



# Exploitation of Dowry Against Muslim Women In Papua

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*The dowry has often been a trigger for domestic violence due to misunderstandings surrounding its purpose. It is assumed that once the husband has paid the dowry to the wife, he has full rights over her. This research aims to explore how dowry exploitation occurs among the Yelipele indigenous people. The study employs qualitative research with a sociological-normative approach, focusing on the Yelipele Muslim indigenous society in Jayapura. The findings indicate that injustice and violence, such as physical and psychological abuse by men, persist due to dowry payments. This violence is rooted in the dominance of traditional customs, the patriarchal system, lack of education, and the inability to control emotions.*

Mahar kawin seringkali dijadikan pemicu terjadinya tindak kekerasan di dalam rumah tangga. Hal ini disebabkan karena pemahaman tentang mahar kawin tidak difahami secara utuh. Seperti anggapan bahwa ketika suami sudah membayarkan mas kawin kepada isteri maka seorang suami sudah menganggap memiliki hak penuh apa yang ada pada seorang isteri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bentuk-bentuk eksploitasi terhadap pembayaran mahar kawin yang dilakukan oleh masyarakat adat Yelipele. Penelitian ini menggunakan jenis penelitian kualitatif dengan pendekatan Normatif Sosiologis yang mengambil lokasi di Jayapura dengan obyek penelitian masyarakat adat muslim Yelipele. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa masih adanya ketidakadilan dan tindak kekerasan yang disebabkan oleh pembayaran mahar pada masyarakat adat seperti kekerasan fisik dan psikis oleh laki-laki. Adanya tindak kekerasan karena pembayaran mahar ini disebabkan karena hegemoni adat, sistem patriarki, pendidikan dan kurangnya kemampuan mengendalikan emosi.

## **Introduction**

The dowry (*mahar*) practiced in marriages has often exploited the position of women in their daily lives. This exploitation is evident in the belief that a woman whose dowry has been paid becomes the property of the man and is cut off from her family. This aligns with the statement made by Suparto Iribaram, who said that dowries are frequently used as a tool to force wives to work and provide for their livelihoods (Suparto Iribaram, personal communication, August 2021). This kind of exploitation of women occurs due to traditional practices, particularly marriage rituals. Such views essentially place women in a subordinate position to men, as observed in the research by Nisa (Nisa & Rahmita, 2018). The reality of this hegemony is further emphasized by individualistic theory, which states that aggressive behavior and acts of violence are part of male identity (Nisa & Rahmita, 2018).

While several studies have addressed the exploitation of women, they have generally focused on three main aspects: exploitation, domestication, and violence experienced by women. The exploitation of women is discussed in the work of Imam Syafi'i, who explains the various forms of harassment faced by women, stressing the need for government protection of women's dignity (Syafé'i, 2015). On the other hand, research on domestication is found in Yuliatin's writings, which highlight the equality of rights and status between men and women as stated in the Quran, Surah Al-Hujurat: 13 and Surah An-Nahl: 97, and the independence of women as based on the Quran, Surah At-Tahrim: 11 (Yuliatin, 2019). Meanwhile, Nisa's writings illustrate that the most common form of violence experienced by women is psychological violence, which is difficult to identify as it is not visible (Nisa & Rahmita, 2018).

This research is based on the argument that the exploitation of women due to traditional reasons, legitimized by religion and culture, occurs among indigenous Muslim communities in Papua, particularly the Yelipele people. The exploitation in these communities is driven by three factors: first, the strong hegemony of customs that treat women as objects; second, the patriarchal culture in Papua, which limits women's freedom and independence; and third, the inadequate legal literacy in these communities. These three factors are the main causes of exploitation in society. The understanding of dowry as a requirement for a valid marriage is actually intended to honor and elevate the dignity of women, as historically, before Islam, women were seen merely as objects of male gratification. Women's rights were ignored and often

violated (Syawqi, 2016). It is at this point that Islam intervened to provide guidance for human relationships, particularly between husband and wife.

