

Mother's Day

Mother's Day is celebrated worldwide, including in Indonesia, which celebrates it on Dec. 22 each year. In celebrating Mother's Day, *The Jakarta Post* presents these stories related to women and mothers. Initially, the celebration of Mother's Day in Indonesia was related to the Indonesian women's spirit and struggle to advance and improve the condition of the nation. Today, however, Mother's Day is celebrated as in other countries, expressing love for mothers in a more special way.

Studies have shown that working mothers can be as productive as non-mother employees are and, therefore, employers need to recognize the leading role of working mothers during the current revolution in flexible work.

Between bathing and feeding, dropping off and picking up their children at pre-school, not to mention taking them to the doctor, time management is a major issue for most working mothers.

In a country where telecommuting or work-from-home is still considered an abstract concept, more than a few women, despite their high education and extensive work experience, have had to succumb to office inflexibility. Some may afford to hire nannies or have the luxury of having a grandmother figure to help with raising their children, but for many others, being a mother and pursuing a career is as difficult as it gets.

What working mothers in Indonesia really need, says one woman, is acknowledgment and understanding by senior management of their situation.

"It shouldn't be about reducing working hours. It should be about allowing room for flexibility, for us to keep being productive and meeting goals just the way non-mother employees do," said the government employee and mother of two, who preferred to remain anonymous.

In the United States, where major companies are competing for top positions as the best companies for working mothers, flexibility seems to be the new buzzword.

Chicago-based managing consulting firm A.T. Kearney, which was named by *workingmothers.com* as the best company for working mothers in 2014, allows its employees to adjust their schedules, telecommute and work remotely, and also provides flexible individual arrangements.

Abbott, a healthcare company with headquarters in Abbott Park, Illinois, runs an extensive child-care center that has been recognized as one of the best in the US, and provides discounts at other day-care facilities. Mothers also get an extensive employee-assistance program and a host of other activities related to their health and wellbeing.

As studies show, the role of the institution cannot be over-estimated in setting a supportive environment for working mothers.

One of the most recent pieces of research, published this month by *Harvard Business Review*, urges companies to move past the discriminative assumption that family responsibilities lead mothers to care less about their careers.

The survey of more than 25,000 Harvard Business School graduates, found that women in general are less satisfied with their careers and their work-and-family combinations. However, it's the lack of opportunities, not family, that tends to prompt women to leave their jobs.

Why flexibility is a working mother's best friend



Out & about: A mother working as a freelancer communicates with her employer while her child looks on. In Indonesia, working from home while caring for children is still considered an abstract concept.

"Our survey data and other research suggest that when high-achieving, highly educated professional women leave their jobs after becoming mothers, only a small number do so because they prefer to devote themselves exclusively to motherhood; the vast majority leaves reluctantly and as a last resort, because they find themselves in unfulfilling roles with dim prospects for advancement."

The message that they are no longer considered 'players' is communicated in various, sometimes subtle ways: They may have been stigmatized for taking advantage of flex options or reduced schedules, passed over for high-profile assignments, or removed from projects they once

led," says the report.

For many working mothers, workplace incivility is a reality they have to cope with.

A Cornell University study on motherhood penalties, published in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 2007, found the practice widely spread over geographical and time differences.

"We found that evaluators rated mothers as less competent and committed to paid work than non-mothers, and consequently, discriminated against mothers when making hiring and salary decisions. Consistent with our predictions, fathers experienced no such discrimination," wrote the study authors, Shelley J. Correll, Stephen Benard and In Paik.

The good news is, according to psychologists, mothers make strong women. Research shows that holding multiple roles can promote greater life satisfaction and better relationships and reduce depression.

However, considering the stress of multiple children, there is no denying that workplace problems can be quite overwhelming. To protect themselves emotionally, the experts at *psychologytoday.com* suggest working mothers "draw on the emotional resources that come from caring for children to protect themselves from the stress they often experience."

For employers, providing just treatment for working mothers can be seen as the first step toward having good ethics and business sense. The next step is to recognize the leading

role of working mothers in this current revolution in flexible work. In the end, flexibility is not just for working mothers, as noted by the president of Working Mother Media Carol Evans on *Huffingtonpost.com*.

"Many groups of employees are marching right beside us in our quest for flex: employees caring for elderly parents, millennials, sports enthusiasts, adult students, differently abled employees, people involved in their communities. You name it and they want it. Flex is the answer for nearly every work life need found in today's high tech, highly committed workforce," she writes.

For now, let working mothers pave the way. **(Sondang Grace Sirait)**

Collaborative endeavors needed to empower dementia-sufferers

Disorientation and memory loss are among the signs that a person has dementia or Alzheimer's. Irritation and forgetfulness are common reactions to people with Alzheimer's. DY Suharya, whose mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, initially reacted in that way, but after learning more about the condition, regretted her attitude. The founder of Alzheimer's Indonesia tells of her family's experience with the disease.

It all started with a phone call on a Friday afternoon from Dad letting me know that Mom had been diagnosed with malnutrition both by her geriatrician and her dentist. It was 2008 and I had just started working on my PhD in Public Health at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia.

A year later, the situation worsened – my Mom was not only malnourished, but the doctor's MRI test and assessment had diagnosed her with vascular dementia, the second most common cause of dementia – accounting for between 20 and 30 percent of all dementia cases – and results from decreased blood flow to the brain, which deprives brain cells of essential nutrients and oxygen.

The official diagnosis from the doctors, received in 2009, affected me deeply and eventually motivated me to leave Australia and come back to be near my Mom in early 2012. It also inspired me to establish Alzheimer's Indonesia (ALZI) in August 2013, a not-for-profit organization that aims to improve the quality of life of people with dementia and their caregivers in Indonesia.

