

Studying Families in Southeast Asia: Exploring Polygamy and Its Dynamics in Indonesia

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Abstract

As one of the most fundamental parts of social structure, marriage significantly influences society. In Indonesia, the complexity of issues in a marriage is increased considerably by the practice of polygamy. Historically, polygamy has been a part of Indonesian society. Nonetheless, as Indonesia progresses to become more democratic society, women's rights in polygamous households has become a topic of tension among Indonesians. The effort to address women's rights in polygamy is confronted with a sensitive hurdle due to the close association of polygamy with religious beliefs, particularly within Islam. As defined by the faith, polygamy was designed to be the social welfare protection system for a widow and her children. However, the modern practice has deviated from its original intention and is at risk of harming women's rights. As such, establishing a broader perspective of polygamy with an approach that leans more towards accepting Indonesian plurality and tolerance is critical for protecting women's rights.

Keywords: *Polygamy, women's rights, marriage, Indonesia, family studies*

Introduction

Marriage remains a critical foundation of societies across the world, including in Indonesia. For example, Indonesians tend to perceive that being unmarried, especially when a person is at their productive age, as something that is against the cultural norm (Himawan et al., 2018). Conversely, weddings are often celebrated grandiosely to express the importance of marriage in a person's life. Even a conversation with strangers often will start with questions about family, with an emphasis on the number of children and time since a couple got married. At the national level, family relationships are regarded as a significant issue, as seen through one of Indonesia's most important legal papers, the *Kartu Keluarga* (Family Welfare Card), which records family linkages.

Like marriage, religion is another critical part of Indonesian society. In almost every area of Indonesian social life, religion has a special place that others cannot replace. For instance, a political candidate's religious background alone can be the most crucial factor determining their chance of being elected despite questionable leadership qualities (Sumaktoyo, 2021). This is an example of how intertwined religion is with the functions of Indonesian society.

Therefore, Indonesians face a tough dilemma when marriage and religion are combined to regulate certain social matters. The difficulty is particularly prominent in the case of men having multiple wives, known as polygamy. Being one of the countries where polygamy is legal under certain conditions, the issue of marriage in Indonesia can no longer be viewed as just a simple issue about the relationship between one man and one woman.

Many at present, especially those who are concerned about women's rights in Indonesia, remain concerned about polygamy, arguing that the practice is unjust towards women and thus requires more robust regulation. However, for the proponents of polygamy, being in a polygamous marriage is often associated with religious beliefs. The idea of prohibiting polygamy tends to be perceived as a restriction of religious freedom and even persecution of people of faith. Therefore, while polygamy tends to be rejected by many western countries (Faisol, 2016), the issue of polygamy remains a tough issue in Indonesia.

In this paper the aim is to show the complexity of polygamy in Indonesia. The discussion is divided into several sections. The first section deals with the historical context of polygamy, with particular attention given to the role of Islam in the practice of polygamy. In the second section, the discussion shifts to the present situation, focusing on the legal provisions in Indonesia concerning polygamy. The

paper explores gaps in the existing regulation. Also, the paper will show how the religious ideal of polygamy differs from the practice observed in society. Lastly, some suggestions are given on how polygamy should be handled as Indonesia continues to develop its democracy.

Polygamy in Indonesia: The Historical and Religious Context

Pinpointing the time when the practice of polygamy began in Indonesia can be a difficult task. Based on historical record, the two earliest kingdoms in Indonesia, Kutai and Tarumanegara, did not appear to have adopted the practice. Existing historical records suggest that the earliest polygamy practice may have started in the sixth century of this era in a Javanese kingdom called Kalinga (Kustiani, 2020). Polygamy at that time was also limited to royalty. For example, King Airlangga (Kahuripan kingdom) and King Ken Arok (Singashari kingdom) were engaged in polygamous marriages (Ja'far et al., 2020). The practice of polygamy limited to royalty remained until the end of the Hindu-Buddhist Kingdom era of Indonesia.