In Islam, giving dowry to women is a sign of piety and a form of respect valued highly by Allah (al-Bājūri, 1999). Therefore, understanding the meaning of dowry for achieving family harmony, as taught by religion, is a duty for married couples, especially men. Hence, good communication in determining the dowry between the prospective husband and wife is crucial to prevent any negative impact from the dowry payment. The amount of dowry should be agreed upon by the bride's family and must be approved by the bride (Al-Sabuni, 2007).

Moreover, the dowry given to the bride must meet the criteria set by Islamic law. The items given should be obtained through halal means and not from prohibited sources. The items should also be valuable, clear, and not obtained by wrongful means, such as stealing. These criteria must be understood by men, as dowries are not just trivial items but should be valuable and significant. Thus, if the dowry is regarded as valuable, the person receiving it—women—should also be valued and protected.

The approach used in this study is a normative-sociological approach. The normative approach is used to examine the norms within customary dowry practices that cause violence and injustice in the family. Meanwhile, the sociological approach is used to analyze the social background of the community, particularly the Yelipele indigenous people.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is field research conducted in Jayapura City. The nature of this research is descriptive-analytical (Aswar, 2009), aiming to describe and analyze the views of Muslim figures in Papua, particularly the indigenous leaders of the Yelipele clan, regarding the function and purpose of dowry payments, which are believed to contribute to inequality and injustice in families. This study addresses three important issues: the forms of exploitation of Muslim women in Papua, the factors influencing this exploitation, and the implications for women, all of which stem from the impact of dowry payments. The data collection process in this research is divided into several stages, including interviews, documentation, and data triangulation. The informants involved in this study are six individuals, consisting of religious leaders and indigenous leaders from the Yelipele clan of Papua.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### **Papuan Women in a Family Setting**

The lives of indigenous Papuan women in maintaining and sustaining their households are often seen as “different” from women in general. One of the issues is that they continue to face violence in their homes, both physical and psychological (Arifin, 2016). This statement aligns with Suparto’s observation that violence against indigenous Papuan women still occurs, although the causes are varied (Suparto Iribaram, personal communication, August 2021). While violence against indigenous Papuan women remains prevalent, the scale has diminished compared to the 1980s (B. Yelipele, personal communication, 2023). Several references confirm that violence against indigenous Papuan women still happens, where women do not have the same opportunity to fully participate in decision-making. This often relates to basic issues in their lives concerning customs, ethnicity, family, and individual roles (Majelis Rakyat Papua & Perempuan, 2009).

On the other hand, the obligation to treat husbands and wives fairly and equitably, and to build a just household, is a command in religion (Qur’an, 4:19). If this command is carried out justly and fairly, the marriage will become ideal and bring blessings to the couple. Women, mothers, and children often carry heavier workloads compared to men. After working hard in the fields, they are still tasked with carrying firewood for cooking, produce from the fields, and, if they have children, they bring their children to the field, carrying them on their shoulders along with their harvest and farming tools. Girls, too, are raised and trained from a young age to bear the same burdens as their mothers (Widjojo, 2012). Wives and children are part of the family that should be cared for and protected. Ideally, husbands and wives complement and cooperate with each other in their family roles—raising children, providing affection, offering proper education for the future, and protecting one another. When these roles fail, it can cause imbalances in the family and lead to psychological impacts on children, as noted by Horn and Sylvester, cited by Nurazidawati Mohamad Arsad (Arsad et al., 2017).

Maintaining family unity is not easy, especially for those who bear dual responsibilities, such as many indigenous Papuan women who juggle raising children, earning a living, and fulfilling their duties as wives, who are expected to be obedient to their husbands daily. Such struggles are indeed challenging, but with patience, this can elevate the status of the family in God’s eyes. Essentially, humans

are expected to be cultured, mobile, responsible, and aware of their limitations. Thus, they realize they cannot do more without the help of others (Marit, 2016). From this perspective, we see that many Muslim Papuan women still experience these dual burdens, particularly the “mama-mama” (indigenous Papuan women) who sell at markets and on the streets, especially in Jayapura.

