

# Sexual agency of young widows in Malay culture: An ethnographic study in Serdang Village, South Bangka

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## Sexual agency of young widows in Malay culture: An ethnographic study in Serdang Village, South Bangka

### *Agensi seksual janda muda pada budaya Melayu: Kajian etnografi di Desa Serdang, Bangka Selatan*

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#### Abstract

Patriarchal culture is part of Malay society. However widows in Serdang Village, South Bangka gain agency in the midst of patriarchal culture. They find strategies in meeting their sexual needs after getting their agency. This study looks at how women find their agency and strategies to fulfill their sexual needs in the midst of the Serdang Village community which is still heavily associated with its Malay culture. The ethnographic research method was carried out to explore the agency of young widows in the village using Agency Theory from Lois McNay and Gayle Rubin's thought "The Charmed Cycle" as an analytical knife to dissect the problems that exist in Serdang Village. This study found that young widows use strategies to fulfill their sexual needs, either by connecting with a boyfriend without getting married, watching adult videos, connecting with customers on a consensual or paid basis. This study concludes that the agency that has been built by the widows allows them to express their sexual needs freely.

**Keywords:** Malay culture; sexual agency; South Bangka; young widows

#### Abstrak

*Budaya patriarki menjadi bagian dari masyarakat Melayu. Namun para janda di Desa Serdang, Bangka Selatan mendapatkan keagensian di tengah budaya patriarki. Mereka menemukan strategi dalam pemenuhan kebutuhan seksualitas mereka setelah mendapatkan keagensian mereka. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana perempuan menemukan agensi serta strategi mereka untuk memenuhi kebutuhan seksual mereka di tengah masyarakat Desa Serdang yang masih kental dengan budaya Melayu. Metode penelitian etnografi dilakukan untuk mengeksplorasi agensi para janda muda di desa tersebut dengan menggunakan Teori Agensi dari Lois McNay dan pemikiran Gayle Rubin "The Charmed Cycle" sebagai pisau analisis untuk membedah persoalan yang ada di Desa Serdang. Studi ini menemukan bahwa para janda muda menggunakan strategi dalam memenuhi kebutuhan seksual mereka dengan berhubungan dengan pacar tanpa harus menikah, menonton video dewasa, berhubungan dengan pelanggan atas dasar suka sama suka maupun dengan bayaran. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa keagensian yang sudah terbangun pada diri janda membuat mereka bebas mengekspresikan kebutuhan mereka dalam hal seksual.*

**Kata kunci:** budaya Melayu; agensi seksualitas; Bangka Selatan; janda muda

#### Introduction

The study of sexuality is a fascinating subject to research because, in Malay society, it is still taboo to discuss sexuality freely in public or in private. Studies on sexuality have been widely studied by previous researchers, but it is still uncommon to examine the sexuality of young widows in the Malay culture community. Previous studies of sexuality in the study of widowhood in India revealed that widows are required to "restrict" from society, wear white clothes, and experience injustice (Lamb 2001). Widows in Indonesia experience stereotypes of demeaning women who have sexual desire and seduce men. This stereotype is given through the use of language, naming, and the construction of a social environment to

denigrate them (Mahy et al. 2015). Widows face challenges meeting the necessities of life, particularly poor widows who adopt survival mechanisms due to the many burdens of life (Fitrianingrum & Legowo 2014). Those who are widowed owing to the death of their husbands are more likely to experience severe stress than those who are divorced (Gayatri 2016). Widows are vulnerable to social sanctions in the form of discrimination, fear, negative feelings, trauma, abuse, and exploitation (Chowdhury et al. 2016). Widows require social support in the form of friendship in the social environment in order to avoid feeling isolated and discriminated against (Huisman & Lemke 2020).

De Beauvoir (1989) stated that women's sexuality is an essential part of women's humanity. According to Riyani & Parker (2018), Following the fall of President Soeharto, which signaled the start of the reform era, gender ideology became more publicly addressed, particularly among gender activists, resulting in increased demands for women's equality, as well as their awareness of the need to rise above male dominance. Women's aspirations for equal rights in the public realm, politics, education, employment, and the household reflect their understanding of the need to rise above male dominance (Brenner 2013, White & Anshor 2015).

