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Dhiyaa Thurfah Ilaa & Rona Agustin

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Menstrual leave for female workers in Indonesia from the perspective of SDGs 3, 5, and 8

Dhiyaa Thurfah Ilaa*^{ID} & Rona Agustin^{ID}

Communications Department, Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif, Jl. Srengseng Sawah no.17, Jagakarsa, South Jakarta, Indonesia

*email: dhiyaa.thurfah@polimedia.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the implementation of menstrual leave policy for female workers in Indonesia and explored it through the perspective of Sustainable Development Goals, particularly goal 3 of SDG (Good Health & Well-Being), goal 5 of SDG (Gender Equality), and goal 8 of SDG (Decent Work & Economic Growth). Although menstrual leave rights for female workers in Indonesia are legally regulated, significant implementation gaps remain. Using a qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with female workers in Indonesia, this study identified four main themes: knowledge & awareness of menstrual leave rights, implementation variations of menstrual leave rights at workplaces, organizational culture & workplace support of women's reproductive issues, and perception of productivity & appreciation of female workers. The findings show considerable variations in the implementation of menstrual leave across informants' workplaces. The informants reported that menstrual leave supports their physical health and mental well-being, and support inclusivity and equality in their workplaces. This finding further suggests that support for women's reproductive health in the workplace may positively contribute towards their work productivity.

Keywords: menstrual leave, sustainable development goals, female workers, women's rights.

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



1. INTRODUCTION

Women's reproductive health is a part of the global public health system that is often overlooked in workplace policies. One of the most important part of women's reproductive health is menstruation. Menstruation is not just a biological routine, for many women, that routine comes with its own significant physical & psychological challenges. Global data indicates that up to 90% women experience dysmenorrhea or menstrual pain, can be quite severe and could interfere with daily activities like work (Armour et al., 2019).

In Indonesia, the recognition of the importance of this biological experience has been existed since 2003, with the legalized menstrual leave rights through Law No. 13 of 2003 concerning manpower. Article 81 paragraph (1) of the law states that female workers who experience menstrual pain, are not required to work on their first and second days of their period. This policy is designed to provide legal protection and space for women, especially female workers to maintain their reproductive health without sacrificing their professional positions.

Despite this legal protection has been in place for over two decades, there is still a wide gap between the regulation and the actual implementation at the company level. Many companies in Indonesia still lack a clear Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) of menstrual leave. This right is often "disguised" as regular sick leave that requires sick "letters" signed by doctors. This is not right because menstruation is not a disease, but a natural condition.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has become one of the most important things in nowadays and has become an important part of our lives. SDGs was introduced by the United Nations in 2015. Through SDGs, women's reproductive health and labour rights are recognized as an important part to support sustainability. Through SDGs perspective, menstrual leave is not only associated with workers' health protection, but also helps bring attention to gender equality, and inclusivity.

Despite the existence of regulations on menstrual leave by, the implementation gaps were seen in different workplaces around Indonesia. This indicates that there are still lack of information and socialization on these rights in Indonesia. Many female workers are unaware of the existence of menstrual leave, and if they are aware, they are hesitating to take the menstrual leave, due to the social stigma. Masculine organizational culture often views menstruation as a form of weakness and a barrier of work productivity. This makes the legal rights become meaningless and creates loophole for employers not to implement the menstrual leave.

Previous studies have primarily examined menstrual leave from the perspectives of labour law, reproductive health, workplace productivity, and gender rights (Sommer et al., 2016; Sohil et al., 2025). While these studies give important insights to the legal and health dimensions of menstrual leave, none highlighted its contribution to sustainable development. There remains a lack of research examining menstrual leave implementation through the perspective of SDGs, in particularly Goal 3 (Good Health & Well-Being), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), and Goal 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth). Furthermore, studies focusing on Indonesian female workers' experiences of menstrual leave implementation from an SDG perspective remain scarce. This study addresses this gap by exploring how menstrual leave implementation is experienced by female workers in Indonesia and how it contributes to SDGs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Menstruation and Work Productivity

Normal menstruation is defined as a bleeding cycle from the uterine corpus that occurs between menarche and menopause period (Critchley et al., 2020). Menstruation is a part of the menstrual cycle that occurs on most women every month & can last for 2-7 days. Many women who experience menstruation can have symptoms such as pain, dysmenorrhea, anxiety, depression, and fatigue, according to Critchley

et al. (2020). Menstrual health is an important part of women's overall health, because it could impact significantly on their physical, mental, and social well-being (Matteson et al., 2013).

