

SUICIDE BEHAVIOR AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM IN BALI: A SOCIO-LEGAL STUDY AND THE ROLE OF CUSTOMARY VILLAGES AS A PREVENTION MEASURE

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of suicide in Bali is a complex issue that has not only psychological dimensions, but also social, cultural, and legal dimensions. This study uses a socio-legal approach to examine how suicidal behavior is understood and handled within the framework of customary law and in the context of the local wisdom of the Balinese people. By highlighting the traditional village as a place to ensure community welfare, this paper reveals how values such as communal values of society, the values of karma phala, Tri Hita Karana, and Tat Twam Asi play a role in shaping social responses to suicide. This study also identifies opportunities and challenges in building a suicide prevention system that is contextual and culturally just

Keywords: suicide, socio-legal, customary law, Balinese local wisdom

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1. Background of the Problem

Suicide behavior has become a serious social problem in various parts of the world, including Indonesia. In Bali, this phenomenon attracts attention because it occurs in a society that is very religious and has a strong customary value system. Suicide cases are not only personal tragedies but also cause social unrest. Empirically, the suicide rate in Bali is recorded as high. Indications of high suicide factors include economic pressure, family conflict, mental disorders, and the burden of social expectations such as maintaining the family's good name.¹

In a study conducted by Made Emi Andayani Citra entitled Implementation of Criminal Law Against Negative Responses of Global Society in Committing Suicide in the Legal Area of Bali Province, it is stated that "Suicide is often committed due to despair, which is often associated with mental disorders, such as depression, bipolar disorder schizophrenia, alcohol dependence/alcoholism, or drug abuse. Factors that cause stress include financial difficulties or problems in interpersonal relationships also play a role".² The results of this study found that there were individual problems that had an impact on the legal and social order which pushed Balinese people into the trap of wanting to commit suicide due to various factors.

Emile Durkheim and classified suicide into three types: egoistic, altruistic, and economic. This theory emphasizes the importance of social and cultural factors in shaping suicidal behavior.³ Emile Durkheim conducted research related to suicide. In his famous work entitled *Le Suicide: Étude de sociologie* (Suicide: A Study in Sociology), Durkheim analyzed suicide to be one of the most influential research contributions in understanding the phenomenon of suicide. Durkheim argued that suicide is not an isolated individual act, but also a social phenomenon

¹ Kusumayanti, N. K. D. W., Swedarma, K. E., & Nurhesti, P. O. Y. 2020. Hubungan faktor psikologis dengan risiko bunuh diri pada remaja SMA dan SMK di Bangli dan Klungkung. *Coping: Community of Publishing in Nursing*, 8 (2), 124.

² Citra, M. E. A., SH, M., HENGKI, I. G. B., & SH, S. (2020). Implementasi Hukum Pidana Terhadap Responsif Negatif Masyarakat Global Dalam Melakukan Tindakan Bunuh Diri di Wilayah Hukum Provinsi Bali. *Jurnal Hukum Saraswati*, 2(2).189

³ Mesra, R. 2024. Meningkatnya Kasus Bunuh Diri Akibat Pergaulan Bebas dalam Kehidupan Remaja di Indonesia (Analisis Berdasarkan Perspektif Teori Bunuh Diri Emile Durkheim). *ETIC (EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCE JOURNAL)*, 1(3), 152-159.

influenced by social factors. Durkheim emphasized that the suicide rate in a society is not only related to the characteristics of the individual who feels pressured, but also to the social factors that influence the individual. Durkheim identified three types of suicide based on social integration and social regulation.⁴

1. Egoistic Suicide: Egoistic suicide occurs when an individual feels disconnected or less connected to society or social groups. Factors that can lead to egoistic suicide are high individualism, lack of social support, and a sense of isolation.
2. Altruistic Suicide: Altruistic suicide occurs when an individual sacrifices himself or herself for the sake of a high social interest or norm. Factors that can lead to altruistic suicide include strong social pressure, for example in cultures that value self-sacrifice, such as some honor traditions or religions
3. Anomic Suicide: Anomic suicide occurs when there is a social imbalance in society, leading to confusion or loss of clear goals and norms. Factors that can cause anomic suicide are sudden social changes, economic instability, or social conflicts that disrupt the orderly social structure. In his research