The phase in which women become aware of their own values and begin to voice demands for their own interests is referred to as Agency (Ortner 2001). The agency raises the awareness of women to make strategies, negotiate to meet demands for their interests or needs. One of the requirements of women who tend to be ignored and considered taboo to discuss is their sexual desire. Based on the Indonesian Plan Parenthood Association (IPPA) of DIY Yogyakarta or PKBI DIY (2016), the distinction between sex and sexuality is that sex refers to gender, which distinguishes between men and women, but sexuality is a dimension that encompasses social, biological, psychological, and cultural dimensions.

Women who are conscious of their sexual needs and desires understand the significance of their bodies' existence. Haraway (1991) divides the body into three parts, including the corporeal (physical) body, the social body, and the imaginary body. Women, on the other hand, are a paradox, according to Simone de Beauvoir, because a woman can be a subject, a consciousness, while also being an object of the 'Absolute Other' (Prabasmoro 2005).

People with dominant patriarchal culture are generally found in almost every culture in Indonesia, including the Malay community. According to M. Nasir in his writings, in Malay Culture, the people live with strong Islamic values, and sources and rely on Islamic laws in applying the rules of their life in their daily lives. Geertz (1963) stated that Malay culture can be classified into a coastal culture whose activities are trade, marine, and plantation. Meanwhile, based on the records of the Dutch and British colonial rulers, Natsir (2014) said that if a person is mainly Muslim, speaks Malay, follows the customs and habits that are characteristic of Malay culture in his daily life, then he/she can be said to be a Malay. Malay custom is based on syarak law from the Kitabullah (Al Quran), so the Malays are ethnically bound culturally and do not have to be due to genealogical similarities (blood lineage) (Natsir 2014).

The processes of assimilation, acculturation, adaptation, social conflict, and socialization that occur today tend to have an impact on changes in Malay society, resulting in numerous shifts in the customs of the Malay community. Prabasmoro (2006) stated that women are raised socio-culturally with the belief that ideally, women have a romantic relationship with their partners. Meanwhile, men are raised with the belief that they are independent beings, which has resulted in the emergence of double standards for male and female sexuality. Women and men who are naturally brought up with such beliefs form a manifestation to perpetuate the view that women are raised to seek romantic relationships that lead to marriage, where wedding ceremonies are held traditionally and women dream to find the ideal men. Therefore, women tend to be obedient, be good wives, serve her husband in bed, do the chores, especially cooking. The construction built in society is that a good woman can meet all of her husband's needs. As a result, women are not aware that she ignores their own needs, particularly in terms of sexuality in order to please their spouse or partner.

Sex is the most absolute identity in every human being because it is the initial identity that a person has, followed by ethnic identities, religion, class, race, and other identities. Therefore, sexuality is an inherent aspect in humans from birth. In practice, a person's sexual expressions are inextricably linked to the social and cultural norms in which they live. Then, it can be interpreted that human sexuality is the result of human construction (Hidayana 2013). A person's experience of himself as a sexual being, feeling entitled to enjoyment, sexual security, then deliberately making active choices to meet his/her sexual needs is referred to as sexual subjectivity (Tolman 2012). Aquarini Priyatna (2013) in her writings asserted that female sexual subjectivity refers to her experiences, desires, choices, and identity as a sexual being. As a result, it may be claimed that female sexual subjectivity encompasses not only the satisfaction of sexual desire but also the question of how sexual desire manifests itself in sexual relations as a type of sexual agency, as well as social and cultural aspects.

This study employs the term Divorcee, which is defined as a woman who is legally separated from her husband who is still living by law, custom, or religion. This study categorizes widows as divorcees as research subjects, as well as widows who come from the mass marriage tradition.

