

A Blooming Island Beneath the Patrilineal Canopy: Balinese Women and the Politics of Reproduction

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24843/JKB.2025.v15.i02.p16>

Abstract: The family planning (KB) *Krama Bali* policy aims to counter Bali's fertility decline and rising in-migration by promoting a four-child ideal to sustain the indigenous population. However, this policy challenges Balinese women's reproductive rights and family preferences. Through in-depth interviews with 34 married Balinese women conducted in 2020 and 2022, this study explores how *KB Krama Bali* shapes fertility decisions, family size preferences, and gender expectations. Findings reveal three key themes: the number of children women prefer, their perception of an ideal family size, and their desire to have a son. Balinese women navigate conflicting pressures from local family planning policies, economic burdens, and the patrilineal system. Their triple role in economic contributions, reproductive function, and *adat* (customs) obligations underscores their role in preserving Balinese identity. This study highlights the need for gender-sensitive policies that balance demographic goals with women's autonomy and well-being.

Keywords: Bali; development policies; family planning; gender; population

1. Introduction

Bali is often regarded as a "Blooming Island" due to its flourishing tourism industry, vibrant culture, strong religious traditions, and deeply rooted social structures (Chong, 2020). However, the island is experiencing a significant demographic change, characterised by declining fertility rates

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Submitted: 24 March 2025; Accepted: 2 August 2025; Published: 5 August 2025



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and an increase in in-migration (BPS, 2016; National Population and Family Planning Board et al., 2018; Poffenberger, 1983). These shifts raise concern about the decreasing proportion of indigenous Balinese, which has implications for cultural continuity, social cohesion, and economic sustainability (Febriawan et al., 2017; Suartha & Yasa, 2017; Sudibia et al., 2012). As a response, the local government introduced *KB Krama Bali* (Putra, 2019), a family planning policy that encourages Balinese families to have four children, instead of two. This policy aims to sustain the Balinese population and uphold traditional values (Lukman et al., 2021; Sarmita, 2019; Wahyu et al., 2021). However, it has also placed new pressures on women's fertility decisions.

Despite its cultural significance, *KB Krama Bali* presents a dilemma for Balinese women, who must navigate the competing demands of *adat* (customs), economic constraints, and reproductive autonomy in family planning (Gelgel, 2016). The policy assumes that all families can comply with the four-child ideal. Yet, it does not fully account for the financial burden, evolving gender roles, and shifting social dynamics that shape fertility choices (Withers & Browner, 2012). While some individuals embrace the policy as a means to preserve their cultural identity and ancestral land (Wahyu et al., 2021), others find it increasingly difficult to reconcile with the economic realities of modern life (National Population and Family Planning Board of Bali Representative & Center for Public Health Innovation, 2019). This contradiction reflects broader tension between state-driven demographic initiatives and individual reproductive autonomy.

Existing studies have explored Bali's fertility trends, cultural influences on family planning, and the role of Hindu traditions in shaping reproductive norms (Lukman et al., 2021; Wiranata, 2021). However, research examining Balinese women's perspectives on the implications of *KB Krama Bali*, their control in reproductive decision-making, and the intersection of economic, cultural, and policy-related pressures remains limited. Most studies have focused on the effect of this local policy on fertility preference, particularly the number and gender of children (Lukman et al., 2021; Wahyu et al., 2021), but few have analysed how government policies affect women's lived experiences and fertility choices. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how Balinese women perceive and navigate the expectations set by *KB Krama Bali*.

This study seeks to address this gap by analysing how Balinese women perceive and navigate the expectations embedded in *KB Krama Bali*. Specifically, it examines the influence of economic constraints, cultural obligations, and individual preferences on fertility choices. By centring the experiences of Balinese women, this research highlights the gendered impact of family planning policies and the intersection of tradition with contemporary socio-economic challenges. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on reproductive

rights, population policies, and cultural sustainability in Indonesia, offering insights for policymakers, academics, and advocates concerned with the intersection of gender, fertility, and state governance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Fertility Decline and Demographic Shifts in Bali

Bali has undergone significant demographic transformations due to declining fertility rates and increased in-migration. Figure 1 shows that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) decreased from 5.8 in 1967-1970 to around 2.1 in 1990-2017 (National Population and Family Planning Board et al., 2017; Poffenberger, 1983). This demographic transition is primarily attributed to the effectiveness of Indonesia's national family planning program (*Program Keluarga Berencana Nasional*), which played a pivotal role in reducing fertility rates and shaping reproductive behaviours across the country, including in Bali.

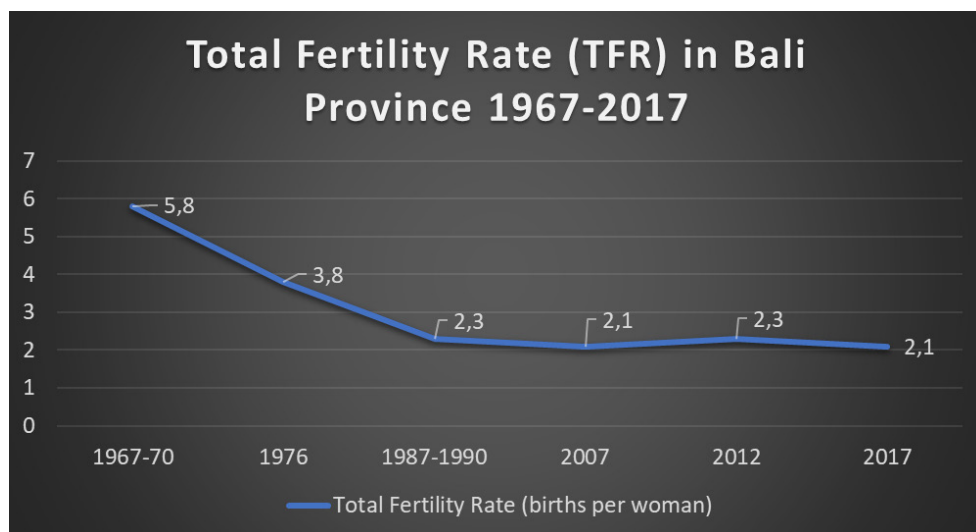


Figure 1. Bali's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in 1967-2017 (National Population and Family Planning Board et al., 2017; Poffenberger, 1983; Sudibia et al., 2013)