Durkheim showed that suicide rates can vary between different social groups, and can be influenced by social factors such as the degree of social integration, the degree of social regulation, and social change. However, it is important to remember that Durkheim's approach does not ignore the individual psychological factors that also play a role in suicide. His explanation focuses more on social factors involving the individual in the context of society. Suicide becomes a social problem when the individual's actions impact the wider community, giving rise to anxiety, stigma, and collective rituals of redemption.⁵ In Balinese society, this action is not only understood as an individual failure but also as a social and spiritual failure.

The socio-legal approach opens up space to understand how local legal norms and cultural values interact in responding to suicide. In Indonesia, positive

⁴ Biroli, A. (2018). Bunuh diri dalam perspektif sosiologi. *Simulacra*, 1(2), 213-223.

⁵ Adinda, S. T., & Prastuti, E. 2021. Regulasi emosi dan dukungan sosial: sebagai prediktor ide bunuh diri mahasiswa. *Journal An-Nafs: Kajian Penelitian Psikologi*, 6(1), 135-151.

law does not criminalize suicide, but medically and socially, suicide attempters are considered in need of protection and rehabilitation.

Meanwhile, in the Balinese customary law system, suicide is seen as an act of *ulah pati* (seeking death carelessly), which disrupts the harmony between humans and the universe. Consequently, families and communities can experience losses in *sekala* and *niskala*, and carry out special ceremonial atonement such as *guru piduka* which is carried out to re-purify the spiritual environment that has been harmed communally.

Traditional villages in Bali are a container for social and spiritual groups that have a central role in regulating the life of the community as a whole. Its function is not only administrative, but also normative, empirical and religious. However, in the context of mental health issues, especially the phenomenon of suicide that continues to occur in Bali, the role of traditional villages appears to face serious challenges. Traditional villages act as guardians of harmony between humans, nature, and God (*Tri Hita Karana*).⁶ In this context, prevention of all forms of social chaos is its primary task. However, the weakness in this customary system is that it places more emphasis on ritualistic purification and normalization of suicidal behavior than on preventive handling. In cases of suicide, customary villages generally perform a ritual cleansing of the scene and sometimes impose customary sanctions on the victim's family.

Suicide behavior in Bali is not just an individual problem, but has developed into a complex social phenomenon. Although Balinese society has an established social and spiritual system through traditional village institutions, the still high suicide rate indicates a failure to detect and respond to the psychosocial dynamics of its citizens. In the context of a society that upholds harmony and balance between *sekala* (the real world) and *niskala* (the *niskala*/spiritual world), suicide is often seen as a form of moral and spiritual imbalance. This has an impact on the way society

⁶ Padet, I. W., & Krishna, I. B. W. 2020. Falsafah hidup dalam konsep kosmologi Tri Hita Karana. *Genta Hredaya: Media Informasi Ilmiah Jurusan Brahma Widya STAHN Mpu Kuturan Singaraja*, 2 (2).

responds to the event, which is often more ritualistic than psychologically and socially solutive

Traditional villages that should be protective social spaces for their communities have not been fully able to play an active role in preventing and handling mental crises, including suicidal behavior. This raises questions about the role of customary law in the contemporary social system and its effectiveness in responding to modern social challenges. Through a socio-legal approach, this study attempts to examine suicidal behavior as a social phenomenon that is not only psychological in dimension, but also closely related to the social structure, cultural norms, and legal system in force in Bali.

2. Problem Formulation

Based on this background, through the identification of fundamental issues related to the relationship between suicidal behavior, social norms, and the function of traditional villages, several questions can be formulated as follows:

1. How should the traditional village system be structurally and culturally inhibiting the prevention of suicidal behavior?
2. How can a strategy to revitalize the role of traditional villages be formulated to prevent suicide in the context of modern Balinese society?

