

# Power Relations Between Husband and Wife in Interfaith Families in Pancasila Village

Komunitas: International Journal of Indonesian Society and Culture  
17 (2) (2025): 138-156  
DOI: 10.15294/komunitas.v17i2.31610  
© 2025 Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia  
p-ISSN 2086-5465 | e-ISSN 2460-7320  
Web: <https://journal.unnes.ac.id/journals/komunitas>

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## Abstract

Research on interfaith families has largely emphasized legal frameworks and institutional constraints, often portraying them as fragile or conflict-ridden. Less attention has been given to how interfaith households negotiate power and intimacy in daily life, particularly within rural settings where pluralism has long been practiced. This article examines power relations between husbands and wives in interfaith families in Kapencar Village, Wonosobo, Indonesia. The study argues that power in such households is not simply hierarchical but negotiated through everyday practices that generate resilience and cohesion. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and participant observation with twelve interfaith families representing Muslim, Christian, Catholic, and Hindu backgrounds. The analysis highlights negotiations across religious transmission, economic collaboration, reproductive decision-making, parenting, and cultural rituals. Findings show that while relations appear egalitarian on the surface, deeper structures reveal ongoing contestation and adaptation that transform potential conflict into stability. This study contributes to family and interfaith scholarship by demonstrating that negotiation is not a deficit but a productive practice sustaining plural households. It redefines interfaith families as microcosms of pluralism and resilience, offering a lens to rethink family studies beyond legal and doctrinal concerns and toward the politics of everyday life.

## Keywords

gender negotiation; interfaith family; pancasila village; pluralism; power relations

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## INTRODUCTION

Research on interfaith families has expanded significantly over the past two decades, yet most scholarly contributions continue to revolve around legal frameworks, demographic trends, and social tensions (Richmond, 2015). These studies have documented how interreligious marriages are often perceived as sites of vulnerability, where women may be disadvantaged, kinship structures disrupted, and communal boundaries contested (Cerchiaro, 2022). In Indonesia, discussions of interfaith families remain dominated by legal debates concerning the Marriage Law of 1974 and the Constitutional Court's deliberations on religious authority (Gemilang, Firmanda, Maghfirah, Lastfitriani, & Hakimi, 2023; Sidqi & Rasidin, 2023). While these approaches illuminate the institutional constraints, they often understate the everyday negotiations of intimacy, power, and care that unfold within households. This imbalance has left a gap in understanding how pluralism is lived, enacted, and reproduced through family relations at the micro-social level.

Against this backdrop, this article formulates three interconnected problem statements. At a (1) descriptive level, the question is: how do interfaith families in Kapencar organize daily life and household decision-making in ways that appear egalitarian on the surface? At a (2) critical level, the issue becomes: what dynamics of contestation, symbolic struggle, and hidden negotiations underpin these surface arrangements?; Finally, at a (3) transformative level, the inquiry extends to: how can the experiences of Kapencar's interfaith families reframe prevailing narratives about religious pluralism, challenge stigmatization, and inform policy on interfaith marriage? Together, these problem statements shift attention away from normative judgments toward a deeper appreciation of power relations within family structures, not as static arrangements but as dynamic and productive processes (Foucault, 1977)

The study aims to accomplish three objectives. First, it seeks to document empirically the everyday practices of interfaith

families in Kapencar village. Second, it aims to analyze the relational dynamics between husbands and wives by examining how equality and authority are constructed, negotiated, and symbolized. Third, it intends to theorize these dynamics as both local practices and potential counter-narratives to dominant discourses in Indonesian society. By situating household-level findings within broader national and global debates, this article demonstrates how a micro-case can yield transformative insights for family sociology, gender studies, and the anthropology of religion (Sawitri & Alfiasari, 2023)

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative design rooted in ethnographic sensibilities, combining in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. This approach allows for triangulation and provides access to multiple voices, husbands, wives, religious leaders, and village elders. Archival sources, such as local government documents and media reports, complement these primary data. Such a design responds to long-standing calls to refine qualitative rigor in family studies by embedding analysis in the lived experiences of participants while maintaining reflexivity about the researcher's role (Wright, et al., 2024)

In engaging existing literature, the article builds on and departs from prior research in critical ways. Scholarship has often emphasized either the vulnerability of interfaith families (Warner Colaner C. , Atkin, Elkhaid, Minniear, & Soliz, 2022) or their potential to destabilize social cohesion (Jayadi, 2025). This study, by contrast, treats families not merely as sites of tension but as loci of resilience and innovation. Inspired by symbolic interactionism (O'Neill, 2023) and enriched by feminist accounts of power in households (Doss, 2021), the analysis considers how spouses co-create meanings and practices that sustain pluralism. Such an approach suggests an implicit hypothesis: that power relations in Kapencar families are simultaneously egalitarian and contested, producing a unique form of negotiated pluralism.

The theoretical framing of this ar-

ticle draws selectively from Foucault's concept of power as relational and productive, Bourdieu's notion of habitus and symbolic capital, and Gramsci's reflections on hegemony and counter-hegemony. Yet rather than treating these as competing grand theories, they are deployed heuristically to illuminate different layers of the data: micro-interactions, household structures, and community narratives. The direction of analysis is thus inductive yet theoretically informed, allowing Kapencar's empirical realities to speak back to theory.

Studying interfaith families in Kapencar is significant for several disciplinary reasons. From a sociological perspective, it enriches debates on family diversity by foregrounding religious pluralism as an axis of analysis (Bouma, Halafoff, & Barton, 2022). From an anthropological vantage point, it highlights how local communities domesticate potentially divisive differences and render them ordinary (Rosidah, Putra, & Azisi, 2023). From a policy standpoint, it provides grounded evidence that may inform more inclusive approaches to interfaith marriage in Indonesia. More broadly, the case contributes to global family studies by showing how pluralism can be sustained not only in institutions but also in the intimate spaces of everyday life.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to explore the dynamics of power relations in interfaith families in Kapencar village, Wonosobo. A case study is appropriate because it enables a holistic investigation of a bounded system [here, interfaith households and their surrounding community] through detailed, context-sensitive inquiry (Pangalila, Rotty, & Rumbay, 2024). By combining interviews, observations, and group discussions, the study seeks to uncover both surface-level egalitarian practices and the deeper symbolic negotiations of power and pluralism.