The family planning program, officially established in the 1970s, was designed to promote contraceptive use, enhance reproductive health services, and encourage smaller family sizes as part of broader population stabilisation efforts (Poffenberger, 1983). The Banjar system, a traditional form of local governance and community organisation unique to the island, facilitated Bali's successful program implementation. The Banjar family planning initiative functioned as a grassroots mechanism for disseminating information, registering eligible couples, and compiling quarterly statistics on contraceptive use (Meier,

1979). Its widespread acceptance and effectiveness were primarily due to the alignment of national family planning objectives with Balinese cultural values.

Balinese-Hindu ideology, which emphasises balance between spiritual and material well-being, naturally supports family planning and population management principles. The Hindu concept of “*moksartham jagathita yaca itidharmah*”, which refers to the pursuit of both spiritual fulfilment (*moksa*) and physical well-being (*jagathita*), resonates with the goals of the national program (Sangging, 2019).

Strong governmental support, cultural integration, and efficient local implementation made the national family planning program in Bali one of the success stories, contributing to its demographic transition and broader socio-economic stability.

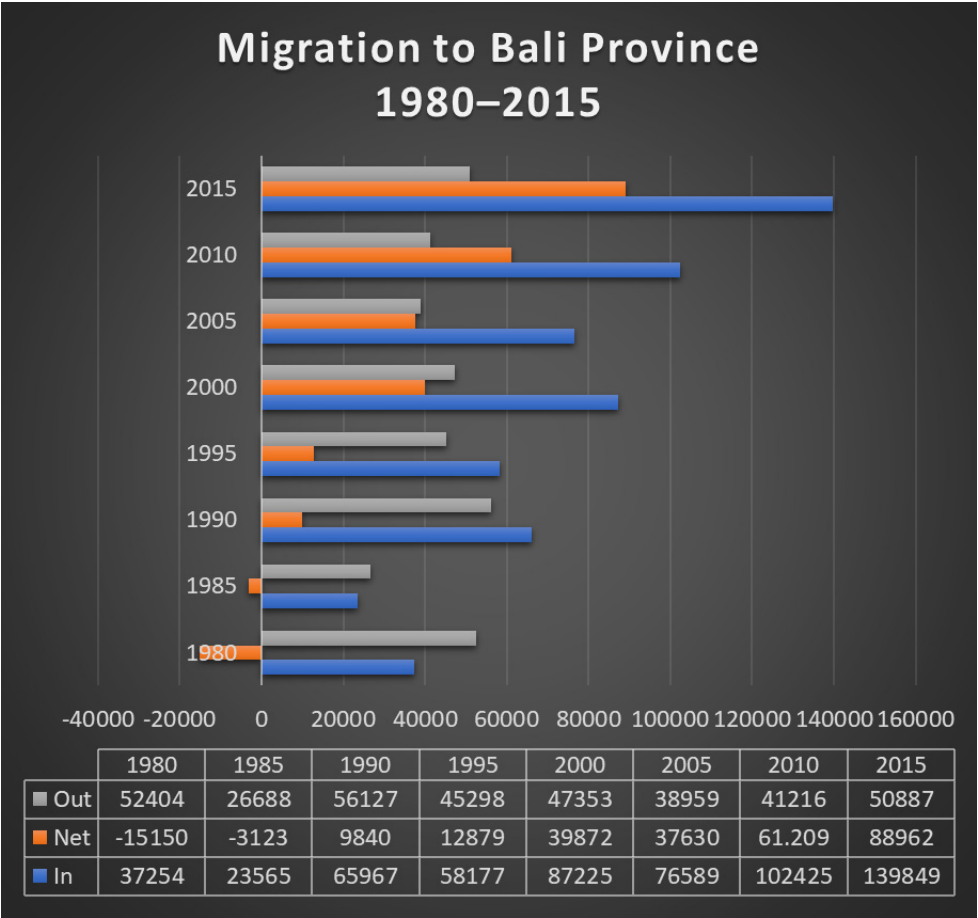
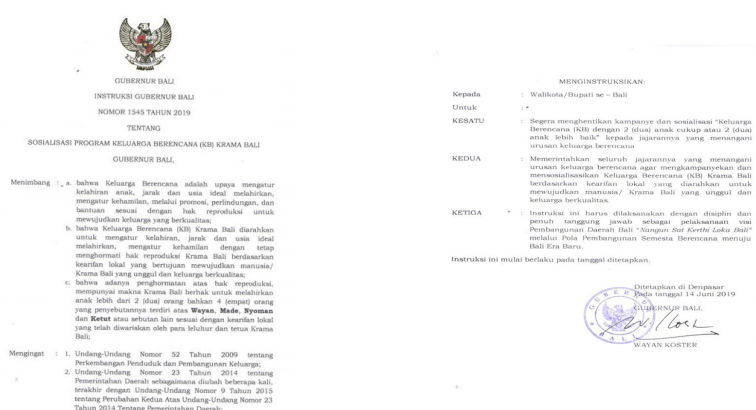


Figure 2. Migration to Bali Province, 1980–2015 (BPS, 2016)

Simultaneously, the influx of migrants to settle in Bali has altered the island’s demographic composition. The “Blooming Island” has emerged as one of Indonesia’s primary pull provinces, drawing both tourists and in-

migrants due to the growth of the tourism industry and improved economic prospects. Figure 2 portrays the migration from 1980 to 2015. The first positive net migration appeared in 1990 at +9,840 and continued to increase in 2015 to +88,962 people (BPS, 2016). In 2015, in-migration to Bali Province was 139,849 people, three times the out-migration of only 50,887 (BPS, 2016). Based on the Indonesian census data, the Bali population (1930-2010) increased by 3.5 times (Sudibia et al., 2012). In just one year (2020–2021), Bali's population increased from approximately 4.317 million to 4.362 million, reflecting an annual growth rate of 1.40% (Statistics of Bali Province, 2022).