For most women, widowhood is a watershed moment and a significant life event that brings about considerable changes. The most significant changes concern widows' roles, daily routines, and the value they assign to their new lifestyle. Widows have basic needs, including biological or sexual needs, that must be satisfied as sexual beings. These young widows will undoubtedly have sexual desires that must be met after their divorce, particularly now that they have experienced how these needs are met. However, as a result of the divorce, they had to split ways with their legal sexual partners. Their status as widows in a society still steeped in Malay traditions forces them to devise new ways to meet their sexual desires. This study was conducted to reveal how widows with an agency that has been built in them seek strategies to meet their sexual desire needs, either legally (by remarrying) or freely. This study incorporates agency theory from various opinions of feminist scholars who discuss agency, including "the charmed cycle" by Gayle Rubin.

## **Research Method**

Ethnography is a study method based on direct observations by researchers. Doing ethnography requires listening to the actors' conversations 'on stage', reviewing documents created in the field while studying them, and asking other individuals questions. However, ethnography differs from other methods in that it gives a more active role assigned to cognitive styles for observing, viewing, and researching (Wijaya 2018).

Using the ethnographic method, this study investigated the people of Serdang Village of South Bangka's everyday lives, including the Malay culture that pervades their daily lives, how they practice cultural and religious values, and how cultural and religious links bond communal life in Serdang Village. This study investigated by recording and narrating what is observed in the field about the lives of divorced, both unmarried and remarried young widows, how they find their agency in the presence of patriarchal domination and religious values, expressing their desire for sexuality and their strategies to fulfill their desires, and finally, this study investigated the local form of feminism of these young widows in Serdang Village.

The study included 15 young widows aged 16 to 24, their mothers, village heads, village officials, headman traditional leaders, and government officials from the Bangka Induk Regency and South Bangka Regency, as well as academics who had previously performed research in these villages. This study uses data collection techniques by conducting in-depth interviews conducted repeatedly, using audio and video recordings. This data collection tool is highly useful in the process of data collection and data analysis because it ensures the accuracy of the data and allows it to be repeated if necessary.

The data obtained in this study was qualitative. Spradley (1979) describes the technique of analyzing data that has been obtained from the research field. Making ethnographic records or notes is crucial because everything we see and hear is an essential part of the research. No matter how small the information the researchers obtain, the data is still important. The main entry into ethnographic note-taking is the language that must be overcome. An ethnographic record may include field notes during the study, recording devices, pictures, artifacts, or other objects that allow the researcher to describe the cultural atmosphere of the community being studied. The collected data were analyzed and discussed along with previous studies and agency theory proposed by Lois McNay and sexuality by Gayle Rubin.

## Results and Discussion

### Agency of young widows

The results of the study suggest a number of factors that triggered the establishment of the agency in young women, leading to their decision to divorce. One of them is aware of their bodies and their ways or strategies in meeting their body's needs, including sexual desire. Women's awareness of their existence manifested through the act of getting out of escaping dominance, is referred to as agency.

The research subjects were 15 young widows, with diverse family and educational backgrounds. This study explored the complexity of the lives of widows at a young age. Four young widows were quoted from their interviews. Meanwhile, most of the eleven other young widows became widows because they refused to be in a marriage bond that was considered to restrict their freedom. The following is the story of young widows about their efforts to obtain their agency, making the decision to divorce at a young age, and fighting against the stigmatization of society about widows. SUL is a young widow who is 24 years old and has been widowed twice. SUL does not have a problem with his widow status because for her it is better to be a widow than to be cheated on and not given sustenance.

"Since my husband was caught having an affair with a widow from the neighboring village, there was no forgiveness for him. We've only been married for two weeks. I immediately left him and reported to the headman that I no longer wanted to be the wife of the striped-nosed man. I work and can support my children. My big family also helps take care of my children."

Another young widow is YUN who is still 19 years old. She has been divorced three times and said even if she gets married again, then she only wants to marry a man who is well-established and handsome. YUN said:

"I have no problem being a widow because for me, being a widow is better than being disrespected. Being a widow also does not harm people. I am not a usurper for another woman's husband. My family supports me although I have been divorced three times."