### **Exploitation of Dowry Payments for Muslim Papuan Women**

The dowry (*mahar*) is a mandatory gift from the groom to the bride as a sign of sincerity and devotion, aimed at fostering love in the bride’s heart. This dowry can be in the form of goods or services (such as freeing slaves, teaching knowledge, etc.). In Papua, dowry payments can sometimes take the form of “*wam*” (bride price), even among Muslim communities (H. Yelipele, personal communication, 2023). Providing dowry is a condition for the legitimacy of marriage, with the goal of establishing a happy and lasting family based on faith in God Almighty (Raharjo, 2017a). Maintaining harmony in marriage is a shared obligation. Interacting with family, creating harmonious relationships, playing, and enjoying time together are part of mutual rights (Basyir, 1999). In such an atmosphere, a family can become the ideal household every couple dream of.

Understanding the meaning and purpose of marriage is sometimes not fully grasped by many in the community. Issues arise from the misunderstanding of marital requirements, rights, and responsibilities, which results in the failure to achieve the noble values of marriage. This can be seen in the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse (Pristiandaru et al., 2024). The causes of such violence and abuse are many, ranging from misunderstandings between spouses to a lack of knowledge about the values of marriage. As explained by Haji Asri Yelepele, a member of the indigenous mountain community, the lack of knowledge about marriage is a significant factor, especially regarding dowry for indigenous Papuan women, which some perceive as excessively high (Muslimin Yelipele, personal communication, October 2022). When the purpose of marriage is understood, exploitation and possessiveness will not occur. Factors such as misunderstanding, impatience, lack of education, and the desire to control women can lead to domestic violence, as explained by Semi Hisage.

*“A woman must be obedient and understand men, or else she can be beaten. But if she obeys, men will be happy and respect her—there will be mutual respect”* (Semi

Hisage Yelipele, personal communication, October 2022). This statement illustrates the reality faced by many in Papua. It becomes clear that when couples understand, respect, and appreciate each other, harmony in the family can be achieved.

Forms of exploitation in a family, caused by various factors, often result in psychological pressure on family members. The occurrence of violence within families is attributed to some of the factors mentioned above. However, as Muslimin Yelipele explained, violence, abuse, and discrimination against women are closely linked to the lack of understanding about relationships and marriage (Muslimin Yelipele, personal communication, October 2022). His statement is echoed by Haji Yelipele, who added that misunderstandings, lack of patience, insufficient education, and the feeling of dominance can lead to fractures in a marriage (H. Yelipele, personal communication, 2023). These factors often lead to physical violence by husbands toward their wives. As Semi Hisage Yelipele stated, slapping a wife who fails in her duties is seen as “normal” for men.

*“For example, if the wife neglects to feed the livestock, a man might beat her. There may be many relatives or children at home, and she doesn’t cook, just spends time fixing her hair. Mealtime has passed, but she hasn’t served the family. Even though the kitchen is fully stocked, she doesn’t cook, so she deserves to be slapped”* (Semi Hisage Yelipele, personal communication, October 2022).

Hisage’s explanation suggests that when a wife is not fulfilling her responsibilities, such actions are considered justified. However, the purpose of marriage is to build a happy, everlasting household based on faith in God Almighty (Raharjo, 2017b). Any behavior that disrupts this purpose, no matter the form, is not acceptable. Marriage is meant to reconcile differences between partners, to have children, create peace, and preserve societal values (Zuhaili, 2010), as emphasized in the Quran, Surah Al-Rum: 21.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

Social, political, and economic factors often pose separate challenges for women but can also determine their participation (Yamani, 2000). Unequal role distribution between husband and wife can lead to feelings of injustice, which often results in physical conflicts. As Muslimin Yelipele noted:

*“After politics entered, many men shifted their focus to the city. This meant that men could no longer be relied upon, forcing women to work harder. This is a ‘transition’”* (Muslimin Yelipele, personal communication, September 11, 2022).

Haji Yelipele further explained that this imbalance in roles stems from unstable political conditions, which in turn impact the psychological well-being of women. In addition, political instability has contributed to the burden of dual roles borne by many Muslim Papuan women (Muslimin Yelipele, personal communication, September 11, 2022). Consequently, these unstable conditions affect family food security. Furthermore, the excessive interpretation and exploitation of dowries (*mahar*) continue to occur in Muslim Papuan communities, particularly affecting women. This issue contributes to domestic violence cases, as men often feel entitled to dominate women after paying dowries, leading to forced behavior and even verbal domestic violence (Suparto Iribaram, personal communication, Agustus 2021). These issues are frequently faced by Muslim Papuan women, as confirmed by Hasri, a member of the indigenous Muslim community in Papua (H. Yelipele, personal communication, 2023).