According to the WHO, dementia is a syndrome that results in the progressive deterioration of cortical functioning including language, judgment, comprehension, memory, thinking and learning.

As dementia advances, the person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities such as shopping or managing finances declines, eventually resulting in the person needing assistance to undertake even the simplest activities.

According to *fightdementia.org.au*, Alzheimer's disease, first identified by Alois Alzheimer in 1906, is the most common cause of dementia, accounting for 50 - 75 percent of dementia cases. The disease affects adults of any age, but usually occurs after age 65 and is characterized by changes in the brain resulting from a build-up of abnormal plaques and tangles.

In 2013, there were 44 million people worldwide diagnosed with dementia. It is estimated that by 2030, there will be 76 million people with dementia and 135 million by 2050.

There are 77 million new cases of dementia every year worldwide and one new case every four seconds. Global economic losses from dementia are estimated at US\$604 billion. In Indonesia, the estimated number of people with dementia was one million in 2013, and will double to two million in 2030 and again to four million in 2050.

The economic cost for Indonesia is estimated to reach US\$ 1.7 billion per year, according to WHO publication *Alzheimer's Disease International 2012*.

At a workshop at Erasmus Huis Jakarta during World Alzheimer's Month in September 2014, RSCM director Dr. dr. Heriawan Soejono SpPD, KGer revealed that four times as many women as men get Alzheimer's disease, in part because women tend to live longer than men and the chance of developing Alzheimer's increases with age.

In her teens, my mom was the director of a cinema owned by her brother in Subang, West Java, but when she married my dad in 1958,



Keeping active: Former health minister Nafsiah Mboi (sixth from left) leads a release of doves along with members of Komunitas Peduli Lansia (Care for the Elderly Community), marking the start of a healthy walking program for the elderly in Jakarta.

she seemed to lose interest in life. She gradually became antisocial and did not engage in any physical activity or community projects in her neighborhood.

My mom was 75 when she received the diagnosis from the doctors, but from what I can recall she had been gradually demonstrating each of the 10 warning signs of Alzheimer (See box below) for 20 years. Her behavior was one of the reasons I avoided her and settled overseas.

I finally understood that the arguments and generally dysfunctional relationship that I had with my mom, my irritation at her forgetfulness and tendency to repeat questions over and over again, her arguments with all of the members of our family, were because of this disease that had been creeping within her for so many years without anyone in the family realizing. If I knew back then that my mom was actually struggling with dementia, I wouldn't have made fun of her repetitive questions. I would have dragged her to the nearest place she could engage in physical activity or community work, which would have stimulated her brain and made her feel empowered and valued.

Increased life expectancy

Over the past 10 years, there has been an increase in life expectancy in Indonesia from 68.6 years to 72.7 years, according to Renstra, Ministry of Health, 2012. With the increase in life expectancy and disability, dementia-related quality of life of the elderly will increasingly weigh on families, communities and governments in the economic, psycho-social, political and legal fields.

In my years as a student living in Australia, I got a job working part time as a bus driver. My job was to pick up and drive elderly and special needs people from their homes to workshops and offices, where they would produce headsets for Qantas Airways or Christmas cards for Hallmark. They were paid A\$2000 per month by the government and private sector as part of corporate social responsibility (CSR). I believe we could make a similar scheme happen here. What is the key word? Collaboration!

A national collective action in the public and private sectors and among policymakers to address dementia has just been launched, involving an awareness campaign to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's with

the tagline "Jangan Maklum Dengan Pikun" (Don't underestimate memory loss). It is a public-private partnership collaboration including the Health Ministry, the Social Affairs Ministry and the DKI Jakarta administration and supported by private-sector industries such as pharmaceuticals, banks, fast-moving consumer goods and the media, as well as NGOs and research institutions.

What lessons have I learned? That activating your highest potential remains important for all age groups. Awareness and knowledge of the issues involved are critical and will eventually lead to the empowerment of elderly people who are still productive and can still contribute to the community in a meaningful way.

I also learned that what is good for your heart is good for your brain and that nutrition is undoubtedly important in minimizing the risk of dementia. Risk factors include age, family history, strokes, diabetes, obesity, high cholesterol, hypertension, depression and physical inactivity.

My dream is to institute a collaborative partnership of work and commitment between the government, the private sector and NGOs, as well as communities, to empower the elderly to continue being active both physically and mentally. Eventually, I would like to see a dementia-friendly city established with all support systems in place in this country.

My mom is now in the last stage of Alzheimer's, and I know there's nothing I can do to make the disease go away. There is no cure. However, she has empowered me to initiate further collaboration, as mentioned above, with the government, private sector, institutions, support

groups, communities and many more, to reduce people's risk of contracting dementia or any other non-cardiovascular disease. Take my advice: be physically active, look after your heart, follow a healthy diet, challenge your brain and enjoy social activity.

The vision is to have a city in which people with dementia and the elderly can walk around, gather together and enjoy places that provide stimulating fun, productive and empowering activities – singing, dancing, *angklung* (bamboo musical instruments), *congklak* games – all in the framework of a public-private partnership approach.

Thank you Mom, for being such an inspiration, Happy Mother's Day, with love.

The 10 warning signs of Alzheimer's, taken from *alz.org*:

- 1) Memory loss
- 2) Challenges in planning, solving problems
- 3) Difficulty in completing familiar tasks
- 4) Disorientation
- 5) Trouble understanding visuo-spatiality
- 6) Communication problems
- 7) Misplacing things
- 8) Decreased or poor judgment
- 9) Withdrawal from work or social activities
- 10) Changes in mood and personality

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