Another young widow is WIR who is 24 years old and decided to remain a widow because her experience with her ex-husband made her think twice about marrying again. Following is WIR's narrative:

"Early in my marriage, I secretly consulted with my friend who is a midwife to give birth control injections so that I do not get pregnant. I did it because I didn't feel ready to have children. My husband was impatient because I couldn't get pregnant, so I was divorced a year after getting married. I didn't mind because I was young at the time and was sure to get a new husband. Finally, I was introduced to a man by a friend of mine who is also a widow. We dated for two months, got married, but again, this second husband did not give me sustenance just like my first husband. I kicked him out of the house, but he kept coming to seduce me, and I occasionally melted as well. We separated and reconciled four times before finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I refused to see him after the last separation. Remarrying may necessitate thought, as I do not want to choose the wrong man again."

Another young widow is RIS who is 25 years old and decided to divorce because she did not want to continue in a marriage that was not like being married. Her ex-husband used to be busy in the TI (Timah Inkonvensional) camp, working as a tin miner. Meanwhile, RIS was busy gardening. Her husband only comes home every Wednesday and Saturday. The following is RIS' statement:

"I'm married but it is like I'm not married and don't have a husband because we have always lived separately since we got married. He was in the IT camp while I was at home gardening. We got married through mass marriage. I thought our marriage would be blessed because it was prayed by traditional elders, but I didn't want it to continue like this. I don't mind getting divorced because I have my own income. The yields from my family's rubber and oil palm plantations are enough to support me and my father"

McNay (2003) defined agency as the ability to act in unexpected ways or to establish new and unpredictable behavioral patterns. Certain transformations in gender relations are based on such forms of agency. The term "agency" refers to an individual's actions taken with a clear objective, regardless of whether these actions are a manifestation of self-autonomy or the result of structural forces (Duits & van Zoonen 2007). Women's agency cannot be separated from a scenario in which they are in dominance/power, as well as their ability to fight in their own way, whether through negotiation, compromise, or even extreme measures such as resistance, deviation from domination/power. In order to fight back, these women frequently devise a strategy for escaping male dominance. The agency raises the awareness of women to make strategies, negotiate to meet demands for their interests or needs. One of the needs of women that is often overlooked and difficult to discuss is their sexual desire.

The awareness of women to rise from male domination then manifests into various new forms of power for women to change their situation. According to Ahearn (2008), this new power is considered as a form of deviation or rebellion for certain community cultures in a society with an overwhelming patriarchal culture, where religious values are embraced, believed, and practiced in real terms. This study strengthens the study that was conducted by Mahy et al (2015), which is about widows in Indonesia who experience stereotypes of demeaning women who have sexual desires and seduce men. This stereotype is manifested through language, naming, and the creation of a social environment to demean widows. In strengthening the study of the status of widows in society, a negative label is always attached to a widow, no matter what social status the widow has achieved. Previous studies conducted by two previous researchers about stereotypes and labels about widows is strengthened by this study which aims to open up the mindset of villagers, particularly where the patriarchal culture is still firmly attached, that being a widow is not a disgrace but an achievement that a woman obtains after exhausting mental and physical struggles in her domestic realm.

This study aligns with Parker's (2015) and Parker & Creese's (2016) investigation on widows' sexuality and stigma. This study also discovered that young widows in Serdang Village engage in sexual activity without worry of being stigmatized by a community that sees them adversely. In Parker's study, widows get a negative stigma, but young widows in Serdang Village have no problem with the negative stigma that is always attached to their widow status. Both this study and Parker's study investigate the agency on widows. However, the young widows in this study are those who can utilize their agency as a way or strategy to achieve their welfare.

This study did not examine widows whose husbands died. In this study, young widows aged 16-24 years divorced because they filed for divorce against their husbands. These young widows find agency at a young age, fight society's labels about the negativity of widowhood, and some even challenge the dominant culture. This study is different from the study conducted by Gayatri (2016), which is about women who are widowed due to the death of their husbands, who can suffer from acute stress when compared to widows due to divorce.