Scholars have raised concerns over the declining proportion of indigenous Balinese due to low fertility and high in-migration (Figures 1 and 2), particularly within the Balinese Hindu community, emphasising potential long-term socio-cultural implications (Febriawan et al., 2017; Suartha & Yasa, 2017; Sudibia et al., 2012). These demographic shifts (fertility decline and high in-migration) have led to a new policy to preserve local identity, such as introducing *KB Krama Bali*. Bali Governor's Directive No. 1545/2019 acknowledges that Balinese families may have up to four children, aligning with the traditional naming system (Picture 1). The first provision of the regulation mandates the immediate cessation of all campaigns and public outreach efforts advocating the slogan "Family Planning (FP) with two children is better," specifically among officials tasked with overseeing FP programs. This directive marks a pivotal shift in the ideological framing of reproductive policies, signalling a move away from previously dominant narratives that prioritise population control. Instead, the regulation repositions fertility within a culturally resonant framework, recognising higher birth rates not merely as statistical outcomes but as expressions of ancestral heritage and local wisdom.



Picture 1. Bali Governor's Directive No. 1545/2019 of *KB Krama Bali*

One of the core reasons behind the policy is the declining use of traditional Balinese names that indicate birth order, specifically Nyoman or Komang (third child) and Ketut (fourth child). Governor Wayan Koster highlighted this concern, noting that only 6% of children are named Ketut and 19% Nyoman (Detik Bali, 2025). These names form part of a sequential system comprising four children—Wayan or Putu for the firstborn, Made or Nengah for the second, Nyoman for the third, and Ketut for the fourth. By promoting adherence to the four-child ideal, *KB Krama Bali* seeks to maintain cultural continuity while reinforcing Balinese identity (Putra, 2019). Additionally, the policy aligns with broader socio-political movements such as *ajeg Bali* (Bali stands strong) (Allen & Palermo, 2005), which advocates for local cultural preservation and economic sovereignty (Bali for Balinese) amid growing concerns over non-Balinese investment and migration (Allen & Palermo, 2005; National Population and Family Planning Board of Bali Representative & Center for Public Health Innovation, 2019; Sri & Mahaendra, 2018). Although positioned as a measure for demographic sustainability, the policy reflects more profound anxieties about Bali's minority status within Indonesia's Muslim-majority population.

2.2 Cultural Norms and Fertility Preferences in Balinese Society

As the “Blooming Island” of harmony and heritage, Balinese society is deeply rooted in Hindu traditions, emphasising maintaining cultural and religious continuity through family structures. Family relationships are intimately bound up with *adat* law, which is based on Hindu Balinese traditions and codified in *awig-awig* regulations that bind society (Astiti, 1994). This relationship is also shaped by customary and religious obligations, such as *ngayah*, which requires individuals to offer their time and labour for ritual and social activities within the *pawongan* sphere. This practice ensures harmony among neighbours, ancestors, and deities (*parhyangan*).

Having children is essential in Balinese society because children are responsible for replacing their parents' positions in the household and clan, and their duty to the local community (Astiti, 1994). The Balinese believe that children, especially sons (Picture 2), ensure the family line and the proper transition of parents and ancestors in cycles of Bali-Hindu reincarnation (Adnyani, 2016b). The Jaratkaru story (mythology from Hindu literature) conveys the critical value of children, especially sons, in the cycles of the afterlife. In the Hindu compendium *Manawa Dharmasastra* IX:137 (Astiti, 1994), it is stated that “through a son, a man subdues the world; through a grandson, he attains eternity; and through a great-grandson, he enters the sun's realm.” However, these religious narratives warrant critical examination, as they reflect deeply entrenched patriarchal values that prioritise male offspring while marginalising the roles of daughters in family

continuity.



Picture 2. In patrilineal Balinese culture, women are expected to “produce” at least a male heir for the husband’s family to continue their family line and tradition (Illustrated by authors).

The practice of patrilineality and Balinese *adat* law, where family lineage and inheritance pass through male offspring, contributes to a strong societal preference for sons (Wiranata, 2021). A son will also inherit family properties and religious responsibilities, take charge of the family temple (*sanggah*), and fulfil obligatory community service (*ayahan*) in society (Adnyani, 2016b; Astiti, 1994). Balinese children have significant roles, not only when their parents are still alive but also in maintaining ongoing relations with ancestors after death to ensure family well-being. Hence, Balinese couples are inclined to add more children to their families until they have a son.

In contemporary Balinese society, the traditional preference for sons remains deeply embedded, though evolving socio-economic conditions have influenced family planning decisions. While patrilineal inheritance and religious obligations continue to shape reproductive expectations, modern factors such as economic constraints, urbanisation, and shifting gender roles have led some families to reconsider the necessity of having multiple children (Titisari et al., 2022). In several Balinese communities, families without male offspring can continue their lineage through adoption within their clan or by designating a daughter as a successor via *sentana rajeg* marriage, reversing traditional female exogamy. This practice elevates a daughter’s status to *purusa*, making her the

family heir, as recognised in *Manawa Dharmacastra IX: 127* (Adnyani, 2016a). While son preference remains dominant, *sentana rajeg* offers an alternative for preserving lineage within Balinese society (Titisari et al., 2023). In reality, societal expectations still emphasise the importance of male heirs, reflecting the enduring influence of tradition in shaping gender roles and family structures in Bali.

To critically assess these dynamics, this study applies the theoretical lens of Reproductive Justice, which examines how cultural, economic, and policy-driven factors shape reproductive autonomy. Reproductive Justice provides a framework for understanding how Balinese women navigate societal expectations surrounding fertility, particularly in relation to son preference and family planning policies.

