

# THE SING BELING SING NGANTEN TRADITION: GENDER INEQUALITY AND FERTILITY PRESSURES IN BALINESE CULTURE

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## Abstract

The Sing Beling Sing Nganten tradition in Bali is a cultural practice requiring women to prove their fertility before marriage. This tradition reflects deeply ingrained social norms and contributes to gender inequality within Balinese society. This study analyzes the tradition through the theoretical lenses of Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, Kate Millett's structuralist feminism, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality. Findings reveal that these cultural norms are passed down through social interactions and reinforced within traditional structures that prioritize male lineage continuity. Women are associated with nature and reproductive functions, while men serve as decision-makers within the social system. Moreover, women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face greater pressure compared to those with access to education and economic resources. The social implications of this practice include stigma against women who fail to prove their fertility before marriage, significantly affecting their psychological well-being. Legally, there are no specific regulations protecting women from social pressure imposed by such cultural norms. Therefore, systemic changes are required, including legal reforms, women's economic empowerment, and public education to raise awareness of women's rights.

**Keywords:** Sing Beling Sing Nganten, Women's Fertility, Patriarchy, Balinese Culture.

## Abstrak

Tradisi Sing Beling Sing Nganten di Bali merupakan praktik budaya yang mengharuskan perempuan untuk membuktikan kesuburannya sebelum menikah. Tradisi ini mencerminkan norma-norma sosial yang telah mengakar kuat dan berkontribusi terhadap ketidaksetaraan gender di masyarakat Bali. Penelitian ini menganalisis tradisi ini dengan menggunakan pendekatan teori sosiokultural Lev Vygotsky, strukturalisme Claude Lévi-Strauss, feminisme strukturalis Kate Millett, dan interseksionalitas Kimberlé Crenshaw. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa norma-norma budaya tersebut diwariskan melalui interaksi sosial dan dipertahankan dalam struktur adat yang mengutamakan keberlangsungan garis keturunan laki-laki. Perempuan diasosiasikan dengan alam dan fungsi reproduksinya, sementara laki-laki berperan sebagai pengambil keputusan dalam sistem sosial. Selain itu, perempuan dari kelompok sosial ekonomi yang lebih rendah berada di bawah tekanan yang lebih besar daripada mereka yang memiliki akses ke pendidikan dan sumber daya ekonomi. Implikasi sosial dari praktik ini termasuk stigma terhadap perempuan yang tidak dapat membuktikan kesuburan mereka sebelum menikah, yang berdampak pada kesejahteraan psikologis mereka. Dari segi hukum, belum ada peraturan khusus yang melindungi perempuan dari tekanan sosial akibat norma-norma budaya tersebut. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan perubahan yang sistematis, termasuk melalui reformasi hukum, pemberdayaan ekonomi perempuan, dan pendidikan publik untuk membangun kesadaran tentang hak-hak perempuan.

**Kata kunci:** Kesetaraan Gender, Kesuburan Perempuan, Patriarki, Perubahan Budaya

## Introduction

Premarital sex is a highly complex issue that is often debated in Indonesia from various moral, psychological, and religious perspectives. Although state law regulates that premarital sex, including cohabitation (living together without marriage), may be subject to social or even criminal sanctions under Article 412 of the Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP), in reality, there are still cultural practices that permit or even encourage such behaviors. One example is the Balinese tradition of “*sing beling sing nganten*,” which means “*if not pregnant, no marriage*.” This tradition is not merely a saying but has evolved into a social norm that shapes public perceptions of women. In this context, women are often treated as objects to test their fertility before marriage. If the woman becomes pregnant, the couple proceeds to marry; if not, the marriage does not take place. This phenomenon raises profound concerns regarding gender injustice, where women are consistently disadvantaged, whether they become pregnant or not.<sup>1</sup>

The deeply rooted patriarchal culture in Bali further exacerbates this situation. In a patriarchal system, women are positioned in an inferior role, with their primary responsibility perceived as bearing children especially male offspring to continue the male lineage.<sup>2</sup> In Balinese society, which places high value on tradition and social norms, there is intense pressure on women to give birth to children, particularly sons, who are regarded as the rightful heirs of the family. This pressure often leads to negative judgments toward women who fail to meet these expectations, whether by not becoming pregnant or by becoming pregnant out of wedlock.

The practice of *sing beling sing nganten* clearly illustrates gender inequality, where women are

often valued solely based on their reproductive capabilities. This exacerbates the social stigma faced by women, whether they become pregnant or not. As a result, women frequently experience excessive social pressure, which ultimately affects their mental and emotional well-being.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, men involved in this tradition do not face the same societal expectations. They are not subjected to the same scrutiny regarding fertility or reproductive roles within the family. This imbalance highlights the injustice embedded within the existing social and cultural structure. The *sing beling sing nganten* phenomenon in Bali creates a clear disparity within society not only in terms of women’s roles within the family and community but also in how it affects their mental, social, and physical well-being. Therefore, it is crucial to examine this tradition through a gender perspective to uncover its impact on women and how patriarchal culture continues to reinforce their marginalized position in Balinese social life.<sup>4</sup>

The *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* phenomenon in Bali is closely related to a legal concept known as “nullifying the recognition.” In this context, nullifying the recognition refers to how women, as subjects of this tradition, lose their legal and social status due to discriminatory cultural norms. This practice places women in a vulnerable position, where they lack adequate protection under the current legal system in Indonesia.<sup>5</sup> From a gender discrimination perspective, the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition can be categorized as a form of discrimination against women. The fundamental concept of this practice requires women to “prove” their fertility before marriage something that not only contradicts the principles of gender equality but also restricts women’s rights over their own bodies and autonomy. Unfortunately, despite Indonesia having ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

<sup>1</sup> Dian Nita Luthfi, “Women’s Protection in Legal and Human Rights Perspectives: A Feminist Ethnographic Study of Culture-Based Sexual Violence in Beling Malu in Bali” (Thesis, Islamic University of Indonesia, 2023), <https://dspace.uii.ac.id/handle/123456789/46411>.

