

# The Role of Community Figures in Preventing Divorce: A Case Study in Pahonjean Village, Cilacap Regency, Central Java Province

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Quality families (consisting of quality human resources) in villages, is increasingly required in line with village development. Unfortunately, many divorces of village families are initiated by women for economic reasons. Examples of this exist in Pahonjean village, a part of Cilacap Regency, where divorce cases are considered the highest in Central Java Province. This research aims at examining the awareness level of community figures in Pahonjean village, related to divorce cases in their village and how to prevent them. The research respondents are 32 community figures. The data was collected using mixed methods. Quantitative data was collected using a questionnaire and qualitative data was collected through a focus group discussion. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data was used to sharpen the information. The research result shows that most community figures (71.9 percent) are not aware of the divorce phenomena in their village. Consequently, more than half of the respondents (59.3 percent), have not adopted preventive measures since socialisation is not required by the village government. According to the village government, the divorce administrative process does not involve the village government. Consequently, the village government does not have the data and there is no special agenda for socialisation. Therefore, the village government and community figures need to immediately socialise the community and drive the villagers' economy (particularly men) in the prevention of potential "divorce-prone family".

**Key words:** *Divorce, divorce-prone family, community figures.*

## Introduction

Currently, the Indonesian Government pays concentrated attention to village development in line with the implementation of village autonomy by providing villages with opportunities to manage their budget. This will be realised only if human resources (HRs) in the villages' (both village government and community) are of good quality. Therefore, they will be able to optimise chances and opportunities to develop the village, in line with existing technological advancement.

The basis of HRs formation required for development is family, since family is the essence of a community. Family has a number of strategic functions which are not replaceable by any other institution. Family is a vehicle in the formation of mega skills and moral virtues (Rich, 1997 and Popov, 1997) and is an embodiment of some departments such as education, health, and economy (Bennett as cited in Megawangi, 2000). Family may also become a vehicle for the creation of social capital, as a prerequisite to create a civil society (Fukuyama, 2009). Therefore, family's quality of HRs should be continuously improved for the sake of the village development.

In fact, the quality of families in villages' is currently declining in line with an increasing number of divorce cases occurring in villages (Indriani *et al.*, 2018; Djuwitaningsih, 2018; Matondang, 2014; Goldscheider & Goode, 1996). Therefore, preventive measures are needed to ensure such phenomenon do not spread, since divorces may harm the families themselves, particularly children; (Goldsmith & Smiley, 1981; Havermans, Botterman, & Matthijs, 2014; Bernardi & Radl, 2014; Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000; Ahiaoma, 2013; Mauki, 2016) and wives (Hoffman & Duncan, 1995; Tobin, 1987). Divorce also negatively contributes to the economic condition of the society (Smock *et al.*, 1999) and even the government (Klawitter & Garfinkel, 1992; Fagan & Rector, 2000; Fagan & Curchil, 2012).

One party which has good potential to change and guide villagers' is the community figures. The community figures are a group of people considered to have special positions in an area, they are known either for their formal positions or certain superiorities like seniority, expertise, and wealth. Until now, their roles were still considered important (Ananth Pur, 2007; Alatas, Pritchett, & Wetterberg, 2007), including in minimising poverty in villages (Amat Simin, Abdullah, & Ibrahim, 2015), preventing malaria cases (Shinta, Supratman Sukowati, 2012) and developing tourism (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2012; Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen, & Duangsaeng, 2014). However, community figures' roles in the prevention of divorce cases cannot be traced and therefore, this study is considered necessary.

Pahonjean Village is a village in Cilacap Regency with the highest number of divorce cases in the last few years in Central Java province, Indonesia. 7.50 percent out of the 76,355 divorce

cases in 2016 in Central Java province took place in Cilacap regency (5,723 cases) (Statistics Indonesia of Central Java Province, 2017). This high rate continues through to 2017 with an increasing contribution and number of cases to 7.76 percent or 5,550 cases (Statistics Indonesia of Central Java Province, 2018). The main causes of divorce in Cilacap regency are related to economic issues (73.98 percent), continuous quarrels (15.74 percent) and abandonment by spouses (8.98 percent) (Syahrial, 2018).

The number of divorce cases in Pahonjean Village is increasing. There were only 17 cases in 2017 (Religious Affairs Office of Majenang district, 2017), increasing to 36 cases in 2018 and increasing once again to 42 cases until August 2019. Although the 2018 and 2019 data is only in the form of the divorce process with no legal standing (in the form of Letter of Religious Court of Cilacap on Hearing Summons for those whose spouse applied for a divorce process to the Religious Court), but they commonly ended up with a divorce. In comparison with the number of marriages in 2018 of 178 marriages (Pahonjean Village Government, 2018), the rate of divorces was about 20.22 percent. Furthermore, until October 2019, the number increased to 26.75 percent.