3. Research Method

The research used in this journal is using the type of empirical legal research. Empirical legal research is legal research on the implementation or enforcement of normative legal provisions in action on every specific legal event that occurs in society.⁷

4. Theoretical Foundation

The theory of living law is the meaning of law that lives in society. According to Eugen Ehrlich (1862-1922) the center of activity of legal development, does not lie in the law, not in legal science, and also not in court

⁷ Abdulkadir Muhammad. 2004. *Hukum dan Penelitian Hukum*, (Bandung, Citra Aditya Bakti,) 134

decisions, but in society itself.⁸ From the perspective of the legal theory above, law can be found directly in the daily lives of society by looking at the norms, customs, and social facts that grow and develop in society, which are referred to as customary law.

5. Research Results

a. Structural and Cultural Factors in the Traditional Village System That Inhibit the Prevention of Suicidal Behavior

Talking about the System, the system is most often used to refer to the concept of a method or way and a collection of elements or components that are interconnected with each other to form a complete whole. Actually, its use is more than that, but it is less well known. As a set, the system is also defined in various ways. The legal system according to language is a legal entity that consists of three elements, namely: (1) Structure; (2) Substance; (3) Legal Culture.⁹

If we look at the legal culture in Balinese traditional society, it reflects the very complex nature of the communal life of Balinese traditional society, it binds social structures and cultural structures that inspire all behavior of its society.

In the context of Balinese society, traditional villages are social institutions that have a strategic position in regulating communal life based on traditional, spiritual and customary law values.¹⁰ However, in facing contemporary issues such as the increasing suicide rate, traditional villages face significant structural and cultural challenges. As a social institution formed with the logic of balance between the material and the spiritual, the traditional village system tends to view deviant behavior, including suicide, as a violation of cosmic harmony that must be ritually neutralized. This has direct implications for the weakness of preventive and rehabilitative responses to people with mental disorders.

⁸ Achmad Ali, 2013, *Menguak Teori Hukum (Legal Theory) Dan Teori peradilan (Judicialprudence) Termasuk Intepretasi Undang-Undang (Legisprudence), Vol-1 Pemahaman Awal*, Cetakan ke-5, Jakarta, Jakarta, Kencana Prenadamedia Group), 424.

⁹ Kristanto, K., Dekapolis, C. D., & Pandowo, I. (2023). Customary Law as Part of the Reform Legal System in Indonesia. *Focus Journal Law Review*, 3(2).

¹⁰ Hadat, H. 2020. *Eksistensi Tri Hita Karana dalam Pembentukan Peraturan Hukum di Bali (Perspektif Filsafat Ilmu)*. *Jurnal Magister Hukum Udayana*, 9 (1), 132-141.

From a structural perspective, traditional villages do not yet have adequate institutional tools to handle mental health issues. There is no traditional body or work unit specifically tasked with identifying or intervening in individuals who show symptoms of psychological disorders or suicidal tendencies. The institutional functions of traditional villages are more focused on managing ceremonies, resolving traditional disputes, and preserving customary norms. This is exacerbated by the lack of synergy between traditional institutions and state institutions, such as social services or health services. As a result, suicide cases are often not followed up socially or medically, but are instead resolved through environmental purification rituals, without touching on the root of the problem. There are a number of other cultural factors that strengthen the barriers to suicide prevention in Balinese traditional villages. One of them is the strong culture of shame and social self-esteem that is rooted in the self-awareness of the Balinese people. In this culture, individuals are required to always maintain the image of the family and social honor in front of the wider community. When someone experiences economic pressure, family conflict, or personal failure, deep feelings of shame can become a major psychological burden. In many cases, this shame is not accommodated in open communication, but rather buried in silence, which can ultimately lead to tragic decisions such as suicide.

