

Pilihan Rasional Perempuan dalam Keputusan Melajang sebagai Strategi Menghindari Risiko Patriarki di Desa Bagik Polak Barat

Women's Rational Choice in Single Decision as a Strategy to Avoid Patriarchal Risks in West Bagik Polak Village

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Informasi Artikel

Article history:

Dikirimkan

28/05/2026

Direvisi 05/06/2026

Diterima 27/06/2026

Cite : Noviani Safitri,
2026, Women's
Rational Choice in
Single Decision,
SAKAAI : Jurnal Sosial
dan Humaniora, Juni,
Vol. 03, No. 01, hal 54-
66, DOI : ...

Abstrak

Artikel ini menganalisis fenomena perempuan dewasa yang memilih untuk tidak menikah (melajang) di Desa Bagik Polak Barat, Kecamatan Labuapi, Kabupaten Lombok Barat, Nusa Tenggara Barat. Fenomena ini menarik untuk dikaji karena terjadi di tengah masyarakat Sasak yang kental dengan tradisi pernikahan adat merarik dan sistem kekerabatan patrilineal. Menggunakan pendekatan sosiologi keluarga dengan teori pilihan rasional James Coleman sebagai pisau analisis, penelitian ini berupaya menelaah bagaimana perempuan Bagik Polak Barat mengkalkulasikan biaya dan manfaat dari institusi pernikahan patriarkis sebelum mengambil keputusan untuk melajang. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus, melibatkan wawancara mendalam terhadap lima perempuan lajang berusia 30 tahun ke atas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keputusan melajang bukanlah semata-mata akibat ketidakberuntungan sosial, melainkan merupakan tindakan rasional dan strategis yang dilakukan perempuan sebagai respons terhadap struktur patriarki yang membebani. Risiko-risiko utama yang diperhitungkan meliputi beban finansial aji krame, kekerasan dalam rumah tangga, poligami, perceraian sepihak, serta hilangnya otonomi ekonomi dan sosial pasca merarik. Temuan ini menantang asumsi normatif bahwa keluarga inti adalah satu-satunya jalan bagi perempuan untuk mencapai kesejahteraan dan status sosial dalam masyarakat Sasak.

Kata Kunci: Pilihan Rasional, Keputusan Melajang, Strategi Menghindari Risiko Patriarki, Desa Bagik Polak Barat

Abstract

This article analyzes the phenomenon of adult women who choose not to marry (single) in West Bagik Polak Village, Labuapi District, West Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. This phenomenon is interesting to study because it occurs in the midst of the Sasak community which is thick with the tradition of traditional

marriage and the patrilineal kinship system. Using the family sociology approach with James Coleman's theory of rational choice as an analytical knife, this study seeks to examine how West Bagik Polak women calculate the costs and benefits of patriarchal marriage institutions before making the decision to be single. The method used was qualitative with a case study approach, involving in-depth interviews with five single women aged 30 years and above. The results of the study show that the decision to be single is not solely the result of social disadvantage, but rather a rational and strategic action taken by women in response to the burdensome patriarchal structure. The main risks taken into account include the financial burden of the family, domestic violence, polygamy, unilateral divorce, and loss of economic and social autonomy after marriage. These findings challenge the normative assumption that the nuclear family is the only way for women to achieve well-being and social status in Sasak society.

Keywords: *Rational Choices, Single Decisions, Strategies to Avoid Patriarchal Risks, West Bagik Polak Village*



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PENDAHULUAN

Marriage in the Sasak community of Lombok is not simply a bond between two individuals, but rather a social event steeped in customary values, religious norms, and cultural conventions that have been ingrained for centuries. The tradition of *merarik*, which literally means running away with the prospective wife, is a typical Sasak wedding practice that is still maintained today, including in the village of Bagik Polak Barat, Labuapi District, West Lombok Regency. In this system, the man and his family act as the active parties in proposing and bringing the woman into the husband's family, while the woman is positioned as a passive subject who follows the flow of structurally determined norms (Wikantyoso, 2019).