Menstruation is often regarded as a "mark" that differentiates women negatively in a masculine work environment. Johnston-Robledo and Chrisler (2013) stated that there is a social stigma that sees menstruation as a thing that needed to be hidden, so that women didn't have to feel unprofessional. This stigma is reinforced by patriarchal culture that views reproductive functions as domestic matters that should not affect professional matters.

The stigma that menstruation can reduce productivity is often becoming one of the main reasons why there are several objections to menstrual leave policy. However, medical research shows otherwise. Female workers who are forced to work under severe menstrual pain, actually experience a significant decline in their productivity compared to those who take adequate rest time (MacGregor et al., 2023). According to Schoep et al. (2019), lost productivity due to menstrual-related symptoms could reach up to 8,9 days per year per female worker. Therefore, providing menstrual leave is actually a smart HR management strategy to ensure the long-term sustainability of employee productivity.

2.2. Menstrual Leave Regulation in Indonesia

The primary base of menstrual leave policy in Indonesia is Law No. 13 of 2003 concerning manpower. Article 81 paragraph 1 states that female workers who experience pain during menstruation, and notify their employer are not obligated to work on the first and second days of their menstruation period. Article 81 paragraph 2 also states that the implementation of said policy shall be regulated in the employment agreement, company regulations, or collective labour agreement. Article 93 paragraph 2 states that employers are obligated to pay wages to female workers who are on their menstrual leave as regulated in article 81 paragraph 1. Employers who violate workers' rights as regulated in Article 93 paragraph 2, could face criminal penalties and fines. This regulation demonstrates a special protection and government's commitment to protect women's reproductive health and promote fair labour practices for female workers. This regulation made it very clear that every employer in Indonesia should be aware of these regulations and implement them on to their employment policies and contract. This legal protection aligns with Indonesia's commitment to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted through Law No. 7 of 1984 (Faisal et al., 2024). However, there are several debates in its implementation, particularly with the enactment of the Law No. 11 of 2020 on Job Creation (Job Creation Law), which raise concern on the existence of the right for menstrual leave. This creates a giant loophole for some ignorant employer to not implement menstrual leave on to their work policies.

2.3. Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global development agenda established by the United Nations in 2015 through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. According to the United Nations (2015), the SDGs aim to ensure that everyone is involved in the development process of global sustainability. The SDGs consist of 17 goals, on those 17 goals there are also 169 targets, 4.120 events, 1.382 publications, and 8.607 actions, designed to address social, economic, and environmental challenges around the world and overall to achieve global sustainability. Global sustainability is believed to be the key of a better world, and every party, are expected to implement these sustainable values, and work together to achieve these goals.

Those 17 goals are: (1) No Poverty: End poverty in all its forms everywhere; (2) Zero Hunger: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture; (3) Good Health and Well-Being: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; (4) Quality Education: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; (5) Gender Equality: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; (6) Clean Water and Sanitation: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; (7) Affordable and Clean Energy: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all; (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic

growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all; (9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation; (10) Reduced Inequalities: Reduce inequality within and among countries; (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable; (12) Responsible Consumption and Production: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; (13) Climate Action: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; (14) Life Below Water: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development; (15) Life on Land: Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems; (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable institutions; and (17) Partnerships for the Goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Those 17 goals are connected, and the success of one goal can influence the others. [Le Blanc \(2015\)](#) explains that the SDGs were designed so that the issues such as health, equality, rights, and work ethics are related and influenced one another. In work environment, employer have the authorities to implement SDGs perspectives into their policies. This makes labour policies and organizational practices became an important component in supporting sustainable social development, and sustainable life. This aligns with [Sachs \(2012\)](#), who stated that sustainable development requires responsibility from organizations & institutions to ensure social welfare and reduce inequalities in our global society. Therefore, the SDGs encourage governments, and all parties to adopt policies that supports those 17 goals. In workplaces, this means adapting policies that prioritize employers' health & well-being, equality, humane working condition, and dignity.