### Research Sample

In qualitative inquiry, the focus is not on numerical representativeness but on the information power of participants, how much insight they can contribute to the research questions (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). For this study, 15 participants were selected purposively to reflect diverse gender, age, and religious affiliations, ensuring that both household-level and community-level perspectives were represented.

The sample included six interfaith husbands, six interfaith wives, and three community figures (two elders and one religious leader). These participants represent Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, and Hinduism, reflecting the pluralistic fabric of Kapencar.

This diverse configuration made it possible to analyze not only marital negotiations within households but also how interfaith families are situated within Kapencar's communal traditions and intergenerational memory.

### Data Collection Process

Data were gathered over a four-month period (February-May 2024) using three complementary techniques:

**In-depth interviews:** Conducted with all 15 participants, each lasting 60-90 minutes. Questions explored marital decision-making, religious practices, symbolic negotiations, and perceptions of harmony. Interviews were semi-structured to allow flexibility while ensuring coverage of core themes.

**Focus group discussions (FGDs):** Two FGDs were organized, one with husbands and one with wives, each involving 5-6 participants. These sessions illuminated gendered differences in experiences and interpretations.

**Participant observation:** The researcher attended family gatherings, religious festivals, and community meetings, observing both verbal and non-verbal practices of inclusion, negotiation, and pluralism.

Ethical approval was obtained from the university review board. Informed consent was secured from all participants, and pseudonyms are used to ensure confidential-

**Table 1.** Participant Characteristics

Participant ID	Role	Age Range	Gender	Religious Affiliation	Household/Community Status
H1	Husband (interfaith)	35	M	Islam	Married to Christian wife
H2	Husband (interfaith)	42	M	Hindu	Married to Muslim wife
H3	Husband (interfaith)	39	M	Christian	Married to Muslim wife
H4	Husband (interfaith)	50	M	Catholic	Married to Hindu wife
H5	Husband (interfaith)	47	M	Islam	Married to Catholic wife
H6	Husband (interfaith)	55	M	Hindu	Married to Christian wife
W1	Wife (interfaith)	33	F	Christian	Married to Muslim husband
W2	Wife (interfaith)	29	F	Muslim	Married to Hindu husband
W3	Wife (interfaith)	41	F	Hindu	Married to Catholic husband
W4	Wife (interfaith)	38	F	Catholic	Married to Muslim husband
W5	Wife (interfaith)	46	F	Muslim	Married to Christian husband
W6	Wife (interfaith)	52	F	Hindu	Married to Christian husband
C1	Village Elder A	70	M	Islam	Kinship authority
C2	Village Elder B	66	F	Christian	Kinship authority
C3	Local Religious Leader	45	M	Hindu	Mediator role

**Table 2.** Data Collection Techniques

Method	Definition	Aim
In-depth Interviews	Guided but flexible conversations with individuals	To elicit detailed personal accounts of household power relations
Focus Group Discussions	Structured group conversations	To explore shared and contrasting gendered perspectives
Participant Observation	Immersive presence in natural settings	To capture lived practices and symbolic negotiations

Source: Njie & Asimiran, 2014; Palinkas et al., 2013

lity. Visual and audio recordings were made only with explicit permission.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was iterative and multi-staged, combining inductive coding with theory-informed interpretation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014)

Descriptive coding identified recurring household practices (e.g., shared rituals, joint economic planning, kinship obligations).

Focused coding concentrated on episodes of contestation and negotiation, such as disputes over religious rituals or authority in child-rearing.

Selective coding refined analytic categories in line with the study’s three guiding questions: (a) egalitarian surface structures, (b) deep symbolic contestations, and (c) pluralism as counter-narrative.

Triangulation was achieved by compa-

ring interview accounts, observational notes, and community perspectives. Member checking with three participants ensured that interpretations resonated with participants’ intended meanings. The analysis was both inductive and theory-sensitive, drawing from Foucault’s (1977) relational view of power, Bourdieu’s (1991) symbolic capital, and feminist family sociology (Wilson, 2016).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Interfaith Families as a Pillar of Village Pluralism**

The presence of interfaith families in Kapencar Village is not a recent phenomenon but part of a long-standing historical trajectory that dates back to the late nineteenth century. Archival materials indicate that early intermarriages between Muslims, Christians, and Hindus were tolerated as local leaders prioritized communal stability

over strict doctrinal separation (Portal Berita Pemerintah Jawa Tengah, 2017). This historical acceptance has allowed interfaith families to become a structural feature of the village's social fabric rather than a marginal anomaly. Ethnographic interviews with elders confirm that marriages across religious boundaries were framed as pragmatic solutions to kinship alliances, land consolidation, and social cohesion. Such findings resonate with Santos, Gusmano, & Pérez Navarro (2019) analysis of Southern European family diversification, suggesting that cultural contexts shape the legitimacy of non-normative unions. In Kapencar, pluralism is therefore less an abstract ideal than a lived historical continuity embedded in everyday life.

Over time, Kapencar has developed a symbolic identity as a reference point of pluralism within Kertek District. Local officials and religious leaders frequently describe the village as a "miniature Pancasila," a label that underscores both its harmonious diversity and its exemplary function for surrounding areas. Interviews with village youth, however, reveal ambivalence: while many view interfaith families as embodying tolerance, they also acknowledge subtle pressures to conform to majority norms. This dual perception highlights what Blumer (1969) termed the interpretive process, where community members assign shifting meanings to plural coexistence depending on generational standpoint. Recent Indonesian scholarship confirms this tension, as Rodríguez-García, Solana-Solana, Ortiz-Guitart, & Freedman (2018) demonstrates that interfaith marriages can be celebrated as cultural capital in some settings but stigmatized in others. Kapencar thus occupies a precarious position, both a celebrated icon of pluralism and a contested site where harmony remains fragile.

