coverage had appeared on the print edition’s front page. However, more was required because the standard of work was measured by the amount of news produced for the online edition. It was a requirement that he had just found out from the short training, including the working mechanism that was only held in the fifth month he worked. Shortly after, he was fired because he was deemed not meeting the company’s work standards.

Journalist 9 experienced a similar experience. At the end of 2020, he was politely fired – asked to resign voluntarily – because of the economic crisis experienced by the media where he works. Meanwhile, Journalist 3 was also fired in late 2020 due to the shutdown of the media. Journalists 1 and 9 then work as freelance journalists because of the dismissal, while Journalist 3 soon finds work in another media company. These examples demonstrate how vulnerable journalists who work under contract are, especially new journalists recently joining media companies. It increasingly becomes vulnerable because, during a pandemic, dismissal can occur suddenly.

Long Term or Temporary Profession?

Another important matter is how young journalists imagine their future. The media industry, especially in the digital era, has a high turnover rate. Based on the researcher’s interview with online media editors in Jakarta, this high turnover rate is dangerous because there is an accelerated process of increasing the level or promotion of a journalist. This is different from characters in print media such as newspapers. In the past, it took a relatively long time, more than five years, from a reporter’s position to becoming an editor or even an editor. Nowadays, it only takes 2-3 years from a reporter position to become an editor.

The tendency is that young journalists will switch media or completely change professions. In this context, it is unsurprising that with the conditions described above, only two out of ten journalists interviewed passionately answered that they would pursue journalism for the long term and even retire as a journalist. Journalist 8, for example, provided his answer fervently.

Since I was a student, I have been interested in becoming a journalist. The conditions right now are not ideal, but so far, it is enough for me. I imagined I would be a journalist for at least another ten years.

Meanwhile, other informants preferred to look at the conditions and, if they got the opportunity, would prefer to switch professions. Some want to change professions that are far from the media industry; there are also those who, even if they are no longer journalists, choose to work in a profession that is not too far from the media world. For example, as mentioned by Journalist 2:

In my plan, I will first work in media for 4-5 years, and only after that will I try to go to graduate school. After graduating with a Master, I envision returning to the media industry. Even if not, at least close to the world of media and journalism. For example, I was a researcher or academic in the media field.

Journalist 5, a freelance journalist, also has a similar answer. Even though being a journalist has been her dream job for a long time, she tries to be realistic. She said she would try to survive as long as possible as a journalist but did not rule out the possibility of working on other more realistic projects to guarantee her welfare. She noted that even though she would no longer be a journalist, she would like to work in a field with links to the media and journalism industries.

Journalists who decidedly answered that they would not make journalism a permanent profession, as exemplified by Journalist 1 as follows:

“By looking at my current age (26 years), I choose to be realistic. Having also had to send for the family, I will take the better chances there are. I love being a journalist, but it is an unpromising profession, and I have had bad experiences. So, it is okay to change professions if there is an offer.”

Journalist 6 conveyed a similar tone; he stated that he was not satisfied with his working conditions today. However, he perseveres because he understands that it is tough to find a job, especially during a pandemic. He continued that he would not hesitate to change professions when conditions allowed and received a better offer.

The few journalists offering passionate answers about their future in this profession should be a red light on the existing vulnerabilities. Gradually, this profession can be abandoned, and if structural efforts are not made to address existing structural problems, journalism in Indonesia will likely lose its generation of journalists and its best future journalists (Mariani, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This article discusses the working conditions and vulnerabilities experienced by young journalists who have just started working in the media industry before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. By using a precarization lens, this article shows that young journalists who enter the media industry are in layers of vulnerability. They enter an industry experiencing a disruption phase that started before the pandemic, and the pandemic has exacerbated these conditions. The outcome of the situation is journalists who are under the shadow of vulnerability in carrying out their work.

This condition of vulnerability is also internalized and normalized by journalists by accepting it because it is considered a “risk of being a journalist.” The process of internalization and normalization is referred to as self-precision. Journalism and communication students who will work in the media industry have also started the process of self-preparation. In this situation, it is unsurprising that most interviewees said they would only make journalism a temporary profession and look for better opportunities.

When viewed in a broader context, the situation’s impact can be dangerous for democracy. Democracy requires media that can flow the flow of information, and we need journalists in media companies who can perform their journalistic work well. The existing vulnerabilities show the potential that the quality of the resulting coverage could decline, which is bad news for media relations and democracy in Indonesia. The journalists themselves are no exception.

This paper poses a limitation. With the limited number of informants and elaboration in literature reviews, this study cannot be used to generalize about what is happening with the media industry, particularly the condition of young journalists in Indonesia. Even so, it can provide an overview, or at least fragments, which show the vulnerabilities journalists face and the importance of structural responses to deal with these conditions.

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