As the civilization in Indonesia continued to progress, based upon the theory proposed by Abdullah et al. (2018), Islam then came as the next influential power through the large migration of Muslims in the thirteenth century. Upon its arrival, Islam went through an assimilation process among the people in Indonesia through trading and marriage (Sunarso, 2018), which resulted in some shifts on how religion was practiced. At that time, the people of Indonesia perceived Hinduism and Buddhism as the religions of royalty (Maarif, 2018). The former placed emphasis on the implementation of the caste system, while Islam expressed the importance of equality and brotherhood. Therefore, Islam and its practice were met with lesser resistance, particularly among the commoners. This assimilation included the practice of polygamy. For example, polygamy was practiced in the Islamic Sultanate of Mataram (Akun & Ernawati, 2012). However, historical records from the same era show that commoners also practiced polygamy (Kustiani, 2012). Such a practice is significant since no similar description is available from the earlier part of Indonesian history. Commoners today also practice polygamy. It is no longer perceived as a practice restricted to royalty. Polygamy is associated with Islam as part of its teaching and practice.

The colonial Dutch power, which occupied Indonesia for the 350 years, set the issue of polygamy in Indonesia on another level. One significant shift that the Dutch brought with them was the opportunity for Indonesian women to be exposed to the culture and practice of marriage in the western world. As they learned from their Dutch counterpart, Indonesian women began to realize the critical issue of women's rights, including their rights in marriage (Coté, 2017). Individuals such as Raden Ajeng Kartini and Dewi Sartika were pioneers among Indonesians and promoted women's rights in all areas of life, including their reservations over polygamy. Kartini (1879–1904) saw polygamy as a threat to women's rights, since women in Indonesia at that time were often expected to follow the decisions of their husbands. Such expectations included a husband's decision to take another woman as a second wife. In Islam, women were taught that their role in life was to be excellent and loyal servants to their husbands and dedicate their lives to them (Dewi, 2012). However, Kartini believed that every woman should have equal rights in marriage instead of only obeying their husbands' demands. Such rights also include choosing to marry the person they loved and not to share their husband with another woman (Woodward, 2015).

Similarly, Sartika (1884–1947) opposed polygamy when she received a proposal to be the second wife of an Indonesian man (Labibatussolihah et al., 2019). Sartika then used education as the channel to fight for women's rights. She believed that educating women would provide them with independence in determining their future, instead of being dependent on their husbands. By having an equal level of knowledge, women may have a greater position in expressing their needs and defending their rights.

The impact of these individuals in voicing women's right encouraged organized movements to emerge in Indonesia. For example, in 1928, an Indonesian women's congress was held where one agenda item was to discuss the issue of polygamy (Qibtiyah, 2009). As Indonesian women became vocal in fighting for their rights, enough pressure was exerted on the Dutch colonial government to

pass legislation regarding marriage. In 1937, the Dutch colonial government in Indonesia issued an ordinance to allow indigenous Indonesian to register their marriage (Trigiyatno, 2011). The intention was to provide the Dutch with the authority to interfere in the marital matters of the local Indonesians. The Dutch, however, made the law only to recognize monogamous marriages as the type of marriage that could be registered (Bedner & Van Huis, 2010). By doing so, the Dutch indirectly rendered polygamous marriages illegal, which brought intense opposition from the Indonesians. Strong opposition came especially from conservative Islamic groups (Trigiyatno, 2011). They perceived that such rules were a threat to the religious beliefs of Islam. Due to the strong opposition, the ordinance was eventually withdrawn (Trigiyatno, 2011).

As Indonesia became independent, it gained the freedom to decide its future direction. Indonesia's forefathers, such as Soekarno and Hatta, had their own perspective in understanding what marriage was all about. Soekarno was well known to have been married at least nine times throughout his life (Suwirta, 2009). Further, though Soekarno did not claim that he was a polygamist, often he did not divorce the earlier spouse before marrying the next. The image of Soekarno as a man with multiple love interests becomes prominent, which was always portrayed in movies and media (Hernawati, 2018). While Soekarno may not officially have promoted polygamy and a law about polygamy was not established, his lifestyle gave room for the interpretation that such a practice was acceptable.