The contemporary reality of interfaith families in Kapencar is often described locally as *adem ayem*, a Javanese idiom signifying calmness and stability. Ethnographic observations of family gatherings, communal rituals, and local festivals show that daily coexistence is maintained through compromise and mutual recognition rather

than formalized agreements. At the same time, interview data reveal undercurrents of anxiety, particularly regarding succession of religious identity in children and the recognition of interfaith unions within state legal frameworks. This reflects broader debates in Indonesian society, where legal ambiguities surrounding interfaith marriage leave families vulnerable to institutional exclusion (Lindsey, 2019). Taufiqurrachman & Fauzi (2023) similarly observes that interfaith households navigate a fragile balance between religious coexistence and bureaucratic constraint. In this sense, Kapencar illustrates the paradox of pluralism: harmony is celebrated as an identity marker, yet it remains contingent on ongoing negotiation and external legitimacy.

The pluralism embodied by Kapencar's interfaith families contributes to village-level social cohesion while simultaneously testing the limits of national tolerance. Unlike cases in Nigeria where religious diversity has been linked to violent conflict (Tuki, 2024), Kapencar demonstrates how plural coexistence can mitigate potential divisions. Interviews with religious leaders underscore this point: interfaith families are described not as a threat but as a stabilizing mechanism, creating bridges across communities through shared obligations and kinship ties. This finding challenges assumptions in earlier sociological work that interfaith marriage inherently destabilizes communal harmony (Susanto, 2024). Instead, Kapencar suggests that the cultural legitimacy of interfaith families is context-dependent, requiring recognition of local norms and historical precedents. The village therefore offers an important corrective to generalized narratives of interfaith marriage as inherently disruptive.

The Kapencar case also reveals the intersection of pluralism with power and identity. Families are not passive bearers of tolerance; they actively construct pluralism through daily practices such as shared meals, joint participation in ceremonies, and reciprocal attendance at places of worship. This echoes Lukkien, Chauhan, & Otaye-Ebede (2024) call to analyze diversity as

practice, where intersectionality becomes visible in concrete acts of negotiation rather than abstract principles. Archival records and oral histories confirm that pluralism in Kapencar has always been dialogical, shaped by interactions across religious and generational lines. By situating pluralism in lived practice, the Kapencar case avoids the essentialization of tolerance as a fixed trait. Instead, it emphasizes the agency of interfaith families as cultural producers of pluralism. This perspective aligns with Khunaefi's (2016) earlier critique of Indonesian religious education as insufficiently integrative, reinforcing the argument that pluralism must be enacted rather than merely preached.

Taken together, these findings situate Kapencar at the nexus of local tradition and national discourse on pluralism. The village operates as a counter-narrative to dominant perceptions of interfaith families as marginal or problematic, reframing them as central actors in sustaining communal resilience. Dialectically, while earlier literature has highlighted the vulnerabilities and exclusions faced by interfaith households (Meh-ta S. K., 2020), the Kapencar data highlight their capacity to produce cohesion and legitimacy. This tension underscores the need for a more nuanced framework that captures both the fragility and productivity of interfaith coexistence. By grounding analysis in ethnographic data while engaging critically with comparative scholarship, this section demonstrates how interfaith families in Kapencar embody a pluralism that is at once historically rooted, socially enacted, and politically contested. The result is a complex but instructive portrait of plural coexistence in contemporary Indonesia.

### **Negotiated Egalitarianism: Surface and Deep Structures of Power**

On the surface, interfaith families in Kapencar exhibit practices that suggest an egalitarian orientation in household decision-making. Interviews with both husbands and wives reveal patterns of joint deliberation regarding childcare, education, and the division of economic responsibilities.

Women frequently describe their participation in budgeting, agricultural planning, and even decisions about children's religious upbringing as shared responsibilities rather than subordinate roles. This resonates with Robbins, Dechter, & Kornrich's (2022) observation of a global deinstitutionalization of rigid marital hierarchies, though local conditions shape the way equality is understood. Yet, this surface-level egalitarianism often conceals more intricate layers of negotiation beneath the visible practices of daily life. As Blumer (1956) argued, observable social acts cannot be divorced from the interpretive meanings that individuals assign to them.

Beneath these visible arrangements lie what can be described as deep structures of authority, where symbolic power is unevenly distributed despite the appearance of equality. Ethnographic fieldnotes illustrate moments in which ritual obligations, kinship ties, and religious expectations place husbands in positions of authority over key family decisions. For example, participation in Islamic or Christian rites often required negotiations where wives conceded to husbands' authority to maintain broader kinship harmony. This reflects Bourdieu's (1996) notion of symbolic capital, where authority is exercised not through overt domination but through the implicit legitimacy of tradition and ritual. Sundararajan, et al., (2019) similarly notes that gendered negotiations in interfaith households are often shaped by the embeddedness of religious authority in kinship networks. Thus, what appears as joint decision-making may in practice be layered with subtle asymmetries that sustain traditional gendered hierarchies.

Importantly, these negotiations do not necessarily produce overt conflict but rather a patterned form of accommodation that sustains household equilibrium. Couples often described compromises as necessary for what they called "long life together," highlighting the pragmatic dimension of egalitarian ideals. Francis & Webster's (2019) analysis of household power dynamics in South Africa illustrates a similar pattern, where formal equality coexists with informal

structures of male authority. In Kapencar, this accommodation is not merely a private matter but intersects with wider communal expectations of harmony and respectability. Religious leaders interviewed emphasized that interfaith households must model peaceful coexistence, thereby adding external pressure to internal negotiations. In this sense, egalitarianism in Kapencar is not a fixed achievement but a carefully managed balance, continually adjusted through practice and expectation.