Collective values in Balinese culture also contribute to obstacles. The social system of traditional villages is more oriented towards preserving collective harmony than towards restoring individual conditions. In many cases, individuals who experience psychological stress or mental disorders do not have the space to voice their suffering openly for fear of disrupting social order or being considered to bring negative energy to their surroundings. As a result, a culture of silence has emerged that closes off space for discussion and education on mental health issues and suicide prevention.

In the traditional social structure of Balinese society, communal life is the main foundation that supports social, spiritual, and economic relations. Values such as *nyama braya* (brotherhood), mutual cooperation, and *menyama braya* are the

main pillars in maintaining social cohesion between residents.¹¹ This communal spirit is not only a symbol of togetherness, but also functions as an effective social protection system in dealing with suffering, crises, and life pressures. However, in recent decades, these values have been degraded along with the entry of modernization, individualism, and market logic into the life structure of Balinese indigenous people.

This erosion of the communal spirit has weakened the social function of traditional villages as protectors of their citizens. Solidarity that used to be present in the form of direct attention, emotional support, and collective involvement in solving problems, has now been replaced by more formal, shallow, and transactional social relations. When someone experiences psychological suffering, depression, or other social pressures, the community response is no longer spontaneous and organic. In fact, in some cases, individuals who experience suffering are left in social silence

This phenomenon can be explained as a form of social fragmentation, where the sense of belonging between villagers is fading. One indicator is the decreasing role of the traditional banjar as a space for emotional communication and collective solidarity. The presence of residents in communal activities is now more administrative than effective. Many individuals come because of obligation, not because of the urge to be together. In an atmosphere like this, individuals who are experiencing a mental crisis often feel alone in the midst of a crowd, there is no safe and intimate enough space to express suffering honestly without fear of being judged or ostracized.

The loss of communal spirit also causes failure to detect early signs of suicide. In a cohesive community, signs of behavioral or emotional changes are usually quickly read by neighbors or close family. However, when social relations become impersonal and rarely accompanied by emotional closeness, individuals with mental disorders become invisible to the community. Traditional villages as a social system also become ineffective as an early warning system, because they lose

¹¹ Fatmawati, K. 2021. Menyama Braya dalam Upanisad. *JAPAM (Jurnal Pendidikan Agama)*, 1 (01), 62-67.

the sensitivity and social closeness that were previously their strengths. Sociologically and culturally, the loss of communal spirit is a shift in values from a communal society to an individualistic society. This is reinforced by the pressures of modern life, and an orientation towards social image rather than the quality of relationships between people. In this condition, customary law also loses its function as an emotional and moral binder for society, because it loses the social basis that supports its validity internally.

b. Revitalization Strategy of Traditional Village Role Can Be Formulated to Prevent Suicide in the Context of Modern Balinese Society

In the dynamics of Balinese society which continues to change due to modernization, urbanization, and socio-economic pressures, traditional villages are faced with the major challenge of remaining relevant and responsive institutions to contemporary humanitarian problems¹², including the phenomenon of suicide. The strategy for revitalizing the role of traditional villages must be designed fundamentally not only to improve structural and institutional aspects, but also to reaffirm the communal values that are the soul of the Balinese traditional system.

One concrete form of this strategy is the re-strengthening of the values of *menyama braya* and *gotong royong* as the moral foundation of the community. In the context of suicide prevention, the values of *menyama braya* are not enough to be interpreted symbolically in social rituals, but must be revived as a form of active concern for the psychosocial conditions of community members. Traditional villages can form citizen forums that function as sharing spaces to voice concerns, life pressures, and personal suffering without fear of being stigmatized or judged. This is the first step in rebuilding an empathetic communal spirit in a space where every individual feels seen, heard, and appreciated

Revitalizing communal values also requires a change in perspective on individual suffering. In a healthy communal system, the suffering of one person is a shared responsibility. This is the spirit that must be re-instilled regarding the fact that no citizen is left to suffer alone. Traditional villages can develop a culture of