With such assumptions, what Muslim said has an impact on women's psychology. It is not uncommon for men, when facing problems, to easily scold women even over trivial matters (Muslimin Yelipele, 2022). One reason for this is that men often feel superior to their partners. According to Muslim, such problems can indeed affect women's mental, emotional, and even physical well-being. One of the most common impacts of men's pressure on women, according to Blascovich, is a decrease in self-esteem. When women frequently feel pressured, judged, or compared, they tend to feel isolated and alone. This can trigger feelings of worthlessness, contributing to low self-confidence and shaping their self-image as housewives (Wijayati et al., 2020). Meanwhile, according to Irma, pressure from men, especially in unhealthy relationships between men and women, can cause women to feel isolated. This isolation can make them emotionally dependent on their partners. Such isolation can also have further psychological effects, as women lose support from their families, which can negatively impact their activities and well-being (Muhsen, 2023).

### **Factors Leading to the Exploitation of Women**

In social and cultural contexts, every society will inevitably experience changes in its life. These changes can be influenced by the mindset and values present in the

community. As societal perspectives and ways of thinking advance, communities become more open to accepting advancements in knowledge. Therefore, education plays a crucial role in transforming the social order within a community. Education is essential for advancing social systems, both in physical and non-physical aspects. It also plays a significant role in fostering harmonious relationships within families. As Muslimin Yelipele states, education is crucial in shaping an individual's character. However, he also emphasizes that not all education can effectively improve a person's character. It is education that upholds noble values, rooted in traditions and religion, that can change negative character traits and poor cultural practices (Muslimin Yelipele, personal communication, September 11, 2022).

Domestic violence is closely linked to how family members manage their emotions. Cultural habits and traditions in a particular area significantly influence family interactions. The customs governing communication within a cultural setting greatly affect how couples relate to their families. As Soepomo points out, to understand customary law in a region, one must recognize how practitioners are influenced by that law (Soepomo, 2003). Muslimin Yelipele reinforces this by noting that customary practices vary widely between regions, exemplified by Javanese and Papuan customs. He explains that Javanese customs tend to be more composed, unlike those in Papua. However, not all Javanese customs are calm (Muslimin Yelipele, personal communication, September 11, 2022). His statement illustrates that cultural "hegemony" also influences the exploitation of women. This aligns with Mansur Faki's assertion that gender bias leading to the subordination and exploitation of women arises from social systems, cultural norms, and interpretations of religious teachings in society (Faki, 2008).

The hegemony over women, resulting in marginalization and subordination, particularly among Muslim women in Papua, is largely driven by the persistence of patriarchal ideologies in society. This results in men feeling a sense of ownership over women (H. Yelipele, personal communication, 2023). Additionally, factors stemming from marriage, such as high dowry payments, contribute to this hegemony. Muslimin Yelipele asserts that one reason for violence against Muslim women in Papua is the dominance of customary practices (Muslimin Yelipele, personal communication, September 11, 2022). The persistence of traditional customs in certain regions often creates specific challenges for women. Cultural dominance can also be exploited by those in power to oppress the weaker party, typically women, using norms that are biased against them. Badrika notes that a misinterpretation of customs can lead to

disharmony in family dynamics, even resulting in domestic violence (B. Yelipele, personal communication, 2023).

On the other hand, gender differences shaped by social and cultural constructs are relative, mutable, and influenced by time and region, depending on the awareness and understanding of the community (Jalil & Aminah, 2018). However, these differences can persist if the root causes are not addressed. Unresolved issues can lead to various problems within families, including those related to social and cultural systems, misinterpretations of cultural and religious teachings, and beliefs in cultural doctrines. Therefore, as Muslimin suggests, knowledge developed through education is crucial in shaping and improving one's character (Muslimin Yelipele, personal communication, October 2022). It can be said that domestic violence, particularly that involving physical abuse and exploitation of women, is often caused by internal factors such as a lack of knowledge about marriage, impatience in resolving conflicts, and an overbearing sense of ownership. External factors, as Muslimin Yelipele mentions, include political instability and the influence of local cultural hegemony.

