

Optimism of Women with *Belis*

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Abstract. Marriage practices rooted in local cultural traditions often shape women's psychological experiences and well-being. In the Nagekeo community, the '*belis*' tradition not only represents social respect and cultural identity but also presents social, economic, and emotional challenges for women within marital life. This study aims to identify the factors that influence women's optimism with *belis* in Nagekeo, using a descriptive qualitative method with 7 participants. Data were collected through interviews and thematic analysis. The results found four main themes that shape women's optimism: (1) social support, including support from husbands, children, immediate family, and the social environment; (2) self-esteem that arises from social appreciation and acceptance after the *belis* process; (3) self-confidence through involvement in decision-making, adaptability, and self-control; (4) accumulated experience, including readiness for marriage and spiritual conviction. These findings show that women's optimism is shaped by mutually reinforcing factors that help them persevere and view marriage positively.

Keywords: *optimism, belis, Nagekeo*

Abstrak. Praktik perkawinan yang berakar pada tradisi budaya lokal seringkali membentuk pengalaman psikologis dan kesejahteraan perempuan. Tradisi *belis* masyarakat Nagekeo tidak hanya merepresentasikan penghormatan sosial dan identitas budaya, tetapi juga menghadirkan tantangan sosial, ekonomi, dan emosional bagi perempuan dalam kehidupan pernikahan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi optimisme perempuan dengan *belis* di Nagekeo, menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan tujuh partisipan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dan menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menemukan empat tema utama yang membentuk optimisme perempuan: (1) dukungan sosial, meliputi dukungan suami, anak, keluarga inti, serta lingkungan sosial; (2) harga diri yang muncul dari penghargaan dan penerimaan sosial setelah proses *belis*; (3) kepercayaan diri melalui keterlibatan dalam pengambilan keputusan, kemampuan adaptasi, dan pengendalian diri; (4) akumulasi pengalaman yang mencakup kesiapan menikah dan keyakinan spiritual. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa optimisme perempuan terbentuk melalui interaksi berbagai faktor yang saling menguatkan, sehingga membantu perempuan bertahan dan memaknai pernikahan secara positif.

Kata kunci: *optimisme, belis, Nagekeo*

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Introduction

Belis is a dowry in traditional marriages among the people of East Nusa Tenggara, including in Nagekeo. In this tradition, the man gives property to the woman's family as a condition for legalizing the marriage. The *belis* procession involves a series of traditional stages such as *tana ngale*, *teo tada*, *be'o sa'o*, and *tau ngawu*, which not only mark the union of two individuals but also the relationship between families (Engo, 2016).

In several studies, *belis* is understood as a symbol of appreciation that strengthens women's position in their husband's family. Nuwa (2019) found that *belis* also plays a role in guaranteeing women's rights in their husband's family, including the right to work, inherit property, have rights over children, and participate in traditional activities. On the other hand, *belis* can also be a source of emotional pressure because the high value of *belis* often becomes an economic burden for the family, especially when financing *belis* leads to debt and reliance on the extended family. This causes women to feel pressured in their marriages due to the demands of responsibility from the husband's extended family (Sina & Rahman, 2023).

Belis originally considered a form of appreciation for women and their families, is now widely regarded as a burden and even an economic transaction, with women positioned as "purchased objects" (Dafiq, 2018). In some cases, *belis* is used as an excuse for husbands to commit violence against wives who do not bear children, on the grounds that the *belis* given gives the husband the right to act as he pleases (Kristiyani, 2020). Research shows that men who have paid *belis* often exhibit abusive behavior towards their wives, which can trigger physical and emotional violence (Lakamau & Wibowo, 2021).