¹² Praditha, S. H., MH, M., & Artajaya, S. H. 2024. *Buku Referensi Hukum Adat Bali Denyut Nadi Bali dalam Gempuran Globalisasi*. Pt Media Penerbit Indonesia.

padu rasa, mawirasa (inviting to talk), which means creating a tradition of warm, empathetic, and understanding conversation in the village's social spaces

This strategy also requires recontextualization of Balinese religious teachings and philosophies of life, such as Tat Twam Asi and Tri Hita Karana, as a value base for building more inclusive social solidarity. These teachings contain the meaning that the suffering of others is part of our own suffering, and that harmony is not only realized through rituals, but also through real actions in protecting the life and dignity of every villager

Bali Provincial Regulation Number 4 of 2019 concerning Customary Villages is an important milestone in legal recognition of the existence, authority, and strategic function of customary villages in Bali. This regulation not only regulates the institutional structure and customary authority, but also emphasizes that customary villages have an active role in maintaining social, spiritual, and ecological harmony in their territory (*Desa, Kala, Patra*). In this context, strengthening the joy and sorrow groups can and should be placed as one of the concrete forms of implementing the social function of customary villages as regulated in the regulation. Article 3 of Regulation No. 4 of 2019 states that the purpose of regulating customary villages is "to maintain harmony and balance in the relationship between humans and God, humans and humans, and humans and the natural environment." The phenomenon of suicide is clearly a disruption to the harmony of human relations with themselves and their communities. Therefore, suicide prevention can be categorized as part of efforts to maintain the safety of the world, which is the moral and institutional obligation of customary villages

Furthermore, Article 17 letter (e) states that traditional villages have the authority to organize social functions based on custom. This is the legal basis for the revitalization and empowerment of the suka duka group as a social unit that can be directed to support community mental health. Strengthening the role of suka duka, in this case, does not go beyond the formal legal framework, but rather becomes a concrete form of implementation of the regional regulation

Thus, strengthening communal values is not only an effort to preserve culture, but is a transformative strategy in building social resilience in modern

Balinese society. In this framework, traditional villages become not just guardians of customs, but also social shelters that live in places where no citizen feels abandoned in silent inner suffering

6. Conclusion

The suicide phenomenon in Bali cannot be viewed solely as an individual problem, but rather as a social and cultural problem that reflects the occurrence of value disorientation, weakening social cohesion, and the unpreparedness of local institutions in responding to the challenges of the times. Traditional villages as traditional institutions formally recognized through Bali Provincial Regulation Number 4 of 2019, have a strategic position in responding to this problem contextually and community-based. Socio-legal analysis shows that the failure of some traditional villages in preventing suicide is caused by structural and cultural factors, such as weak social institutions, minimal mental health literacy, preservation of taboos, and the weakening of communal values that used to be the heart of Balinese life. Moreover, social transformation due to modernization has shifted the meaning of *menyama braya* from real solidarity to merely a cultural symbol. Within the framework of revitalization, groups of joy and sorrow as the social unit closest to the dynamics of residents have great potential to be empowered as pillars of social support, education, and early detection of suicide risk. The Bali Customary Village Regulation provides a legal framework that allows for custom-based social innovation, so that suicide prevention strategies can become part of the social function of customary villages legally. Thus, the synergy between customary legal norms, cultural values, and contemporary mental health approaches can be a strong foundation for the development of an inclusive, participatory, and local wisdom-based social protection system. Ultimately, suicide prevention in Bali will only be effective if customary villages are able to reaffirm their spirit as social homes, where every citizen feels they belong, are protected, and are not left alone in suffering. This revitalization is not only a form of preservation, but also a path to salvation for the human dignity of the Balinese people in the midst of the current era

7. Recommendations

The local government through the traditional village has an important role in maintaining the harmony of the traditional law community and the jurisdiction of traditional law by making awig-awig to prevent the behavior of people who want to commit suicide. The traditional village routinely conducts socialization to the community in the traditional village jurisdiction, both local communities and immigrant communities, regarding the impacts of the actions taken

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