<sup>2</sup> - Ni Made Tantri Chandra, - Emy Susanti, and - Karen Mwendu Kinuthia, “Women’s Subordination in Premarital Pregnancy,” *Journal of Society, Culture and Politics* 33, no. 3 (2020): 238–47.

<sup>3</sup> Luthfia Rahma Halizah and Ergina Faralita, “Patriarchal Culture and Gender Equality,” *Wasaka Law* 11, no. 1 (February 21, 2023): 19–32.

<sup>4</sup> Nur Hidayah Pauzi Harahap, “Women and Patriarchal Culture,” *Proceedings of the National Seminar of PSSH (Education, Science, Social and Law) 1* (July 14, 2022): 7.1-7.8.

<sup>5</sup> Rafael del-Pino-Casado dkk., “Gender Differences Regarding Informal Caregivers of Older People,” *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 44, no. 4 (2012): 349–57, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2012.01477.x>.

Against Women (CEDAW) since 1984, the reality shows that women affected by this paradigm still do not receive sufficient legal protection.<sup>6</sup>

The lack of legal clarity for women affected by this tradition highlights a gap in Indonesia's legal protection system. Currently, existing regulations predominantly focus on protecting women within the context of formal households and marriages such as Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence, which only applies to women within domestic institutions. There is also Law No. 23 of 2002 in conjunction with Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, which safeguards underage girls.<sup>7</sup> However, women outside the household framework including those affected by cultural norms like *Sing Beling Sing Nganten*—are not explicitly protected by these regulations. They are essentially in a legal “free zone,” meaning that when they face social pressure, stigma, or even exploitation due to such practices, the state lacks a strong legal mechanism to offer them protection.<sup>8</sup>

Through a social and cultural lens, this phenomenon affects not only women's rights but also reinforces gender-based stigma and expectations that place women in a subordinate position. This paradigm creates a norm in which a woman's fertility becomes a social prerequisite for marriage, while men are not held to the same standard. It reflects a skewed social construction where women's bodies become objects of judgment and cultural control.<sup>9</sup> When women in this tradition are unrecognized by both the legal and social systems, they experience a nullification of their rights both personal and legal. Thus, *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* is not merely a cultural practice, but a reflection of persistent gender inequality, exacerbated by the lack of an effective legal response.<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon demonstrates how cultural practices can interact with the legal system

and expose protection gaps for women. A more comprehensive approach is needed through policy development and legal reform to ensure that women affected by such practices receive proper protection and recognition within Indonesia's legal framework.<sup>11</sup>

One important reference relevant to this research is the book *"Refleksi Hukum Terhadap Fenomena Sing Beling Sing Nganten di Bali"* (*Legal Reflections on the Sing Beling Sing Nganten Phenomenon in Bali*), which examines the impact of this tradition on women in Bali.<sup>12</sup> The book highlights how women are often treated as objects to test their fertility before marriage, a practice that ultimately disadvantages them. It explores the dynamics of the tradition, the position of women as victims, the available legal protections, and efforts to address the phenomenon. The book provides a comprehensive perspective on legal aspects, particularly concerning customary law, marriage law, and criminal law in the context of morality. With its clear legal approach, this book is expected to serve as a valuable reference for courses related to customary law and gender in law.

However, although both address the same topic, there is a fundamental difference in the approaches used. This study is not limited to legal aspects but also employs a deeper gender perspective. The focus of this research is to analyze the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* phenomenon from social and cultural dimensions, and to examine how the deeply rooted patriarchal culture in Bali influences the roles and positions of women within this tradition. The research aims to reveal the gender inequalities reinforced by social and cultural norms, as well as their impact on women's mental and emotional well-being. In contrast, the book *Refleksi Hukum* places greater emphasis on legal analysis and the protections

<sup>6</sup> Defi Uswatun Hasanah, "Women's Rights in Religious Court Decisions: A Comparative Study of Islamic Family Law and the CEDAW Convention" (masterthesis, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Graduate School, 2017), <https://repository.uinjkt.ac.id/dspace/handle/123456789/49513>.

<sup>7</sup> Boturan N. P. Simatupang and Rendra Alfonso Sitorus, "Legal Studies on the Protection of Minors," *Jurnal Juristic* 4, no. 1 (August 24, 2024): 1–6.

<sup>8</sup> Soedharyo Soimin, *Law of People and Families: Perspectives of Western Civil Law/BW, Islamic Law, and Customary Law* (Yogyakarta: Sinar Grafika, 2004), p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> Ahmad Romadhon et al., "The Values of the Refugee Tradition (Sebambangan) in the Indigenous Peoples

of Lampung Pepadun Perspective on Legal Sociology," *Bulletin of Islamic Law* 1, no. 1 (26 May 2024): 13–22, <https://doi.org/10.51278/bil.v1i1.1170>.