In connection with the increasing number of divorce cases in Pahonjean Village, this research aims at examining: (1) community figures' level of awareness of divorce phenomena in their area, and (2) efforts conducted in prevention of divorce in their area.

## Literature Review

In villagers' life, the community figures take an important position, since they are deemed aware of anything and having a big influence on the community. Community figures are influential individuals and highly respected either for their position, capability or expertise, whose acts and opinions will be followed by the surrounding people (BKKBN, 2008; Ahira, 2007). Such figures may be identified from a number of characteristics: (1) they have wider social relationships than their followers, (2) they have certain expertise or knowledge more than most people, particularly their followers, and (3) they do not keep their knowledge and expertise only for themselves, but attempt to distribute this to others in need.

Community figures may be classified into two: formal and informal community figures. Formal community figures are individuals highly respected for their position in government institution, such as: district head, village head, head of neighbourhood or association/neighbourhood council. Informal figures are individuals highly respected by the people in their environment because of their influence, position and capability acknowledged by the people, such as: religious figures, custom figures, female figures, youth figures, etc.

Some researchers showed the importance of community figures for their role in maintaining serenity in a village. Research in Indonesia conducted by Nulhakim (2017) showed that an informal leader in Banggi Village, Central Java had a natural capability to build social capital, network, and trust of the community in vitalising socio-cultural and environmental values. Widodo (2009) also concluded that in Pemalang, Central Java, community figures served to give instruction, guidance, and find the best solution for suspects and victims of domestic violence, with amicable settlement.

Puspita, *et al.* (2016) found that the role played in efforts to prevent divorce by the head of neighbourhood association was highly needed. However, spouses mediated by the head, were commonly beyond help since they had insisted on divorce. Puspita, *et al.* (2018) also found that cadres of Family Empowerment and Welfare (PKK) organisations distributed throughout villages, were one party that served to empower family through monthly outreach for villagers (particularly wives) in their area.

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, Muhamad (1998) showed that local organisations played a significant role in the success and sustainability of economic development. March (2019) found that most of these local leaders were women who participated in changes. Meanwhile, Ananth Pur (2007) presents a more holistic approach to informal local government institutions (“ILGI”) in India, including their role in village government and service provision. This involves how they interact with Grama Panchayats, and implications of their existence and role in local democracy.

## **Methodology**

The respondents of this descriptive-quantitative research are 32 community figures, both formal and informal, who represent the elements of village council. The data was obtained through questionnaire, and enhanced with focus group discussion/FGD. The data was then analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency distribution and enhanced with qualitative data resulting from the focus group discussion.

## **Results & Discussion**

### ***Overview of Pahonjean Village***

Pahonjean Village is one of the villages in Majenang District, Cilacap Regency, five kilometers from the District Capital and 80 kilometres from the Regency Capital. The area is divided into 17 "Community Units (Rukun Warga/RW)" and 106 "Neighbourhood Units (Rukun Tetangga/RT)" areas. The population is 17,600 people where 56.65 percent population is at productive age (15-65 years). Of the 12,746 inhabitants recorded, most (33.67 percent)

attended kindergarten, followed by elementary school (31.40 percent) and junior high school (17.60 percent). Most of the population are farmers (3,084 people or 33.80 percent) and private employees (Pahonjean Village Government, 2019).

### ***Respondents' Profile***

The 32 respondents in this research consisted of 21 men (65.6 percent) and 11 women (34.4 percent). Most of them were 30-39 years old (37.5 percent) and 40-49 years old (28.1 percent). They are from various existing village councils in the village, including village officials, administrators of the Village Representative Body (BPD), Head of Community Units (RW), Head of Neighbourhood Units (RT), and administrators of Family Empowerment and Welfare (PKK) organisation and religious organisation of Nahdatul Ulama (NU). The respondents' age and councils of origin are presented below.

**Table 1:** Respondents' Age

Age	Qty.	%
<30	2	6.3
30 – 39	12	37.5
40 – 49	9	28.1
50 – 59	6	18.8
60+	3	9.4
Total	32	100

**Source:** processed from questionnaire

### ***General Awareness of Divorce Phenomenon***

The objective of marriage is to form a harmonious and happy family. In fact, not all couples are able to achieve this and they end up with a divorce. Since 2010, the phenomena arose in line with increasing number of divorce cases in many regions. The Statistics Indonesia's data showed that Central Java was one of the three provinces with the highest number of divorce cases.

