

# Community-Based Efforts to Combat Family Violence: Evidence from Sorong, West Papua, Indonesia

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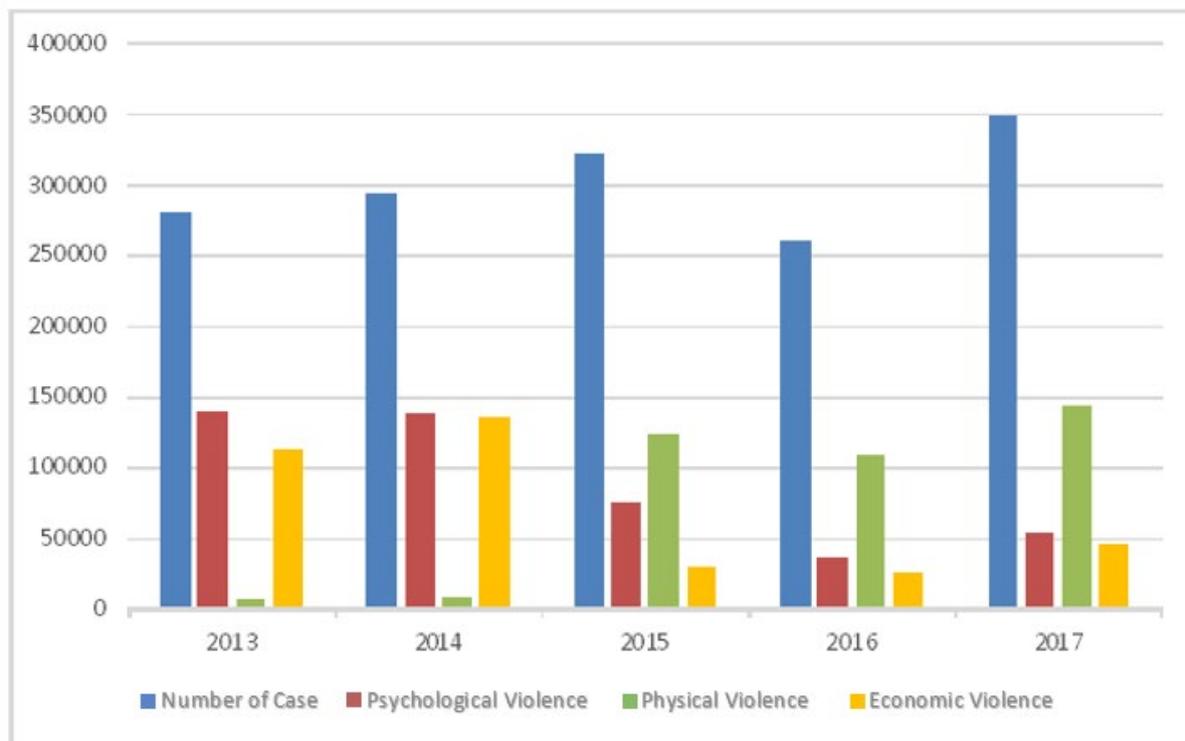
This article discusses community-based resolution to domestic violence in Sorong Regency, West Papua, Indonesia. Drawing on primary data, including results of in-depth interviews with 20 key persons, of whom two are victims of family violence, this article argues that the community can be a more effective institution in resolving cases of domestic violence compared to the state. Results of this study indicate that customary and religious institutions in Sorong play crucial roles in resolving family violence, which range from planning to build family, supporting family life, resolving family problems to managing the births and deaths of family members. It is expected that this study can contribute to enriching literature on the study of family at community level in Indonesia which thus far, only a few researchers have investigated it.

**Key words:** *Community-Based, Family Violence, Indigenous Policy, West Papua.*

## Introduction

In the last few years, the issue of family violence in Indonesia has become more unsettling. Data from the Annual Record (CATAHU) of the National Commission on Violence against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*) in 2014–2018 shows that cases involving family violence in the domestic domain tended to increase (see Figure 1). Many studies classify family violence in Indonesia into three general types. *First*, non-physical violence which includes unhealthy polygamy, excessive jealousy, forced marriage, child marriage, unnecessary punishment, disturbance from a third party, and lack of harmony. *Second*, marital rape, including physical violence resulting in biological disability. *Third*, abandonment of the wife and children by the husband (Komnas; 2018).

**Figure 1.** Case Data for Family Violence in Indonesia 2013-2017



**Source:** *Komnas Perempuan Annual Record Data, 2018*

In response to the above-mentioned matters, this article will discuss the important role of the community in resolving family violence. The role of the community becomes more crucial along with increasing change in views on the issue of family violence. This leads to discussions regarding family violence occurring openly in the public domain, rather than only in the domestic domain. This article will also present data on the success of the community in resolving family violence occurring in Sorong Regency, West Papua.