2.4. Menstrual Leave in the Perspective of SDGs

The implementation of menstrual leave linked to sustainable development goals through Goal 3 (Good Health & Well-Being), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), and Goal 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth) Consist of; SDG 3 (Good Health & Well-Being), the 3rd SDG is good health & well-being; the purpose is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ([United Nations, 2015](#)). The 7th target of this goal specifically addresses the access to reproductive health services. With menstrual leave female workers are allowed to manage their reproductive health and, reducing the physical and mental stress caused by menstrual pain in the workplace ([Sommer et al., 2016](#)). SDG 5 (Gender Equality), the 5th SDG is gender equality; the purpose is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls ([United Nations, 2015](#)). Equality does not mean providing identical treatments, but rather to provide fair support suitable for their needs. Menstrual leave is a much-needed tool to achieve gender equality in the work environment. Furthermore, theory of gender equity by Connell, emphasizes that justice requires responsive treatment to women's biological conditions in order to eliminate structural barriers to economic participation ([Connell, 2009](#)). SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), the 8th SDG is decent work & economic growth; the purpose is to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all ([United Nations, 2015](#)). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), decent work includes protection of workers' health and dignity. A work environment needs to include women's biological needs, and in the long term it will achieve sustainable economic growth ([ILO, 2016](#)). Menstrual leave could be the right instrument to help us achieve that.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach, through semi-structured interviews of female workers in Indonesia (Sumatra & Java). The main focus of the interview is on the experiences and perceptions of informants regarding the implementation of menstrual leave in their workplaces. 10 informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique based on the informants' experiences and relevance to the implementation of menstrual leave in the workplace.

The informants varied in age, work experience, and organizational backgrounds, allowing the study to capture diverse experiences regarding menstrual leave implementation. To protect informants' privacy,

all informants were anonymized and identified using codes (I1–I10) during data analysis and reporting, as seen in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Characteristics of Interview Informants and Workplace Menstrual Leave Policies

Informant	Age Range	Employment Sector	Work Location	Institution Type	Length of Employment	Formal Menstrual Leave Policy
I1	25-30	Food & Beverage	Jakarta	Private	2 years	Yes
I2	25-30	Education	Tangerang	Public	1 year	No
I3	25-30	Plantation	Bengkulu	Private	4 years	Yes
I4	25-30	Banking	Jakarta	State-owned	3 years	No
I5	25-30	Retail	Jakarta	Private	6 years	No
I6	25-30	Media	Bandung	Private	2 years	No
I7	21-24	Government	Medan	Public	1 year	No
I8	21-24	Plantation	Lampung	Private	2 years	Yes
I9	21-24	Food & Beverage	Yogyakarta	Private	3 years	No
I10	21-24	Education	Depok	Public	1 year	No

Source: Processed from interview data (2026)

The interviews were held online through conference calls (Zoom). Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes and was guided by a semi-structured interview protocol. The interview questions explored informants’ awareness of menstrual leave rights, experiences accessing menstrual leave, workplace support, organizational culture, and perceptions of the relationship between menstrual leave, well-being, gender equality, and work productivity.

The collected data then analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The steps are data collection, data reduction, data coding, theme identification, and data interpretation. This approach was selected because it enables researchers to identify recurring patterns and meanings within informants’ experiences regarding menstrual leave implementation.

4. RESULTS

Based on the interviews with informants, 4 themes were identified related to the implementation of menstrual leave for female workers in Indonesia: (1) knowledge & awareness of menstrual leave rights; (2) implementation variations of menstrual leave rights at workplaces; (3) organizational culture & workplace support of women’s reproductive issues; and (4) perception of productivity & appreciation of female workers.

4.1. Knowledge & Awareness of Menstrual Leave Rights

The results showed that most of the informants were already aware of the existence of menstrual leave rights in Indonesia. Most of the informants learned about menstrual leave through social media or their friends. “I knew about this law several years ago through social media & friends, but my company never informed their employees about this law” (Informant 5). There were also informants who were just found out about this right during the interview for this study. Informant 6 stated, “This is the first time I heard about this kind of law, I have never heard about this before”. This indicates that the menstrual leave awareness from authorities is not optimal, even though this right has existed in Indonesia since 2003. The lack of socialization from authorities creates inequality on the implementation of menstrual leave for female workers.

4.2. Implementation Variations of Menstrual Leave Rights at Workplaces

Based on the interview results, it appears that the implementation of menstrual leave varies greatly across the informants’ workplaces. Some companies have implemented a specific menstrual leave policy

for two days, aligned with the existing law, and with simple procedures through WhatsApp or internal HR app (Talenta). Informant 3 stated that, “I took menstrual leave almost every month for two days easily”. However, most of the informants’ company still don’t have a specific menstrual leave policy, forcing female workers to use regular sick leave with a mandatory sick note signed by doctors. “If I had a severe menstrual pain, I can only take the sick leave because my company doesn’t have specific menstrual leave, and that sick leave won’t be approved by HR if I didn’t provide a doctor’s sick note” (Informant 4). This can be considered burdensome because menstruation is a monthly natural biological process experienced by women, and not an illness, and could cause additional administrative and financial burden for female workers.