In the era of Soeharto, regulations on the practice of polygamy were resurrected through the establishment of laws regarding marriage in 1975 (Jones, 2010). To ensure a strong political control exercised by the Islamic group, Soeharto introduced the idea of "islamization" in which Islamic teachings were to be integrated into all aspects of culture that governed Indonesian society (van Wichelen, 2005), including marriage (Susanto & Zhang, 2017). Due to this political movement, the marital law of 1974 now contained a specific, written regulation about polygamy. The establishment of the marital law of 1974 brought significant progress to the Indonesian legal system over marriage ever since the Dutch's retraction of the marital law. In Brenner's (2006) perspective, the New Order regime's move to regulate polygamy did make the practice of polygamy much more difficult. In other words, the practice had become restricted. However, at the same time, it was not necessarily beneficial for democracy (Brenner, 2006). When the issue of marriage is tightly controlled by the government, abuse of power can go unchecked. Such situation did happen during the New Order era when the rights of women, including in the issue of polygamy, were neglected (Brenner, 2006).

After the New Order regime fell, Indonesia entered the Reform era and human rights became a primary focus among Indonesians. This focus on human rights issues covers women's rights, including in the context of marriage. Questions over women's marriage rights in polygamy regained momentum as women's rights activists primarily raised it. However, on the other side, certain Islamic religious groups continued to perceive the question on polygamy as a threat to religious practice (Kholis et al., 2017) and responded with equally intense resistance towards any form of force that tried to make polygamy too restrictively.

As such, it is challenging to further discuss polygamy in Indonesia without identifying the role of Islam in it. However, it should be noted that the purpose of this paper is not to provide an exhaustive exegetical analysis on polygamy in the Qur'an, nor does it try to establish a complete Islamic theological position on polygamy. Instead, it simply attempts to provide an adequate understanding of the basic premise of polygamy in Islam and how it influences the practice of polygamy in the Indonesian context.

Like all other religious teachings, the foundation for understanding polygamy in Islam is derived from their holy scripture, the Quran. In the Qur'an, polygamy was mentioned in the Al Nisa:

And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hands possess [i.e., enslaved people]. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]. (Qur'an 4:3, Saheeh International)

As indicated in this text, Islam permits polygamy. However, strict conditions are mentioned surrounding the practice. First, doing justice for any orphans should be the driving force for taking

another wife. Second, a maximum of up to four wives are allowed for a man. Lastly, if the man cannot be just to all the wives, then he should stay married to only one wife.

The Al Nisa is considered the most distinctive verse in the Qur'an where specific instruction regarding polygamy was given (Sunaryo, 2010). This implies that the practice is not part of Islam's fundamental religious practice, nor is it considered *sunnah* (Mukri, 2018).

In a deeper examination of the Al Nisa letter, Basyar (2017) indicated that a Muslim man must abide by two main conditions in a polygamous marriage. First, all the subsequent wives must be a widow with orphans (Basyar, 2017). In other words, the instruction does not say that men can marry any wife of their choice. Only women who had been married before and have a child can be second, third, and fourth wives. Second, there is a chance for the man to be unfair in treating all the orphans if the man does not marry the mother of those orphans (Basyar, 2017). The consistent emphasis on taking care of orphans suggests that polygamy was designed to afford social protection to women and children when they lose their source of income due to the death of the man of the house.

Further evidence to support the argument that polygamy in the Qur'an was intended to protect widows and orphans can be seen in the following verse:

And you will never be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]. So do not incline completely [toward one] and leave another hanging. And if you amend [your affairs] and fear Allah - then indeed, Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful. (Qur'an 4:129, Saheeh International)

The word "hanging" was used to emphasize the intention of polygamy that justice is more important than any other consideration in embarking into polygamy (Hasan, 2012). Polygamy is not designed for legalizing the need of men for extramarital sexual desire, nor for the sake of men's domination over women. Instead, its aim is to provide adequate support to widows and orphans.