2.3 Gender and Reproductive Autonomy in Balinese Households

This island's radiant blend of cultural vibrancy, spiritual devotion, and strong communal ties forms its distinctive identity. Family structures are not just the heart of this heritage—they are dynamic vessels through which rituals, beliefs, and customs are carried forward, ensuring the island's traditions flourish amid modern transformation. Yet within this beautifully layered society, patriarchal norms shape everyday life, especially influencing women's roles in economic responsibilities, reproductive duties, and spiritual responsibilities (Gelgel, 2016). Balinese women face the dilemma of productive and reproductive roles and their disproportionate responsibility in Balinese *adat* (Gelgel, 2016). Balinese women are also expected to produce children for their husbands' families and often have limited control over fertility choices (Adnyani, 2016b).

Despite these traditional expectations, economic realities have driven many Balinese families to limit the number of children (National Population and Family Planning Board of Bali Representative & Center for Public Health Innovation, 2019), a study of ideal family size and acceptance of family planning in Bali found that the Balinese realised the cost of bringing up children (basic needs and future education) and gave particular consideration to childcare and the high cost of living. The financial demands of the many *adat* ceremonial and socio-religious obligations central to Balinese life and identity compound these concerns (Adnyani, 2016b; Poffenberger, 1983). In the book of *Bali Sekala & Niskala*, Fred B. Eiseman (1990) explained that the Balinese have life cycle ceremonies (rites of passage) from birth to death. The demands of the individual *adat* ceremonies increase when they have more kids.

The increasing financial burden on Balinese families is primarily driven by rising costs of living, education, and childcare, as well as the extensive socio-religious obligations tied to *adat* ceremonies. Balinese life cycle ceremonies, such as *Pegedong-gedongan* (a prenatal ritual), *Oton* (a baby's first birthday ceremony), *Mapandes* (tooth filing), and *Pawiwahan* (marriage rites), require significant financial investment

(Eiseman, 1990). As families grow, the frequency and scale of these ceremonies increase, adding to the economic pressures that influence fertility decisions.

2.4 *KB Krama Bali: Policy and Sociocultural Implications*

In 2019, the local government, through the Governor's Instruction No. 1545 of 2019, introduced family planning (*KB Krama Bali*) (Titisari et al., 2022). *KB Krama Bali* promotes families with four children to sustain Balinese cultural traditions. The policy is rooted in the symbolic importance of Balinese names (Wayan, Made, Nyoman, and Ketut). It counteracts the "extinction" of the Balinese names *Nyoman* and *Ketut*, which are traditionally given to the third and fourth children. *Krama Bali* refers to the wisdom of the Balinese people since their ancestors believed that having more than two children is a blessing in family life (Lukman et al., 2021). Although *KB Krama Bali* is a population policy, the use of traditional Balinese words and customs shows the government's efforts to reconcile competing cultural identities. It aims to strengthen Bali's local cultural identity concerning its existence on its land (Wahyu et al., 2021), regional policy directly contradicts Indonesia's long-standing two-child policy and raises questions about the role of women in family planning decisions. *Krama Bali* fits in a broader movement to preserve Balinese identity and control the island's economy, *ajeg Bali*, i.e., sturdy (strong) Balinese (Miharja, 2013; Samiyono, 2013). *KB Krama Bali* is a new policy that would sustain traditional values in the naming system, reflecting an ideal Balinese family size to strengthen Balinese identity (Titisari et al., 2022). The problem is not only about the Balinese name but also about the fundamental values of children. Childbirth is very important because it provides the opportunity to free a soul (ancestor) from the birth and death cycle in the path of *Dharma* (Titisari et al., 2022). The community faces a social policy polemic between their cultural-religious values and the lure of material well-being over politics and demographic challenges.

Bali's blossoming tourism and economic development have brought vibrant growth to the island. Yet, this rapid transformation, along with national successes in health and family planning, has blurred the distinct identity of *Krama Bali*. In response, local policies like *KB Krama Bali* call on Balinese society—particularly women—to actively shape family planning efforts that balance tradition with the pressures of modern progress. The policy, however, does not account for women's economic realities, health considerations, or personal aspirations, reinforcing their subordinate position in both household and societal structures. Despite being the primary subjects of family planning policies, women's voices remain largely absent from the discourse, as decisions about fertility and population control continue to be shaped by male-dominated institutions (Dixon-Mueller, 1993; Titisari et al., 2022).

Despite the growing body of research on fertility decline, cultural norms, gender roles, and policy frameworks in Bali, there remains a critical gap in understanding how *KB Krama Bali* affects women's reproductive choices in practice. This study is urgent because it captures the intersection of demographic shifts, cultural traditions, and policy interventions at a time when Balinese women face increasing pressures from multiple directions. Focusing on women's voices and experiences, this research provides a fresh perspective on the ongoing discourse surrounding fertility, gender, and policy in Bali. Ultimately, its findings will be valuable for policymakers and scholars seeking to develop more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and gender-responsive approaches to family planning in Indonesia.

3. Method and Theory

3.1 Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore how Balinese women perceive and experience reproductive decision-making amid demographic and policy changes. A qualitative approach is chosen to capture participants' experiences, particularly regarding sensitive, culturally embedded issues like fertility, gender roles, and religious values. It is well-suited for exploring subjective perspectives, daily behaviours, and the significance of language and actions in shaping meaning (Taylor et al., 2015). This study focuses explicitly on married Balinese women because they are the primary subjects of family planning policies and are directly impacted by fertility-related expectations within household and community structures. By centring on their perspectives, this research provides critical insights into how state-driven demographic initiatives intersect with traditional cultural values and personal reproductive autonomy. While the inclusion of men or unmarried women could offer additional perspectives, the study's scope prioritises those most immediately affected by marriage-linked fertility policies. This approach aims to highlight the significance of women's rights and agency in shaping development policies and programs, ensuring their voices are foregrounded in discussions on reproductive decision-making and socio-cultural transformation in Bali.