Research by Homewood Health United Kingdom shows that women are more vulnerable to mental health disorders than men (Arifia, 2021). Women often face challenges in their daily lives, both in the household and in public spaces. This situation can have an impact on women's mental health, such as anxiety, feelings of worthlessness, and even depression. Therefore, the ability to see the future positively is important in maintaining psychological well-being. An optimistic attitude is expected to help a person think clearly, thereby creating a sense of security. An optimistic person tends to be more creative, persistent, hardworking, and often smiles (Harpan, 2015). Optimism can keep a person enthusiastic, survive, adapt, and provide for their family's well-being. Optimism among women is influenced by mutually supportive factors. Self-esteem, self-confidence, resilience, faith in the creator, stable children, and support from those closest to them help women rise from difficulties. These factors contribute to optimism, which enables them to continue facing life's challenges with hope (Santoso & Prihartanti, 2017).

Based on the above explanation, research on the optimism of women with *belis* in Nagekeo is very important. To date, no research has specifically addressed the optimism of women involved in the practice of *belis*. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring the factors that influence women's optimism in the *belis* tradition in Nagekeo.

Method

This study uses descriptive qualitative research. Sugiyono (2013) states that qualitative research methods are often referred to as naturalistic research methods because the research is conducted in scientific conditions (natural settings). This study was conducted in the Nagekeo regency. There were 7 participants, and the participant selection process used purposive sampling. The criteria for participants expected by the researcher were: married women in *Belis*. Aged between 20 and 60 years old, and residing in Nagekeo. Data was collected through interviews. The data obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis. Data validity was tested using member checks.

Member checking was conducted by providing participants with a verbatim interview transcript for review. Participants were asked to reread their interview summaries, and all confirmed that the transcriptions and summaries accurately reflected their experiences and were appropriate for analysis.

Result

The data collected through interviews was then analyzed. Thematic analysis is a method used to examine data in depth, enabling researchers to identify patterns and themes in the collected data (Heriyanto, 2018). The stages of data analysis techniques include: understanding the data, coding, and identifying themes. This study found four themes and ten sub-themes: (a) Social support: husband and children, immediate family, and social environment; (b) Self-esteem: appreciation from the husband's family, social acceptance; (c) Self-confidence: decision-making, adaptability, and self-control; (d) Accumulation of experience: (a) readiness for marriage, (b) spiritual beliefs.

(a) Social Support

Social support is a form of assistance and guidance that participants feel in facing married life. Social support comes in the form of attention, advice, presence, and cooperation in household management, helping participants feel they are not alone in facing problems. This support comes from husbands, children, biological families, husbands' families, and social environments.

Participants reported that their husbands show support through attention, reassuring words, and cooperation in household management. The following is a participant's statement:

Of course, my husband has to support me no matter what. He has a saying: when he sees me tired or having a problem, he usually says, "Come on, don't think too much about it." He also often helps me when I have a lot of work. (Mrs. Rena)

My husband is also very understanding; he always tries to help me. When it comes to children, it's a shared responsibility. Not just me as a wife, but also with my husband. (Mrs. Lisa)

Children are also a source of strength for participants; their presence motivates them to persevere and fight for a complete family.

I'm also afraid my children will lose their complete family. I chose to persevere and fight.
(Mrs. Jesi)

I was afraid that if I gave up, they would no longer feel like a complete family. (Mrs. Lisa)

Participants also mentioned support from their families in the form of help with housework and childcare. The following is a participant's statement:

When I'm sick, my mother-in-law usually helps. She usually helps take care of me and also takes care of the children. (Mrs. Leta)

My sister-in-law is also kind, she likes to help when I'm tired or busy taking care of the children. (Mrs. Lisa)

Support from my social circle helps me deal with problems in my household. A caring relationship can foster a sense of togetherness, strengthening women's optimism about running a household. This was conveyed by a participant:

Usually, when I talk to Ani's parents, they advise me, "Be patient. Problems in the household are normal, but don't give up on your relationship. You two were brought together by God." Sometimes I also tell my neighbors, and they usually listen to me. Praise God, after sharing stories like that, I feel better. (Mrs. Reta)

Having the opportunity to share my stories, participants felt calmer. This was also conveyed by Mrs. Jesi, as follows:

After sharing my problems, I usually feel calmer. So when I come back home, I feel more at ease. If we have a problem, we just want to be heard. Once we've told our story, it feels more at ease. (Mrs. Jesi)

(b) Self-Esteem

In Nagekeo, *belis* is understood as a symbol of respect and honor for women and their families. Participants stated that *belis* is not interpreted as a form of economic transaction, but rather as a way to make them feel respected as women.

