



A Sociological Review of the Phenomenon of Premarital Intimacy Among Papuan Muslims in Wamena Regency

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative study, employing a normative-sociological approach, is to identify the various social factors that contribute to the phenomenon of premarital sexual relations among Papuan Muslims in Wamena. Primary data was obtained through interviews and observation, whilst secondary data was sourced from relevant literature or documents. Analysis was conducted by relating field findings to Émile Durkheim's theoretical framework of social behaviour. The results of the study indicate that the main factors influencing this phenomenon are weak religious education, inconsistent family control, the dominance of permissive customs, and the influence of social media and global culture. This study emphasises the importance of strengthening religious education, family supervision, and the integration of Islamic values with local wisdom as preventive measures to reduce premarital behaviour among religious communities.

Keywords: *Social constructs, Intimate relationships, Pre-marital, Muslims in Wamena.*



A. Introduction

These noble values in Islamic marriage law often come up against complex social realities in various regions. One such example can be found among the Papuan Muslim community in Wamena, Jayawijaya Regency. In this area, the majority of the population comes from a strong indigenous and local cultural background (Lestari, 2023). There is a phenomenon of premarital sexual relations within the Muslim community. This phenomenon not only reflects a shift in religious norms within society, but also indicates a crisis in the internalisation of Islamic teachings, particularly regarding the ethics and laws of marriage. In a brief interview, the chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) for Jayawijaya Regency stated that this behaviour has become widespread amongst the Muslim community in Wamena. There is a need for a collective approach to address this issue and find a solution, aiming to minimise such occurrences and to validate the marriages that have already taken place (Yalipele, 2025).

The phenomenon of premarital sex highlights a clash between religious norms and the local customs (local wisdom) that have developed within society (Nugroho et al., 2022). This indicates that such a conflict will give rise to its own set of complexities. In the legal framework of Islam, custom or 'urf is only acceptable if it does not conflict with the textual provisions of Islamic law (Amiri, 2021). Therefore, the practice of engaging in sexual relations before the marriage contract cannot be justified on cultural or economic grounds, as it is fundamentally at odds with the basic principles of Islamic marriage law, including the principles of preserving honour, chastity and lineage.

The aim of this study is to identify the various social factors that contribute to the phenomenon of premarital sexual relations among Papuan Muslims in Wamena. This study employs a qualitative method with a normative-sociological approach. Primary data was obtained through interviews and observation, whilst secondary data was sourced from relevant literature or documents. Analysis was conducted by relating the field findings to Émile Durkheim's theoretical framework of social behaviour.

Various previous studies, including that by Sarwono, explain that premarital sexual behaviour refers to any form of conduct arising from sexual desire prior to a valid marriage (Sarwono, 2011). Furthermore, Handayani's research indicates that premarital sexual behaviour among adolescents is generally influenced by uncontrolled social interactions (Handayani, 2020). Nancy and Novianti present a comprehensive analysis of premarital sexual behaviour among adolescents, covering a range of activities—from light physical contact such as touching and kissing to more intimate acts such as petting and sexual intercourse prior to formal marriage (Nancy & Novianti, 2011).

This study differs from previous research in that it focuses on the phenomenon of premarital sexual relations among Papuan Muslims, particularly in

Wamena, which is influenced by the interplay between customary and religious traditions. The study's approach is unique in that it not only describes the phenomenon of premarital sexual behaviour in general, but also analyses the tension between the strict norms of Islam and the more permissive Papuan customs. This focus opens up new avenues for contributions to the study of Islamic law and the social sciences, particularly in understanding the dynamics of the Muslim minority community in Papua. This study is expected to enrich the literature by presenting an integrative perspective between religious norms, local culture, and social theory.

B. The Construction of Social Behaviour Theory

A study of the phenomenon of premarital sexual relations among Papuan Muslims in Wamena is not only relevant to analyse from an Islamic normative perspective, but is also important to understand within the framework of classical sociology. One theory that can provide an in-depth explanation is Émile Durkheim's thinking on social behaviour. Durkheim's theory of social behaviour provides an analytical framework for viewing premarital relationships not merely as individual moral transgressions, but also as a reflection of a lack of harmony in societal values.

1. Social Deviance

From Émile Durkheim's perspective, social deviance is viewed as an inevitable phenomenon in social life. Durkheim rejected the view that deviance is entirely negative or destructive. On the contrary, he asserted that deviance is a normal part of any social structure. The presence of deviant behaviour actually serves as a mechanism that helps society maintain, reinforce, and even renew prevailing norms. Therefore, social deviance must be viewed not merely as a form of transgression, but also as a phenomenon that fulfils a specific social function (Durkheim, 1964).