This study reveals that the amount of news on social media, the high number of divorces of artists, introductions to other men in the virtual platforms that lead to relationships are factors that raise the self-

awareness of young widows. The existence of social media, such as WhatsApp groups, makes widows actively exchange information about various aspects that support them to find a new partner/boyfriend and easily decide to divorce. One young widow said that "As widows, we have a group. We give each other advice when our friend is having problems with her boyfriend. The principle is that we don't need to feel sad because of a man".

This study found that young widows in Serdang Village got their agency through extended family support, peer influence among widows, and social media. Social media also contributes to providing perspectives that being a single parent is a trend if one feels that her husband does not respect them. In addition to the role of social media, the cultural character of the people of Serdang Village is different from other villages in South Bangka Regency. The Serdang Village is more egalitarian, allowing the role of mothers to have an influence on widows in making decisions. SIN, a young widow who decided not to get married because she was still comfortable with her current life, said that "Mother can still support me because all this time I have been helping my mother selling clothes. I am paid by my mother to take care of myself, go to the beauty salon. So, if there are men who just want to live comfortably with me, my mother will not easily give permission." In addition, young widows in Serdang Village have economic independence. Some of them even own a grocery store, a cell phone shop and its accessories, and manage family gardens.

### **The sexuality of young widows**

Young widows in Serdang Village gain agency, which allows them to make more choices and decisions in their lives. In addition to being able to manage their financial needs without relying on men, these young widows also have their own means of meeting their biological needs, particularly in regard to sexual desires.

Women's sexual subjectivity can be viewed by referring to their experiences, desires, choices, and identities as sexual beings. It might be claimed that women's sexual subjectivity includes not only the fulfillment of sexual desires but also the question of how these sexual desires are manifested in their sexual relationships as a form of sexual agency as well as in social and cultural aspects (Priyatna 2013).

The young widows' story is told in the following paragraphs. SUL, a 24-year-old widow, said that in order to meet her financial needs and desires, she sometimes can have sex without being paid because it is done consensually.

"I've had sexual experiences with my boyfriend since before we married. We used to do it every time we met, which was three times a week before we got married, and it grew more frequent after we got married. However, after I gave the child and had to use contraception, my sex urge plummeted. After the divorce, I satisfied myself by watching adult films and occasionally serving customers at the cafe at a rate that I determined."

Previous studies have shown that every widow who is left behind by her spouse has physical or psychological needs that must be satisfied. Furthermore, the researchers discovered that young widows have become more aware of their existence. In regions where there is a strongly patriarchal culture, value shifts occur. Women, especially widows, challenge patriarchal values with their actions and strategies to meet their needs, especially in terms of sexuality.

A study conducted by Huisman & Lemke (2020) found that the form of social support needed by widows is friendship in the social environment so that they do not feel isolated and discriminated against. A study of widows in Serdang Village reveals that they have a young widow community that facilitates them to share information on various matters, particularly about potential husbands, although it does not cover the fact that there is competition between them. The study conducted by Huisman & Lemke is in line with the study of this study, although this study focuses on the facts that occur among young widows.

The divorce experienced by these young widows makes them feel liberated because they are no longer considered 'unsold' or 'old girls'. In the village, a girl at 17 years old who does not have a boyfriend is labeled as an unsold girl. YUN is a young widow who has been married three times and divorced three times. She claimed that being a widow is fine because she is still young to remarry and find the right husband. Having a boyfriend online is safer than having a boyfriend in the real world, as long as the man does not live too far from her. YUN said that her fellow widows support each other and introduce each other to potential men.

YES, a young widow who has been married three times, does not hesitate to remarry because she admits that she has high sexual desires.

"All of my ex-husbands have been unable to satisfy me in bed, even though I now have four children, so I chose to divorce and, if a man later wants to marry me, I will have no doubts because I, too, require a bed partner."

VIR, a young 20-year-old widow who recently became widowed, said that since she became a widow, she has never lost access to sexual and economic needs because of the support of her new boyfriend and her big family who are quite wealthy.