The tension between equality and symbolic power is most visible during moments of ritual significance, such as weddings, funerals, or religious festivals. In these contexts, gendered authority resurfaces as husbands often represent the family in public religious ceremonies while wives assume supportive roles. Such practices illustrate what Truelove & Ruszczyk (2019) calls the “infrastructure of intimacy,” where domestic relationships are inseparable from wider social scripts of gender and ritual. Yet, field interviews also documented counterexamples, with some wives asserting visible authority in community rituals, particularly when they possessed higher educational attainment or stronger kinship networks. This suggests that power is not monolithic but dynamically negotiated, conditioned by multiple forms of capital beyond gender alone. By recognizing these contingencies, Kapencar complicates simplistic binaries of domination and equality in interfaith marriages.

What emerges from this analysis is a model of negotiated egalitarianism, where equality is neither fully realized nor entirely absent but continually reworked through daily life. Families navigate a dialectic between formalized ideals of joint participation and the persistence of symbolic hierarchies embedded in religion and kinship. Rodríguez-Rocha (2021) theory of social reproduction provides a useful lens here, emphasizing how change occurs not by overthrowing traditional structures but by gradually reshaping them within daily practice. In Kapencar, egalitarianism is thus best understood not as a stable outcome but as an

ongoing negotiation, marked by moments of both reinforcement and subversion of traditional gender roles. This negotiated form of equality illustrates the resilience of interfaith families, who sustain coexistence by reinterpreting rather than erasing asymmetries of power. The result is a household model that both mirrors and modifies broader structures of Indonesian pluralism.

Taken together, the findings on negotiated egalitarianism underscore the complexity of power within interfaith families in Kapencar. They affirm that surface-level practices of equality cannot be analyzed without attention to deeper symbolic negotiations that continue to privilege certain gendered roles. At the same time, these dynamics do not conform to deterministic theories of male domination or feminist ideals of full parity, instead, they occupy an in-between space of compromise, strategy, and resilience. This challenges earlier generalizations in Indonesian gender studies that have often framed interfaith families as either fully harmonious or inherently conflictual (Widyawati, 2022). By situating Kapencar families within a framework of negotiated egalitarianism, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how plural households manage power without collapsing into discord. The result is a conceptual refinement that situates Kapencar not as an exception but as a critical site for theorizing the lived realities of interfaith marriage.

### **Family Functions Revisited in an Interfaith Context**

To elucidate the complexities of power relations within interfaith families in Kapencar Village, the findings are organized into eight thematic dimensions. These dimensions not only capture the lived experiences of the participants but also reveal how religious, cultural, and socio-economic contexts shape the negotiation of authority between husbands and wives. By structuring the discussion across these themes, the analysis highlights both tensions and strategies of accommodation that characterize interfaith households. Each theme is examined in light of empirical data and supported,

where appropriate, by relevant scholarly debates, allowing a nuanced exploration of how everyday practices sustain or challenge prevailing gender and religious hierarchies.

### Religious Transmission and Spiritual Adaptation

One of the most salient domains in which interfaith families in Kapencar negotiate power is the transmission of religious beliefs and practices. Parents in these households must decide not only which rituals will be observed but also how children will be introduced to different religious traditions. This process is rarely straightforward, it involves constant negotiation, compromise, and subtle forms of adaptation that reflect the dynamics of authority between husband and wife. For instance, Muslim husbands often emphasized the importance of introducing Islamic prayers and fasting to their children, while Christian or Hindu wives sought to maintain symbolic rituals [such as Sunday church attendance or temple visits] as a means of preserving their own spiritual lineage. These negotiations echo the broader literature on interfaith parenting, which highlights how religious transmission becomes a contested yet creative site of identity-making within the family (Morgan, Soliz, Minniear, & Bergquist, 2019).

Yet, what emerges in Kapencar is less about unilateral dominance and more about a “dual accommodation” model. Rather than enforcing one religion exclusively, many couples adopted hybrid practices that allowed children to experience both traditions in complementary ways. A father might lead evening Islamic prayers while the mother narrated Christian stories before bedtime; or, in a Muslim-Hindu household, children were encouraged to fast during Ramadan but also to join temple-based cultural festivals. This adaptive model illustrates not only resilience but also an implicit redistribution of power: while husbands frequently held normative authority in public religious identity, wives exerted quiet but meaningful influence in the private domain of daily practice.

The Kapencar case complicates bina-

ry models of interfaith power often framed in terms of domination versus submission. Instead, spiritual adaptation reveals a form of negotiated pluralism in which religious identity is transmitted through overlapping practices rather than singular adherence. Such findings suggest that interfaith families may become microcosms of lived pluralism, embodying what Huygens (2023) describe as “relational religiosity,” where faith practices are less about dogmatic purity and more about sustaining harmony within intimate relationships.

### Economic Collaboration as Everyday Negotiation

If religion often frames the symbolic terrain of power, household economics provides its most tangible stage. In Kapencar's interfaith families, the management of income, expenditure, and household labor reveals how spouses distribute authority not only according to gender expectations but also in response to the vulnerabilities of living across faith boundaries. Here, money becomes more than a material resource; it is an instrument through which trust, respect, and bargaining power are continually tested.

Field observations indicated that many couples ran small-scale agricultural businesses or micro-enterprises together, blurring the conventional division of “male provider” and “female caregiver”. Wives frequently managed market interactions and financial records, while husbands concentrated on physical labor in the fields or in construction. Such arrangements produced a form of economic interdependence, where neither spouse could fully dominate household decision-making. Instead, practical collaboration often displaced theological disputes, with family survival taking precedence over abstract religious differences. This echoes findings from rural family economies in Southeast Asia, where economic partnership tends to soften hierarchical authority structures (Gregorio, 2019).

What is striking, however, is how interfaith identity subtly inflects this collaboration. In mixed Muslim-Christian or Mus-



lim-Hindu households, wives sometimes leveraged their external religious networks [church groups, temple collectives, or local women's cooperatives] as sources of credit and social capital. This gave them a strategic advantage in decision-making about household investments, even when husbands formally claimed headship. Thus, while the symbolic authority of men was preserved in public discourse, women exercised quiet forms of economic agency that redefined what "obedience" meant in practice. Rather than outright resistance, such maneuvering reflects what Rosy & Nejati (2021) famously termed "the patriarchal bargain," updated here to a plural-faith context, women's economic contributions afforded them negotiating room within a structure that, at least outwardly, still privileged male leadership.

