

Consolidation in social change: women's alternative media in indonesia

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Abstract

Mainstream media shows a gap in engaging public participation, producing alternative content, and introducing social change. It is hoped that alternative media can be counter-hegemonic to mainstream media by providing a different perspective from the dominance of existing information. Women's alternative media can provide a voice and platform to empower women and place women's issues in their reporting. This study uses a critical paradigm with a qualitative approach and case study design. Researchers use the concepts of development communication, development journalism, and alternative media. The primary research subjects (informants) are the editors-in-chief or executive editors of five women's alternative media. The results of this study explain that women's alternative media contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and equitable space in society. They change negative narratives and stereotypes about women that frequently appear in mainstream media by creating more positive and accurate representations. They use creative and innovative ways to provide educational content about job skills, training, and self-development. They promote role models by featuring women's success stories in various fields. They interact directly with their communities to better connect with their audiences, understand their needs, and utilize digital platforms and social media to reach a wider audience.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) conducted a study of 192 media companies in 17 countries. This research was to record the company owners who fill the top positions for both business operations and editorial in each company based on gender. Companies were selected based on their size and audience. The two positions

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included in this study were the top business position (CEO) and the top editorial position (editor-in-chief or executive editor). In other words, this study was to see who is responsible for business operations and who is responsible for the editorial agenda. In Indonesia, the percentage of women responsible for business operations is only 10% and the percentage of women as editors-in-chief or executive editors is only 20% (Siciliano, 2022:5). These results show that a significant gap exists at the top of mainstream media companies. Women are not yet optimally represented and the equality in mainstream media companies is still limited.

Based on an analysis of the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report, the gender gap in development in Indonesia is still high at 69.7%. This index is used as a reference every year in four main dimensions, namely economic participation and opportunities, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2023:28). The results of the analysis place Indonesia in 87th position out of 146 countries. The low figure of gender equality achievements can also be seen from the 2021/2022 Human Development Report on Indonesia. The value of Gender Development Index (GDI) from 3 dimensions, namely health, education, and economic resources is 0.941. Indonesia is in 114th position out of 191 countries and 8th out of 10 ASEAN countries. For the Gender Inequality Index (GII), with a value of 0.444, Indonesia is in 110th position out of 191 countries and 10th out of 10 ASEAN countries. GII explains gender-based inequality in 3 dimensions, namely reproductive health, empowerment, and economic activity (United Nations Development Programme, 2022:286–292). In addition, in terms of the achievement, through assessment of 14 goals and 56 SDGs indicators, Indonesia is ranked 76th out of 144 countries. Indonesia's index for goal number 5 or gender equality has even decreased and is categorized as very poor.

Alternative media is thought to lean liberal or progressive when it comes to topics like environmental preservation, pacifism, women's equality, and civil rights. It is evident that in the public domain, there is a close relationship among citizen knowledge, mainstream journalism, alternative media, and political communication. The public now relies heavily on alternative news sources for information (Rauch, 2021). Publications created outside of the mainstream media are generally referred to as alternative media. Dissatisfaction with how the mainstream media covered certain subjects gave rise to the media. The alternative media are more open to public participation, so they do not function in the same way as traditional journalism. Professionals can be involved, but most of the news are usually produced by community members, activists, or public. Alternative media challenge

hegemonic views, become critical to the system, and sees themselves as a corrective to the mainstream media (Wold, 2022).

Alternative media have the advantages of facilitating a public forum for speech and discussion and concentrating more on local problems of relevance. Legal recognition, equitable spectrum and licensing access, long-term financial sources, and engagement in discussions surrounding the digital transformation are all suggestions for the viability of alternative media. Because social and political activists contended that alternative media are possibly a vehicle to fight for their struggle on problems connected to community development and civil society empowerment, the reforms brought about improvements in Indonesia's alternative media. It is anticipated that alternative media will present Indonesia with encouraging prospects. Additionally, information about Indonesia's alternative media distribution indicates that 21 of 37 Indonesia's provinces have alternative media (Aini, 2022).