This was conveyed by a participant:

For this belis process, the woman's family, including mine, doesn't ask for a belis. But the man's side gives it as a sign of respect for their parents. This also elevates my status as a woman, showing that women are also valuable. (Mrs. Lisa)

This was also conveyed by Mrs. Leta, who views the *belis* as a form of appreciation and gratitude for her parents, who raised her from childhood. She stated as follows:

I consider the belis a form of appreciation for my parents, because they raised me from childhood until I got married. (Mrs. Leta)

Mrs. Yuli also stated that the *belis* (wedding dowry) provides a clear position in the husband's family. Here's what Mrs. Yuli said:

In our system, if we have it according to our customs, we have to buy a dowry so we have some rights in the man's house. If we don't buy a dowry, we have no rights. (Mrs. Yuli)

The *belis* serves as a social symbol that strengthens a woman's position and legitimizes her existence. This fosters feelings of acceptance and appreciation, which form the basis for optimism in married life. This sense of appreciation is further strengthened by social acceptance after the woman has bought a dowry. Mrs. Rida and Mrs. Rena stated that they were well-received by their husband's families.

They didn't have any demands, so they truly accepted my sister as their true daughter, not just a daughter-in-law; she was already part of their family. They were very kind to my sister. (Mrs. Rida)

They accepted me for who I am, so I felt comfortable. (Mrs. Rena)

(c) Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is an individual's belief in their ability to face situations and fulfill their roles in daily life. Women's self-confidence develops through three processes: involvement in decision-making, adapting to new roles, and self-control in the face of problems. Women's involvement in household decision-making demonstrates an equal relationship and the husband's respect for his wife's abilities. Participants reported that they were involved in family decision-making and were not ignored.

If there was something we had to resolve, they would definitely accept my opinion, and I would accept their opinion. So, my older sister was also involved in decision-making, not ignored. (Mrs. Rida)

In my extended family, I was also asked for my opinion. So, I felt involved and had a say in decision-making. (Mrs. Reta)

Women's involvement in decision-making strengthened their perceptions of control over their lives, their feelings of being valued and recognized, and their self-confidence and self-esteem.

After marriage, women face changing roles, habits, and social demands that differ from their pre-marriage lives. This adaptation process includes changes in daily habits, self-control, and the ability to manage relationships with their husband's family. Mrs. Lisa said she has to wake up earlier and prepare meals.

When you're married and have a wife, there are a lot of changes. You have to wake up early and prepare meals. Especially in our country, Mbay, where we have to drink coffee in the morning. We have to adapt. Those who used to wake up late now have to wake up early. Then, those who used to be lazy about cooking now cook diligently. Yes, there are big changes after marriage. Because it's become a habit, we have to adjust. (Mrs. Lisa)

Mrs. Yuli said the importance of managing time and making family a top priority.

We really have to adapt; we can't be as selfish as before. Now, we don't live just for ourselves, but for our family as well. That's what teaches us patience and responsibility, and it makes us stronger. (Mrs. Yuli)

This shows that adaptability helps participants adjust to changes in married life. In addition to adaptability, women use self-control to maintain relationship harmony and deal with various problems that arise in marriage. Self-control functions to manage emotions, regulate responses, and reduce conflict. Participants choose to calm down before responding when faced with emotional situations.

