

The Role of Female Journalist in Disaster Education in Aceh and North Sumatra

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Abstract

Aceh and North Sumatra are among Indonesia's most disaster-prone regions due to their geographical and climatic conditions. Frequent disasters have triggered humanitarian crises that affect social, psychological, and human security conditions. In this context, the media plays a strategic role in disaster education and in shaping public awareness. From an International Relations perspective, journalists can be seen as non-state actors who contribute to public discourse, promote state accountability, and strengthen human security. This study examines the role of female journalists, particularly Najwa Shihab, in advancing disaster education and public awareness in these regions. Disaster education refers to the dissemination of accurate and context-sensitive information, while public awareness involves fostering empathy, risk understanding, and social responsibility. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this research relies on literature review and qualitative content analysis. Primary data include interviews, reports, and disaster coverage produced by Najwa Shihab and female journalists, while secondary data are drawn from academic sources. The findings show that female journalists play a significant role in humanizing disaster narratives, amplifying affected communities' voices, and enhancing public awareness, aligning with both International Relations perspectives and Islamic values on social responsibility.

Keywords : *Female Journalists, Non-State Actors, Human Security*



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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of the countries in the world that has a high level of vulnerability to natural disasters. Its geographical location, where three major tectonic plates meet, means that Indonesia is often hit by earthquakes. In addition, Indonesia's location in the tropics means that climate-related disasters, such as tsunamis, floods, and landslides, are also increasingly common. Aceh and Sumatra are recent examples of regions that have

experienced natural disasters in the form of major floods and landslides. These natural disasters have caused a humanitarian crisis and significant casualties, as well as material losses that have had a major impact on the social, psychological, and security issues of the affected communities.

The series of natural disasters that occurred in Aceh and Sumatra then caused various humanitarian crises. The mass media plays an important role in conveying information and as a bridge between events in the field and the wider public, because often, not all levels of society are *aware* of such news. (Ardhana et al., 2025) In this case, the media, apart from being a conveyor of information, also acts as an actor that shapes the perceptions of the wider community through *agenda setting* and *framing*. The awareness generated by the media is expected to make the public feel sympathy and empathy for the reality on the ground, namely the natural disasters and humanitarian crises that have occurred.

In International Relations studies, the presence of women often receives prominent attention. The role of women is seen to have undergone a certain shift, from being positioned as passive objects to becoming subjects with agency. (Stellarosa & Silaban, 2020) This is due to the presence of feminism, which echoes their slogans and acts as an actor that contributes actively to social, political, and humanitarian processes. Feminists carry out a series of activities with the aim of gaining attention and recognition for their existence and presence in the global arena.

Within the scope of this research, Islamic perspectives on women serve as a key normative framework for interpreting women's engagement in the public sphere, including the field of journalism. Islam acknowledges women as ethical agents endowed with social responsibility and the capacity to contribute to collective well-being, particularly through the promotion of knowledge, justice, and humanitarian principles (Zulfahani, 2012; Mujiati, 2024). This framework is pertinent to understanding the role of Najwa Shihab as a female journalist who operates as a non-state actor in disaster communication. By adopting journalistic approaches that prioritize public education and awareness, female journalists play a role in shaping societal understanding of disaster risks, humanitarian obligations, and the safeguarding of vulnerable populations. In this study, the concept of "education" is defined as the provision of accurate and context-specific information on disaster situations and response mechanisms, while "public awareness" refers to the development of empathy, risk comprehension, and civic responsibility among audiences.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the role of female journalists in disaster education and the development of public awareness. Primary data comprise media outputs produced by Najwa Shihab and female field journalists, including video interviews, news articles, and live disaster reporting related to natural disasters in Aceh and North Sumatra. Secondary data were sourced from scholarly journals, official documents, and relevant literature in the fields of disaster

journalism, International Relations, and gender studies. Data were collected through documentation methods by identifying and selecting media materials that explicitly address disaster situations, humanitarian consequences, and public communication strategies. The data were subsequently analyzed using qualitative content analysis, with particular attention to narrative framing, thematic focus, and the portrayal of education and public awareness in disaster coverage. This analytical framework seeks to explore how female journalists operate as non-state actors in shaping humanitarian narratives and reinforcing human security perspectives.

3. FINDING AND DUSCUSSION

3.1 Najwa Shihab as a Female Journalist

Najwa Shihab is a female journalist who has influence and a strategic position, both within the government and Indonesian society itself. Through various media platforms, Najwa Shihab has emerged as a critical, independent, and consistent figure in voicing issues related to humanity. (Mujiati, 2024) This gives her symbolic authority, which can influence public opinion and encourage deeper discourse on issues. Najwa Shihab has also played a role in voicing humanitarian issues related to disasters in Aceh and Sumatra, as well as voicing the responsibility of the state in this regard. Najwa Shihab's credibility is built through her journalistic track record and her substantive interview approach.