There are several studies related to alternative media such as Kristoffer Holta et al. (2019). This article proposes a definition of alternative news media and suggests directions for further research. Billur Aslan Ozgul & Anastasia Veneti (2021) examines and contrasts the organizational designs of alternative media initiatives in Greece and Turkey. Two nations that have recently seen social movements with a networked focus. Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk et. Al (2022), explains how and to what degree alternative news outlets support news diversity. By providing further details on the notion of diversity, the media's democratic function, and the normative consequences of alternative media in the larger media landscape. Research by Özlem Erkmen et al. (2022) revealed that most of the safety threats against female alternative media journalists come from security forces in the field and arbitrary judicial sanctions in the courtroom. In addition, journalists suffer from the unsustainable working conditions of alternative news media. However, these studies do not specifically discuss the role of women's alternative media.

Women's alternative media emphasize to advocate for women's equality. They are non-profit or mostly depend on funding sources other than advertising. They target female readers and bring attention to topics pertaining to women. The editorial goal of women's alternative media is to provide information regarding women's roles. On February 17th, 2023, 17 Indonesia women's alternative media representatives participated in the conversation on women's alternative media in Indonesia. According to Nurhajati et al.

(2023), these alternative media outlets are in Aceh, Bengkulu, Jakarta, Bandung, and NTT, among other places.

For women to fully participate in the development, society, policymakers, and individuals must comprehend and be conscious of gender equality. By publishing news, journalists inform the public. Social transformation and sustainable development are related to journalism in several ways. Hence, alternative women's media will contribute to the public's understanding of women's responsibilities in development by providing explanations. They can connect trade unions, social movements, organizations, and other facets of society to create networks that help solve a variety of issues. Therefore, this study will explore how women's alternative media contribute to the changes in women's news coverage.

The results of the study are expected to be a guideline for journalists of alternative news media to have a strategic role in voicing the rights of women and other minority groups, especially in reporting on the role of women in development. This study is useful in helping policy makers understand the concept of women's alternative media. Thus, there will be policies and regulations that can support the sustainability and expansion of alternative media. The study of women's alternative media as agents of change can function as a new dimension in the study of gender-perspective development communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Development Communication

Development communication in the empowerment paradigm aims to empower communities, build local capacity, and equalize. The activation and maintenance of social support networks, social networks, local narrative empowerment, critical awareness facilitation, and community power facilitation are now among the broader goals of development communication initiatives. Human resources professionals in development communication now play a variety of roles, including those of collaborators, facilitators, participants, advocates for people and communities, risk-takers, and even activists on behalf of the public. Development communication is greatly influenced by a wide range of disciplines. According to Melkote and Singhal (2021), this evolution shifts the function of communication from development to social change.

Development Journalism

Development journalism, according to Alan Chalkley (Chattopadhyay, 2019), is more than just reporting the facts. It also offers critical evaluations of the different development initiatives implemented by governmental and non-governmental organizations. In other words, it educates the people about plans and strategies to enhance their living situations through the idea of a participatory development strategy. Journalism must also explain the plans, initiatives, policies, issues, and their effects on society in terms of development possibilities, as well as give background and contextual information about the development process. The needs of people should be the focus of news about development. The needs can differ from nation to nation or area to area, but they typically include necessities, like food, housing, and work. They also include tertiary needs, like dignity, cultural variety, and recognition as well as secondary needs, like food, transportation, and energy.

Alternative Media

In his 1981 book *A Trumpet to Arms: Alternative Media in America*, David Armstrong coined the phrase "alternative media." According to Armstrong, journalists with an underdog mentality who merged political activism with reporting by advocating for an idealistic vision of a better society were considered to be part of the alternative media. He fought against the mainstream media because he believed that alternative media could be a force for social and cultural change. John D. H. Downing's early research on alternative media was very significant. In addition to news reporting and analysis, Downing broadened the definition of alternative media to include radical media acts like song and dance, street theater, and murals. Chris Atton has concentrated more on the organizational procedures and production methods that distinguish alternative media as a communication medium (Borchard, 2022).

Alternative media are self-proclaimed media that are considered corrective, opposing the overall trend of public discourse that comes from what is considered dominant mainstream media in each system. Alternative media can publish different voices (alternative content creators) to influence public opinion according to agendas of which promoters and/or audiences consider underrepresented, excluded, or marginalized in the mainstream news media. In other words, they offer a counter or complementary position to a given hegemony, as this should be interpreted as the organizing principle behind alternative media companies (Holt et al., 2019).