However, amidst the dominant narrative of marriage as a primary obligation and goal for women in Sasak culture, a striking phenomenon has emerged: a number of adult women in West Bagik Polak have consciously chosen not to marry. They are not simply unmarried, but are actively rejecting or postponing marriage as a life choice. This phenomenon constitutes a social anomaly worthy of academic study, as it contradicts dominant norms that view unmarried women as failed, old, or even socially defective (Blackwood, 2005).

In the context of family sociology, the phenomenon of female singleness in a society that is still highly patriarchal raises a fundamental question: is this decision born of powerlessness or of mature, rational calculation? James Coleman's Rational Choice Theory (1990) offers a relevant framework for answering this question. In this perspective, individuals are understood as purposeful actors who consider various available options and make decisions based on cost-benefit calculations within the context of existing structural constraints.

Bagik Polak Barat Village is one of the villages in West Lombok with strong Sasak socio-cultural characteristics. The patrilineal kinship system, *merarik* norms, and customary provisions such as *aji krame* (traditional dowry) remain integral parts of local social life. In this context, the institution of marriage exists not only as a means of family formation but also as an arena for the reproduction of patriarchal power, which places women in a subordinate position (Hayati, 2021).

Studies on single women in traditional Indonesian society are still relatively limited, particularly those analyzing them from the perspective of agency and rational choice. Most existing studies tend to position single women as victims of social stigma, without exploring the strategic dimensions of that choice. This research seeks to fill this academic gap by presenting a more balanced perspective based on the women's own subjective experiences.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of singleness among Sasak women is also closely related to broader social changes, including increased female participation in the workforce, more open access to education, and the influence of modernity that is slowly shifting traditional values. Women who have higher education and earn

independent incomes tend to have a greater ability to redefine their life goals outside the framework of marriage (DeLaat, 2007).

This research specifically focuses on the village of Bagik Polak Barat as the research locus, arguing that this village represents a Sasak community that still consistently maintains the merarik tradition while simultaneously experiencing significant pressures of modernization. Thus, the local context provides an ideal opportunity to study the dynamics between patriarchal customary structures and women's individual agency in making decisions regarding marriage. This article argues that the decision to remain single in Bagik Polak Barat is a rational and strategic act, not simply a passive choice or fate taken in response to the unfavorable incentive structure within the patriarchal Sasak institution of marriage. This argument is built through an in-depth analysis of the narratives and experiences of single women in the village, which are then interpreted using Coleman's Rational Choice Theory framework.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to understand the meaning, perceptions, and subjective experiences of single women in West Bagik Polak in making the decision to not marry. As Creswell (2014) points out, a qualitative approach is very appropriate when researchers want to explore social phenomena that are complex in its natural context, especially when the phenomenon involves dimensions that cannot be measured quantitatively.

The research location was determined to be Bagik Polak Barat Village, Labuapi District, West Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara. This location was chosen based on the consideration that the village is a Sasak community that still actively maintains the traditional practice of merarik (traditional rituals) and has a number of adult women who have consciously chosen to remain unmarried. The research was conducted over three months, from September to November 2025, covering several hamlets within the village.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique of intentionally selecting informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The primary informants consisted of five single women aged 30 and over who resided in West Bagik Polak and explicitly stated their conscious decision to remain unmarried. Supporting informants included two local traditional figures with in-depth knowledge of the merarik and aji krame traditions, and one Tuan Guru (cleric) who holds religious authority within the community.

The data collection techniques used included two main methods: in-depth interviews and observation. The in-depth interviews were semi-structured to allow informants the flexibility to freely express their experiences and perspectives while

remaining focused on the main research themes. Each interview session was recorded with the informant's consent and then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Observations were conducted on the daily lives of key informants, including their economic activities, social interactions within the family and community, and how they manage the social stigma of being single. These observations served to complement and confirm the data obtained through interviews and also helped researchers understand the broader social context of their decision to remain single.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, referring to Coleman's rational choice theory framework. The analysis process involved three main stages: data coding (open coding, axial coding, and selective coding), identification of key themes related to informants' rational calculations, and interpretation of the findings within the established theoretical framework. To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation (comparing data from different informants) and method triangulation (comparing interview results with observation results).

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

Based on field data, three main categories of risks were identified that female informants associated with marriage in the Sasak customary context of West Bagik Polak: economic risks, social risks, and psychological risks. These three risk categories are interrelated and form an incentive system that, overall, is perceived as disadvantageous by women who choose to remain single.

