

THE NEW IBAN *BILEK*-FAMILY STRUCTURE: A THREAT OR THE DYNAMICS OF OUR TIME
(*STRUKTUR BILEK-KELUARGA IBAN BARU: SUATU ANCAMAN ATAU DINAMIKA ZAMAN*)

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the impact of female-headed families on the Iban traditional *bilek* family structure. Hence, our study and data tend to stipulate that the increasing number of single mothers among the Iban is more likely or inevitably affect [if not] change the traditional structure of the *bilek*-family. In essence, the traditional family was previously absolute patriarchal in nature in terms of the hierarchical position and decision-making have continued to witness dynamic changes in the social realities. Accordingly, the absence of males as head of the family within this new form of *bilek* will further impact the role(s) and responsibilities that some contemporary Iban women are *forced* to shoulder. This study employed an ethnographic approach as a methodology because of the nature of the research. Snowball sampling was used as a sampling technique due to the challenges of identifying the participants for the study.

Keywords: Iban Traditional Family, *Bilek*-Family, New Family Structure, Single

Motherhood, Decision-Making, Iban Women

Abstract

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk meneroka kesan keluarga ketua wanita terhadap struktur keluarga bilek tradisional Iban. Oleh itu, kajian dan data ini cenderung untuk menetapkan bahawa peningkatan bilangan ibu tunggal dalam kalangan Iban lebih berkemungkinan atau tidak dapat dielakkan mempengaruhi [jika tidak] mengubah struktur tradisional keluarga bilek. Pada dasarnya, keluarga tradisional sebelum ini bersifat patriarki mutlak dari segi kedudukan hierarki dan pembuatan keputusan terus menyaksikan perubahan dinamik dalam realiti sosial. Sehubungan itu, ketiadaan lelaki sebagai ketua keluarga dalam bentuk bilek baharu ini akan memberi kesan kepada peranan dan tanggungjawab yang terpaksa dipikul oleh sesetengah wanita Iban kontemporari. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan etnografi sebagai metodologi kerana sifat penyelidikan. Persampelan *bola salji* digunakan sebagai teknik persampelan kerana terdapat cabaran mengenal pasti peserta kajian.

Kata kunci: Keluarga Tradisional Iban, Bilek-Keluarga, Struktura Keluarga Baru, Ibu Tunggal, Membuat Keputusan, Wanita Iban

1.0 Introduction

Besides socialization and wellbeing of members, family has always been identified as first and foremost, the fundamental unit of production and reproduction. Essentially, within families, important non-market transactions between men and women take place in all societies. Undoubtedly, contributions that men and women formulate in a joint family determine to a high degree the material and wellbeing of adults and children in that family. In fact, this is the principal source of distinct economic gender roles. Ironically, many societies in the past and even in today's world only recognised the birth-right and place of individual if such individual is a product of legally married couple. Thus, such understanding of the concept 'family' tend to position female headed-families as an outcast of social system and often portray them as dysfunctional and none conventional family unit. Nonetheless, with annual increase of divorce rate