METHODS

The paradigm in this study is critical with a qualitative approach. This paradigm explores the ways that specific types of communication in society produce privilege, oppression, and power. With special attention to whose interests these power structures serve, the critical tradition aims to comprehend the implicitly accepted institutions, ideologies, and power structures that shape society. To further emancipation, the critical paradigm is to expose the oppression of social conditions and power structures (Littlejohn et al., 2017). The type of case study in this research is a multiple case study. The sample is drawn from a selection of uncommon cases to thoroughly illustrate the many viewpoints on the issue and to represent a variety of cases. The type of sampling strategy in this study is maximum variation sampling. It records the differences between people or places according to specific traits. This method entails first identifying a set of characteristics that differentiate locations or participants and then using those factors to choose a variety of locations or participants (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The main informants in this study are the editors-in-chief or executive editors of five women's alternative media. The selection of these alternative media was based on the characteristics of multimedia elements, including actuality, flexibility, interactive, and documented. The alternative media are *Jurnal Perempuan*, *Bincang Perempuan*, *Srikandi Lintas Iman*, *Suluh Perempuan*, and *Marsinah id*. These five women's alternative media convey the perspectives of women and minorities through articles on websites, videos, or films, and information or knowledge to the public.

The researcher used the following procedures to collect data for this study (Yin, 2018):

1. In-depth Interviews. The informants in this study are 5 editors-in-chief or executive editors of different women's alternative media. They had at least 2 years of experience in the media where they worked. This was used as a benchmark, so that informants could provide more in-depth information.
2. Observation. The researcher observed the informants' activities, and everything implied in the informant's activities as editor-in-chief or executive editor. The researcher used this technique to see and observe directly the activities of the women's alternative media editorial team and then pour them into writing.

The study was conducted from August to December 2024. In qualitative data analysis, the category system was developed inductively from concrete materials and deductively put together individually for a particular study. The first stage of data analysis was open coding, in which the interview results were marked or coded to concentrate the data into a particular categorization. The second stage was axial coding, in which the researcher concentrated more on the themes or categories given in the first stage. The third stage was selective coding, in which the researcher identified the main themes of the study. The researcher selectively looked for cases that illustrated the theme and made comparisons after the data collection (Neuman, 2014: 481-484). The indicators found were: (1) issue planning, (2) generating or sourcing facts, (3) processing/organizing data/information, (4) involving stakeholders (audiences) in the editorial process, (5) managing operations (editorial and business), (6) generating revenue, and (7) social media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The reduced role of government in the mass media system is a part of democratization. Since the beginning of the reform in Indonesia, several regulations have been changed to reduce government control over the flow of information. The government removed the requirement for SIUPP (Press Publishing Business License) through Permenpen Number 1 of 1998. Then, there was also the ratification of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press. The idea of development towards social justice outcomes is increasingly becoming a basis among researchers and professionals. Conceptualizing development as a process of directed social change with the articulation of social justice is an important goal. The goal of social justice must be the anchor for theory and practice in communication development. One important reason why development initiatives are unequal and discriminatory is because the operationalization of development activities does not reflect all aspects of gender equality. There are various challenges in the application of gender norms that are detrimental to women, thus they hamper the progress of gender equality in Indonesia.

Various strategic steps have been taken to anticipate media companies that do not side with women. Women who have been working as journalists or mainstream media workers must have gender awareness and sensitivity. More than that, they become defenders of equal rights for women and men. The success of a woman in the mass media (either as a journalist or as a media management implementer) depends on the figure, attitude, and

motivation of the journalist herself in carrying out her profession and is accompanied by the emergence of opportunities. In addition to mass media management that has gender awareness and sensitivity, most female journalists feel the bonds of masculinity, distrust of female journalists, and limited opportunities for job promotion.