2. Social Control

Durkheim emphasised that social control takes two main forms: formal and informal. Formal social control is embodied in officially institutionalised rules, such as laws, government regulations and institutional policies. It possesses coercive power through legally binding sanctions that can be enforced upon all members of society (Lukes, 1973). With formal controls in place, society enjoys legal certainty as well as protection for social stability. For example, when an individual commits a criminal offence, law enforcement agencies can impose sanctions in accordance with the applicable regulations.

Conversely, informal social control operates through unwritten, everyday social mechanisms, yet is highly effective in guiding individual behaviour. This control is exercised through public opinion, moral reprimands, gossip, stigma,

censure, and even social exclusion(Giddens). Although they lack legally binding force, informal controls often have a stronger influence because they are directly linked to feelings of shame, self-respect and acceptance within the community. For example, indigenous communities or religious leaders in a particular area may reprimand young couples who behave in a manner inconsistent with social norms, and such reprimands serve as a deterrent to prevent individuals from repeating the same behaviour.

3. Sosial Solidarity

Durkheim distinguishes between two main forms of solidarity: mechanical and organic, each of which develops in accordance with the level of complexity of society. Firstly, mechanical solidarity is typically found in traditional societies with simple social structures. Social bonds in such societies arise from shared identities: religion, customs, occupation, language, and even daily lifestyles (Lukes, 1973). Individuals in traditional societies tend to be uniform and have largely similar roles, so their unity is underpinned by homogeneity. In mechanical solidarity, the strength of the collective outweighs individual interests. Consequently, deviations from the norm are usually met with a harsh response in the form of strict sanctions, as they are seen as threatening the collective unity(Ritzer 2008). Secondly, organic solidarity emerges in modern, more complex societies. In such social structures, relationships between individuals are no longer based on similarity, but on the differing roles that arise from the division of labour. Each person has a distinct function and specialisation, meaning they are mutually dependent on one another to meet their basic needs. In other words, diversity actually becomes a force that strengthens social bonds. Organic solidarity arises from the realisation that society can only survive if every individual fulfils their role effectively. This differs from mechanical solidarity, where uniformity is regarded as the foundation of togetherness.

4. Social Change

Within Émile Durkheim's theoretical framework, social change is viewed as a natural process that is constantly occurring within society. This change can take the form of transformations in social structures, value systems, patterns of interaction, and social institutions. Modernisation, industrialisation, and the tide of globalisation are the dominant factors driving such change. For Durkheim, social change not only creates opportunities for progress but also has the potential to present serious challenges in maintaining social order(Giddens).

One of Durkheim's key ideas in understanding social change is the concept of anomie. This term is used to describe a condition in which old social norms begin to lose their influence, whilst new norms have not yet become firmly established(Durkheim). In such situations, both individuals and groups experience

moral confusion because they lack clear guidelines for their actions. It is this absence of norms that can lead to a crisis of values, as society loses the collective foundation that usually governs its behaviour.

C. An Overview of the Social Conditions of the Muslim Community in Wamena

The Muslim community in Wamena is a minority group that has grown amidst the dominance of Protestant and Catholic Christians. Their presence cannot be separated from the processes of social mobility and population migration that have taken place from the colonial era to modern-day Indonesia.

The majority of Muslims in this city are migrants from other regions of Indonesia, particularly Bugis, Makassar, Java and Buton, who have brought their religious and cultural identities with them. They come from a variety of occupational backgrounds, ranging from traders who have opened shops in Wamena market, civil servants posted by the government, to service workers in the transport sector and small-scale traders. As for the indigenous Papuan population who have embraced Islam, their numbers remain relatively small, although they are increasing year on year thanks to missionary activities and inter-ethnic marriages. This phenomenon illustrates how Islam has gradually entered the social fabric of the local community (Latief, 2015). The presence of a Muslim community in Wamena highlights the role of migration and socio-economic interaction in the natural spread of Islam within a predominantly non-Muslim society.

Aside from the centre of Wamena, the growth of the Muslim community is also quite prominent in Walesi District, an area situated not far from the capital of Jayawijaya Regency. This region is often cited as one of the key centres of the Muslim community in the central highlands of Papua. Muslims in Walesi largely originate from migration networks from Bugis, Makassar, Buton, and Java, which have long been known as resilient communities of migrants and traders. Their mobility is not merely economic in nature, but also cultural, as they bring Islamic traditions to new, predominantly non-Muslim environments.