This study draws on qualitative data from two sets of in-depth interviews conducted separately and for different research purposes. Through qualitative inquiry, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how state-driven family planning initiatives intersect with traditional values and gender norms, offering insights into the broader implications for Balinese society. Both interview sets collected information about cultural liabilities on Balinese women's fertility intentions, such as the patrilineal kinship system, son preference, and *KB Krama Bali* policy.

3.1.1 Interview set 1 (2020 study)

The first set of interviews was conducted between January and February 2020 with 18 Balinese Hindu women from three different sites (six women from each site): Banjar Tumbekasa (Gianyar), Banjar Biaung (Denpasar), and the Bali Representative Office of the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN). Banjar Biaung was selected to represent an urban perspective, while Banjar Tumbekasa provided a rural perspective. Participants were selected based on these criteria: aged 18 years or older, married, and provided informed consent to participate. Additionally, BKKBN staff members were included to offer insights into policy implementation and administrative attitudes toward national and local family planning policies. This phase of the study was approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project number 2019/177).

The interview sought information about urban and rural Balinese women's experiences with the national and *KB Krama Bali* policies and their perceptions of reproductive autonomy. BKKBN staff members were interviewed to provide background information on policy, practice, and administrative attitudes about national and local family planning. They present their experiences exposed to population programs and policies that may influence their perspectives about family planning and the varying degrees of the agency they can exercise.

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the 18 respondents. Most were aged 40-49, were formally employed, and had two children.

Table 1. Sample characteristics interview set 1 (study in 2020)

Variables	Office n=6		Urban n=6		Rural n=6		Total N=18	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Age								
20-29	1	16.67	0	0	0	0	1	5.56
30-39	3	50	2	33.33	1	16.67	6	33.33
40-49	0	0	4	66.67	5	83.33	9	50
50-59	2	33.33	0	0	0	0	2	11.11
Education								
Secondary education or lower	1	16.67	3	50	5	83.33	9	50
Tertiary education	5	83.33	3	50	1	16.67	9	50
Occupation								
Informal sector	0	0	3	50	5	83.33	8	44.44
Formal employee	6	100	3	50	1	16.67	10	55.56
Number of children								
0	2	33.33	0	0	0	0	2	11.11
1	1	16.67	1	16.67	0	0	2	11.11
2	3	50	1	16.67	5	83.33	9	50
3	0	0	4	66.67	1	16.67	5	27.78
4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Calculated by authors

3.1.2 Interview set 2 (2022 Study)

The second set of in-depth interviews was conducted between March and April 2022 with 16 married women from eight districts and cities in Bali. The inclusion criteria were the same as in the first interview set, with an additional requirement that participants were not using contraception at the time of data collection. Ethical approval for this phase was granted by the Health Research Ethics Committee of STIKES Bina Usada Bali (Approval No. 037/EA/KEPK-BUB-2022). The interviews aimed to gather information on social and cultural issues, including the implementation of the local *KB Krama Bali* program and its influence on fertility choices—particularly the decision not to use modern contraceptive methods. The interview data were selected from answers regarding cases of unmet need for family planning and cultural reasons behind the community’s relationship with *KB Krama Bali*.

Table 2 summarises the characteristics of the 16 participants. Most were aged 30-39, had a secondary education level or lower, worked in the informal sector, and had two children.

Table 2. Sample characteristics interview set 2 (study in 2022)

Variables	N=16	
	n	%
Age		
20-29	1	6.25
30-39	11	68.75
40-49	4	25
Education		
Secondary education or lower	10	62.5
Tertiary education	6	37.5
Occupation		
Informal sector	10	62.5
Formal employee	6	37.5
Number of children		
1	4	25
2	9	56.25
3	2	12.5
4	1	6.25

Source: Calculated by authors

This study employs descriptive qualitative analysis. All recorded interviews were transcribed, coded, and combined into themes. The triangulation method was used to define the themes. During the studies, the records, field notes, transcripts, and reflexive journals were used as a basis for diagramming to make sense of the theme. Data were structured into three key

themes: opinions about the number of children, the ideal number of children, and the desire for a son. To ensure clarity in the results, the identification system for interview data is divided into two parts according to the years of the two interview sets in the study, 2020 and 2022. It consists of letters and numbers, which state the respondent's domicile and the serial number of the interviews conducted.

In the 2020 data, the Office, City, and Rural codes were used based on the division of the participant's area, namely the BKKBN Bali Representative Office, Banjar Biaung, and Banjar Tumbekasa. For example, *Office1* refers to a participant from the BKKBN Representative Office with serial number one. Meanwhile, in the 2022 data, participants were labelled according to their regencies/cities based on the participant's domicile. For example, *Karangasem1* denotes a participant from Karangasem Regency with serial number one.

The analytical approach ensures a structured understanding of Balinese women's reproductive experiences within the broader socio-cultural and policy landscape.

3.2 Theory

To deepen the understanding of the cultural context, Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory (Nash, 1990) provides a valuable lens for understanding how deeply ingrained cultural norms shape reproductive behaviours and family planning decisions in Bali. Habitus, a system of internalised dispositions formed through socialisation, influences individuals' perceptions and practices, ensuring continuity in traditional fertility expectations despite socio-economic changes. In Balinese society, *adat* (custom) and Hindu religious values emphasise lineage continuity, ancestral obligations, and the preference for male offspring, shaping reproductive choices at both individual and community levels. Despite rising living costs and declining fertility rates, the persistence of these expectations demonstrates how habitus stabilises cultural practices, reinforcing the social imperative to have multiple children, particularly sons, to inherit family responsibilities and maintain religious traditions (Pertiwi et al., 2023). Policies such as *KB Krama Bali*, which promote a four-child ideal, reflect the institutionalisation of these values, aligning state-driven family planning initiatives with existing cultural frameworks rather than challenging them.