In fact, the divorce phenomenon is not known to the respondents. With regard to divorce phenomenon at the national level, half of the respondents are not aware of the phenomenon. Only 28.1 percent are aware that the current phenomena increased and only 9.4 percent state that the phenomena increased drastically. The same awareness is shown at the Central Java province level, that almost half of the respondents (43.8 percent) are not aware of such phenomenon. The same level of awareness of the phenomena also occurred in the regency (Cilacap) and the district where they lived (Majenang), in which about half of them are not aware of these phenomena. It showed that about half of the respondents are not aware of the

divorce issues at the national, province, regency, district and village levels. The table below reveals the data.

**Table 3:** Respondents' Awareness of Divorce Phenomenon in Various Areas

Answer	Area							
	Indonesia		Central Java		Cilacap		Majenang	
	Qty.	%	Qty.	%	Qty.	%	Qty.	%
Not known	16	50.0	14	43.8	16	50.0	19	59.4
Normal	4	12.5	4	12.5	5	15.6	4	12.5
Increasing	9	28.1	13	40.6	9	28.1	9	28.1
Drastically increasing	3	9.4	1	3.1	2	6.3	0	0.0
Total	32	100	32	100	32	100	32	100

**Source:** processed from questionnaire

### *Awareness of Divorce Phenomena in Pahonjean Village*

Although the respondents generally stated that they were not aware for certain of the divorce phenomenon in the village, but they were generally aware enough of divorce cases in the village, particularly those in 2018-2019. Of the 20 cases successfully identified from the respondents, most of the cases (85 percent) were in the form of *cerai gugat* (the applicants for divorce were the wives). The remainder (15 percent) are *cerai talak* (applicants for divorce were the husbands). Most of the cases they were aware of occurred in their surrounding (within the same neighbourhood association), with both wives and husbands were mostly still at productive age, particularly 30-40 years old. Besides, most of the divorced couples (5 cases) were newly married young couples who had been married for less than 5 years. It means that the wives were still of productive age.

**Table 4:** Divorced Couples' Age

Age	Husband		Wife	
	Qty.	%	Qty.	%
20 – 29	2	10	5	25
30 – 39	8	40	7	35
Do not know	10	50	8	40
Total	20	100	20	100

**Source:** processed from questionnaire

Most of the divorce processes were managed by the applicants (mostly wives) with assistance of attorney by paying about IDR4 million. Other parties frequently asked for help were village officials, commonly “*kayim*”, who were previously (before amendment to village regulation) marriage registrars.

**Table 5:** Parties who help the divorce process

Parties who help the divorce process	Qty.	%
Village official	4	
Attorney	11	55
Others	5	25
Total	20	100

**Source:** processed from questionnaire

Most of the divorced couples were from the poor family, as may be identified from their education level (both husbands and wives were Elementary School and Junior High School graduates). The husbands mostly worked as labours and farmers, while the wives mostly did not work. That these many husbands worked as labours and farmers were likely to be one of the causes of their divorce, which was mostly initiated by the wives. This may be observed from the respondents' information that 55 percent of the known divorced couples got divorce for the economic reasons. The others were caused by the "third party".

**Table 6:** Type of employments of divorced couples

Employment	Husband		Wife	
	Qty.	%	Qty.	%
Labour	9	45	4	20
Merchant	2	10	1	5
Musician	1	5	0	0
Teacher	0	-	2	10
Farmer	3	15	0	0
Housewife	0	-	8	40
Do not know	5	25	5	25
Total	20	100	20	100

**Source:** processed from questionnaire

Divorce generally has negative impact on family, particularly children. In the respondents' opinion, divorces in their village mostly made children lose attention and were even abandoned, that they were usually taken care by their mother or grandmother. Meanwhile, of a number of impacts of divorce on respective party that the respondents were aware of, divorce psychologically had good impacts on the wives and husbands. However, there were also cases that divorce became a solution, that each found replacement spouse after divorce.

**Table 7:** Impacts of divorce on wives and husbands

Impact of divorce	Wife		Husband	
	Qty.	%	Qty.	%
1. depression	1	5	0	0
2. suffering	1	5	0	0
3. trauma	1	5	0	0
4. gets wilder	1	5	0	0
5. becomes Female Migrant Worker	1	5	0	0
6. remarry	2	10	2	10
7. becomes shabby	0	-	1	5
8. gets drunk	0	-	1	5
9. takes it as fate	0	-	1	5
10. working in other region	0	-	1	5
11. gets sick	0	-	1	5
12. do not know	13	65	13	65
Total	20	100	20	100

The impacts of divorce were also felt at Village Government level in the form of additional load of citizenship administrative services. For example, changes in marital status on Residential Identity Card and Family Card.