By settling permanently, these migrants subsequently establish families, build places of worship, and strive to adapt to a different social environment. This makes Walesi a concrete example of how a minority community can thrive in the relatively homogeneous interior regions of Papua. (BPS Papua, 2020). Perkembangan komunitas Muslim di Walesi menandakan bahwa Islam dapat diterima dan berkembang di daerah pedalaman, dengan pendatang yang membawa serta budaya dan agama mereka.

Religious activities in Walesi are quite active and well-organised, with the mosque serving as the main hub of these activities. The mosque's functions are not limited to congregational prayers, but extend to serving as a venue for education and social interaction. At the mosque, regular religious study sessions are held,

along with lessons in reading the Qur'an, religious schools for children, and events to mark major Islamic holidays.

Furthermore, mosques serve as meeting points for Muslim residents to discuss social and community issues and to strengthen bonds amongst fellow expatriates. This dynamic religious life demonstrates that, despite being a demographic minority, Muslims in Walesi are able to preserve their Islamic identity whilst making a tangible contribution to strengthening the internal social bonds of the community (Azra, 2002). The mosque in Walesi plays a vital role as a centre for religious life, education and social interaction, helping to preserve Islamic identity despite the Muslim community being a minority.

Culturally, relations between Muslims and the indigenous Papuan people in the Walesi region are relatively harmonious. Their interactions are forged through economic activities, such as the trade of agricultural produce and basic necessities, as well as family ties formed through intermarriage. Furthermore, social cooperation in community activities such as mutual aid, traditional ceremonies, and village consultation forums strengthens social cohesion.

Although there are cultural and religious differences, the local values of solidarity that uphold brotherhood and kinship act as a unifying factor. This demonstrates that, in the context of Papuan society, differences in religious identity do not necessarily trigger conflict, but rather present an opportunity to foster tolerance rooted in local cultural values.(Geertz, 1989). Relations between Muslims and the indigenous Papuan community in Walesi have proven to be harmonious, demonstrating that religious differences are not always a source of conflict, but rather an opportunity to foster tolerance.

The presence of Muslims in Wamena also reflects the unique dynamics of identity in the region. As a minority group, they face significant challenges in upholding their religious values amidst the tide of globalisation, social change, and the cultural dominance of the non-Muslim majority. However, through the role of religious leaders, families, and religious organisations, Islamic identity is maintained through both formal and non-formal education.

Efforts to preserve the purity of Islamic teachings are undertaken alongside strategies of adaptation to the local context, for example through respect for local customs that do not conflict with Islamic principles. This way of life exemplifies a form of 'cultural accommodation' that enables the Muslim community to continue to exist without losing the fundamental values of their faith(Hefner, 2000). Cultural accommodation enables Muslim communities to preserve their religious identity whilst respecting local customs that do not conflict with the principles of Islam.

The presence of the Muslim community in Walesi and the surrounding area completes the overall picture of the development of Islam in Wamena. They are not only part of the local religious landscape, but also help to foster social harmony through economic, cultural and family interactions. As a minority, they continue to

strive to preserve their religious identity whilst maintaining good relations with the majority community. Their presence is not viewed as a threat, but rather as an element of diversity that enriches the face of Papuan pluralism. This phenomenon also demonstrates how Islam can grow and take root within a multicultural society, despite the various limitations and challenges that accompany it (Azra, 2019). The Muslim community in Wales demonstrates how diversity and pluralism can coexist harmoniously, with Islam firmly rooted in a multicultural society despite being a minority.

D. A Sociological Analysis of the Phenomenon of Premarital Intimacy Among Muslims in Wamena

Examining the phenomenon of premarital relationships among Muslims in Wamena is an attempt to understand the social dynamics unfolding within a community characterised by strong Papuan cultural traditions. This phenomenon cannot be viewed merely as a moral or religious issue; it is also closely linked to local cultural constructs, the influence of modern social interactions, and shifts in the mindset of the younger generation.

On the one hand, the practice of premarital relationships is often seen as deviating from Islamic religious norms; yet, on the other hand, social reality indicates that this behaviour emerges as a response to increasingly open and complex social interactions. Therefore, a study of this phenomenon is essential, not merely to judge right or wrong, but also to identify the root causes, understand the surrounding context, and formulate solution-oriented steps based on the perspective of Islamic law and a sociological approach.

These qualitative findings present a realistic picture of how Papuan Muslims in Wamena understand, experience, and respond to the phenomenon of premarital relationships. From the perspectives of religious leaders, traditional leaders, educators, parents, and young people, a variety of views emerge that complement and enrich our understanding of the issue. From interviews with various informants, it can be concluded that there are various factors contributing to this behaviour.