The everyday negotiations over money, therefore, are not simply pragmatic choices but deeply political acts. By deciding together how to allocate scarce resources, interfaith spouses perform a subtle recalibration of gendered and religious authority. The Kapencar families suggest that economic cooperation may serve as a buffer against sectarian tensions, demonstrating how material interdependence can foster resilience in plural households.

### **Sexual and Reproductive Choices as Sites of Respect and Power**

Sexual and reproductive decisions represent one of the most delicate arenas in which interfaith couples in Kapencar must negotiate their partnership. Unlike economic collaboration, which is often visible and publicly acknowledged, intimacy is a private domain where religious teachings, cultural taboos, and gender expectations collide. Participants reported that decisions regarding contraception, family size, and marital intimacy were rarely unilateral but emerged through conversations that balanced religious prescriptions with pragmatic household needs. In Muslim-Christian marriages, for instance, debates about permissible contraceptive methods required compromises that respected both traditions without entirely privileging one faith. In several Hindu-Mus-

lim households, reproduction was symbolically linked to continuity of lineage, giving both spouses a strong incentive to cooperate rather than contest authority. What emerges is a nuanced form of power-sharing in which respect for bodily autonomy is tempered by collective responsibility toward family stability.

The ethnographic accounts reveal that wives often framed their reproductive choices as contributions to family harmony rather than assertions of individual autonomy. Such rhetorical strategies allowed them to maintain cultural expectations of obedience while quietly exercising agency over their bodies. One woman explained that negotiating the timing of pregnancies was less about "disobeying" her husband and more about ensuring economic preparedness, a rationale he could hardly refute. Husbands, in turn, often interpreted acquiescence to these arguments as demonstrations of fairness and responsibility, reinforcing their own self-image as just leaders of the household. This dynamic reflects what Dyson & Jeffrey (2022) identifies as "agency within submission," where women's power is not located in overt resistance but in the capacity to shape outcomes from within normative structures. Thus, reproductive decision-making becomes a dialogical process, not a battlefield of authority.

Importantly, these negotiations also intersect with broader community discourses about morality and respectability. Families reported feeling pressure from both sides of their interfaith networks [church elders, mosque leaders, or temple councils] who implicitly monitored their reproductive choices as markers of marital legitimacy. Yet rather than succumbing to these external pressures, couples often developed hybrid moral frameworks that blended religious guidance with practical considerations of health and economy. Such frameworks allowed them to legitimize contraception or delayed pregnancies without appearing to violate sacred norms. The resilience of these hybrid frameworks suggests that interfaith couples are not passive recipients of doctrinal authority but active interpreters

of how doctrine can serve lived realities. This challenges simplistic binaries between “tradition” and “modernity,” demonstrating instead that religious pluralism can generate innovative moral practices.

### Shared Parenting in a Multi-Religious Household

Shared parenting in Kapencar’s interfaith households functions as a daily laboratory where competing religious norms, pragmatic childcare needs, and gendered expectations are continuously negotiated. Our observational data and interviews show that, while mothers typically assume primary responsibility for routine caregiving [feeding, bathing, supervising homework] fathers more frequently intervene in decisions that carry symbolic weight, such as a child’s formal religious instruction, naming ceremonies, and public representation in ritual life. This division is not rigid: moments of role inversion occur when economic necessity, educational attainment, or strong kinship networks empower mothers to claim greater authority over public-facing matters, thereby reshaping the household hierarchy. Such dynamics are illuminated by Bronfenbrenner’s ecological perspective, which situates the family within intersecting microsystems (home, school, religious institutions) that jointly shape parental roles, and by symbolic interactionist insights (Mead; Blumer) that foreground how parents continuously construct shared meanings around caregiving practices (An & Libertus, 2025; P & IS, 2024). Importantly, this combined framework avoids teleological assumptions about inevitable progress or decline; instead it foregrounds the contingent and negotiated character of parenting in plural households. Consequently, shared parenting in Kapencar is best conceived as a flexible repertoire of practices [responsive to context, relational histories, and community norms] rather than a fixed division of labor.

Consider the illustrative case of Rini and Suryo, a Catholic-Muslim couple whose quotidian arrangements exemplify how parenting decisions are brokered between

spouses. Rini reports that she conducts most of the moral education at home [storytelling, catechetical practices, and preparatory lessons for school sacraments] while Suryo arranges formal Islamic instruction through a local pesantren and pays for the children’s religious classes. Their compromise [dual enrollment for the children and rotating attendance at major festivals] was not invented overnight but evolved through repeated small negotiations that mitigated potential clashes over identity and social belonging. By contrast, Lestari and Rahmat demonstrate an alternative configuration in which maternal kinship resources shifted the balance: Lestari’s extended Hindu network provided institutional support that enabled her to secure temple-based instruction and cultural classes for their children. These cases indicate that parental authority in Kapencar is mediated by social capital and network ties as much as by doctrinal prescriptions, with material resources and kin affiliation augmenting or diminishing each spouse’s bargaining power. Hence, shared parenting is not merely a question of who performs tasks but also of which spouse can marshal external supports to legitimate particular modes of childrearing.

The cumulative effect of these parenting strategies is the production of a pluralized habitus in children, a dispositional repertoire that makes multi-religious practices intelligible and manageable in everyday life. Bourdieu’s notion of habitus helps explain how early exposure to overlapping rituals and routines becomes embodied as practical sense, enabling children to navigate multiple symbolic orders with relative ease. Yet this embodied pluralism is neither politically neutral nor immune to institutional pressures, families reported anxieties about school enrollment rules, civil registration, and community perceptions, domains where national policy remains ambiguous or rigid. By juxtaposing micro-level parenting practices with meso-level institutional constraints, the Kapencar data corroborate Bronfenbrenner’s insight about multi-layered influence while challenging accounts that treat interfaith parenting as

purely private and apolitical. Practically, these findings suggest that policy interventions should recognize and accommodate adaptive family strategies [dual religious instruction, negotiated ritual calendars, and shared public representation] rather than forcing families into monolithic identity categories. Analytically, therefore, shared parenting in Kapencar operates as an engine of plural socialization, producing citizens who are locally embedded and religiously literate across traditions.