"Ever since I was dating my husband, I've had an active sexual relationship. My husband, on the other hand, frequently went out gambling late at night during our marriage, and I eventually divorced him. And I've been satisfying my sexual desires with my new boyfriend since I got divorced."

In addition to revealing that their sexual needs can be fulfilled even without having to get married, these widows are also supported by their big families. Some of the parents, particularly the mothers of the widows, said that they did not mind if their daughters had to marry multiple times, as long as they did not suffer. RUS, a widow in her 30s traumatized by her husband's infidelity, is determined to find a husband who is much better than her ex-husband.

"My husband always satisfies me during our 13 years of marriage, but after being caught cheating, I divorced him. Now I vent my sexual desire to my new boyfriend who always satisfies my sexual and economic desires."

MEL, a 26-year-old widow, has freedom after being widowed because, in addition to being financially independent, she has high confidence that getting married is only a matter of time. It is because she has many admirers and her boyfriend always supports her in fulfilling her sexual needs.

"I learned about intimate intercourse for the first time from social media and school friends, and I did it with my ex-husband. However, I was never content during my marriage and opted to utilize contraception. After the divorce, I date a man I believe that can better fulfill me than my ex-husband. But we haven't made up our minds about getting married yet."

This study is different from the study conducted by Fitrianingrum & Legowo (2014) on the survival strategy of elderly widows. Their study examined widows who have difficulty in fulfilling their basic needs in life, especially for poor widows, those who apply survival mechanisms to cope with so many burdens of life. Meanwhile, the young widows in Serdang Village studied were not poor widows. Their approach is not the same as that of elderly widows.

This study also strengthens the studies conducted by other researchers. Grant & Ragsdale (2008) showed that being a widow continues to experience biological and psychological needs. Therefore, some widows start dating after divorce. Then, Dewi (2010) revealed that some widows will decide to remarry because of their sexual urge as a necessity. Syah & Mulyadi (2016) who examined elderly widows found that although they do not really need attention from their partners, they still need physical



and psychological needs. Ahmed-Ghosh (2009) stated that in a patriarchal culture, widows are asked to control their sexuality but on the other hand, they are used as a symbol of sexuality while demeaning the widow herself.

A study of young widows in Serdang Village found that widows have ways of meeting their sexual needs. Some of them said that they have options in fulfilling their sexual desire, either by remarrying, having a relationship with a boyfriend, or satisfying themselves. This is as said by RIS, a 24-year-old widow. RIS was widowed for four years and only started dating again in the last few months. RIS really enjoys her widow status, a relationship with her new boyfriend, financial support that is often given without RIS asking, and highly satisfying sexual needs. Adult videos become their lighter before having sex. His new boyfriend has asked RIS to marry him, but RIS does not want to rush into marriage because she still enjoys her widow status.

"I enjoy sex more with my current boyfriend than my ex-husband because my current boyfriend can satisfy me both sexually and financially. But right now, I'm not ready to remarry and I'm still comfortable with being a widow."

The researcher also found data in the field that patriarchal culture is inextricably linked to Serdang Village because it is part of Malay culture. The condition of school-age adolescents in having sexual relations is a common thing. Parents do not mind when their children have to do early marriage because their daughter is already pregnant. The researcher found the reality that the culture of the people in Serdang Village was in fact highly permissive to early marriage and divorce that happened many times to a widow. According to the headman, Atok Wi, married residents usually report verbally to him, but many of them later divorce and remarry without reporting again for registration as an official report to the Religious Court.

An essay was written by Rubin (1984) entitled 'Thinking Sex' visualizes a circle that is divided into two, including the inside and the outside to describe how different social groups with different social values apply these values to sexual behavior, placing certain behaviors in the middle. They place certain behaviors at the very core of what is 'good and natural' (heterosexual, monogamous, voluntary sex within a legal marriage, and without payment). Certain other behaviors are on the periphery of the circle because they are considered 'bad and unnatural' (polygamy, LGBT, sex with payment, and sex in public places). Sex is the most absolute identity in every human being because it is the first identity possessed by individuals that are followed by other identities such as ethnicity, religion, class, race, etc. Therefore, sexuality is inherent in humans from birth. In practice, a person's sexual expressions cannot be separated from the prevailing socio-cultural norms where they live. Eventually, it can be interpreted that human sexuality is the result of human construction.