This location is selected for a case study for three main reasons. *First*, Sorong is one of the regencies in West Papua with a considerably higher number of family violence cases. *Second*, the community remains to uphold the tradition which forbids the wife from resisting harsh treatment from her husband. *Third*, compared to other regions, the presence of customary and religious institutions in Sorong plays an important role in preventing and resolving family problems. Those reasons make this study interesting. It is expected that the results of this study can serve as recommendations for an alternative policy in the effort to resolve the issue of family violence in Sorong, because until now, customary institutions in Sorong are not fully involved in such resolution. Exploration of the role of the community in eradicating family violence is based on results of interviews with 20 stakeholders, of whom two are victims of violence.

To gain further understanding of the issue, this article will be divided into several sections. The first section describes married life and procedures to solemnise a marriage in Sorong. The second section concerns the influence of the values adopted by the community in Sorong. Lastly, the third section identifies the capability and power of the community in preventing and resolving family violence cases.

## Literature Review

### *Community and Resolution to Family Violence*

Since the 1980s, family violence has been the centre of attention around the world, which demands numerous resolution initiatives from the international level to the community level. This is because family violence remains a problem concealed by myths, cultures, and other factors which perpetuate the patriarchal culture (Hamby; 2000, pp. 649-669; Ellialti; 2016).

At the international level, the issue of family violence has been intensely responded to since 1989 through a UN Convention. Initially, this Convention focused on the rights of children as a group deemed most vulnerable to family violence. It asserts that all children must be protected from physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, abandonment or neglect, persecution or exploitation, including sexual violence causing physical, sexual, or psychological disorders (Nicolson & Wilson; 2004, pp. 266–283).

However, as the number of female victims increased in the years following the Convention, protection of women has started to gain intense attention along with the issues of children. This is because family violence has taken on more diverse forms. Slabbert & Green (2013, pp. 234-246) classify family violence into three types: *First*, physical violence causing internal injury, such as fractured ribs or broken bones. *Second*, emotional violence which includes verbal and non-verbal violence, with the potential to disgrace women by means of insult, slur, accusation, and adultery, including abandonment causing the survivor to suffer from health and mental disorders. *Third*, marital rape which occurs when the husband views the wife as property, that must be willing to engage in sexual intercourse at any time and by any method desired by the husband, without taking into account the wife's condition. In other words, marital rape can be considered as one-sided sexual activity (sexual violence).

Although numerous countries have ratified the proposal to follow up on family violence cases, in reality, formal institutions are not yet capable to perform preventive and curative efforts for such problems. As an alternative, the community may become an option to alleviate family violence at a grassroots level. It is assumed that the community is the informal institution closest to society which may encourage a collective action to change gender norms and values applicable among society.

Various studies have also been performed on the importance of the community in intervening to stop family violence. Several results of the studies state that the presence of the community can advocate, perform mandatory arrest, escalate the case to a more accountable level, and increase victim safety (Hovmand & Ford; 2009, pp. 261-272); evaluate the occurrence of such cases (Kaufman; 2006, pp.191-200), prevent and resolve family violence (Chan, Lam, & Cheng; 2009, pp. 559-568); and reduce the stress level suffered by affected women by means of social support and service (Eby; 2004, pp. 221-232). To some extent, the presence of massive social support from family and the community can also significantly generate positive perspectives to women regarding gender equality among society (Kohli *et al*; 2015, pp. 276-284; Kerry, Lauritsen, D'Souza, & Moyer; 2015, pp. 421-433). Additionally, the community can also create new and more positive room for survivors in the process of intervention and recovery (Pennington-Zoellner; 2009, pp.539-545).

In some cases, the community can mediate dysfunctional families (Saathoff & Stoff; 1999, pp. 97-110) and accommodate any preventive and curative efforts to family violence (Becker *et al*; 2008, pp.187-204). Thus, community-based resolution to family violence is a relevant discussion as an alternative option, that is still rarely addressed in major literature on family violence and gender.

## **Discussion and Results**

### ***Wedding Ceremony Tradition in Sorong***

To marry a woman from the Sorong traditional society, the groom must pay an amount of wealth (*bayar harta*) consisting of *Kain Timor* (weaved Timor fabric), *Piring Gantung* (decorated plate), and other accessories (household appliances are also acceptable). For information, a piece of *Kain Timor* costs approximately IDR 1,000,000 while 1 *piring gantung* costs approximately IDR 5,000,000. In order to determine how much money the groom will spend on *bayar harta*, the extended family of the groom and bride must meet first. An interesting matter to be highlighted is that the agreed amount of *bayar harta* to be accepted by the bride must at least be equal to the amount of *bayar harta* accepted by the bride's mother at her wedding ceremony.