Cultural hegemony within a society can subtly and unconsciously influence family behavior and dynamics. When a culture dominates societal norms, values, and beliefs, these become the standards followed by the community, affecting family life. The strong influence of culture can shape the roles and dynamics within a family. Generally, cultural hegemony impacts almost all aspects of family life, from individual characteristics to the dynamics between family members. Hasri argues that harmful cultural influences should not be followed, as culture is meant to promote goodness (H. Yelipele, personal communication, 2023). Hasri adds that cultural influences are particularly strong in Papua, so people must choose which cultural practices to embrace and which to reject, as it is impossible to adopt everything (H. Yelipele, personal communication, 2023). This statement aligns with traditional principles, as harmful cultural practices contradicting human values should not be upheld.

The negative hegemony of tradition, for example, is the belief that the presence of women in a family is considered irrational beings, leading to the notion that they do not need a high level of education and do not have to possess leadership skills. In certain jobs, women's abilities are often overlooked and doubted (Wati & Saifulloh, 2020). Such actions and beliefs are certainly very offensive and demeaning to women, resulting in a hierarchical position where women are seen as inferior

and men as superior. These actions are the root of problems in domestic life. Men take a dominant position without considering and understanding their partner's position. Therefore, what Badrika stated is that building a family involves equal rights between men and women that must be shared and shouldered together (B. Yelipele, personal communication, 2023).

### **Implications of Dowry Payment**

The payment of dowry in a marriage is part of the mandatory requirements that must be fulfilled in a marriage. Thus, allowing an intimate relationship between husband and wife becomes halal in the view of religion. It is mandatory for a husband to give the agreed-upon dowry to his wife once the marriage has been consummated (Ridwan, 2020). The provision of dowry to a woman is not merely seen as a transaction, but rather as a form of responsibility, affection, and respect towards women (Sabiq, 2006). Therefore, the giving of dowry is a sign of seriousness from a man towards a woman, to take responsibility, to care for, protect, provide security, love, and the ability to provide a decent living.

The dowry is an obligation for the husband that must be fulfilled, as it represents respect and dignity for a wife. On the contrary, viewing the dowry as a mere transaction for pleasure can lead to a husband feeling a sense of ownership and control over his wife. If this happens, there is a potential for exploitation and a lack of appreciation for the wife. As stated by Haji Muslimin Yelipele, it is not uncommon for the payment of dowry to be interpreted as a transactional agreement, leading many men to feel a sense of ownership over their wives, often expressed in phrases like "Oh, that's my right because I have bought her," which can come from men who feel they have purchased their wives with dowries, whether large or small (M. Yelipele, personal communication, September 10, 2022).

On the other hand, the obligation to pay dowry should not be viewed solely in terms of the nominal amount or the size of the dowry to be paid to a woman, but should be understood as a reflection of how Allah and His Messenger honor women, as stated by Sayyid Sābiq (Sābiq, 2008). This understanding is crucial for achieving the goal of creating a harmonious family, based on Surah An-Nisa, verses 4 and 34 (Sābiq, 2008). Sayyid Sābiq's statement aligns with what Alimin Yelipele emphasizes: if the giving of dowry is seen as a form of worship, then in marriage, there is no perception that a man owns a woman, thereby preventing any acts of

violence, whether verbal or non-verbal. According to Alimin, the essence of dowry payment should protect the dignity of a woman both physically and emotionally, as well as financially.

Furthermore, the implications of dowry payments for women should affect the obedience of the wife to the husband and vice versa. Both parties should reciprocate with kindness, respect, and love, rather than the opposite. If this is not the case, the desired household relationship will not be achieved, according to Alimin Yelipele. His explanation aligns with Faqih's assertion that the root of family problems stems from an inability to understand religious and cultural teachings properly. Faqih rightly states that social and cultural systems, as well as erroneous interpretations of culture and religion, become the root causes of household issues, such as violence, subordination, stereotypes, and marginalization. Thus, Muslim Yelipele argues that the implications of dowry should create harmony and tranquility within the household. When individuals understand the value of dowry, they will develop love, affection, and a sense of belonging, preventing them from treating their wives poorly (M. Yelipele, personal communication, September 10, 2022).