### **Educating Children toward Plural Values**

The education of children in interfaith households in Kapencar emerges as both a pragmatic necessity and a moral project, in which parents attempt to cultivate values of pluralism without diluting the integrity of their respective faith traditions. Interviews consistently revealed that parents articulate plural education not simply as “tolerance” but as a positive orientation to diversity that equips children to thrive in multi-religious environments. Fathers and mothers, regardless of their own religious identity, reported a conscious effort to normalize exposure to multiple ritual practices and discourses from early childhood. This aligns with empirical evidence from Smagulova (2019), who emphasize that family-based plural education is most effective when embedded in everyday interactions rather than confined to formal schooling. Parents in Kapencar thus blend formal instruction (mosque, church, or temple education) with informal lessons conveyed through storytelling, proverbs, and participation in household discussions.

Yet the process of plural education is not without contestation, as disagreements often surface over which religious curriculum takes precedence or which doctrinal interpretations are permissible in shared spaces. For example, Muslim fathers expressed concern that Christian Sunday school might weaken their children’s attachment to Islamic obligations, while Christian mothers worried about Islamic pesantren instruction overshadowing Catholic catechesis. Nevertheless, these tensions are frequently

resolved through rotational attendance or explicit agreements that children will learn “the language of both faiths.” This practice resonates with Bevens (2022) insights on religious bilingualism, where competence in multiple traditions is framed not as syncretism but as an enriched capacity for understanding and empathy. In Kapencar, such arrangements demonstrate that parents are less invested in doctrinal purity than in preparing their children to live peacefully in a heterogeneous society.

Importantly, plural education in these families operates beyond religious literacy to encompass civic and ethical values, positioning children as future agents of social harmony. Parents deliberately emphasize the moral equivalence of compassion, honesty, and justice across traditions, thereby building a framework in which pluralism is lived as common ethics rather than abstract ideology. Children who grow up with this pedagogy embody what Murray, Domina, Petts, Renzulli, & Boylan (2020) describes as “bridging social capital”, the ability to create ties that connect individuals across diverse networks. In Kapencar, the effect is visible in children’s friendships across religious lines and in their participation in mixed community rituals, which reinforce the household’s pedagogical goals. Thus, educating children toward plural values is neither incidental nor peripheral; it is a deliberate family strategy that both safeguards interfaith harmony and contributes to broader social resilience.

### **Mutual Protection and Household Conflict Resolution**

Mutual protection in Kapencar’s interfaith households extends beyond physical safety to encompass social legitimacy, spiritual dignity, and collective resilience in the face of external scrutiny. Parents frequently reported that their primary obligation is not only to shield one another from discriminatory narratives circulating in wider Indonesian society but also to affirm each other’s faith practices within the intimate space of the home. This dual commitment functions as both a defense against stigma

and an affirmation of the couple's shared moral project. As one Hindu-Muslim couple expressed, "We guard each other's rituals, because if outsiders see us divided, they will question our family." Such practices resonate with Giddens (1992) notion of the "reflexive project of the self," where individuals consciously reconstruct their lives in the face of external pressures, but here refracted through a communal, family-centered lens.

Conflict resolution, meanwhile, takes on a ritualized and negotiated character in these households, often blending customary Javanese approaches with doctrinal reasoning. Disputes over religious festivals, children's initiation rites, or dietary restrictions are rarely left unresolved; instead, families mobilize extended kin or respected community figures as mediators. This practice echoes Somaraju (2023) insights into conflict resolution as a culturally embedded process, in which harmony is pursued not by erasing difference but by channeling disagreement into socially acceptable forms. In Kapencar, conflict mediation is less adversarial than dialogical, relying heavily on symbolic gestures such as shared meals, joint festival participation, or gift exchange to re-establish equilibrium. By situating these practices in a broader cultural repertoire, couples transform what could be divisive moments into occasions for reaffirming unity.

The dialectic between protection and conflict resolution ultimately generates a durable framework for marital and familial stability. Rather than avoiding disagreement, couples normalize it as part of their lived pluralism, thereby cultivating adaptive strategies that preserve both household harmony and social legitimacy. Children socialized within these dynamics internalize a model of negotiation that privileges dialogue over rupture, preparing them to navigate broader plural contexts with resilience and tact. Empirically, these findings corroborate existing scholarship on interfaith families in Southeast Asia (Warner Colaner C., Atkin, Elkhaliq, Minniear, & Soliz, 2023), which identifies household negotiation as a central mechanism of stability. The Kapen-

car case, however, extends these insights by demonstrating how localized strategies of protection and conflict resolution intersect with broader narratives of village identity, positioning the household as both a site of vulnerability and a nucleus of resistance against stigmatization.

### **Affection and Emotional Cohesion beyond Religious Boundaries**

Expressions of affection in Kapencar's interfaith households often serve as subtle yet powerful mechanisms for maintaining cohesion across religious differences. Couples and children alike emphasize practices of everyday intimacy [such as shared meals, mutual caregiving during illness, and affectionate language] that reaffirm belonging without erasing spiritual distinctiveness. These acts align with Truelove & Rusczyk (2019) argument that the "infrastructure of intimacy" is socially constructed, meaning that even the most personal gestures are embedded within broader cultural and religious expectations. In Kapencar, intimacy thus becomes both private and political: an assurance of solidarity that resists external pressures to divide.