4.3. Organizational Culture & Workplace Support of Women’s Reproductive Issues

Most of the interview informants said that they are comfortable enough to talk about their reproductive health and menstruation in their workplace. But for some informants, it can cause discomfort, depending on the organisational culture. Informant 7 stated that, “Whenever a woman is having menstrual pain, the men almost always make fun & not take the pain seriously”. In workplaces dominated by women, or led by female supervisors, most female workers felt more comfortable & supported. On the other hand, in more masculine work environments and still strongly rooted in patriarchal culture like military or government-based institutions, workers felt less comfortable discussing their reproductive health and menstruation. Some workers are even afraid of being labelled as “unprofessional” or becoming the subject of gossip if they were shown having to take time off to take care of their reproductive health. “Even when a woman is taking a maternity leave for 3 months after they gave birth, somehow they could become a new source of gossip in my workplace” (Informant 2).

4.4. Perception of Productivity & Appreciation of Female Workers

All of the informants in this study agreed that menstrual leave is beneficial to support the health and work ethic of female workers in Indonesia. Most informants believed that this policy actually could increase work productivity, by being motivated to work for being appreciated and having their rights met. Informant 1 stated that, “Because my menstrual pain is always constantly bad, this menstrual leave really helps, and it made me feel more settled in my current company. The day after taking the leave, I feel more energetic because I had time to rest”. In contrast, the informants believed forcing female workers to work while experiencing menstrual pain may result in an ineffective performance. “My current workplace doesn’t apply menstrual leave yet, but whenever I work whilst having menstrual cramps, I lose focus and feel not productive at all” (Informants 10). Recognition of these biological needs creates greater loyalty and engagement between employer and employee.

5. DISCUSSION

The interview in this study finds that menstrual leave for workers in Indonesia is heavily linked to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health & Well-Being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth).

5.1. SDG 3-Good Health & Well-Being

Data from this study show that menstrual leave can influence the well-being of the informants. Informants believed that the existence of menstrual leave made female workers feel more appreciated. House (1981) stated that organizational support for workers’ health needs can improve psychological well-being and individual work quality. Menstrual leave provides space for both physical and mental recovery for female workers. Female workers who menstruate monthly may experience various symptoms. According to Armour et al. (2019), menstruation can cause symptoms like abdominal pain, fatigue, nausea, headaches, and even emotional disturbances that may affect daily activities. Informants in this study also shared their experiences during menstruation, where some experienced severe pain and needed rest during their period. This is one of the main reasons why menstrual leave is necessary. Menstrual leave also

provides female workers the opportunity to maintain reproductive and psychological health. Without such support, women are at risk of chronic fatigue and a decline in overall quality in life. This means that menstrual leave is clearly aligned with the 3rd issue of SDGs, whose main goal is to ensure healthy lives and well-being.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that menstrual leave contributes not only to physical recovery but also to psychological well-being. Several informants reported feeling valued and supported when their workplaces recognized menstrual leave as a legitimate need rather than a personal weakness. This finding indicates that organizational recognition of women's reproductive health needs may reduce stress and enhance employees' sense of well-being, which is consistent with the broader objective of SDG 3 to promote both physical and mental health.

5.2. SDG 5-Gender Equality

Based on the interviews, the informants believed that menstrual leave can promote gender equality, and in line with the 5th goal of SDGs. The informants felt more appreciated without being perceived as weak by taking menstrual leave. Gender equality in workplaces does not mean that all workers must get exactly the same treatment. Rather, gender equality should provide fair access, opportunities, and support according to biological needs. This concept aligns with gender equity theory, which argues that gender justice requires responsive treatment toward women's conditions, not merely identical treatment between men and women (Connell, 2009). Menstrual leave exists to accommodate women's biological needs, which are often considered a taboo and irrelevant in masculine work environment. Moreover, menstrual stigma in the workplace often causes women to fear being considered less professional when having their period (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013). Therefore, the implementation of menstrual leave became part of the most important efforts to create a more inclusive and equal workplace. Official recognition of menstrual leave also helps normalize conversations about reproductive health in public spaces, which is an important step toward deconstructing patriarchy in the workplace.

However, the findings also reveal a tension between formal legal protection and workplace realities. Although menstrual leave has been legally recognized in Indonesia, access to this right remains varied by organizational culture and workplace practices. Several informants reported hesitation in requesting menstrual leave due to concerns about being perceived as less committed, less productive, or unprofessional. In some organizations, the absence of clear standard operating procedures (SOPs) and the requirement to provide medical certificates create additional barriers that discourage female workers from utilizing menstrual leave. These findings suggest that legal recognition alone is insufficient to achieve substantive gender equality. Instead, organizations must actively foster supportive and gender-sensitive workplace cultures where women can exercise their reproductive health rights without fear of stigma or professional consequences.