Research on gender and news has largely focused on the relationship between women and news although the scope of gender issues related to news is certainly broader, starting from discussions on gender neutrality and gender sensitivity in the production, distribution, and consumption of news. The main discussions on journalism and gender include gender and news, gender representation in the news content, gender gaps in the news consumption, and women's participation in the media industry (Bachmann, 2020). The limited number of female journalists in the Indonesian press to date is due to the editorial policies of several media outlets that see the limited arena or workspace for women. AJI data in 2020, the number of women working as journalists professionally only reached 30%. For media companies, the need for female journalists is when it is difficult to penetrate certain news sources, ranging from artists or celebrities, the fashion world, the beauty world, to the household and family activities. Thus, female journalists are only recruited for the purpose of filling women's columns or issues. This means that the newsroom is still a place for men who work with masculine work patterns and behaviour.

Women's Alternative Media Have a Role in Social Change

The relationship between gender and news is a complex and uneven phenomenon. There are inequalities of power and privilege based on gender that have been embedded in the social system reflected in the news. Despite significant breakthroughs in terms of gender equality around the world, studies in different national and regional contexts consistently show that in journalism, women are still not treated equally by the industry. Research by Martina Topić and Carmen Bruegmann (Topić and Bruegmann 2021) found a culture of blockishness in UK newsrooms by looking at women's expectations and work culture. The research showed that the newsroom culture only little changed and there were the same problems with blockishness and cultural masculinity in work expectations. In addition, the research showed that women faced direct and indirect sexism and a deep-rooted culture of blockishness that hindered their opportunities, such as the rare presence of female journalists in serious news content when male colleagues were more focused on their physical appearance than their ideas, activities or achievements and the position of women in the news making process.

Women's alternative media is considered as a key to raising gender awareness in the long term because of their uniqueness in reaching a large segment of society and their ability to influence public policy. Media contents on violence against women can be influential and can have significant side effects. It is important for media professionals to have a better understanding of contents on gender equality and women's empowerment. Understanding and awareness of gender equality are needed from individuals, society, and policy makers, so that women's involvement in development is more optimal. The role of gender awareness in life is socialized through themes that appear repeatedly in women's alternative media. Messages conveyed in the news often emphasize the role of women in development.

Women's alternative media are media concerned with women's issues and how issues of gender equality and justice become the focus in the narratives and news they produce. Women's alternative media and women's community concern to raise women's issues and they fight for the rights of their community - whether women's rights, around issues of equality, or gender justice. So, in my opinion, this is because it is called alternative. It may be small, but consistent with what is small. Small is beautiful.

(Interview with PR 5)

Media that is opposite to mainstream media. Focuses on certain themes such as women's issues. Does not rely on advertising. For operations, so far we have tried to do what we can and also we have tried to follow some grands. For aid proposals, we try. Because with, the term is there is an offer of a proposal that also spurs us to create a project. Trying how this project will succeed. For operations, so far we have tried to do what we can and also we have tried to follow some grands. For the aid proposal we try. Because with, the term is there is an offer of proposals that also spurs us to make a project. Trying how this project succeeds.

(Interview with PR 1)

...In the sense of having responsibility or having a job task to convey information. But what makes them different is that in the mainstream media, there is a connection with business or economic targets. Women's alternative media do not have that. I think this is, you could say, an effort to voice marginalized groups. So usually, this kind of alternative media is strong in its idealism. For example, commitment to marginalized groups, such as women's groups or indigenous communities and the like. Because it is not oriented towards money and networks and the like, usually its writing can be freer to convey according to the goals or ideals of each organization.

(Interview with PR 4)

We are media with a gender perspective. So, we are different from other mainstream media. Alternative media for women are media that have journalism with a gender perspective. Alternative media are a renewal media, where many things that are not found in mainstream media can be applied in alternative media.

(Interview with PR 2)

We used to think about how community media is built and owned by the community. The community can use the media to voice their problems that have specific characteristics. And that specificity is never raised by the mainstream media because the mainstream media will voice what the advertisements want. It rarely highlights social relations and the lives or dynamics of marginalized women. That is where the role that women's alternative media can take.

(Interview with PR 3)

Table 1 Women's Alternative Media Management Indicator

Indicator	Women's Alternative Media
Issue planning	Women in all aspects. Create a more positive and accurate representation.
Generating or sourcing facts	Empowering marginalized voices, being inclusive, listening to diverse, and advocating for social change perspectives.
Processing/organizing data/information	Using creative and innovative ways to convey information.
Involving stakeholders (audiences) in the editorial process	Engaging audiences with community empowerment. Open to feedback from the audiences.
Managing operations (editorial and business)	Editorial and business are mostly combined.
Generating revenue	Training, grants, seminars, and collaborations.
Media Sosial	Maximizing all social media.