Lastly, Mukri (2018) indicates that a hadith such as *Naufal ibn Muawiyah* and *Qais ibn Tsaabit* mentioned Muhammad's instruction for an individual only to keep four among their existing wives. This limitation further showed that boundaries are being set for men even when they are already in a polygamous relationship. Such a rule indicates that polygamy is not the license for men to marry anyone they like. Instead, it reconfirms the initial idea of polygamy as the social support system for protecting widows and orphans.

In summary, Wartini (2013) argued that Islam establishes strict and specific conditions for polygamy. For a man who wants to engage in polygamy, he must be just to all his wives. Second, the man needs to be able to ensure the welfare of all the wives. Also, polygamy was established as a way to administer justice in the culture where women did not have any form of protection as a widow (Husain et al., 2019). Historically, polygamy was established for protecting women's right (Baihaqi, 2019). However, like all religious movements, modernization and globalization pose a challenge towards the theological ideal of polygamy. There are many emerging new contexts in society that may not be the same as at the time when the statement was written in the Qur'an. As Islam becomes a global religious movement, interpretation of polygamy is now being affected by different interpretations by various scholars who are either supportive or against the practice (Cahyani, 2018).

Polygamy in Indonesia at Present: The Challenge of Maintaining the Ideal in Practice

While as a country Indonesia considers itself a secular democracy, the influence of religion had always been present in society and the legal system. When it comes to the legal issue of polygamy, the constant struggle between different parts of society created difficulties in establishing such a law. Since the religious aspect of polygamy has been considered, the legal aspect of marriage, especially polygamy in law about marital regulation, also must be explored.

The primary law about marriage is contained into a section known as Law No.1 of 1975. Marriage is defined as a monogamous relationship between one husband and one wife (Santoso, 2021). However, the law is expanded in articles 4 and 5 to accommodate practices that are known as open polygamy (Rizki et al., 2020). The main requirement of a man allowed to engage in a polygamous relationship is when the wife provides written consent allowing it (Nasution, 2008). Second, he shall

give an affidavit to deliver the needs of all the wives and children. Third, he must act justly to all his wives (Jaman, 2020). Fourth, certain conditions are included as reasons for polygamy, namely, when the wife cannot perform her duties, suffers from an incurable illness, and is barred from having a child. Lastly, the decision for polygamy must be conferred by a judge in court and both witnessed and registered (Setiyanto, 2017).

The concept of marriage in Law No.1 of 1975 was then reinforced through Law No.2 of the Islamic Law Compilation. It indicates marriage as *mithaqan galidzah*. This can be defined as an unbreakable bond between a husband and wife (Ainiya, 2017). The regulation implies that marriage was intended as a monogamous relationship since adding another wife may break the existing bond and polygamy is an exception to the norm. When holding certain official positions, such as being a civil servant, a specific regulation for polygamy also applies beyond the regular law that includes permission from their superior (Nurcahaya et al., 2018; Wartini, 2013). This is specified in order to emphasize the idea that while polygamy is permissible it should be done according to the guidance of the Qur'an.

While the present law provides a fair regulation on marriage, including accommodating polygamy, there are several gaps. First, in the context of polygamy, the law leans too heavily towards discussing the material welfare of the wife and children. The law only requires the husband to provide income reports to the court for the judge to decide whether the man has the financial ability to take care of all the family members adequately (Ainiya, 2017). However, for a complete family to function healthily, ensuring the psychological needs of the wife and children to be met is also essential. Basic emotional satisfaction of the wife and children such as the sense of peace, contentment, feeling secure and other forms of emotional well-being are critical to a happy marriage. Unfortunately, the law does not cover such obligations for the men to fulfil. A study conducted by Fahmi (2016) indicates that women who engage in polygamy tend to suffer from psychological problems such as a sense of inferiority, insecurities, jealousy, and anger. Other findings by Anggraini (2015) had shown that the adjustment period in polygamous marriage takes about one year from the time the husband introduces a second wife to the family. The first wife went through an adjustment period that often brought negative emotions such as doubt, jealousy, low self-esteem, and a sense of betrayal (Anggraini, 2015). With the present existing law, a husband engaging in polygamy has no legal responsibility to fulfil his first wife's emotional needs.