<sup>10</sup> Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Women's Fiqh: Kiai Reflections on Religious and Gender Discourse*, Cet. IV (Yogyakarta: LKIS, 2007), p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Nur Asikin Thalib, "Women's Political Rights After the Constitutional Court Decision (Material Examination of Article 214 of Law Number 10 of 2008)," *Jurnal Cita Hukum* 2, no. 2 (December 1, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.15408/jch.v1i2.1466>.

<sup>12</sup> Ni Komang Ratih Kumala Dewi et al., *Legal Reflection on the Phenomenon of Being Lying Down in Bali* (Bali: UNMAS PRESS, 2023), p. 54.

available to women, along with legal strategies to address the phenomenon. Thus, while both share a common focus, this research offers a broader dimension by integrating deeper social, cultural, and gender analysis moving beyond a purely legal perspective.

## Result and Discussion

The *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition in Bali, which literally means “no pregnancy, no marriage,” reflects the gender construction within Balinese society that places women in a subordinate position. This gender construction plays a significant role in shaping and sustaining the tradition, as well as influencing societal perceptions of women.<sup>13</sup> Balinese society follows a patrilineal system, in which lineage is traced through the male line. In this system, men are regarded as the heirs of the family line and the primary holders of inheritance rights.<sup>14</sup> While women do play important roles in family life and traditional rituals, they are often positioned lower than men. This is reflected in various aspects of life, including the division of domestic and public roles, as well as the prevailing social norms.<sup>15</sup>

The gender construction that places women in a position where they must prove their fertility before marriage is rooted in the strong patriarchal norms within Balinese society.<sup>16</sup> The *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition requires women to become pregnant before marriage as a demonstration of their fertility. Meanwhile, men are not expected to prove their fertility before marriage, highlighting a harmful double standard that disadvantages women. This reflects the dominance of male power and the subordination of women within the

social structure of Balinese society.<sup>17</sup> The tradition reinforces the tendency to judge women based on their reproductive ability. Women who do not become pregnant before marriage may be perceived as infertile or as failing to meet social expectations, while those who do become pregnant outside of marriage may face stigma for being seen as immoral.

The gender construction within Balinese patriarchal society places men in a dominant position, both in the domestic and public spheres. Women are expected to fulfill traditional roles as wives and mothers, with a strong emphasis on domestic duties and reproduction. The *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition reinforces this male dominance by requiring women to prove their fertility before marriage, while men are not subjected to the same expectation. This clearly illustrates a deep-rooted gender inequality within Balinese society.<sup>18</sup>

Gender construction in Balinese society plays a significant role in shaping and sustaining the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition. Patriarchal norms that place women in a subordinate position and judge them based on their reproductive abilities reinforce male dominance and female subordination. To achieve gender equality, there is a need to critically reassess and reform traditions and social norms that disadvantage women.<sup>19</sup>

In an interview with IWS, it was explained that Balinese society is known for its patrilineal kinship system, in which lineage is traced through the male line. In this system, marriage and offspring are crucial factors in maintaining the

<sup>13</sup> Ni Made Tantri Chandra, Emy Susanti, dan Karen Mwendu Kinuthia, “Women’s Subordination in Premarital Pregnancy.”

<sup>14</sup> Halizah and Faralita, “Patriarchal Culture and Gender Equality.”

<sup>15</sup> Malicia Evendia, Ade Arif Firmansyah, and Ulinuha Saifullah, “Portrait Legal Protection Women’s Human Rights Through the Establishment of Gender Mainstreaming Local Regulations,” *Journal of the Court: Studies of Islamic Law and Law* 7, no. 2 (2022): 107–22, <https://doi.org/10.25217/jm.v7i2.2726>.

<sup>16</sup> del-Pino-Casado dkk., “Gender Differences Regarding Informal Caregivers of Older People.”

<sup>17</sup> Mentari Berliana Kemala Dewi dan Ridwan Arifin, “Emancipation and Legal Justice; Portrait of Women’s Legal Protection In Indonesia,” *Jurnal Cita Hukum* 7, no. 1 (20 March 2019): 101–14, <https://doi.org/10.15408/jch.v7i1.10261>.

<sup>18</sup> P.D. Yasa et al., *Young Hindus Talk About Adult Topics!* (Nilachakra, 2022), p. 32, <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=LciEAAAQBAJ>.

<sup>19</sup> Mojtaba Tashkeh dkk., “Examining the validity of an adaptive model of sustaining behaviors in long-distance relationships: Predicting intimacy and marital satisfaction,” *Acta Psychologica* 250 (1 Oktober 2024): 104489, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2024.104489>.

continuity of the family.<sup>20</sup> According to IWS, the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition emerged from the desire to ensure that women entering marriage are capable of bearing children particularly male children. This stems from the belief that having sons is the best way to preserve family balance and fulfill customary obligations. However, IWS also emphasized that this practice often places significant social pressure on women.

