

Indonesia - Marriage And Parenthood

Marriage and parenthood give people full adult status. In Indonesian, one does not ask, "Is he/she married?" but "Is he/she married yet?" to which the correct response is, "Yes" or "Not yet." The same is true in questions about whether a person has children. Unmarried adults are uncommon, though urban people are marrying at later ages than in the past or in rural society. Even homosexuals are under family pressure to marry, whether or not their orientation is known.

Marriage in many Indonesian societies commonly involves protracted negotiation and gift exchanges, often involving middle persons. Certain societies in Sumatra and Eastern Indonesia practice *affinal alliance*, by which marriages are arranged between persons in patrilineages who are related (near or distantly) as cross-cousins. In these societies the relationship between wife-giving and wife-taking lineages is basic to the structure of society and involves lifelong obligations for exchange of goods and services between kin (Singarimbum 1975). For Batak, a prominent Sumatran example of such a people, clan membership and marriage alliances between lineages are important whether they live in their mountain homeland or have migrated to distant cities. Though marriages may be made to perpetuate relationships between lineages, love between young people also may be considered by their families and kinsmen, as may education, occupation, religion, and wealth among urbanites. Newly married couples are usually expected to live with the parents of one spouse, especially before a child is born, and many societies require the husband to serve the wife's parents during that time.

In societies without lineal descent groups, love is more prominent in leading people to marry, but again class, education, occupation, religion, or wealth (in cities), or the capacity to work hard, be a good provider, and have access to land or other resources (in villages), are also considered. Among stratified societies such as Javanese or Bugis, higher status families are more likely to arrange marriages (or veto potential relationships). Marriage can be an important means of maintaining, advancing, or losing family social status, and extravagant marriage ceremonies with Hindu-derived ritual are used to display status (Koentjaraningrat 1985).

Among Muslims divorce is governed by Muslim law and may be settled in Muslim courts or, as with non-Muslims, in government civil courts. Initiation of divorce and its settlements favor males in Muslim courts and also much customary law. Divorce also may be handled by local elders and officials according to customary law, and terms for settlements may vary considerably by ethnic group. Societies with strong descent groups, such as the Batak, eschew divorce and it is rare (Rodenburg 1997). Such societies may also practice the *levirate* (requiring widows to remarry a brother or cousin of their deceased spouse). In societies without descent groups, such as the Javanese, divorce is reportedly frequent and is initiated by either spouse. Divorce among upper-class and wealthy Javanese is rarer (Brenner 1998).

Polygamy is recognized among Muslims, some immigrant Chinese, and some traditional societies, but not by Christians. Such marriages are probably few. Marriages between members of different religions are rare, and those between members of different ethnic groups remain relatively uncommon, though they are increasing in urban areas and among the better educated.

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Indonesia - Family And Gender

The nuclear family of husband, wife, and children is the most common domestic unit, though elders and unmarried siblings may be added to it in various societies and at various times. It is found among remote peoples and city dwellers, and is unrelated to the presence or absence of clans in a society. An exception is the rural matrilineal Minangkabau, for whom the domestic unit still comprises co-resident females around a grandmother (or mothers) with married and unmarried daughters and sons in a large traditional house. A husband comes only as a visitor to his wife's hearth and bedchamber. Some societies, such as the Dayak of Kalimantan, live in long houses with multiple hearths and bedchambers belonging to related or even unrelated nuclear families.

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Indonesia - Inheritance

Inheritance patterns are diverse even within single societies. Muslim inheritance favors males over females as do the customs of many traditional societies (an exception being matrilineal ones where rights over land, for example, are passed down between females.) Inheritance disputes may be settled in Muslim or civil courts, or by customary village ways. Though custom generally favors males, actual practice often gives females inheritances. Many societies distinguish between inherited and acquired property: the former is passed on in clan or family lines, the latter goes to children or the spouse of the deceased. In many areas land is communal property of a kin or local group, whereas household goods, personal items, or productive equipment are familial or individual inheritable property. With changing economic conditions, newer ideas about property, and increasing demand for money, rules and practices regarding inheritance are changing, and this can produce conflicts that a poorly organized legal system and weakened customary leaders cannot easily manage.

Though Indonesia is predominantly Muslim, the status of women is considered to be relatively high, though their position and rights vary considerably in different ethnic groups, even Muslim ones. Nearly everywhere gender ideology, both by custom and national reinforcement, views men as community leaders and decision makers (even among matrilineal Minangkabau) whereas women are the backbones of the home and teachers of values to the children.

An elementary school teacher helps a young pupil with an assignment. Many teachers in elementary schools are women, while most teachers at the secondary and university levels are men. SERGIO DORANTES/CORBIS

Women and men share many tasks in village agriculture across the archipelago, though plowing is more often done by men and harvest groups composed only of women are commonly seen. Gardens may be tended by either sex, though men

more commonly tend orchards. Men hunt and fish, which may take them away for a long time. If men do long-term work outside the village, women may do all aspects of farming and gardening. Women are found in the urban work force in stores, small industries, and markets, as well as in upscale businesses, but usually in fewer numbers and lower positions than men. Many elementary school teachers are women, but men are more frequently teachers in secondary schools and universities. Men dominate all levels of government, though some women are found in various subordinate positions. The 2001–2004 president's cabinet has thirty-two ministers, only two of whom are women. President Megawati Sukarnoputri is a woman, though her following derives mainly from respect for her father, Sukarno, the leading nationalist and first president, rather than any of her achievements. She was opposed, unsuccessfully, by many Muslim leaders because of her gender.

Increasing urbanization and interregional migration in the 1980s and 1990s, the need felt by rural people to seek money in the city, weak urban infrastructure, and poor employment opportunities for many school graduates, put strains on families and marriages. After 1998, the fall of President Suharto, political instability, economic deterioration, decreasing law and order, and communal and religious violence in some areas added strain to family and kin networks in both urban and rural areas. However, they continue to be vital resources for supporting people in Indonesia.

See also: [ETHNIC VARIATION/ETHNICITY](#); [ISLAM](#); [KINSHIP](#)

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