### Preventive Measures

The respondents were community figures, particularly for their formal position, both in village administration and social religious organisation. With regard to the increasing divorce rate in the village, more than half of respondents (78.2 percent) agreed that preventive measures were necessary. The reason was to prevent it from re-happening, and thus prevent children from becoming victims.

**Table 8:** Necessity to prevent divorce in Pahonjean Village

Qty.	Qty.	%
No answer	7	21.9
Necessary	19	59.4
Highly necessary	6	18.8
Total	32	100

**Source:** processed from questionnaire

In fact, however, more than half of the respondents (59.3 percent) had not made any effort to prevent it. This commonly happened with those who lack of awareness of this phenomenon

and who did not find many cases in their residential environment. Meanwhile, some respondents made preventive measures by giving advice. Such effort was usually unsuccessful since the couples (one party) had made up their mind to divorce. A respondent, who was the head of the community empowerment agency, stated

“It is relatively frequent ... Like the domestic violence previously occurring right on the west of my house. Quarrelling and even beating, grabbing the other’s hair and banging it to the wall. Yes, the husband was the one who did it. Afterwards, the husband came to my house. The motif is (wife’s) jealousy. I then visited the wife to learn about the problem and then confronted it for the best solution. I suggested the husband to be patient and not to give any comment until the situation calmed down. ... I also suggested the families to have both parties calming down. ... But it was quite troublesome, just like taking care of young children.”

Some respondents agreed that preventive measures are made by arranging formal regulation in the form of village regulation (*perdes*), such as *perdes* on family resilience. The reason was for the village government to get directly involved in and to involve existing social community agencies in the village. In addition, victims of domestic violence (mostly wives and children) need to be protected. However, it was acknowledged that this was not something easy to do, since there was no regional regulation at regency level to refer to.

## Discussion

Based on the explanation above, it is clear that the respondents are basically not aware of the divorce phenomenon existing beyond their residential area (at subdistrict, regency, province and national levels). However, they are relatively aware of the divorce phenomenon in the village. Some divorce cases successfully identified in the village generally occurred with couples of productive age and reproductive age (wives) of poor families. This phenomenon strengthened previous research (Nayyiroh, 2010; Astuty, 2011; Matondang, 2014; Mukhrosin, 2014; Purnama, *et al.*, 2013; Kaplan & Herbst, 2015).

The impacts of divorce on public service processes in Pahonjean Village were also found by Puspita, *et al.*, (2016). More comprehensive impacts were found by Fagan & Rector (2000) in a large study of divorce phenomena in America, of which divorce rate was almost half of the marriages. Divorce did not only influence such families (particularly children), but also surrounding community and even local government. With regard to health, divorce degraded children’s health conditions, which eventually influenced their life expectancy. Divorce also influenced related parties’ behaviour, emotion and psychology, and even led them to suicide. Other impacts that significantly increased include crimes, violence, abandonment, and drug abuse which in turn increases the fund the Government must spend to solve them.

The reason for community figures' lesser role in Pahonjean Village in such preventive measures (particularly the village government) was that divorce processes currently did not need a recommendation letter from the head of the neighbourhood association, or the head of the neighbourhood council and village. Anyone who wanted to apply for divorce might directly submit the application to the religious court of Cilacap, which was about 80 km away from the village. Therefore, they generally (mostly wives) asked others' help, such as attorneys and *kayim*, while the head of the neighbourhood association had a strategic function which is the leader of the lowest level of government (under neighbourhood council and head of village). This means that they were the most reliable person for the first stage "prevention" for couples who showed symptoms of disharmony. As found by Puspita, *et al.* (2014), the head of the neighbourhood association might be relied on to help family planning outreach processes and other various family issues, particularly among men.

A relatively comprehensive measure of divorce prevention might be made through arrangement of the village regulation (*perdes*), such as the *perda*, on family resilience. With formal rules, all elements (particularly the village government) might include this effort in village development planning processes. This would not only serving as a form of preventive measure (such as, in the form of outreach for various parties and prevention of emerging "economically divorce-prone family's"), it might also handle poor families. This effort was more possible with the existing village fund of almost one billion directly provided to village governments.

## **Conclusion**

According to the explanation above, we might conclude that the divorce phenomenon in Pahonjean Village mostly occurred with young couples of poor families. This confirms the divorce phenomena in villages found in previous studies. The community figures' low awareness of divorce phenomenon in the village caused their lack of concern to prevent it.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that all village components get involved in the process of prevention and handling of divorces occurring in their area. It is suggested that the village form regulations regarding this issue. In addition, village funds may be optimised, which has not yet been utilised for community empowerment.



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