Najwa Shihab's persistence and accuracy in revealing reality to the public has attracted the attention of various segments of society. This has indirectly made Najwa Shihab one of the main actors in the production of knowledge and information, while also proving that gender stereotypes in the public sphere are real and that women must also be heard. (Mulya & Soetjipto, 2021) However, her background as an independent figure does not automatically make her a recognized feminist. Najwa Shihab remains a Muslim woman who strives to voice the concerns of the people who were victims of the natural disasters in Aceh and Sumatra. Although, besides Najwa Shihab, there are also other female reporters who have voiced their sadness and criticism of the government's slow response to the natural disasters in Aceh and Sumatra. One such reporter is Irine Wardani, a field reporter and journalist working for CNN. (Houmine, 2024) In one of her reports, Irine was seen crying and unable to hold back her tears while broadcasting the conditions of the people of Aceh in the Aceh Tamiang region, who had not yet received assistance from the government due to "difficult access." The clip sparked various perspectives, to the extent that CNN itself took down the broadcast because it was considered to have created an undesirable perspective on the parties concerned, which in this case was assumed to be the government and the state itself.

From this, it is clear how the media has become a highly sensitive issue, capable of provoking various reactions that can even have widespread impact. Irine Wardani, as a female journalist, together with Najwa Shihab, played a major role in shaping public opinion on the broadcast. Therefore, both Irine and Najwa themselves must be careful and cautious in

describing the reality on the ground to reveal the truth that is often hidden by the government and the state.

3.2. Najwa's Role in Aceh-North Sumatra Disaster Education

In the context of natural disasters in Aceh and Sumatra, Najwa Shihab played a role in educating the public through her critical interviews with local officials and policy makers. This approach was taken to obtain credible information and encourage state accountability in disaster management. One of the interviews conducted by Najwa was with the Governor of Aceh, Mr. Muzakir Manaf. On December 7, 2025, Najwa Shihab and her team visited the Governor of Aceh in Banda Aceh. Najwa asked a series of questions related to the condition of the province of Aceh after the natural disaster that struck a few days earlier, where in certain areas flooding was still occurring and had not been touched by any disaster. (Mata Najwa, 2025a)

In the interview, Muzakir Manaf, better known as Mualem in Aceh, expressed a series of concerns and sadness about the natural disasters that had struck Aceh in quick succession. There was concern that a "second tsunami" in Aceh would recur, given the severity of the damage, with infrastructure washed away by the torrential waters carrying mud. Many people suffered and lost their possessions, homes, and family members. The disaster had a real psychological impact on the people of Aceh, bringing back memories of past traumas. (Mata Najwa, 2025a).

Mualem stated that the flash floods that hit the area had disrupted access to water and electricity. Many transportation routes were also damaged, making it difficult for the authorities to send aid by land, so evacuation and aid distribution were carried out by sea and air. One of the areas affected is Takengon, Bireun, and Southeast Aceh, which are still experiencing difficulties in receiving aid. Mualem also stated that he had sent a letter requesting assistance to President Prabowo Subianto two days before his interview with Najwa Shihab. Meanwhile, areas such as East Aceh, namely the Pinding region, are also affected. (Mata Najwa, 2025a)

Mualem also stated that he had sent requests for assistance to neighboring countries, such as Malaysia and China, which specifically sent aid in the form of medicines and medical personnel. In addition to medical supplies, these countries also distributed aid that Mualem considered to be donations between friends. The natural disaster, which has not been declared a National Disaster, has made it difficult for Mualem to obtain assistance commensurate with the aid already received. The Aceh government has been working tirelessly to deal with the natural disaster. Based on the monitoring that has been carried out, Mualem himself has determined the disaster status in Aceh for each region from the most severe, namely: Aceh Tamiang, North Aceh, East Aceh, Aceh Takengon, and part of Bireun. (Mata Najwa, 2025a)

The main message that is always echoed to encourage local governments that provide assistance to Aceh is "regents, do not give up, regents, do not fail to help the people." This message is echoed to remind regents that they are representatives of the

people, elected by the people, for the benefit of the people. Mualem strongly and clearly stated that he does not support regents who turn a blind eye to the actual conditions and realities experienced by their own people. Even outside Aceh, Mualem continues to insist that regents help areas affected by natural disasters, rather than partying and pretending to be blind to the conditions of the people. (Mata Najwa, 2025b)

Previously, Najwa Shihab and her team had traveled to North Sumatra, to the Besitang region. On November 30, 2025, Najwa Shihab, her team, and Save the Children traveled there to directly monitor the conditions of the communities affected by the recent natural disaster. Najwa and her team interviewed Ali, a volunteer from Bukit Kubu and an activist responsible for distributing aid to local residents. The conditions described were difficulties in access, both for distributing aid and for communication, due to fallen power poles and internet outages. (Mata Najwa, 2025c)

A series of interviews conducted by Najwa Shihab and her team showed that the narratives constructed by media coverage and public discussions contributed significantly to the formation of empathy and awareness among the wider community towards disaster victims. (Almutamah, 2021) By highlighting the human dimension, the media not only provides data and events, but also educates the public about the current situation and encourages them to understand the social and psychological impacts of disasters and the current conditions of disaster victims. This shows that Najwa Shihab, as a female journalist, acts as a bridge between victims, the state, and the wider public. (Zulfikar, 2019)