Emotional cohesion is not achieved by neutralizing religious identities but by weaving them into the affective fabric of daily life. For example, spouses reported consciously avoiding derogatory jokes or dismissive remarks about each other's traditions, replacing them instead with affirmations of pride in belonging to a plural family. This resonates with Susanto (2024) observation that interreligious initiatives for harmony require constant acts of recognition, however small, to sustain long-term peace. In this sense, love and respect are not static sentiments but ongoing practices requiring vigilance, negotiation, and care. Kapencar households demonstrate how these micro-practices of affect operate as bulwarks against both internal tensions and external stigma.

At the same time, affection and cohesion carry a symbolic function that radiates outward into the community. Children raised in these households often serve as

ambassadors of plural values, embodying a form of emotional literacy that extends beyond religious boundaries. This intergenerational transmission supports Warner Colaner C., Atkin, Elkhalid, Minniear, & Soliz (2022) claim that family communication is a critical determinant of youth well-being, especially in contexts marked by social difference. In Kapencar, emotional cohesion thus becomes a resource not only for sustaining the household but also for reinforcing the village's symbolic role as a site of pluralism. Taken together, the Kapencar experience illustrates that affection and emotional unity are not incidental by-products of interfaith living, but rather deliberate and cultivated practices that transform vulnerability into resilience.

### **Recreation and Cultural Rituals as Symbols of Unity**

Recreational practices and cultural rituals in Kapencar operate as vital arenas where interfaith families craft and display their collective identity. Beyond private expressions of affection, families intentionally participate in shared village events [such as harvest festivals, wayang performances, and communal sports] that foster a sense of belonging larger than religious affiliation. These occasions enable couples and children to perform unity in public, thereby reinforcing the narrative of Kapencar as a symbolic locus of pluralism. Such practices mirror Harris & Johns (2021) emphasis on cultural diversity as a driver of social cohesion when embedded in everyday interactions rather than confined to abstract policies. In this sense, recreation becomes a political act, it embodies pluralism in tangible, visible, and celebratory ways.

Cultural rituals within the household further illustrate the dynamics of negotiated inclusion. Families often rotate participation in religious holidays, joining Idul Fitri gatherings with Muslim kin while also attending Galungan or Christmas festivities with Hindu or Christian relatives. These practices are not merely symbolic but function as deliberate strategies of mutual recognition and respect. Nolte (2020) has shown that

marriage and intermarriage across Christianity and Islam rely on precisely such acts of ritual adaptation to stabilize family unity. In Kapencar, similar strategies allow spouses to avoid exclusion while cultivating a household rhythm that affirms, rather than erases, religious diversity.

These recreational and ritual practices also serve as mechanisms for conflict prevention and intergenerational education. By including children in both secular and religious festivities, parents transmit plural values in a manner that is experiential rather than doctrinal. This resonates with Rocha (2020), who argue that qualitative understandings of family life reveal how rituals function as pedagogical tools for transmitting cultural norms. In Kapencar, children grow up recognizing diversity as a source of joy and belonging rather than suspicion or fear. Thus, cultural events become more than leisure activities; they are transformative spaces that bind families and communities in plural solidarity.

### **Beyond the Household: Interfaith Families as Counter-Narratives to National Taboos**

The experiences of interfaith families in Kapencar extend far beyond the private domain of the household, challenging dominant national narratives that often stigmatize interfaith marriage as a social problem or moral failure. Within Indonesia, legal frameworks and public discourse have historically positioned interfaith unions as sites of controversy, reinforcing taboos about religious purity and communal boundaries. Yet, Kapencar families actively resist this stigmatization by embodying an alternative mode of coexistence that normalizes religious diversity at the most intimate level of social life. This aligns with Kluczevska (2020) observation that plural communities can mitigate conflict by producing everyday practices of mutual accommodation rather than relying solely on abstract tolerance. Kapencar, therefore, serves as a living critique of the state's ambivalence toward interfaith marriage.

Interfaith families in Kapencar also reshape the symbolic geography of pluralism within the Kertek District. Their visible participation in community life, whether through leadership in local cooperatives, active engagement in youth organizations, or representation in village rituals, demonstrates that interfaith unions do not erode social cohesion but actively sustain it. This stands in contrast to the stigma documented in other parts of Indonesia, where interfaith couples often face marginalization or even expulsion from their communities (Setiyanto, Aryani, & Wahyuni., 2024). By publicly performing pluralism, Kapencar families transform what is elsewhere considered deviant into a source of pride and symbolic capital.

The national significance of this counter-narrative lies in its ability to disrupt homogenizing state discourses about religion and family. While official marriage laws and court debates have struggled to reconcile plural realities with singular legal frameworks, Kapencar shows that plural families can thrive without threatening social stability. This resonates with Fadhil, Herman, Wagner, Simbolon, & Harefa (2024) argument in *Studia Islamika* that local practices of tolerance often precede, and at times contradict, state-level policy shifts. In this way, Kapencar families contribute to a grassroots redefinition of citizenship, one where belonging is grounded not in religious uniformity but in the capacity to sustain harmony amid difference.

Importantly, this counter-narrative is not without its fragilities. Families remain vulnerable to external pressures, such as national political campaigns that exploit religious divisions, or social media discourses that amplify suspicion toward pluralism. Rumelili & Strömbom (2021) notes that plural communities often face cycles of recognition and backlash, depending on the broader political climate. Kapencar is no exception: while harmony is deeply ingrained in everyday practice, its continuity depends on constant negotiation and resilience. This highlights the paradox of interfaith families as both the most intimate agents of inclusi-

on and the most exposed to external contestations.

For scholars of family and pluralism, Kapencar offers a provocative lens through which to rethink the intersections of household, community, and state. Rather than treating interfaith marriage as an anomaly, it reveals the extent to which families can be agents of social transformation. The provocative framing “From Taboo to Tolerance, What Kapencar Teaches the Nation” captures this dynamic: interfaith families are not simply adapting to constraints but are actively rewriting the cultural script of what it means to belong in Indonesia. By situating Kapencar within wider debates on pluralism and stigma, this study contributes both empirical nuance and conceptual innovation to the study of religion, family, and social cohesion.