Gayle Rubin sees that the issue of sexuality, particularly in a society with a strongly patriarchal culture, is something dirty to talk about. Rubin divides the issue of sexuality in remote communities in a binary opposition including The Charmed Circle and The Outer Limits. According to Rubin, The Charmed Circle is society's view that true sexuality is everything that has to do with sexual matters. This is done normally, heterosexually, through marriage, and only done in reasonable places. Meanwhile, The Outer Limits shows that matters of a sexual nature are said to be deviant. The Outer Limits is the opposite of The Charmed Circle, including homosexuality, sexual relations outside of marriage, polygamy, having sex just for fun, having sex for payment, and having sex in public.

This study revealed the reality that widows in Serdang Village, which is far from the city, actually have different values from the general village community. While they should still be bound by cultural customs, the opposite happened in Serdang Village. Rubin said that in communities that are far from the city, traditional communities have customs that strictly regulate sexuality issues. But this study on the other hand found that these young widows try hard to meet their sexual needs. It belongs to the two binary opposition groups stated by Rubin. They have sex outside of marriage. Some of them have sex

either just for fun or for money. Based on the results of interviews with one of the research subjects, she is used to having sexual intercourse on the football field in their village, every Sunday night regularly, by going on double dates. DEW, a research subject, stated that:

“We used to go on dates at the football field in the village. Young people from the next village also often come. We get together for a date on a motorbike or go out into the bush. We usually get together because all week we are busy working in the garden while some of our boyfriends work in the IT (Timah Inkonvensional) camp.”

Based on the reality found in the field, the Serdang Village community which is a Malay community is in fact quite permissive to religious values and norms. This is a paradox because Serdang Village should be one that sticks to religious values. The reality found supports people who are so permissive of certain religious values because based on stories from the traditional elders of Serdang Village, this village indeed believes in the power of their ancestors who give them a successful harvest which is realized through thanksgiving and mass marriages. As long as the elders believe that village celebrations through mass weddings are held every year, then anything else that is contrary to religious values will not be a problem.

Agency of sexuality not only breaks patriarchy but also norms in general, including social, legal, and religious. The patriarchal culture is commonly strongly attached to the village community, but the patriarchal culture in Serdang Village is not too strong because based on the research conducted. The characteristics of the Serdang Village community are generally more egalitarian. The role of mothers in Serdang Village is highly strong, particularly in making decisions for widows when they decide to divorce or remarry.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the factors that make widows in Serdang Village find their agency include a) their financial independence. In Serdang Village, the average woman works in the garden by planting pepper, rubber, and oil palm as a source of income, b) the influence of social media. Divorce of artists, acquaintances with other men in cyberspace that lead to relationships is also a factor in awakening the self-awareness of young widows, c) not being satisfied sexually. This is because some of their ex-husbands have an affair so they rarely get sustenance mentally/sexually, d) their awareness of their bodies. They take advantage of their young age to quickly get out of divorce to get a better man so they can get the ideal happiness they desire, and e) full support from their mothers for divorce.

When agency appears, women, particularly in this study, look for ways to break free from dominance, and a strategy emerges. Women who have been widowed at an early age look for strategies to fulfill their sexual desires. Based on the results of the exploration, the researcher found the fact that several strategies are used by the young widows including a) establishing relationships through social media, then meeting outside the village, b) by remarrying. Many of them decide to divorce afterward, and c) establish relationships with other men without getting married. Feminism is women's awareness of equality, beyond their nature as women. In the midst of change, a culture of violence continues to be perpetrated against women. This study was carried out, at the very least, to provide a different viewpoint on the resistance of young widows in Serdang Village, who, without realizing it, were resisting and giving meaning to feminism, namely feminism in the style of widows in Serdang Village (local feminism), sexual agency, which is something that is always attached to every woman.

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