IBKW, a traditional leader, added that although many people still uphold this tradition, not all families in Bali apply it strictly. He stated that in some families, the practice is merely a belief without explicit coercion. However, in communities where customary norms are still strongly upheld, women who do not become pregnant before marriage may be stigmatized as "imperfect" women.<sup>21</sup> From an interview with NLPS, a women's rights activist, it was revealed that women involved in this practice face various social challenges. She explained that women who do not follow the practice may be regarded as unproductive members of the family. Meanwhile, those who do follow the tradition but then do not marry for various reasons also face significant stigma from society.<sup>22</sup> KA, a woman who personally experienced the impact of this tradition, shared how her family pressured her to prove her fertility before marriage. She revealed that the social pressure placed a heavy emotional burden on her. When she refused to undergo the practice, she experienced rejection from those around her, including some members of her own family.<sup>23</sup>

According to NLPS, this practice further reinforces gender inequality. She emphasized that men do not experience the same social pressure

related to fertility, creating a harmful double standard that disadvantages women. Moreover, she highlighted that the practice often forces women to sacrifice their future particularly in terms of education and career—in order to meet societal expectations.<sup>24</sup> In an interview with IWS, he explained that the pressure women face in the context of this tradition can lead to various psychological impacts. The fear of social stigma often results in prolonged anxiety and stress.<sup>25</sup> KA shared that after refusing to follow the tradition, she experienced depression due to the sense of losing support from her family. She also felt fear about her future, especially regarding the possibility of struggling to find a partner, as society began to view her as "unworthy." She noted that this social pressure severely limits women's freedom to make decisions based on their own will.<sup>26</sup> NLPS added that many women develop feelings of low self-worth because they believe their value in the eyes of society is measured solely by their ability to bear children. This, she stated, poses a serious threat to women's mental health and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation.<sup>27</sup>

### Legal Implications of the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* Tradition"

The *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* practice places women in a legally vulnerable position. The pressure to prove fertility before marriage can lead women to engage in premarital sexual relationships, which may result in pregnancies outside of wedlock. Under Indonesian law, particularly Law No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage, pregnancy outside of marriage can bring about various legal consequences, including issues

<sup>20</sup> IW S, Interview with IWS on the Cultural and Social Background of the Sing Beling Seng Nganten Tradition, October 2024.

<sup>21</sup> IB K, Interview with IBK on the Cultural and Social Background of the Tradition of Sing Beling Seng Nganten, October 2024.

<sup>22</sup> NLP S, Interview with NLPS on the Social Implications of Traditional Practices That Are Changing Their Minds, October 2024.

<sup>23</sup> K A, Interview with KA on the Psychological Implications of the Tradition of Being Left Behind, October 2024.

<sup>24</sup> S, Interview with NLPS on the Social Implications of Traditional Dating That Is Long Lived.

<sup>25</sup> IW S, Interview with IWS on the Psychological Implications of Traditional Dating Sites, October 2024.

<sup>26</sup> A, Interview with KA on the Psychological Implications of Traditional Dating That Is Long Lived.

<sup>27</sup> NLP S, Interview with NLPS on the Psychological Implications of Traditional Dating Sites, October 2024.

related to the status of the child and the rights of the woman involved. Legal protection for women in the context of this tradition can be examined from two perspectives: Balinese customary law and Indonesian national law.

Balinese society follows a patrilineal kinship system, in which lineage is traced through the male line. In this system, women often do not have inheritance rights equal to those of men. However, there are mechanisms such as the adoption of a daughter as a *sentana rajeg* (a son in customary terms), which allows women to receive inheritance rights. In addition, property grants through gifts or *jimwa dana* (wedding gifts) are also ways for women to obtain a share of family assets.

IBKW, a traditional leader, explained that within the Balinese customary legal system, this practice does not have any binding legal foundation. However, due to the strength of social norms, the tradition continues to be practiced across generations. He stated that customary law does not explicitly require women to prove their fertility before marriage, but the norms that have developed in society have allowed the practice to persist.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, IWS emphasized that Indonesian national law does not have any specific regulation addressing this tradition. However, Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence can be used to provide protection for women who experience psychological pressure as a result of this tradition.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, according to him, the implementation of the law is often hindered by the dominance of customary norms that remain strong in some areas of Bali.<sup>30</sup> NLPS emphasized the need for more inclusive legal reforms that can protect women who face social pressure as a result of this practice. He

argued that the government needs to be more proactive in educating the public about women's rights and ensuring that national law can operate in harmony with customary norms without compromising women's fundamental rights.<sup>31</sup>

The Indonesian Constitution guarantees gender equality and the protection of human rights. Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence provides protection for women from various forms of violence, including sexual and psychological violence. However, in the context of the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition, formal legal protection for women's reproductive and social rights still requires special attention.<sup>32</sup> While there is a legal framework that guarantees women's rights, its implementation at the local level often faces challenges.<sup>33</sup> The strong patriarchal culture and deeply rooted customary norms can hinder the enforcement of fair laws for women. For example, in inheritance matters, although women have equal legal rights under national law, in practice, Balinese customary law still places women at a disadvantage.<sup>34</sup> To enhance legal protection for women in the context of the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition, a comprehensive approach is needed, including:

1. Customary Law Reform, encouraging changes in Balinese customary law to provide more equal rights for women, including in matters of inheritance and social roles.
2. Raising Public Awareness, through education and outreach, is essential to shift societal paradigms regarding the roles and rights of women, as well as to reduce the stigma against those who do not follow traditional norms.
3. Fair Law Enforcement, ensuring that national laws protecting women's rights are effectively

<sup>28</sup> K, Interview with IBK on the Cultural and Social Background of the Sing Beling Seng Nganten Tradition.

<sup>29</sup> Habib Ismail and A. Kumedu Ja'far, "The Legal Status of Marriage of Half-Siblings Perspectives on Islamic Family Law," *Kartika: Journal of Islamic Studies* 4, no. 2 (November 25, 2024): 227–38, <https://doi.org/10.59240/kjsk.v4i2.82>.

<sup>30</sup> S, Interview with IWS on the Cultural and Social Background of Sing Beling Seng Nganten.