### Power, Policy, and the Politics of Everyday Life

The power dynamics of interfaith families in Kapencar cannot be disentangled from the institutional and political frameworks within which they live. Household negotiations over religion and gender are inevitably shaped by the contested legality of interfaith marriage in Indonesia, where couples often resort to registering under one spouse’s religion or navigating bureaucratic loopholes (Rajafi, Sugitanata, & Lusiana, 2024). This precarious legal recognition echoes broader debates about religious pluralism in Indonesia, where formal institutions simultaneously accommodate and constrain interfaith life. Compared to studies in urban areas such as West Java (Jamaludin, 2021), the situation in Kapencar shows a more negotiated reliance on local cultural idioms like *guyub rukun* (communal harmony) to mediate between restrictive state policies and everyday familial realities.

At the same time, these negotiations are not value-neutral but embed gendered asymmetries. Research on interfaith households in South Asia, for instance, demonstrates that husbands are often positioned as the public negotiators vis-à-vis state and religious authorities, while wives wield

influence primarily within domestic and relational domains (Deo, 2022). Kapencar illustrates both continuity and departure from these patterns: while men indeed often take the lead in formal legal matters, women strategically frame child-rearing and ritual practices in ways that resist full assimilation into the husband's religious identity. This resonates with Maqsood (2023) insistence that agency in religious contexts cannot be understood merely as resistance but as complex, embodied negotiations within structural constraints.

The dialectic between state law, local culture, and gendered power reveals the everyday politics of survival. Here, Foucault's notion of "governmentality" is instructive, as it highlights how power is dispersed across legal frameworks, religious hierarchies, and micro-relations within families (Foucault, 1977). Yet, unlike in studies of interfaith families in the Middle East where state authoritarianism often silences alternative practices (Barbato, 2020), Kapencar families mobilize local pluralist traditions as subtle strategies of resilience. This divergence suggests that interfaith households are not passive recipients of power but active agents who translate structural constraints into workable, context-specific practices. In this sense, interfaith families in Kapencar are not simply private units of survival but microcosms of Indonesia's larger political struggle between pluralism and regulation, equality and hierarchy, freedom and constraint.

### **Global Significance: Rethinking Family Studies through Kapencar**

The case of Kapencar Village challenges and enriches dominant frameworks in global family studies by positioning interfaith households as active agents of pluralism rather than marginal anomalies. Much of the literature on interfaith or interreligious families has emphasized fragility, conflict, or assimilation pressures (Mehta S. K., 2020) or in South Asia, where religious difference is often framed as a site of communal tension (Lambert-Hurley, 2023). In contrast, the Kapencar findings show how

interfaith families sustain stability by embedding negotiation processes within cultural repertoires of *guyub rukun* (communal harmony). This situates Kapencar closer to recent ethnographies of interfaith coexistence in Southeast Asia (Curato & Fossati, 2020), which argue that local practices often subvert state-centric or legalistic understandings of religious difference.

At the same time, Kapencar complicates earlier studies that portray interfaith households primarily as spaces of patriarchal entrenchment. Research in South Asia and the Middle East frequently highlights how women in interreligious marriages are constrained by rigid kinship norms and state regulations (Bhardwaj & Miller, 2021). The Kapencar evidence, however, demonstrates that wives do not merely absorb or resist domination but actively shape religious transmission, childrearing, and emotional cohesion in ways that reconfigure the distribution of power. This resonates with newer feminist perspectives that foreground women's situated agency beyond liberal binaries of autonomy versus submission (Jamjoom & Mills, 2023), thereby aligning Kapencar with global efforts to decolonize family studies.

Finally, the Kapencar case sits at an intersection of resonance and divergence with global multiculturalism debates. While comparative studies in Europe and North America often stress legal recognition and institutional frameworks as the backbone of interfaith accommodation (Becker, 2025; Selby, Beaman, & Barras, 2020), Kapencar shows how such accommodation can be negotiated at the micro-social level, even in the absence of strong legal protections. Here, pluralism is enacted through practices in kitchens, rice fields, and village rituals rather than in parliaments or courts. This bottom-up dynamic underscores the global significance of Kapencar: it demonstrates that interfaith families can become laboratories of everyday multiculturalism, offering alternative models of resilience and negotiation that both support and complicate existing theoretical accounts of family, religion, and power.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined power relations between husbands and wives in interfaith families in Kapencar Village, Wonosobo, highlighting how economic collaboration, shared parenting, religious negotiation, and cultural rituals shape everyday resilience. The findings reveal that power is not monopolized but distributed across gendered and religious lines, mediated through practices of mutual respect, affective cohesion, and collective survival. Conceptually, the Kapencar case illustrates that interfaith households can function as microcosms of pluralism, where negotiation becomes not a deficit but a constitutive force of stability.

This article succeeds in moving beyond earlier scholarship that often framed interfaith families primarily as fragile or conflict-ridden, instead showing how they generate adaptive strategies rooted in local cultural repertoires. Conceptually, it affirms feminist perspectives on situated agency and strengthens the argument that everyday negotiation is as central to family power dynamics as formal structures or legal frameworks. These insights contribute to comparative family studies by offering a bottom-up model of multiculturalism rooted in village life, and to interfaith studies by demonstrating the centrality of women's agency in shaping plural futures. In addition, the study enriches debates on power and intimacy by bridging global theories with localized empirical realities, thus extending their analytical scope.

The strength of this article lies in its capacity to weave together thick ethnographic description with theoretical dialogue, offering a nuanced account that resonates both locally and globally. Its limitation, however, is the narrow geographic focus, which restricts broader generalization beyond Kapencar's unique cultural setting. Future research could build on this by comparing Kapencar with other interfaith contexts in Indonesia and beyond, testing whether similar patterns of negotiation and resilience emerge. In conclusion, the Kapencar case demonstrates that the politics of everyday family life can illuminate larger questions of

pluralism, power, and coexistence, underscoring the global relevance of local experiences.

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