Usually, I stay quiet and don't respond quickly. We're both emotional, and things will get messy. Just listen first, and then speak politely once we've calmed down. (Mrs. Lisa) I'm looking for a solution. I work quietly, I have more time, and I prefer to avoid it. With him and his family, I'm more cautious. Even if they start talking loudly, I stay quiet. I'm not afraid or anything, but I don't want to cause a big problem. (Mrs. Jesi)

When I'm angry, I tend to stay quiet and walk. I sit outside, then calm down a bit before I go home. (Mrs. Yuli)

Mrs. Rena said something similar, saying that even when she feels stressed and irritated, she maintains a calm facial expression in front of others.

Inwardly, we're irritated, but in front of others, we put on face, our facial expressions are normal. I'm emotional, but in front of many people, I have to appear normal to pretend there's no problem. (Mrs. Rena)

(d) Accumulated Experience

Pre-marital experience serves as a foundation for women who receive a bride price in Nagekeo in preparing them for married life. Participants stated that the habit of helping and listening to their parents' advice fosters resilience, independence in problem-solving, and the ability to navigate new environments. The following is a participant's statement:

Pre-marital experience taught me how to relate to others, respect my parents, and learn patience. After marriage and the bride price, I already had the skills to adjust to my husband's family and new household. (Mrs. Rida)

From a young age, I've been accustomed to working at home, helping my mother cook, wash, and take care of my younger siblings. I'm also the first daughter, so when I got married, I wasn't too surprised. This is our job as women. (Mrs. Rena)

Mrs. Leta also stated that her parents' firm upbringing and the habit of working hard fostered strong resilience, so that the responsibilities after marriage didn't feel like a burden.

Even before marriage, my aunt was used to working in my parents' house. Especially in our time, when our parents were very strict with their children. If I'm lazy for a moment, I get hit with a piece of wood. It's sometimes tiring, but because it's the same thing every day, I get used to it. Once I'm married, it's normal. Because I'm used to working. I just go with it; we women have to be able to do everything. (Mrs. Leta)

Meanwhile, participant Mrs. Reta said she understands the new responsibilities after marriage because she's been accustomed to seeing the *belis* tradition in her family since childhood.

For me, yes, in my family, weddings also involve belis. From a young age, I saw my parents and older sisters experience the same thing, so I know that marriage brings new responsibilities. But because I'm used to it, I adapt more quickly. (Mrs. Reta)

Furthermore, belief in God's destiny is a source of strength for women in marriage. Spiritual belief fosters determination, patience, and optimism, helping individuals persevere through various challenges in a household. Mrs. Lisa conveyed the importance of being a strong and patient woman in the face of problems, believing that every event is predetermined by Allah SWT.

We must be more patient and strong in facing the storms of marriage, for the sake of our children's future, because Allah SWT has already determined our life plan; everything will be beautiful in its time. (Mrs. Lisa)

Mrs. Jesi explained that marriage is a sacred bond that cannot be easily broken because it was brought together by God.

Marriage is a very strong, sacred bond. This is a relationship that God has brought together; we cannot just say goodbye. God will never leave us alone; He will always provide a way out for every problem. The important thing is that we are patient and sincere. If we live with good intentions, the future of our marriage will certainly be better. (Mrs. Jesi)

This belief helps women accept the situation, be patient in the face of difficulties, and hope for a better future.

Discussion

This study aims to identify the factors that influence the optimism of women with *belis* in Nagekeo. The results of this study show that the optimism of women who are married to *belis* in Nagekeo is formed through various factors that interact with each other in daily life. Social support, social recognition and acceptance, self-confidence, accumulated experience, and spiritual beliefs work together and reinforce each other. This aligns with research by Santoso and Prihartanti (2017), which found that optimism is shaped by a combination of spiritual resources, life experiences, and psychological strength.