<sup>31</sup> S, Interview with NLPS on the Social Implications of Traditional Dating That Is Long Lived.

<sup>32</sup> Yelse Maya Wulandari, "The Effect of the Implementation of Child Protection Law on the Reduction of Child Violence Cases in Indonesia," *Verdict: Journal of Law Science* 2, no. 2 (October 21, 2024): 112–22, <https://doi.org/10.59011/vjlaws.2.2.2024.112-122>.

<sup>33</sup> Hasanah, "Women's Rights in Religious Court Decisions."

<sup>34</sup> Harahap, "Women and Patriarchal Culture."

implemented at the local level, involving law enforcement authorities and relevant institutions.

With these measures, it is hoped that legal protection for women within the context of the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition can be strengthened, ensuring that their reproductive and social rights are safeguarded in accordance with the principles of equality and justice.

Balinese society follows a patrilineal kinship system, in which lineage is traced through the male line. In this system, the continuation of the family line is considered highly important, resulting in social pressure on women to prove their fertility before marriage. This has led to the persistence of practices such as *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* in certain communities, even though they conflict with the principles of gender equality that are increasingly being advocated.<sup>35</sup> The social impact of this tradition is highly complex. Women who fail to prove their fertility before marriage are often stigmatized as infertile or unfit for marriage. On the other hand, women who become pregnant before marriage are frequently forced into marriage to preserve the family's honor. In many cases, such decisions are not based on emotional or financial readiness but rather on societal demands that prioritize the family's image in the eyes of the community.

Moreover, this tradition reinforces the deeply rooted patriarchal norms within Balinese culture. By placing the burden on women to prove their fertility before marriage, it clearly reflects a gender imbalance. Men are not subjected to the same expectations, highlighting a double standard in the societal judgment of purity and fertility.<sup>36</sup> This tradition indirectly strengthens the notion that a woman's value in society is primarily determined by her ability to bear children, without recognizing

other aspects of her existence as an individual who has the right to her own body and future.

From a psychological perspective, the social pressure faced by women in adhering to this tradition is immense. Those who fail to meet the expectation of becoming pregnant before marriage often experience deep anxiety, shame, and a loss of self-worth. Conversely, women who become pregnant out of wedlock may suffer from depression due to pressure from both family and society. In some cases, women who are unable to meet the cultural standards imposed upon them choose to withdraw from social life, experience feelings of helplessness, or even develop more severe mental health disorders.

In interviews with sources, they provided various recommendations to reduce the negative impacts of this tradition. IWS suggested implementing broader educational campaigns on gender equality and women's reproductive rights. According to her, better understanding of these issues would help shift public perception and reduce the social pressure placed on women.<sup>37</sup>

NLPS added that empowering women through education and access to better employment opportunities is also key to reducing the negative impacts of this tradition. With financial independence, women would be more capable of resisting social pressures that force them to follow practices they do not want.<sup>38</sup> IBKW emphasized the importance of dialogue between traditional leaders and the academic community to find common ground between cultural values and human rights principles. He believes that change can occur if all parties work together to create more inclusive solutions.<sup>39</sup> KA, who personally experienced social pressure as a result of this tradition, expressed hope that future generations will no longer have to face the same dilemma. She hopes that Balinese society can

<sup>35</sup> Dewi et al., *Legal Reflections On The Phenomenon Of The Bewilderment That Awaits In Bali*, p. 32.

<sup>36</sup> Ni Made Tantri Chandra, Emy Susanti, dan Karen Mwendu Kinuthia, "Women's Subordination in Premarital Pregnancy."

<sup>37</sup> S, Interview with IWS on the Psychological Implications of Traditional Dating Sites.

<sup>38</sup> S, Interview with NLPS on the Social Implications of Traditional Dating That Is Long Lived.

<sup>39</sup> IB K, Interview with IBK on the Legal Impact and Protection in the *Sing Beling Seng Nganten* Tradition, October 2024.

become more open to change and learn to value women for their broader contributions, not solely for their ability to bear children.<sup>40</sup>

Based on these interviews, it is evident that *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* is a tradition that has significant social, psychological, and legal impacts on women in Bali. This practice reinforces patriarchal norms that place women in a subordinate position and creates substantial social pressure on them. The interviews reveal that, although this practice still persists in some communities, there is a growing awareness of the need for social and legal change to protect women's rights.

The legal implications of this tradition are also a matter of concern. Although Indonesia has various regulations aimed at protecting women's rights, many of these policies have yet to effectively safeguard women affected by the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* practice.<sup>41</sup> Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence provides protection for women within the context of marriage, but it does not explicitly address the protection of women who face social pressure to prove their fertility before marriage. Similarly, the Child Protection Law does not specifically cover situations in which young women become victims of social pressure under this practice.<sup>42</sup> Education, legal reform, women's empowerment, and dialogue between traditional leaders and women's rights activists are crucial steps in addressing the negative impacts of this tradition. With growing public awareness, it is hoped that this tradition can undergo a transformation toward a more just and gender-equal practice.<sup>43</sup>

## Gender and the Cultural Lens of the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* Practice

One of the main challenges in efforts to provide legal protection for women within the context of this tradition is the strong influence of customary norms that continue to dominate the social system in Bali. In Balinese customary law, women often do not have inheritance rights equal to those of men, and their status within the family is largely dependent on their relationships with male family members. This results in women having limited space to resist the social pressure that compels them to conform to the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* practice.<sup>44</sup>

To address the negative impacts of this tradition, a comprehensive strategy that includes legal, social, and cultural approaches is necessary. From a legal standpoint, more specific regulations are needed to protect women from the social pressure that forces them to comply with this practice. Legal education must also be strengthened so that women in Bali are aware of their rights and can take legal action if they experience discrimination or harmful social pressure. From a social perspective, increasing public awareness about the negative consequences of this tradition is a crucial step. Educational campaigns on gender equality and women's rights can help shift societal perceptions that have long valued women solely based on their reproductive abilities. Women's organizations and local communities must be actively involved in these campaigns to ensure that the resulting social changes are deeply rooted within society.