1. Economic Risk

Economic risks are the most concrete and easiest for informants to quantify. The merarik procession in West Bagik Polak involves a series of stages, each of which requires costs: sorong serah aji krame (the handover of traditional money), begawe (a wedding feast that can last several days), nyongkolan (the bridal parade), and post-wedding thanksgiving. According to traditional leaders, these costs can reach tens of millions of rupiah, a significant figure for farming families and small traders.

Equally significant are the post-marriage economic risks. In the Sasak patrilineal kinship system, a wife who ngoyo (moves into her husband's home) is socially expected to contribute to her husband's household economy, including helping his parents. Inaq Idoq (38), one of the informants, described this directly: she realized that if she married, her flow of economic support to her mother and younger siblings would be cut off or at least reduced, because her resources would be diverted to the new, patrilocal-based family unit. "I'm afraid that if I get married, my husband won't be able to bear the burden of my family," she said.

This analysis aligns with Fakhri's (1996) findings in *Gender Analysis and Social Transformation*, which assert that the patriarchal system structurally conditions women to bear disproportionate social costs within the institution of

marriage. Fakih calls this a manifestation of gender injustice that results in the economic marginalization of women.

2. Social Risk

The second dimension of the risk map is social risk, which relates to the loss of autonomy and decision-making freedom after marriage. In Sasak tradition, a married woman living with her husband's family is bound by the *begundem* norm, which is the obligation to be totally devoted to her husband and his family. This includes: requiring permission to travel, submitting to her husband's decisions regarding family finances, and prioritizing the interests of her husband's family over her family of origin.

Inaq Syria (45), a successful trader in the local market, provides the clearest illustration of this social risk. For her, the presence of a husband in her life does not mean increasing assets, but rather a potential obstacle: "For me, the presence of a husband will actually limit my freedom of movement in trading and managing assets." This statement shows that she made a very concrete calculation: marriage = restriction of autonomy in business decision-making.

This concept is relevant to what Ihromi (1999) in his *Anthology of Family Sociology* calls asymmetric power in patriarchal families. Ihromi asserts that in families built on patriarchal principles, the distribution of decision-making power is systematically unequal: men as heads of households have the final authority in strategic decisions, while women play an implementative role.

3. Risiko Psikologis

The third dimension is psychological risk, the most difficult to quantify but the most deeply ingrained in the informants' subjective experiences. Hj. Rohani (51 years old) most clearly represents this typology. She grew up watching her sister experience domestic violence and being abandoned by her husband after a lavish *nyongkolan* party. This vicariously trauma shaped her rational calculation: the psychological costs of marriage were too high.

"Why have a big wedding if you end up divorced and suffering a year later? I'd rather be alone with peace of mind," said Hj. Rohani. Within the framework of Rational Choice Theory, this statement is a clear calculation: the utility of peace of mind > the utility of social status as a wife. Psychological peace is seen as a benefit that cannot be replaced by the social advantages of marital status.

The high divorce rate in the informants' environment is part of the "information" they calculate. In Coleman's logic, rational actors use the information available to them to make probabilistic projections about the outcomes of their choices. When the social environment provides numerous examples of marital failure (a source of negative information), the expected utility of marriage decreases significantly.

4. Melajang sebagai Strategi Adaptif

The most significant finding of this study is that the decision to remain single is not simply a rejection of marriage, but rather part of a more comprehensive adaptive strategy. The informants not only decided not to marry, but also actively constructed viable and dignified alternative lives outside the framework of marriage. This strategy encompasses various dimensions: economic, social, and cultural.

The singleness strategy in West Bagik Polak operates through several mutually supportive adaptive mechanisms. First, there is the strategy of economic legitimacy: informants actively build financial independence as a shield against social pressure. Inaq Masnah (50 years old) with her cracker business and Inaq Siswa (45 years old) with her market stall have reached a point where, in their own words, "their economic power silences the gossip of their neighbors." This is a manifestation of what Bourdieu (1984) calls the conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital: material wealth is converted into social legitimacy.