Furthermore, Reproductive Justice (RJ) theory is used to analyse how Balinese women navigate fertility decisions within the dual pressures of policy directives and long-standing traditions, shedding light on the intersection of gender, culture, and state governance in reproductive health. RJ is a comprehensive framework that transcends the focus on individual choice, addressing systemic inequalities that impact reproductive rights, health,

and justice (Morison, 2021). By integrating principles of human rights, social justice, and reproductive freedom, RJ provides a multidimensional approach to examining reproductive autonomy. When applied to *KB Krama Bali*, this framework critiques the policy's promotion of a four-child ideal to sustain the indigenous Balinese population, highlighting its inherent conflict with women's reproductive autonomy and advocating for gender-sensitive policymaking.

Reproductive Justice (RJ) emphasises the intersectionality of pressures faced by Balinese women, including challenges arising from local policies, economic constraints, and obligations under *adat*. It underscores the importance of empowering women to make reproductive decisions based on their needs and aspirations rather than conforming to communal or cultural expectations (Morison, 2021). By fostering gender equity, enhancing healthcare access, and providing socio-economic support without compromising cultural identity, RJ advocates for a paradigmatic shift from demographic control to prioritising the autonomy and well-being of Balinese women. This approach advances more inclusive and equitable policy outcomes, balancing cultural preservation with protecting reproductive freedom (Morison, 2021).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

The study in 2020 presented the results of interviews with 18 Balinese women regarding their fertility decisions under the demands of local policy, their cultural identity, and livelihood concerns (Table 1). Balinese women participants show varying degrees of agency in navigating the complexity of their fertility preferences, cultural values, and economic opportunities and constraints. Meanwhile, the interviews in 2022 showed that, out of a total of 16 respondents, only three people wanted four children because they wanted many children, as Balinese people usually have four children. The rest varied for reasons of health, economy, and gender preference. The analyses revealed three main themes: women's opinions about *KB Krama Bali*, the ideal number of children, and the desire to have a son.

4.1.1 Opinion on The Preference Number of Children

In the context of Balinese society, *KB Krama Bali* signifies more than merely a population designation; it functions as a cultural emblem of profound significance. In the past, having four children was considered a source of happiness and fulfilment for Balinese parents. One respondent from a 2020 study reminisced about this tradition, describing how having four children was satisfying.

"I have four siblings..... Having four children was a pride and joy: Putu or I Luh or Wayan or Gede for the first child, Kadek or Made for the second child, Komang or Nyoman for the third, and then Ketut. Maybe having four children makes them feel complete." (Office5, 52 years old, office staff, has two children).

However, the four-child ideal has become a burden for Balinese families over time. Several participants from the 2020 study objected to *KB Krama Bali*, citing the financial and emotional strain it places on parents. The financial challenges of raising four children were repeatedly mentioned by participants, who emphasised that financial constraints can make the ideal impractical, and personal concerns about the physical and emotional toll of childbirth, particularly in cases of difficult deliveries. Some participants noted the pressure of government-imposed family size limits. While four children help preserve Balinese traditions, financial stability is essential, making it unjust if children's needs cannot be met. One participant also highlighted the physical toll of childbirth, particularly repeated Caesarean sections, which make a large family impractical.

"It is an excellent idea to preserve the Balinese tradition [naming system] *Wayan, Made, Nyoman, Ketut* I, but I will not [have four kids] because tuition fees are expensive. Also, it will be so much better if giving birth is easy. I got a C-section two times. Yes [traumatic] and the bills." (Rural5, 31 years old, Balinese villager, honorary teacher, has two children).

The women in the 2020 study also reflected the role of local culture and religion in shaping the four-child ideal. One participant explained how Hindu customs and religious beliefs play an essential role in the stability of Bali, where the people's traditions are seen based on local wisdom:

"In Bali, culture is supported by religion and vice versa. Both are blending. The [tradition] differences are based on the situation. It is called *desa kala patra*, which means adapting to the environment. Different fields, different grasshoppers. Different *adat*, a different system." (Office1, 57 years old, office staff, has two children).

Several other participants acknowledged the reasonable efforts of the Bali governor's policy as a political effort to preserve Balinese Hindu values and traditions in light of demographic and social developments, while others questioned the political motivations behind it:

"Bali [province] is the smallest area with the majority Hindu believers, unlike in other places where the majority religion is Islam. It could be that the ancestors believed that more children were more fortunate, then they held on to how more Balinese people could develop the

Balinese tradition. A positive side of the Governor [*KB Krama Bali*] is to increase the number of Balinese people.” (Office2, 30 years old, office staff, has a child).

“Maybe the government observes the rarity of *Ketut*..... Or, there are political issues.” (Office3, 32 years old, office staff, has two children).

There were concerns regarding the demographic changes in Bali, particularly the decreasing number of Balinese people due to migration, which could affect local traditions

“Today’s generation only has two kids. Automatically, *Ketut* no longer exists anymore..... More migrants stay in Bali now, decreasing the number of Balinese people. More migrants can marginalise the Balinese.” (City3, 36 years old, urban Balinese, office worker, has three children).

The findings reveal a shift in perceptions of *KB Krama Bali*, once seen as a cultural ideal but now increasingly questioned due to financial strain, childcare responsibilities, and the physical toll of childbirth. While traditional values emphasise having four children to preserve Balinese identity and naming customs, modern economic realities make this expectation impractical for many families. Participants recognised Hindu customs and *adat* traditions but stressed the need for adaptability (*desa kala patra*). Some viewed the policy as a political effort to sustain Balinese identity amid demographic changes and migration, while others questioned its feasibility. Ultimately, Balinese families prioritise financial stability over cultural expectations, reflecting an ongoing negotiation between tradition and modern challenges.

4.1.2 *The Ideal Number of Children*

Reflecting on the *KB Krama Bali* also involved considering the ideal number of children for the participating women. Many emphasised the financial burden of having more than two children, especially with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly disrupted Balinese society. Five participants in both studies mentioned a specific number as their fertility preference as compensation for the development of the era with heavier demands. Participants largely favoured limiting family size, citing financial constraints, physical challenges, and broader economic uncertainties. Many viewed two children as optimal, balancing tradition with economic feasibility, while others highlighted childbirth difficulties and rising costs as key concerns. Spousal age and income stability also influenced decisions, underscoring the necessity of strategic family planning amid changing socio-economic conditions. One participant even preferring only one child.