A cultural approach is also key to addressing this issue. Involving traditional and religious leaders in discussions about the negative impacts

<sup>40</sup> K A, Interview with KA on the Social Implications of the Tradition of Yang Beling Seng Nganten, October 2024.

<sup>41</sup> Diyan Putri Ayu, "A Review of Maqashid Sharia on the Consequences of Marital Rape in Law No. 23 of 2014 and RUKHP," *AL-MANHAJ: Jurnal Hukum dan Pranata Sosial Islam* 1, no. 2 (December 16, 2019): 229–56, <https://doi.org/10.37680/almanhaj.v1i2.172>.

<sup>42</sup> Lina Panggabean, Triono Eddy, and Alpi Sahari, "Legal Protection of Children as Victims of Sexual Violence

(Analysis of the Law on the Protection of Witnesses and Victims)," *Iuris Studia: Journal of Legal Studies* 5, no. 1 (March 13, 2024): 20–28, <https://doi.org/10.55357/is.v5i1.476>.

<sup>43</sup> Wulandari, "The Effect of the Implementation of the Child Protection Law on the Reduction of Cases of Child Violence in Indonesia."

<sup>44</sup> del-Pino-Casado dkk., "Gender Differences Regarding Informal Caregivers of Older People."



of the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition can help find solutions that align with Balinese cultural values while still respecting women's rights. More inclusive reforms of customary law that support gender equality should also be encouraged so that women can hold a more equal position in society.<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition reflects how social and cultural constructs can profoundly affect women's lives. To achieve a more just society, collective efforts from various stakeholders are needed to eliminate practices that harm women and replace them with values that promote gender equality and justice.<sup>46</sup>

The *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* phenomenon in Balinese society can be analyzed through the lens of socio-cultural theory. This theory emphasizes that individual behavior and the social norms that develop within a community are shaped by the cultural context and social structures that create and sustain them. This tradition is a product of social construction that places high value on female fertility and the continuation of the male lineage.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, this practice cannot be separated from the existing social system, particularly in relation to gender hierarchy and the distribution of power within a patriarchal society.

Balinese society traditionally follows a patrilineal kinship system, in which lineage and inheritance rights are predominantly passed down through the male line. This results in strong social pressure on women to ensure their ability to bear children particularly male offspring in order to continue the family line. Within this framework, women are often judged based on their reproductive capacity, while other aspects of their

identity, potential, and contributions are frequently overlooked.<sup>48</sup> The *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* practice emerges as a social mechanism aimed at controlling and regulating women's roles in society by emphasizing fertility as a prerequisite for marriage. This tradition indicates that a woman's status is heavily dependent on her reproductive role a concept aligned with how patriarchal societies often confine women to rigid domestic roles.<sup>49</sup>

The dynamics of power within the patriarchal system are clearly reflected in this practice. Control over women's bodies becomes part of an effort to maintain the existing social structure, where decisions about reproduction do not fully belong to the women themselves but are dictated by social norms and cultural expectations. From the perspective of socio-cultural theory, this phenomenon can be linked to the concept of masculine hegemony the way dominant norms that serve male interests are institutionalized through various social practices, including within systems of marriage and reproduction.<sup>50</sup> In this context, men are granted greater freedom in choosing a partner, while women are burdened with the responsibility of proving themselves as “worthy” potential wives by demonstrating their ability to bear children.

The impact of this tradition is far-reaching, particularly on the social and psychological lives of the women involved. Women who fail to become pregnant before marriage often face social stigma that can lead to exclusion or difficulty in finding a partner. They are seen as less “complete” as women, due to the internalized societal belief that

<sup>45</sup> Elisa Dourouthun Nafis El Adibah, Syafril Wicaksono, and M. Khoiril Hadi al Asy'ari, "The Existence Of Women Scholars In Parthiarkhi Culture In Pesantren: A Study Of Women Scholars In Jember City," *Bidayah: Studies Of Islamic Sciences* 15, no. 1 (July 11, 2024): 31–49, <https://doi.org/10.47498/bidayah.v15i1.2322>.

<sup>46</sup> Leah R. Halper, Colleen M. Cowgill, dan Kimberly Rios, “Gender Bias in Caregiving Professions: The Role of Perceived Warmth,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 49, no. 9 (September 2019): 549–62, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12615>.

<sup>47</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, *Thinking Gender* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 32.

<sup>48</sup> IB K, Interview with IBK on Strategies to Overcome Negative Impacts in the Sing Beling Seng Nganten Tradition, October 2024.

<sup>49</sup> Dian Nita Luthfi, "Women's Protection in Legal and Human Rights Perspectives: A Feminist Ethnographic Study of Culture-Based Sexual Violence in Beling Malu in Bali" (Thesis, Islamic University of Indonesia, 2023), <https://dspace.uui.ac.id/handle/123456789/46411>.