3.3. Female Reporters in Disaster Areas

Female reporters assigned to disaster sites are in a unique professional position, as their role is not limited to conveying data and facts, but also presenting powerful human narratives to the public. In its disaster journalism guidelines, BNPB (2023) emphasizes that journalists have a strategic responsibility to raise public awareness of disaster mitigation and preparedness through continuous and informative coverage. Being present in the field allows reporters to interact intensively with victims, so that the experiences of vulnerable groups can be conveyed more authentically. In many situations, female reporters demonstrate a high level of emotional sensitivity to the suffering of victims, reflecting humanitarian engagement in journalistic practice. (Kiki Astria et al., 2021)

Therefore, live coverage by female reporters not only serves as a source of information, but also builds an empathetic public narrative that focuses on the experiences of those affected by disasters. (Rejina M. Bire, Mas'amah, 2019) that communities can take to minimize risk, recognize danger signs, and access available assistance. This is crucial considering that the media is often the main source of safety information, especially when early warning systems have not yet reached all levels of society. Thus, the role of reporters in the context of disasters contributes significantly to improving public disaster literacy.

As social witnesses, female reporters play an important role in recording and revealing the social dynamics that emerge during and after a disaster. Their presence in the field enable the raising of issues that are often marginalized, such as the specific needs of women and children in emergency situations. (Women, 2025) This gender perspective is crucial because disaster narratives are often dominated by masculine perspectives that are less sensitive to certain humanitarian dimensions. Female reporters' sensitivity to issues such as maternal health services, child protection, and sanitation needs helps broaden public understanding of the structural and social impacts of disasters. Thus, female reporters play a role in bridging the reality of victims with public awareness in a more comprehensive manner.

3.4. An International Relations Perspective

In the study of International Relations, female journalists can be understood as non-state actors who play a strategic role in shaping public opinion, influencing policy direction, and acting as a link between affected communities and stakeholders. Through their reporting activities in disaster areas such as Aceh and North Sumatra, women journalists function not only as conveyors of information, but also as representatives of humanitarian interests that are often marginalized in the state's response. This role is in line with the constructivist approach in International Relations, which emphasizes that social and political realities are shaped by norms, identities, and narratives that develop within society. (UNESCO, 2025) By giving voice to victims and vulnerable groups, women journalists contribute to the development of international norms related to disaster management, the right to information, and the protection of civilians, thereby reinforcing the position of the media as an influential non-state actor in non-traditional security issues.

In the perspective of contemporary international relations, the concept of human security places the protection of individuals as a top priority, transcending security approaches that focus on the state. Women journalists make a real contribution to strengthening human security through reporting that highlights the impact of disasters on the daily lives of communities, especially women, children, and other vulnerable groups. By raising issues such as the availability of clean water, access to health services, security in refugee camps, and the psychosocial impact of disasters, women journalists broaden public understanding of the non-military threats facing humanity. (Rongcai et al., n.d.) This role is in line with the people-centered security approach developed by the United Nations, in which the media serves as an important means of raising risk awareness, encouraging community preparedness, and strengthening state accountability in responding to crises. Therefore, gender-sensitive disaster journalism plays a role in strengthening the prevention and protection dimensions within the human security framework.

From an Islamic perspective, women's participation in social and public spheres, including in the journalism profession, has a strong normative basis of legitimacy as long as it is directed

towards the benefit of the community. The principles of trustworthiness and benefit serve as ethical foundations that affirm women's responsibility as conveyors of information that is accurate, educational, and beneficial to the safety of society. (SIRI, 2014) Islam does not limit women's roles to the domestic sphere, but recognizes their contributions to social and humanitarian activities, especially when it comes to the protection of life (hifz al-nafs) and collective welfare. (Islam, 2026) In the context of disaster coverage, the involvement of female journalists can be interpreted as a form of social worship (ibadah ijtima'iyah), because it contributes to life-saving efforts, increasing public awareness, and strengthening solidarity humanitarian solidarity. Thus, the practice of journalism carried out by women does not contradict, but rather aligns with Islamic values that emphasize moral responsibility and concern for others.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that female journalists, particularly Najwa Shihab and female reporters in disaster areas, play a strategic role as non-state actors in building public awareness of natural disasters in Aceh and North Sumatra. Through critical and empathetic journalistic practices, the media acts not only as a conveyor of information, but also as a link between affected communities, the state, and the wider public, contributing to the creation of human security. From the perspective of international relations and Islam, the role of female journalists demonstrates a shift in the position of women from objects to subjects with agency in the public sphere. The involvement of women in disaster journalism has normative legitimacy in Islam through the principles of Amanah and maslahah, because it aims to convey the truth, build social awareness, and bring benefits to society. Thus, the role of female journalists is not only academically relevant, but also socially and ethically meaningful in handling humanitarian crises.

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