In some cases, excessively high or low dowries can lead to social stigma. If a man provides a dowry considered too low, it can generate negative perceptions about his abilities in marriage. Conversely, a dowry that is excessively high may be seen as wasteful or as the family of the bride 'selling' their daughter (Syafe'i, 2015). Therefore, according to Cluster, as quoted by Aniq, the implications of dowry payments can affect the functioning of household life (Yasrony, 2022). Generally, according to Khusnul and Ita, dowry payments can have various implications in marriage. First, there are economic implications; dowry payments can be seen as an initial investment in married life. In some cultures, for example, dowries can take the form of valuable assets like gold, land, cash, or other valuable items that can be used by the wife for personal needs or as family savings. This can serve as an economic guarantee in marriage, particularly if issues arise in the future (Asma et al., 2024).

*Second*, there are implications for financial burdens. The dowry payment, as Wahyudi states, can significantly affect the husband's financial burden; the demand for a high dowry can be a substantial financial strain on a prospective husband, especially if he comes from a modest economic background. In such situations, men may need to borrow money or save for years to meet this family obligation, which can negatively impact the family's economic condition (Wahyudi et al., 2019).

Hasri also mentioned that economic influences within the family can significantly affect family harmony. He stated that such impacts could occur due to a lack of understanding between men and women regarding the appropriate amount of dowry. Hasri emphasized the need for good communication between both parties in determining the dowry amount to be borne by the man, as not all men have the same financial capabilities (H. Yelipele, personal communication, 2023).

*Third*, there are psychological implications. Excessively high dowry payments can also influence the dynamics of the husband-wife relationship, especially if there is dissatisfaction with the amount or type of dowry requested by the wife (Asma et al., 2024). Such dissatisfaction is vulnerable to creating issues that lead to disappointment toward the wife. This can also generate tension, resulting in discrimination against the partner. In contrast, if the dowry is given and accepted sincerely and according to mutual agreement, it can enhance appreciation and satisfaction in the household relationship. A dowry given with sincerity can strengthen the emotional bond between husband and wife and increase mutual respect and love in the marriage. Conversely, as Muslimin pointed out, misconceptions regarding dowry payments often still persist among men. “The interpretation of dowry payments often leads husbands to view their wives as inferior, as they believe they fully possess their wives.”

As an essential element of marriage, dowry not only serves as a condition for the legitimacy of the marriage but also has significant impacts on the social, economic, and psychological dynamics of the couple. Therefore, it is crucial for both parties to understand and agree on the dowry with careful consideration, ensuring that it truly becomes a blessing in their married life. The significance of the dowry provided by the man should foster a strong bond in the marriage. It should not lead to polemics in the family relationship. Thus, it is also important to understand the essence of a dowry to build a solid and robust household relationship, where mutual respect exists between husband and wife.

## CONCLUSION

From this research results, the author concludes that exploitation arising from dowry payments in the indigenous Papuan community still occurs. Additionally, issues of exploitation related to dowry stem from low education levels and the husband's inability to manage emotions. Moreover, discrimination is also influenced

by cultural hegemony and the prevailing patriarchal system. This is evidenced by ongoing violence inflicted by spouses, both physically and psychologically. Furthermore, the discrimination and injustice experienced by couples are also due to the high ego of men, cultural hegemony, and the perception that dowry payments made by a husband to a wife are seen as a transaction. This leads to the belief among husbands that they have full rights to “control” their wives. Such beliefs often result in subordination, physical abuse, injustice, and other actions experienced by the wife within the household. Therefore, to avoid these problems, quoting Alimin Yelipele’s statement, every couple should adhere to cultural norms and engage in discussions, providing input and reminders for good communication between partners and within their communities.

On the other hand, the implications of dowry payments occur due to a lack of understanding of the essence of dowry, which can lead to psychological issues for the couple. Additionally, it can also have adverse effects on unhealthy economic pressures. It is essential for couples to carefully consider and agree on the dowry based on mutual capabilities and agreements so that dowry can serve as a foundation that strengthens, rather than weakens, their household life.

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