<sup>50</sup> Rachel Jewkes dkk., “Hegemonic masculinity: combining theory and practice in gender interventions,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 17, no. sup2 (16 Oktober 2015): 96–111, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2015.1085094>.

an ideal woman is one who can bear children. On the other hand, women who do become pregnant before marriage but are later abandoned by their partners also suffer severe psychological consequences, as they are left to bear the social burden of this tradition without adequate legal protection.<sup>51</sup>

The social pressure resulting from this practice can have serious effects on women's mental health. The fear of stigma and rejection from family and community leads many women to feel anxious and stressed. In some cases, they experience depression or anxiety disorders due to the constant pressure they face. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of social support and institutions that can protect them from the negative consequences of this tradition.<sup>52</sup> Socio-cultural theory emphasizes that the norms governing individuals' lives are not natural or fixed; rather, they are shaped by social interactions and can change over time. In this context, the pressure on women in the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* practice is the result of deeply entrenched social constructions, but this does not mean it cannot be changed.

Another aspect that needs to be considered is how the law and public policy respond to this phenomenon. In the national legal system, Law No. 23 of 2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence provides protection for women from various forms of violence, including psychological violence that may arise from social pressures like those in this practice. However, the implementation of the law is often ineffective, primarily due to the strong influence of customary laws in Balinese society.<sup>53</sup> Customary law still plays

a dominant role in regulating social relations, including in the systems of marriage and family, making it difficult for national laws to fully replace or alter practices that have been deeply entrenched for generations.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to national law, customary law also plays its own role in shaping the social reality faced by women. Although some indigenous communities have begun to adapt to changing times, norms that support the patriarchal system still dominate many aspects of social life. Customary law often favors male interests, granting them greater inheritance rights compared to women and placing women in socially and economically weaker positions. In this context, more progressive legal reforms become one of the solutions that can help reduce the negative impacts of this practice.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Sing Beling Sing Nganten Tradition from a Socio-Cultural Approach**

The socio-cultural theory approach also highlights the importance of social change as part of cultural reform efforts. Gender awareness campaigns and public education about women's rights can help change the way women's value is perceived in society. If, historically, women have been largely judged based on their ability to bear children, then with education and a shift in values, society can begin to see women as individuals who have the right to their own bodies and lives, regardless of their reproductive capacity.

Sociocultural theory emphasizes that an individual's cognitive development and behavior are influenced by social interactions and the cultural context in which the individual exists. Lev

<sup>51</sup> Nihayatul Wafiroh, "Women's Agency in Arranged Marriages Within the Context of Pesantren" (Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2016), <https://etd.repository.ugm.ac.id/penelitian/detail/105720>.

<sup>52</sup> S, Interview with NLPs on the Social Implications of Traditional Dating That Is Long Lived.

<sup>53</sup> S. H. Megawati Barthos, "LEGAL PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACCORDING TO LAW NO. 23 OF 2002 CONCERNING CHILD PROTECTION (CASE STUDY OF DECISION NO. 1500/PID. B/2005/PN. TNG)," *CONSTITUTUM* 12, no. 1 (2012),

<https://ejournal.borobudur.ac.id/index.php/07/article/view/47>.

<sup>54</sup> Umar Haris Sanjaya and Dita Fadillah Putri, "The Construction of Legitimacy and the Consequences of Marriage Under the Hand: Repeating Marriage or Itsbat Nikah?," *Legal Journal IUS QUIA IUSTUM* 31, no. 3 (September 30, 2024): 490–511, <https://doi.org/10.20885/iustum.vol31.iss3.art1>.

<sup>55</sup> Ni Made Tantri Chandra, Emy Susanti, dan Karen Mwendu Kinuthia, "Women's Subordination in Premarital Pregnancy."

Vygotsky, one of the key figures of this theory, argued that learning occurs through interactions with others, particularly through the use of language as a mediating tool.<sup>56</sup> In the case of *Sing Beling Sing Nganten*, cultural norms and social interactions within Balinese society shape perceptions and behaviors related to women's roles and fertility. Edward Alsworth Ross, an American sociologist, also made significant contributions to the development of sociocultural theory. Ross emphasized that an individual's social behavior is more influenced by their social group than by internal factors.<sup>57</sup> He observed phenomena in which emotions and behaviors can spread within a crowd, demonstrating the powerful impact of social influence on individuals. In the context of this tradition, pressure from the community and social expectations play a significant role in pushing women to conform to these norms.<sup>58</sup>

In Balinese society, there is a cultural view that encourages women to prove their fertility before marriage. This view reflects social pressure on men to continue their lineage. On the other hand, this is highly detrimental to women. Balinese women bear the weight of the patrilineal culture embraced by their village communities, which emphasizes the continuation of the male lineage. This social condition turns into a pressure for each Balinese woman to actualize her sexual and reproductive functions in order to bear offspring. By adopting the capabilities approach developed by Martha Craven Nussbaum, this study seeks to demonstrate that the cultural view of *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* infringes upon the capability of integrity over the bodies of Balinese women.<sup>59</sup> As a qualitative study with a cultural context approach, elaborated with literature reviews and

in-depth interviews, the findings of this research show that *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* is one of many local views that damage the capability of integrity over the bodies of Balinese women, all in the singular pursuit of sexual and reproductive functions for external purposes through constructed methods.