Alternative media often provide a platform for underrepresented voices, pushing mainstream media to be more inclusive and listen to diverse perspectives. They acknowledge the complexity of identities and experiences and push the mainstream media to consider factors, such as race, class, and sexual orientation in their reporting. Their tendency is to highlight important social issues and push mainstream media to pay more attention to the issues that may be considered minor but have a major impact on society. They often interact directly with their communities. They act as a watchdog and challenge the mainstream media narratives and practices to push the mainstream media to be more accountable and reflective in their reporting.

Their approach focuses more on human narratives, emotions, and social impact that can increase the depth of reporting. They are more open to audience feedback, so that they can increase engagement and responsiveness to the readers. Maximizing the distribution of information online can provide many benefits, such as expanding reach, increasing engagement with audiences, empowering communities, adding alternative funding sources, increasing trust, educating and increasing awareness, and increasing flexibility in storytelling. Overall, this integration can strengthen the position of alternative media to increase their social impact and create a more inclusive and responsive information ecosystem.

News on the Role of Women in Development

Basically, development journalism in alternative media is a form of journalism that covers news about social, cultural, economic and political issues often ignored by the mainstream media. It highlights the development issues and helps to find solutions to encourage growth and development. Development journalists have a responsibility to educate the public, support national development, and advocate for social change. The full participation of women in public is crucial to achieve the equality envisioned in the 2030 sustainable development agenda. This has implications for issues in the provision, content, and access to information. However, progress towards equality in the media has continued to stagnate in the past five years. In addition to the issue of access, gender equality in the media must also consider three levels of inclusion: representation in the newsroom and decision-making positions, inclusion as expert sources and depiction in news content, and demographic considerations among the audiences. Studies on news content illustrate the ongoing bias in the representation of women. Based on a survey of the size of the gender gap among audiences from the World Values Survey, there is a significant relationship between the low representation of women in the news and the low number of female news readers and viewers (UNESCO, 2022).

The understanding of women's alternative media regarding the issues faced by women and gender inequality will determine the extent to which the editorial team of women's alternative media recognizes the issues faced by women because of gender bias. The awareness has become institutionalized. Their understanding is already high regarding women's issues and development. They believe that women have the maximum level of participation or involvement in development. It influences how their media interpret various women's issues that can become news.

All editors-in-chief or executive editors interviewed view news about women as news about various aspects of women's involvement in development. Therefore, in their practice of reporting, news is often found as a mission to empower women. Women's issues are conditions that indicate a gap between women and men or gender inequality. This inequality condition is obtained by comparing the desired conditions (normative conditions) with the gender conditions as they exist (KPPPA, 2020). The gender gap describes the gap in achieving development benefits for women compared to men regarding basic human needs to obtain employment, education, and health. The issues of gender inequality in Indonesia include in employment, education, and health.

Topics that have been written about the issue of women's roles in development. For example, the topic of premature deindustrialization. How does this affect female workers? Because it then has an impact on mass layoffs. We know that developmentalism or development is identical to economic development. For us, women's issues are important. Because we also raise the politics of the working class, especially female workers.

(Interview with PR 3)

Regarding migrant workers, there will also be discussions on the PPRT Bill, how to get this law passed quickly, we will write that too. About conditions at work. How to get a chance at a better career. Our issue categories are about labor, politics, gender equality, feminism and violence.

(Interview with PR 2)

We do write about some women's employment issues. Especially on the issue of domestic workers, it is now a big issue for the movement. How we form a coalition together for the ratification of the Domestic Worker Protection Bill. For other workers, such as labourers and others, there are also several articles. Such as how the wages of female workers are lower than male workers and the migrant workers who are often affected by human trafficking problems in the recruitment process and others. There are several issues related to employment other than the general issue of female employment, such as the impact of the Omnibus Law on Job Creation on female workers.