Second, as defined by the existing law, the concept of fairness in marriage tends to favor the man. The law was designed to provide a leeway for men to engage in polygamy and not the other way around (Nurhidayatuloh et al., 2018). Such a legal position is against the concept of equality between men and women in marriage, as indicated by the international law on marriage (Nurhidayatuloh et al., 2018). Furthermore, a woman's consent for being in a polygamous relationship may be driven by a self-preservation intent and not because of the approval of sharing a husband with other women. Fear of losing a source of income can be overwhelming for women (Jannah & Izzati, 2020). Therefore, calling the marriage off to show disapproval of the husband's decision to get another wife leads to the fear of losing social support. Fahmi (2016) further argues that many women decide to accept another wife by the husband instead of calling for a divorce. Such a decision to stay married despite disapproval over polygamy is one thing that tends to be overlooked in discussions about polygamy law.

Additionally, cultural factors tend to overrule the legal intention of the law. In most Asian cultures, women tend to be expected to be submissive to their husbands (Sultana, 2010–2011). Such submission may include when their husband decides to get another wife. Often the wife whose husband wants to practice polygamy is pressed by society through peer pressure and religious guilt-tripping to accept the decision without much resistance (Rahmawati, 2013). Such acceptance is often expected as part of the wife's devotion to the husband, even if it results in emotional turmoil (Anggraini, 2015).

In the context of justice, it is often argued that the existing law does not have equality between man and woman as its basic premise (Basyar, 2017; Kholis et al., 2017). For example, while men can legally marry another wife if the first is physically disabled or not able to provide an offspring, it is not possible for a woman to do so (Alkhanif, 2019).

Therefore, Hafiz and Lestari (2019) pointed out that the challenge of polygamy in Indonesia is somewhat located at the practical level. As discussed earlier, sufficient effort has been given to address its theological and legal issues and on paper, polygamy can have its place in Indonesian society. However, when it comes to its practice in the society, the gap between what is ideal as written in the Qur'an and how scholars interpret it and with what is practiced tends to be wide.

To provide some data on how polygamy is practiced in Indonesia, several case studies have been recorded. For example, among the Madurese community, cultural influences give unique power to religious leaders that encourages the practice of polygamy in a direction not necessarily according to the initial intention (Sa'dan, 2015). *Kiai* or Muslim clerics command a particular reverence in Indonesian communities, particularly among the Javanese (Wajiran, 2018). These clerics often run an Islamic boarding school where many male and female students live together in the school compound. Often female students are expected to provide domestic help for the *Kiai* and his family in their house. Such exposure creates a potential romantic or sexual attraction between the cleric and their female students. Some *Kiais* will use polygamy to establish a morally acceptable relationship with the student they like (Sa'dan, 2015). In such cases, the community members tend not to go against the decision, including the girl's parents. For them, going against a *Kiai's* request is considered sacrilegious. It is rational to conclude that such practices deviate from the original purpose of polygamy and are considered a form of power abuse for personal gain in the name of religion.

In another study conducted by Darmawijaya (2019), interviewing several polygamous couples in Cigugurgirang, West Java, it was found that the motives of a man to be in a polygamous relationship may deviate from the idea of protecting widows and orphans. Some personal factors such as fulfilling sexual need, increasing social influence, showing masculinity, and exploring new things in marriage are listed as the main reasons a man entered a polygamous marriage (Darmawijaya, 2019). Also, in many practices of polygamy, due to the fear of rejection of approval from the first wife, many men keep their second marriage a secret (Darmawijaya, 2019). This fear leads to legal and welfare issues that are not representative of what polygamy was initially meant to be.