Claude Lévi-Strauss explained that social systems function based on binary opposition, which is how society constructs meaning through the difference between two opposing concepts. In the context of *Sing Beling Sing Nganten*, the binary oppositions that dominate are male/female and culture/nature. In a patriarchal system like that in Bali, men are associated with culture, meaning they are seen as family leaders, decision-makers, and heirs of the lineage. Conversely, women are associated with nature, meaning their primary role in society is reproductive: to bear and raise children. This opposition shows that women must be "tested" through their fertility before they are deemed worthy of marriage and inclusion in the larger social structure.<sup>60</sup> This concept reinforces the idea that a woman's value in society is measured more by her ability to bear children, rather than by her intellect, creativity, or contributions in other fields. Therefore, women who cannot prove their fertility within this system will be considered individuals who fail in their roles, thus their social status becomes lower compared to women who succeed in meeting these cultural expectations. In Lévi-Strauss's analysis, this binary opposition creates a social order that binds women to traditional roles and makes it difficult for them to break free from a system deeply entrenched in Balinese culture. In other words, women in this society have little choice but to follow the established social norms,

<sup>56</sup> L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. oleh Michael Cole dkk. (Harvard University Press, 1980), 43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4>.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social control: a survey of the foundations of order, Law & society series* (New Brunswick, N.J: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 254.

<sup>58</sup> Ahmad Nur Wahyudi et al., "Customary Law as a Judge's Consideration in Granting Marriage Dispensation Applications and Its Consequences (Case Study of the

Tulang Bawang Tengah Court)," *Bulletin of Islamic Law* 1, no. 1 (May 24, 2024): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.51278/bil.v1i1.1173>.

<sup>59</sup> Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, 7. print (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2003), 124.

<sup>60</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss dan Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 245.

as they have no control over the roles assigned to them.

Kate Millett, in her structuralist feminist theory, explains that social and cultural institutions systematically shape and maintain gender inequality.<sup>61</sup> In the context of *Sing Beling Sing Nganten*, social institutions such as the family, traditional communities, and cultural norms play a role in placing women in subordinate positions. Cultural norms in Bali have institutionalized gender inequality by making fertility a key factor for women to marry. This shows that a woman's role in society is not determined by the individual herself, but by a social structure that has been in place for a long time. In this system, women are forced to follow the rules set by society, where they must prove their fertility as the primary condition to enter the institution of marriage. Millett also highlights how patriarchy operates through control over women's bodies. In this case, a woman's body is not entirely her own, but is controlled by society, family, and customary systems that regulate when and how women can enter the institution of marriage. If a woman cannot meet these expectations, she is seen as a failure within the social system and may even face stigma that hinders her ability to participate in social life. Therefore, Millett's structuralist feminist theory shows that *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* is not just a cultural practice, but also a social control mechanism that reinforces male dominance and female subordination. It shows that this tradition is not merely a "choice" followed by women, but rather a social structure that limits their freedom and forces them to conform to established norms.

Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the theory of intersectionality, which emphasizes that discrimination does not occur based on a single factor (such as gender), but rather through the intersection of various forms of discrimination, such as class, economic status, race, and culture.<sup>62</sup> In the context of *Sing Beling Sing Nganten*, women

from lower economic backgrounds may experience greater pressure compared to women from wealthy or high-status families. This is because women from poor families are often more dependent on existing social and cultural systems. They may not have access to education or employment opportunities that could provide them with alternatives to this system, making them more likely to be forced to follow the norms established by society. On the other hand, women from higher social status families may have more freedom to reject this tradition because they have access to economic resources that allow them to live independently without having to rely on marriage as the only means of obtaining social status. Moreover, intersectionality also shows that women with lower levels of education are more vulnerable to social pressure in following this tradition. If a woman lacks the education needed to secure a decent job, she will be more dependent on traditional social structures, which position marriage as the only way to gain economic and social security.

Crenshaw also highlights that the forms of discrimination experienced by women within this system do not occur in isolation, but are interconnected with other social factors. In this case, the cultural norms that support the *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* tradition not only pressure women based on gender, but also based on their economic status, educational level, and social position within the community.

## Conclusion

This study finds that *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* in Bali is rooted in cultural norms that prioritize women's fertility as a condition for marriage. This tradition reflects gender inequality embedded in social and customary systems, where women are judged based on their reproductive capacity, while men are not subjected to similar demands. From the perspective of Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural

<sup>61</sup> Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 84.

<sup>62</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of

Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *U. Chi. Legal F.* 1989 (1 Januari 1989): 139.

theory, this practice persists because cultural norms are transmitted through social interactions. Claude Lévi-Strauss explains that this system reflects a binary opposition between women, who are associated with nature and fertility, and men, who are associated with culture and leadership. Kate Millett, in her structuralist feminist theory, argues that social and cultural institutions maintain gender inequality through control over women's bodies. Kimberlé Crenshaw, in her theory of intersectionality, highlights that women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are more vulnerable to this pressure compared to those with better access to education and economic resources.

The social implications of this tradition result in stigma for women who cannot prove their fertility before marriage, impacting their psychological well-being. Many experience emotional distress, anxiety, and even depression due to this norm. Legally, there is no specific regulation protecting women from this cultural pressure. Solutions that could be implemented include legal reform, economic empowerment of women, and community education to change perceptions of women's roles. Religious and customary leaders play a crucial role in promoting more inclusive social change. Overall, this study emphasizes that *Sing Beling Sing Nganten* is not just a cultural practice, but also a reflection of the social structure that perpetuates gender inequality. Therefore, systematic change involving law, economics, and education is needed to ensure that women have full control over their bodies and lives.

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