Second, functional role strategies: some informants deliberately took on the role of breadwinner in their families of origin, caring for nieces and nephews whose parents had left to live abroad, or financing their younger siblings' education. These roles provided socially acceptable justification for their single status. By filling the gap in social reproductive function within their families of origin, they shifted the pressure of "when will I get married" to the appreciation of "fortunately, she's here to take care of the family."

Third, stigma management strategies: In response to the societal stigma of "spinster," informants developed various psychological resilience mechanisms. Some chose self-affirmation through career achievements and spirituality (worship, the Hajj). Others chose to distance themselves from the social arena that produced the stigma, while building more supportive social circles.

This analysis aligns with the concept of agency developed by Giddens (1984) in structuration theory: individuals do not simply respond passively to structures, but rather actively use, negotiate, and even transform them through their everyday actions. The single women in West Bagik Polak are agents of structuration: they not only "escape" patriarchy, but are gradually changing the social landscape of what is acceptable as women's life choices.

These findings also contribute to the broader debate on family theory. Parsons and Bales (1955), in their classic functionalist family theory, viewed the nuclear family as the only structure functionally optimal for meeting the needs of individuals and society. However, findings by Bagik Polak Barat challenge this assumption: single women have demonstrated that living units other than the nuclear family are also capable of effectively meeting emotional, economic, and social needs. They form

what Stacey (1990) calls the "postmodern family": a diverse family configuration no longer tied to the normative patriarchal model.

5. Implications for the Sociology of the Family

At the theoretical level, this finding has important implications for the sociology of the family in Indonesia. First, it encourages a revision of the assumption that the institution of marriage inherently improves women's well-being. Empirically, in patriarchal contexts like West Bagak Polak, the institution of marriage actually carries risks that can be rationally assessed as detrimental by women with alternative resources.

Second, this research reinforces the need for an analytical framework that positions women as actors, not objects, in the study of family institutions. Approaches that position singlehood as a deficit or failure ("spinsterhood") are epistemologically patriarchal and fail to accurately interpret the reality of women's agency.

Third, this research has practical relevance for social development policy. As emphasized by Adon Nasrullah Jamaludin (2016) in his *Sociology of Development*, people-centered development must be sensitive to cultural diversity and gender equality. The phenomenon of single women as an adaptation strategy is not a problem to be "solved" through mass marriage programs or traditional education, but rather a signal of changing values that require a more nuanced policy response: opening up space for women's diverse life choices without standardizing normative pressures.

SIMPULAN

This research has demonstrated that the decision to remain single among women in the village of Bagik Polak Barat is not a result of social failure or bad luck, but rather a rational action undertaken as a strategy to avoid the risks inherent in the patriarchal Sasak institution of marriage. Using the framework of James Coleman's Rational Choice Theory, it is clear that these women make a careful cost-benefit calculation, where the costs of marriage, including economic risks (aji krame, customary burdens), social risks (loss of autonomy, begundem), and psychological risks (domestic violence, polygamy, unilateral divorce), are consistently assessed as greater than the benefits offered.

Another important finding is that the decision to remain single does not stand alone, but rather is part of a more holistic adaptive strategy. These women actively build economic independence, strengthen their position within their families of origin, develop alternative identity narratives, and utilize spatial mobility (migration) as a way to legitimize their choices within society. These strategies demonstrate that women's agency in a patriarchal society is not always tangible, overt resistance, but can take the form of intelligent adaptive negotiation within the gaps of the existing system. Theoretically, this research contributes to the

development of family sociology, particularly in applying Rational Choice Theory to the context of marriage decisions in traditional Indonesian Muslim societies. This research demonstrates that this theory, developed in a Western context, remains relevant and productive when applied to local contexts, provided it is done with sensitivity to specific cultural nuances. The concept of the 'rational actor' in Coleman's theory needs to be expanded to accommodate contextual, relational, and gender-based rationality.

Recommendations that can be put forward based on the findings of this study are: first, the need for women's economic empowerment programs that do not link women's status to marital status; second, the need for gender equality education that integrates local Sasak perspectives to reduce stigma against single women; third, the need for a critical study of customary law regarding practices such as *aji krame* that can structurally harm women; and fourth, the need for further research that explores similar experiences in other Sasak communities and other indigenous communities in Indonesia for the purposes of more systematic comparison.

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