It has been observed that despite the intention for polygamy to be driven by the need to provide economic support for women, financial problems remain significant in many polygamous marriages. As Nurmila (2016) shows in her study, women often suffer economic loss in a polygamous marriage. These forms of loss of income from divided financial support may even include having to pay legal fees for the divorce if the polygamous relationship failed (Nurmila, 2016).

In contrast to these studies, in the survey conducted by Ahmadi et al. (2019), it was shown that not all Indonesians perceived polygamy in a negative light. Some argue that the practice of polygamy should even be promoted instead of suppressed. One of the well-known movements was led by Puspo Wardoyo. He established a group known as the Indonesian Polygamy Society (Nurmila, 2020). In Wardoyo's argument, polygamy was perceived as the legal and safe way to accommodate men's sexual desire that may not be able to be handled by one wife alone (van Wichelen, 2005). Such a view expands the understanding of polygamy from its original protection role for women and children. This view gives allowances for men to channel their sexual desire in a way that is legal (Tarigan et al., 2021). In other words, through polygamy, men will not have to seek for illegal sexual services or be involved in illicit relationships with another women. Furthermore, in a study by Azhari (2021) among an Islamic community in Banjar, South Kalimantan, it was reported that a harmonious relationship between the husband and his wives was achieved when the full consent of the first wife was obtained prior to the man marrying the second wife. Azhari's findings provide evidence that polygamy ideals can be achieved if the practitioner is willing to abide by the existing regulation. In a larger context, groups such as Indonesian Global *Ikhwan* ("brethren" or "brotherhood") perceive that polygamy is the best counter-cultural movement against the western promiscuity culture (Ahmadi et al., 2019). In their perspective, polygamy provides the morally acceptable answer to the issues of fulfilling a man's sexual need in a way that is not degrading to the women (Ahmadi et al., 2019). While data from field studies on polygamy continue to provide further information on the dynamics of polygamy in Indonesia, at this present time polygamy seems to be workable, yet its dynamics remains complicated.

Polygamy in Indonesia: Future Endeavours

The earlier sections it has been established how complex the issue of polygamy is in Indonesia, thus requiring a more in-depth look. Issues about polygamy, such as the religious interpretation of it, a more comprehensive legal system to protect women, and its practice in other countries, should be considered in Indonesia's handling of polygamy. Islamic countries such as Jordan and Morocco have adopted a more protective law for the wife whose husband has a polygamous relationship (Hasan, 2012). In these countries, the wife can sign a prenuptial agreement that she does not want polygamy in her marriage (Abdullah, 2008). Any breach of the contract can be used as a basis for an immediate divorce. A similar clause could be considered for Indonesia.

As Indonesia continues to develop its democratic understanding of society, the issue of polygamy will remain a challenge if it remains to stand on the Islamic concept of marriage alone. Ideologically, Indonesia established its national consensus upon the idea of *Bhinneka tunggal ika*, which means "though different, all remain as one" (Nurhayati et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to reflect that unity is not uniformity. Such an application may need to be carefully planned and implemented so that Indonesia can establish a concept and law about polygamy that is more inclusive of perspectives and culture beyond a specific religion. Furthermore, prominent Indonesian Islamic scholars such as Quraish Shihab argue that polygamy is permissible if it remains faithful to the instruction about it in the Qur'an (Norcahyono, 2017). That is why in Shihab's perspective polygamy debates in Indonesia should move beyond the discussion of its validity (Setiyanto, 2017). Instead, the fact that polygamy exists indicates that marital relationships are complex, and adaptation to this problematic situation is inevitable. In this way, Shihab tries to expand the issue of polygamy so that it is based on more pragmatic considerations than theological ones. Shihab is more interested in its proper, fair practice than in the debate of its existence as one of the Islamic practices in the Qur'an. Shihab does this by emphasizing the need for men who practice polygamy to reflect on why they want to be in a polygamous relationship. In Shihab's perspective, there is a moral danger for a man in polygamy if done from ulterior motives, such as lust or desire for other women (Norcahyono, 2017).