The support women receive from their husbands, children, extended family, and the surrounding environment forms the basis for developing optimism. The results of this study indicate that a husband's attention, empathy, and direct involvement in household chores create a crucial sense of emotional security for women. This finding aligns with research by Putriyani dan Listiyandini (2018), which suggests that husbands' support plays a positive and significant role in improving women's psychological well-being. This support conveys that the household burden is not borne alone, thereby making women feel stronger in facing pressure.

The presence of children also motivates participants to maintain their enthusiasm for life and confidence in the future of their marriage. The presence of

children is a consideration for participants in maintaining their marriage, when they consider the impact of separation on their children's development and well-being. This aligns with research by Ismalia et al. (2022), which shows that children are the most fundamental factor and the reason wives stay together. Wives consider emotional needs, stability of caregiving, and preventing children from experiencing the suffering of separation.

In addition, support from the biological family and the husband's family, such as in-laws and siblings-in-law, reinforces the belief that participants are fully accepted in their husband's home. Assistance with household and child care, along with warm daily communication, creates a stable social environment so that participants have a safe space to adapt. The social environment, such as neighbors and close relatives, also becomes a space for emotional recovery. When participants are able to share their stories, receive advice, or simply be listened to, their psychological burden is reduced, and their positive outlook on marriage can be restored.

All of this support serves as a social protection system, keeping women hopeful that problems in the household can still be overcome. This is in line with Noviasari and Dariyo's (2016) findings, which show that family support plays an important role in reducing women's psychological tension and improving their psychological well-being, enabling them to feel more capable of fulfilling their roles and facing daily pressures.

The cultural structure of belis in Nagekeo also plays an important role in shaping participants' optimism. Through the belis process, women gain social recognition and appreciation that affirms their self-esteem. Belis is understood not as an economic transaction but as a symbol of respect from the male family to the female family. Belis also serves as a social symbol that strengthens women's position within the male family. This finding aligns with Nuwa's (2019) research, which shows that belis is interpreted as a form of respect and a guarantee of a wife's rights within her husband's family.

Through belis, women are considered to have full rights within the male family and hold a strong position to participate, speak, and fulfill their roles, so that the presence of belis provides a sense of social security for women who enter their husband's family. The feeling of being valued is further strengthened by social acceptance after women are given belis. Women feel they are part of their husband's family when they are treated not as outsiders but as family members. Women's involvement in family activities, close relationships with in-laws, and the absence of discrimination make women feel fully accepted. In a patrilineal society that has the potential to place women in a vulnerable position, social acceptance is an important foundation for women's sense of security and self-esteem.

The acceptance given to women contributes to a positive outlook on the future of the marriage. This aligns with Pagente's (2023) research, which states that the mother-in-law's accepting attitude, such as a change in treatment after the daughter-in-law shows effort, warmer communication, and recognition of the daughter-in-law's kindness and efforts, makes family relationships more stable and minimizes conflict.

Feeling valued is closely related to women's self-confidence in carrying out their roles as wives, mothers, and daughters-in-law. Women's self-confidence is also an important factor in shaping optimism and belief in their own abilities, which, in turn, determines how they deal with problems. Women's self-confidence develops through three processes: involvement in decision-making, the ability to adapt to new roles, and self-control in facing problems.

Women's involvement in household decision-making, whether related to economics, children's education, or extended family matters, makes women feel they have control and authority in the family. These findings align with the research by Atikah and Sumanti (2023), which shows that women are no longer limited to domestic roles but are actively involved in family decision-making through a process of discussion and deliberation that fosters equal cooperation between husband and wife. This involvement makes women feel trusted and recognized for their abilities,

thereby strengthening their sense of control over family life and enhancing their positive outlook on the household's sustainability.

Adaptability plays a role in building self-confidence. Participants faced changes in their habits after marriage and the dowry system, such as time management, household management, adapting to their husband's family's rhythm, and adjusting to cultural customs. Success in this process reinforces the evidence that participants are able to cope with change and take on new roles. These findings are in line with the research by Noviasari and Dariyo (2016), which shows that self-adjustment is closely related to healthy psychological conditions; wives who are able to manage the demands of their husband's family environment, including complying with household rules, organizing daily activities, and adjusting to their husband's family lifestyle, tend to have better psychological well-being. This condition makes women more confident in facing challenges and role demands after marriage.