Then, the presented *bayar harta* is examined by a person regarded as a customary elder who knows well about the quality of goods. In the event the goods are considered to not meet the applicable customary criteria, they have to be replaced following the wedding ceremony. In the event *bayar harta* is not paid in full within a certain period of time (until the child of the husband and wife is born), the parents of the wife are entitled to take the couple's children to their house.

After agreement has been reached as to *bayar harta*, the groom will present the determined dowry to the bride by walking on foot led by a representative (*Duta*). Once they arrive at the bride's house, *Duta* will first knock on the door of the house as part of the traditional rituals. After the short ritual of knocking on the door, the extended family of the bride will accept the extended family of the groom.

Interestingly, prior to this acceptance, the parents of the bride remain hidden until the *Duta* presents the dowry money to them. The amount of dowry money to be paid depends on the educational level of the bride. The higher the educational level of the bride, the higher the dowry money is accepted by the parents of the bride. When the rituals of giving *bayar harta* and dowry money have been completed, the husband will automatically have rights over his wife, and consequently the wife has to submit herself to her husband.

### ***The Role of Church and Partisanship of Customary Values towards Women***

Despite the obligation to submit herself to her husband (as a consequence of the customary marriage), it does not necessarily mean that the husband is allowed to treat his wife as he likes. In the custom of Sorong, there are norms and values that might actually be favourable to women. For example, if the wife is in her menstrual period or in the postpartum period for approximately 40 days, the husband is forbidden from having sexual intercourse with her. This rule is intended to prevent the wife from becoming a victim of sexual violence by her husband. This matter has also been specified in the local customary law. When it is violated and such a violation is known by the wife's family, the rule specifies that the wife's family may kill the husband (for the violation).

In addition to customary law, a preventive action to protect women is also performed simultaneously by the local church using two methods, which are: *first*, prevention by means of premarital training for brides-to-be and training/dissemination of information on family life for the congregation. Furthermore, the church also conducts economic training by providing assistance in the form of capital to run a business, in order to promote better and independent family life with a view to reducing family violence, which is likely to be caused by economic problems. *Second*, a collective action from the Church congregation in an effort to end conflict among society in general, including family conflict.

### ***Identification of the Community's Capability to Combat Family Violence***

The results of the study found that in an effort to combat family violence, the community itself plays a more centralised role than the state does. This is evident from the presence of customary institutions and the Church in higher intensity, than the state in eradicating family violence in Sorong. Additionally, in everyday society, domestic violence will also be first

resolved by the customary institution, before it is taken to the police. Likewise, if the police receives a complaint reported by society, but it is not considered a serious issue and can still be settled amicably, the police will let the problem be solved based on the mechanism under the local customary law.

An interesting matter to be highlighted is when the wife receives violent treatment from her husband and she comes to her parents' house, the husband must first pay a certain amount of money called *uang susu* to her wife's parents before he can take her back to their house. In several communities where customary norms and values are still strongly upheld, this regulation is very effective in preventing family violence.

In addition to the community, the church also plays an extremely significant role in preventing family violence. It is proved by the intensity of dissemination it carries out by means of sermons regarding family harmony, premarital guidance, values of togetherness, rights and the position and proper treatment of the wife. Moreover, such efforts made by the church are also supported by the pastoral visitation program. This program allows pastors and church administrators to visit houses of each congregation member to discuss various matters, including family matters.

## Conclusions

This article argues that communities can be a more effective actor than the state in preventing and resolving family violence cases in Sorong. This argument is based on several findings: *first*, the values and norms from customary institutions and the Church have powerful legitimacy over society and are more suited than the state to regulate society. *Second*, efforts are made by customary institutions to prevent sexual violence by means of customary law, which forbids the husband to have sexual intercourse with his wife during her menstrual period and a minimum of 40 days after giving birth. *Third*, efforts are made by the Church to prevent family violence through premarital training and reinforcement of family economic capacity. *Fourth*, a collective action is taken by the Church congregation and customary institutions in an effort to end conflict among society in general, including family conflict.

This article has demonstrated the effectiveness of the community's role through its intervention in eradicating family violence. Hence, this article can contribute to the development of theories in the study of social science, particularly regarding family violence and the role of the community which is not a mainstream topic in the studies of family violence in Indonesia.



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