1. Socio-Cultural Factor

According to Muhammad Taha Muda Asso, customary law places greater emphasis on prohibiting relationships within the same clan, whilst relationships outside the clan are not considered a breach (Asso, 2025). This view is in line with the comments made by Sadik Asso, who highlighted that customs are passed down and strictly upheld, even though they are often difficult to reconcile with Islamic teachings. "I wanted to ask—they say that, well, our elders really did uphold the customs, didn't they? Yes, that's true, and when Islamic teachings came along,

sometimes they didn't fit in or align with those customs. Why is that? They really did uphold them, like, for instance, eating pork, or what about marriages outside of marriage—before we've established a husband-wife relationship, how does that work?"(Sadik, 2025).

The above explanation was elaborated upon by Adnan Yelipe, who emphasised that premarital relationships are considered normal under local customs and have been passed down through the generations, although from the perspective of Islamic law they clearly constitute a violation. He also highlighted the differing perspectives between the local community and the younger generation who have studied outside Papua(Adnan, 2025).

Furthermore, Irsan Yelipele added that lax parental supervision and the leniency of customary practices are factors that reinforce this practice, whereby inter-clan relationships are still permitted without age restrictions(Irsan, 2025). Meanwhile, Hamka Yelipele offers a different perspective, stating that the practice of premarital relationships is sometimes seen as a pragmatic way of spreading the message of Islam in rural areas, even though this clearly raises theological dilemmas(Hamka, 2025).

It is evident from the interviews as a whole that traditional customs continue to exert a significant influence on the attitudes of the Muslim community in Wamena towards premarital relationships. Relationships between clans are often regarded as acceptable, even though they clearly contravene Islamic law. This situation highlights the ongoing tension between traditional norms and religious teachings that persists to this day.

2. Social, Educational and Religious Factors

A lack of religious education is one of the main reasons for the prevalence of premarital relationships among Muslims in Wamena. This was highlighted by Muhammad Taha Muda Asso, who believes that many young people do not yet clearly understand the distinction between sin and virtue, and lack a deeper understanding of religious knowledge(Asso, 2025). In line with this, Sadik Asso also expressed his concern regarding the rise in cases of pregnancy outside marriage, which is clearly not permitted under Islamic law, but is now becoming increasingly common due to the changing times(Sadik, 2025). This view was echoed by Adnan Yelipe, who emphasised the importance of religious education programmes that engage directly with the community. He proposed empowering local preachers and collaborating with preachers from outside Papua to strengthen the community's understanding of religion(Adnan, 2025).

Meanwhile, Rudi Hartono Ismail added that basic religious education, whether through formal or non-formal channels, remains very limited. In his view, the lack of a religious foundation makes the younger generation susceptible to the influence of promiscuous behaviour prevalent in their communities(Ismail, 2025).

These various perspectives suggest that the weakness of religious education, limited basic understanding of Islamic teachings, and a lack of religious guidance from an early age are significant factors driving premarital relationships among the young Muslim generation in Wamena. This situation highlights the importance of strengthening religious education—whether through formal or non-formal channels, or by empowering local religious leaders—so that the values of Sharia law can be truly understood and practised in daily life.

3. Social Media Factors

The influence of social media is clearly one of the factors driving premarital relationships among the younger generation. Muhammad Taha Muda Asso emphasises that the development of digital technology has brought about a range of harmful content, including pornography that is easily accessible via mobile phones, Facebook and instant messaging apps, making it difficult to curb and influencing the mindset of young people(Asso, 2025).

This view was also expressed by Irsan Yelipele, who believes that the rise in premarital sex is not only driven by promiscuity and a lack of parental supervision, but also by excessive use of social media. In his view, digital platforms often serve as a gateway to deviant behaviour, leading to cases of unwed pregnancy in Wamena(Irsan, 2025). Social media can therefore be seen as one of the external factors accelerating behavioural change among the younger generation in Wamena. The lack of parental supervision and weak moral safeguards mean that the flow of digital information easily leads them into premarital relationships that run counter to religious and traditional values.

E. Conclusion

This study concludes that premarital sexual behaviour can be understood as a form of social deviance, arising from inconsistencies between customary and religious norms. Customary law allows for a degree of tolerance, whereas Islam regards it as a serious transgression. This situation highlights weak social control and the presence of anomie—a state in which religious norms no longer fully govern the behaviour of young people. Nevertheless, the collective solidarity of the Wamena community remains preserved through social compromise, so that this tension of values does not lead to actual social disintegration.

This study highlights the importance of constructive dialogue between traditional leaders, religious figures, and local policymakers to bridge normative differences, so that customs that remain flexible can be aligned with Islamic law without undermining social cohesion.

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