“It is because of my husband, too. My husband is almost 50 years old, so if I want to have another child, I also need to calculate the cost and income. I guess I have to focus on just one.” (Gianyar1, 33 years old, formal occupation, tertiary education, has a child).

However, some women from the 2022 study supported the four-child ideal in Balinese society. Participants’ preference for larger families reflects cultural norms and individual priorities. The traditional Balinese ideal of four children was frequently cited, with some emphasising gender balance as a key consideration. Their responses suggest that family size decisions are shaped by a combination of tradition, identity, and practical concerns, reinforcing the broader societal expectations surrounding fertility choices. As articulated by this participant:

“Four.....because I like lots of children..... isn’t it ideal?! In Bali, ideally, you should have a boy, because now I have two girls, I want two boys.” (Gianyar2, 34 years old, informal occupation, secondary education, has three children).

The findings reveal a shift in fertility preferences among Balinese women, driven by financial concerns and societal changes. Rising education and healthcare costs have led many to favour smaller families, often one or two children, reflecting an ongoing negotiation between cultural tradition and modern realities.

4.1.3 *Desire to Have a Son*

The preference for sons remains a central issue in Balinese fertility decisions, as highlighted by participants from the 2020 and 2022 studies. For these respondents, preference for one particular gender is a burden that arises directly from the patrilineal kinship system:

“Two children [policy] is blamed because of the disappearance of *Nyoman* and *Ketut*..... Balinese people have issues with tradition and customs..... The problem is not about how many children you have; you should have a son.” (Office6, 35 years old, office staff, no children).

“I will feel distressed if I do not have a son. My husband has a nephew, but it is different if it is my son. Every day, I pray for a son so my family can have heirs for our legacy.” (City5, 46 years old, urban Balinese, nursing home assistant, has three children).

“A wish [to have a son] because in the Balinese *adat* tradition, a son will be in charge in the future. I wishbut back to the economic problem [of having more kids].” (City6, 37 years old urban Balinese, school administrator, has three children).

"I want to have a son..... but what if I have more kids and it is a girl.... I lay my faith in God." (Rural2, 43 years old, Balinese villager, homemaker and craftswoman, has two children).

"Men are expected as heirs of the family. It is the principal. If the first baby is a boy, the second will be easier. Boy or girl does not matter." (Rural6, 40 years old, Balinese villager, small retailer, has three children).

Most respondents indicated that once they attain a specific number of sons, they will cease having children, aligning with the demand for son preference. Additionally, several participants noted that their ideal number of children is influenced by the societal expectation of having a son, as is typical in Balinese culture. One respondent disclosed that her husband was discontented upon the birth of her daughter.

"Then maybe there should be a boy so that there will be a successor for *negen sanggah* [ceremonial household responsibility] ... if there is no guy at home, how do to do it?... so be grateful that I have a boy...." (Denpasar2, 34 years old, formal occupation, secondary education, has two children).

"No, actually, cannot ask for gender. But if it is okay [to ask] Yes, there is hope that if I can, I will just have a son.... so that there will be a successor." (Karangasem2, 26 years old, formal occupation, tertiary education, has a child).

"Two children...a girl and a boy, in my opinion. Apart from living expenses .. and then the cost of living for school later, I am only an honorary employee, so I have always thought about two children, a girl and a boy, before marriage. Coincidentally, I have a boy and a girl. If I have two daughters, maybe it would be the third..." (Bangli1, 33 years old, formal occupation, tertiary education, has two children).

".... I have only two [children], as Balinese, there must be a son. I have two daughters. I should, I want one more [child] if I could, son, but I am too old..." (Badung2, 42 years old, informal occupation, secondary education, has two children).

"... a boy and a girl, maybe two will be enough..... The desire is there, yes, having a son. Just looking at my age, 46 years, it is risky." (Klungkung1, 46 years old, informal occupation, secondary education, has two children).

"I want two children, but I have two girls... So (laughs), so I want more than two From myself, from my family too, so that there will be a

successor.” (Jembrana2, 31 years old, informal occupation, secondary education, has two children).

“In the past, when I had an ultrasound of my first child. A girl. My husband was angry. He did not talk to me for three days.” (Tabanan2, 39 years old, informal occupation, secondary education, has three children).

However, five women rejected gender bias, emphasising that all children, regardless of gender, are a blessing. They said that children are gifts, so they do not have a particular gender preference and have surrendered to God regarding the fortune they received.

“*Ten* [no], equal, the important thing is healthy.” (Tabanan1, 47 years old, informal occupation, secondary education, has two children).

“No [must to have boy] no....” (Bangli1, 34 years old, formal occupation, tertiary education, has a child).

“No. By chance... I waited a long time to have children. I got married in 2017. In 2020, I got pregnant. So, it does not have to be a boy or a girl.” (Klungkung2, 31 years old, formal occupation, tertiary education, has a child).

“I told my husband that if we only have two girls, we will still be grateful” (City2, 45 years old, urban Balinese, homemaker and online retailer, has two children).

The findings highlight the strong preference for sons in Balinese fertility decisions, driven by patrilineal traditions and societal expectations. Many women feel pressured to have male heirs to maintain lineage and fulfil ceremonial duties, influencing their reproductive choices. However, some reject gender bias, valuing all children equally. This tension reflects an ongoing negotiation between tradition and evolving perspectives on reproductive autonomy in Balinese society.

4.2 Discussion

The decline of Balinese offspring and the flourishing of the tourism sector have significantly impacted Balinese people, culture, and traditions (Chong, 2020). The idea of four children offers “collective pride” with “the normality of Bali” to maintain Balinese dominance on their island (Pujaastawa, 2019; Wahyu et al., 2021). *Krama Bali* constitutes the local wisdom of the Hindu community in Bali, a region with a long-standing tradition of having more than two children. This cultural practice is not regarded as an impediment to familial harmony.