(Interview with PR 5)

Quite often discussing the issue of women's roles in development. I mean that the spectrum is quite broad. For example, if the workforce is related to nursing workers, it usually overlaps with the theme of sexual violence, about labour rights, or included in sexual reproductive health rights. That also includes, for example, workers' rights or maternity, all sorts of things. So, if you talk about employment issues, yes, there must be a lot, including the economy.

(Interview with PR 4)

Our main issue is not only women and children in the context of peace and diversity, but also in terms of intersectionality. So, the issue of women in development has many

terms, about health, economy, education, and others. That's what we try to accommodate. We try the intersectionality framework in our contents. I have written about health and education issues. There are also some recent issues. One of them is about the Domestic Worker Protection Bill.

(Interview with PR 1)

Women's media alternative can play a significant role in increasing the role of women in the workforce through various efforts, including education and training by providing educational contents on job skills, trainings, and self-development and helping women prepare to enter or change careers. Can provide some information by informing about job opportunities, scholarship programs, and available trainings, so that they help women access some information they need to build their careers. Women's media alternative promote role models by featuring success stories of women in various fields that can inspire and encourage other women to pursue the same or new careers. They can raise the equality issues by advocating for important employment issues, such as equal payment, protection of workers' rights, and the creation of an inclusive work environment.

Table 2 . Indicators News on the Role of Women in Development

	The proportion of experts and sources in news	The proportion of women in news coverage	The proportion of stories
Srikandi	High	High	High
Lintas Iman			
Bincang Perempuan	High	High	High
Marsinah.id	High	High	High
Jurnal Perempuan	High	High	High
Suluh Perempuan	High	High	High

Furthermore, they can hold campaigns that raise awareness about the importance of women's roles in the workplace and address gender stereotypes that hinder their progress. In terms of networking and connections, they can build networks between women in the workforce to share experiences, resources, and supports for strengthening solidarity among them. Women's alternative media can empower communities by involving local communities in creating contents and ensuring that issues, that are relevant and specific to women in the community, are raised and fought for. By using various digital platforms and social media, they can reach a wider audience and educate about women's rights in the workplace.

In addition, women's alternative media can do collaboration. They can build partnerships among alternative media, non-governmental organizations, and local communities to share resources, knowledge, and networks. Offer trainings for women in journalism, content production, and technology to improve their skills and abilities in media. Women's alternative media can seek various sources of funding, such as crowdfunding, grants, or sponsorships, to support the sustainability and expansion of alternative media. Developed educational contents on issues important to women, such as health, human rights, and economic empowerment. women's alternative media can create a network to share experiences, strategies, and best practices in operating and spreading message, to adapt to emerging social issues and provide critical and inclusive analysis, and to increase marketing efforts to attract more audiences and increase the visibility of alternative media.



Source: Instagram Bincang Perempuan



Source: Instagram Srikandi Lintas Iman



Source: Instagram Jurnal Perempuan



Source: Instagram Suluh Perempuan



Source: Instagram Marsinah.Id

CONCLUSIONS

In general, women's alternative media contribute to the creation of more inclusive and equitable spaces in society. They often educate the society about women's issues. Also serve as a tool to promote social change, support women's rights movements, and advocate for more inclusive policies. By providing a platform to share stories and experiences, they encourage women's involvement in public discussions and social issues. Changed negative narratives and stereotypes about women that often appear in the mainstream media to create more positive and accurate representations. Women's alternative media bring creative innovation in their approach, allowing for the exploration of new ideas relevant to women. They use some creative and innovative ways of telling stories and interact directly with their communities to better connect with their audiences and understand their needs.

However, women's alternative media face some challenges. The challenges faced by women's alternative media are mainly funding, which often hampers their sustainability and development. The access and infrastructure, especially related to the internet and technology, are still limited, making difficult for them to engage with their audiences. Many alternative media face legal and censorship challenges, especially when raising sensitive or controversial issues. They must fight frequently against gender stereotypes and discrimination, both from society and institutions. Accommodating voices from various backgrounds and communities can be a challenge for them, especially if there are opinion differences. Rapid technological developments require constant adaptation, while some alternative media may not have the resources to keep up with the latest trends. Last but not least, women activists, involved in the alternative media, often face safety risks, including threats of violence or intimidation.

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