In addition, self-control helps women maintain stable relationships. By choosing to remain silent when the situation is not conducive, calming themselves so as not to respond emotionally to conflict, and maintaining their composure in front of their extended family, women can maintain harmonious relationships. Self-control is not a sign of weakness but a way for women to manage household problems, maintain emotional stability, and believe that problems can be resolved. This aligns with the findings of Wulan and Chotimah (2017), which show that emotional regulation, especially the ability to suppress impulsive reactions (expressive suppression) and to reassess situations more calmly (cognitive reappraisal), plays an important role in preventing conflicts from escalating and maintaining marital satisfaction. Individuals who manage their emotions are less easily carried away by situations, are better able to defuse tension, and tend to create stable, harmonious relationships.

Women's accumulated experiences, both before and after marriage, contribute to optimism. Pre-marital experiences, such as family-of-origin discipline, household responsibilities, and understanding of marriage responsibilities, shape

participants' readiness to take on the roles of wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. Strict parenting, demands to help with housework, and involvement in family activities from an early age make participants accustomed to hard work and responsibility.

These findings align with research by Suwarnoputri et al. (2024), which shows that readiness for marriage is shaped by pre-marital life experiences, including parenting styles, instilling responsibility, and family role models. The study confirms that childhood experiences, such as family discipline, division of household tasks, and involvement in family activities, help individuals develop emotional, social, and role maturity, making them better prepared to fulfill their duties in marriage. These experiences are proof that women are capable of surviving difficult situations. The more conflicts they successfully overcome, the stronger their belief that difficulties can be overcome, which ultimately increases their optimism.

Spiritual beliefs foster determination, patience, and optimism, helping people persevere in the face of various household problems. The belief that marriage is a sacred bond that must be upheld because it is united by God. Participants believe that God does not abandon His servants in times of difficulty and always provides a way out for those who are patient. This belief helps women to accept their circumstances, be patient in facing difficulties, and hope for a better future. This aligns with Iswari's (2025) research, which shows that women with high levels of religiosity can face the challenges of marriage with greater calmness, objectivity, and open-mindedness. Spiritual values become a source of strength in resolving household problems and maintaining psychological resilience.

Conclusion

Based on the study's results, researchers can conclude that the optimism of women with *belis* in Nagekeo is formed through a combination of social support, social appreciation and acceptance, self-confidence, life experiences, and spiritual beliefs that reinforce one another. Social support from husbands, children, biological

families, husbands' families, and the surrounding environment provides emotional security and is a source of strength that enables women to continue living their domestic lives. In addition to social support, women's self-esteem increases because the *belis* process is interpreted as a form of social appreciation and recognition, leading women to feel fully recognized and accepted within their husbands' families.

Women's self-confidence also develops through their involvement in decision-making, their ability to adapt to new roles, and their self-control in facing conflicts. Life experiences before marriage, such as parental guidance, habits of responsibility, discipline, and an understanding of responsibilities, shape psychological resilience, making it easier for women to adapt after marriage. On the other hand, spiritual beliefs provide inner strength, teach patience, and foster hope that every problem can be solved with God's help. All of these factors work together and shape women's optimism in maintaining and living their lives.

Suggestion

Women who enter into marriages with dowries are expected to maintain open communication with their husbands and families. It is important for women to make space for themselves in the adaptation process and to balance household responsibilities with personal needs to maintain good psychological resilience.

Families are expected to continue fostering a supportive environment and to accept women as an important part of the family structure. Emotional support, appreciation for women's roles, and involving women in decision-making make women feel valued.

Future researchers are advised to explore women's optimism by incorporating the perspectives of husbands and families, thereby broadening the understanding of how optimism is formed.

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