Other Indonesian Islamic scholars such as Abdurrahman Wahid have suggested that Islam in Indonesia must embrace the uniqueness of its local context (Fuad, 2005). Wahid proposed that since Indonesia is constructed from multiple cultures and religions, Islam needs to consider Indonesia's cultural context without losing its fundamental theological position (Qomar, 2019). If Wahid's proposal is considered, one possible suggestion will be that it is sensible to expand the issue of polygamy beyond relying on the Islamic understanding of what polygamy is. It is time to start considering polygamy a unique cultural problem of Indonesia rather than a religious one. Historically, polygamy had become a part of Indonesian society before Islam became prominent in Indonesia. In some regions, such as Bali and Papua, where Islam is not the main religion, polygamy is still practiced (Wajiran, 2018). In some parts of Indonesia, despite having much of its population practicing Islam, the people do not perceive polygamy as culturally acceptable. This applies to the Konawe community in Southeast Sulawesi (Ipandang, 2020). Therefore, Indonesia should reconsider how the law about polygamy should be constructed. Clauses about polygamy in the marriage law need to be considered carefully from the perspective of how different cultures in Indonesia perceive justice and equality in marriage. As Murniati et al. (2020) pointed out, in places where patriarchal culture tends to dominate the social dynamics (as in Indonesia), what people perceive as just and fair can be biased towards one gender alone. Therefore, strengthening marital law with a balanced clause for both genders is crucial for Indonesia, since legal system in Indonesia needs to consider not only the religious context of justice, but cultural factors as well (Alwy, 2018; Jaman, 2020).

The objectives of an ideal democracy, as Morlino (2004) defines it, is represented by freedom and equality. These objectives must be applied to the issue of polygamy as well. As the most basic social structure, marriage and the family unit carry a critical role in building a society. Historically, as explained by Aundra Saa Meroe (2014), family dynamics provide the primary learning platform for understanding democracy. Some models of democracy are even built upon family dynamics theory, such as the work of Feinberg and Wehling (2018).

Further, how democracy is practiced in the family context affects how democracy runs in society. For example, in the study of Miklikowska and Hurme (2011), how democracy is practiced at home correlates significantly with the perspectives of the young on democracy as they entered adolescence. At the same time, Parra et al. (2021) and Nolas et al. (2017) argued that children learn democratic values such as conflict resolution, justice, meritocracy, and equality through day-to-day experiences such as playground activities and political conversation at home. Age-wise, children at the stage of their early childhood education can grasp the concept of democracy well (Moss, 2021). Therefore, ensuring that justice and equality are practiced in the way most beneficial to the development of a democratic society, it is critical to practice these principles in the family.

Lastly, Rinaldo (2008) argued that a strong indicator of a mature democracy is the significant role of women in vital areas of life such as religion and politics. Therefore, women's voices over the issue of polygamy should be given broader exposure allowing them to show their concerns particularly including the issue of women's rights. There is a need to challenge the present position in which women's role in marriage is associated with inferior expectations compared to that of the husband (Robinson, 2006). Often women in Indonesia are taught to believe that their place is to deal with domestic matters (Chin, 2012). Such a perception may not be entirely detrimental, since the struggle for women rights often emerge in such places, including in the issue of polygamy.

Conclusion

The issue of polygamy will remain a continual social challenge in Indonesia, with religion being a potent contributing factor. While polygamy was initially designed for a noble purpose, the actual practice may have fallen far short of the goal. Through this, women's rights in marriage have been at risk of being abused in the name of religious beliefs. Hence, creating more balanced regulations on polygamy are critical in understanding and accepting women's rights in Indonesia. However, implementing democracy in Indonesia is indeed not straightforward. The tension between religious principles and the democratic ideals of human rights and justice will conflict with each other.

Marriage will remain a fundamental institution of human society. Therefore, ensuring that adequate protection of human rights exists is critical in marriage. As a country, the future of Indonesia is influenced by how the community is built, and a strong family structure must be a foundational part of the strategy adopted. With the complexity of polygamy, Indonesia needs to take a bolder direction in deciding how this practice should or should not be carried out.

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