5.3. SDG 8-Decent Work & Economic Growth

Lastly, the interview findings show that menstrual leave can also influence decent work and economic growth for the informants, and in line with the 8th goal of SDGs. Some informants stated that when menstrual leave rights are accessible to female workers, it did not disrupt their productivity, but instead optimized it. Menstrual pain can affect concentration, work performance, and workers' ability to complete tasks optimally (Schoep et al., 2019). Female workers who are experiencing severe menstrual pain and still forcing themselves to work, will not perform optimally. Instead, it could create an inhumane and unproductive work environment. From the perspective of ILO, decent work is not only related to employment opportunities, but also to their guaranteed health, safety, and dignity (ILO, 2016). Therefore, menstrual leave can ensure productive and humane work. Menstrual leave policies can also improve the long-term sustainability of female workers' productivity, and may ultimately contribute to their economic growth. A guarantee of the well-being of female workers is an investment to national economic stability, considering women's significant contribution to Indonesia's workforce.

However, the findings also indicate that the existence of menstrual leave regulations does not automatically guarantee decent working conditions for female workers. Several informants reported that

unclear procedures, limited organizational support, and requirements such as sick note made menstrual leave difficult to access in practice. These may discourage female workers from utilizing their rights and force them to continue working despite experiencing severe menstrual symptoms. This situation highlights the importance of translating legal protections into workplace practices that genuinely support workers' health, dignity, and productivity, which are important principles of SDG 8.

6. CONCLUSION

This study reviewed the implementation of menstrual leave for female workers in Indonesia, and linked it to Sustainable Development Goals 3, 5, and 8. The interview data indicate that there is an implementation gap on menstrual leave in Indonesian companies. The findings suggest that menstrual leave is an important workplace support mechanism for the female workers involved in this study. In relation to the SDGs (Goals 3, 5, and 8), the findings suggest that menstrual leave may promote biological inclusivity, well-being, and workers' basic rights, and can even improve workplace productivity, which ultimately affects women's economic conditions in Indonesia.

While these findings provide valuable insights into menstrual leave implementation, they should be interpreted within the context of the ten female workers who participated in this study and may not represent the experiences of all female workers in Indonesia.

This study contributes to expanding discussions on gender communication and gender-perspective policies in Indonesia by positioning menstrual leave as a tool to achieve sustainable development and support the SDGs agenda. The findings indicate the need for greater awareness, socialization, and monitoring of menstrual leave implementation in Indonesian workplaces. Companies need to build more inclusive environments and implement menstrual leave in accordance with existing laws without imposing excessive administrative burdens such as mandating doctor's sick notes.

This study has not deeply explored the perspectives of companies, HR departments, or policymakers regarding menstrual leave. Therefore, future studies are expected to explore more work sectors, perspectives, and approaches in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of menstrual leave implementation. In addition, larger-scale quantitative research is also needed to map company compliance nationally.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required for this study, because the informants were all adults and were not a vulnerable population, and the study did not include medical intervention, clinical procedures. Nevertheless, this study was conducted in accordance with general and basic ethical principles in social research.

Informed Consent Statement

All informants were informed of the purpose of the study prior to the interview, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were kept confidential and used solely for academic research purposes.

Authors' Contributions

D.T.I.–Conceptualization; D.T.I.–Methodology; D.T.I. and R.A.–Formal analysis; D.T.I. and R.A.–Resources; D.T.I.–Writing – original draft preparation; D.T.I. and R.A.–Writing – review and editing.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are limited due to privacy concerns related to informants' personal experiences regarding menstruation and workplace environments.

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Notes on Contributors

Dhiyaa Thurfah Ilaa

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0379-2300>

Dhiyaa Thurfah Ilaa, S.P., M.Si. is a lecturer in advertising at Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif. She earned her bachelor's degree in Agrotechnology from Universitas Padjadjaran and her master's degree in Communication Science from Universitas Indonesia. Her research interests focus on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), gender issues, environmental communication, and social communication studies. Drawing from her interdisciplinary academic background, she actively conducts research related to gender, sustainability, and environmental issues within communication and advertising contexts.

Rona Agustin

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6202-3374>

Rona Agustin, M.I.Kom. is a lecturer in advertising at Politeknik Negeri Media Kreatif. She earned her bachelor's degree in Communication Science from Universitas Multimedia Nusantara and her master's degree in Communication Science from Universitas Paramadina. Her academic and professional interests include marketing communication, advertising, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She has been involved in various research projects related to communication, branding, and marketing strategies in contemporary media and social contexts.

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