This practice is viewed as a customary and habitual element of their ancestral heritage, handed down through successive generations (Lukman et al., 2021).

The Balinese Hindu minority sees itself under pressure from the dominant Muslim majority in Indonesia. Scholars have discussed this issue as an increasing concern in Balinese society today (Febriawan et al., 2017; Sarmita & Simamora, 2019; Sri & Mahaendra, 2018). The narrative about the marginalisation of the Balinese Hindu community in their land has become a scourge threatening *Krama Bali*. This local value is essential because it is a pearl of local wisdom handed down by the ancestors. The patterns of results from the 2020 and 2022 data are consistent, showing the efforts of Balinese women to navigate the complexity of their fertility preferences, family planning policy, cultural values, and economic constraints. However, they argue about the dilemma of *KB Krama Bali* because of the four children in the Governor's Instruction. This government policy related to family planning and cultural preservation compounds the already tremendous pressures on their fertility decisions, especially their preferred number of children.

The limited uptake of the *KB Krama Bali* programme reflects a broader demographic and cultural shift in reproductive preferences. While the initiative sought to preserve Balinese naming traditions by encouraging families to have four children, recent data from BKKBN (2024) reveals that a diminishing minority embraces this ideal. As of 2024, only 24.14% of couples of reproductive ages (15–49 years) in Bali have more than two children born alive—a decline from 26.02% in 2021. This downward trend suggests that other considerations, including economic pressures, lifestyle aspirations, and the internalisation of the national two-child norm, increasingly outweigh the desire to maintain the *Krama Bali* lineage. Among affluent families, the issue is not financial capacity but rather a reorientation toward quality of life, education, and mobility, which often supersedes traditional imperatives.

As Bali blossoms socially and economically, it shifts in household size, from declining six-member families (from 15.5% in 2019 to 13.58% in 2024) to rising four- and five-member households (of approximately 6%). The data on family planning updates suggest evolving attitudes toward ideal family composition. The proportion of households desiring an ideal number of children, defined as three or more, exhibited a decline from 37% in 2019 to 35% in 2024 (BKKBN, 2024). Fertility preferences increasingly reflect pragmatic considerations, with financial capability often leading women to favour smaller families despite traditional expectations. Confronted with a “triple burden” of production, reproduction, and ritual obligation, women are challenged to reconcile their roles within a patriarchal structure while striving for autonomy and the aspiration of raising “quality” children. Consequently, the *KB Krama Bali*

and national family planning policies must move beyond cultural preservation and actively empower women to shape their reproductive choices in alignment with both economic realities and gender equity.

Governor Wayan Koster's post-2025 policy framework reflects a dual-pronged approach to demographic and cultural preservation in Bali, combining pro-natalist incentives with structural investment in education. His initiative to reward families bearing third and fourth children—particularly those named Nyoman and Ketut (Ginta & Hartik, 2025)—seeks to arrest declining fertility rates and safeguard naming traditions emblematic of Balinese identity. Concurrently, the “One Family, One Graduate” programme (Balipost, 2025), launched in July 2025, signals a strategic reorientation towards educational equity, with 1.450 scholarships distributed through partnerships with 28 universities. While both measures are framed as instruments of cultural continuity, their juxtaposition reveals underlying tensions. The pro-natalist agenda risks entrenching gendered norms and patrilineal expectations, especially in a context where reproductive decisions are shaped less by economic constraint than by evolving aspirations and sociocultural pressures (Titisari et al., 2022). Absent a parallel commitment to gender-sensitive education and reproductive autonomy, such policies may inadvertently reinforce cultural conformity rather than foster informed and equitable choice.

By applying Pierre Bourdieu's habitus theory (Nash, 1990), we can analyse how son preference is deeply embedded in Balinese reproductive decisions as a product of social conditioning and cultural reproduction. Habitus, as a system of internalised dispositions, shapes expectations around fertility, reinforcing the idea that sons are necessary to maintain lineage, inheritance structures, and ceremonial responsibilities. These gendered preferences are not merely individual choices but manifestations of a broader social framework in which patrilineal traditions dictate familial and religious obligations (Barr et al., 2024). The continuity of these norms is maintained through institutions such as family, religion, and governance, ensuring that son preference persists despite economic and demographic changes. Even when financial and personal considerations might suggest smaller families, habitus constrains reproductive autonomy, positioning male offspring as fundamental to social stability (Brunson, 2010).

Reproductive Justice theory (Morison, 2021) critically examines the structural barriers limiting women's autonomy in fertility decisions. While habitus explains the internalisation of gendered expectations, Reproductive Justice addresses the broader socio-political forces that shape reproductive outcomes. Balinese women face pressures not only from familial expectations but also from policies that reinforce traditional kinship structures (Titisari et al., 2022). This framework highlights how economic constraints, healthcare

accessibility, and state-driven family planning initiatives intersect with cultural norms to regulate women's reproductive choices. The expectation to have sons often overrides personal agency, as women navigate societal demands prioritising lineage continuity over their well-being (Brunson, 2010). Those who resist son preference challenge the habitus of Balinese society and the institutional structures that uphold it, positioning themselves within a broader struggle for reproductive self-determination.

While habitus elucidates the culturally embedded dispositions that perpetuate son preference, the theoretical lens of Reproductive Justice offers critical insight into the systemic barriers that constrain reproductive autonomy (Morison, 2021). In the Balinese context, son preference is sustained through a nexus of patrilineal customs, familial expectations, and inheritance norms—all naturalised through habitus as enduring social practice. These internalised cultural imperatives intersect with institutional and policy-level limitations, including restricted access to reproductive health services, insufficient legal safeguards for reproductive choice, and the marginalisation of women's voices within healthcare governance (Granek & Nakash, 2017). This confluence exposes the enduring tension between preserving cultural continuity and asserting female agency, demonstrating the extent to which reproductive decisions are embedded within broader socio-political structures.

Gender-sensitive policy interventions are indispensable to addressing these interrelated challenges (Crespí-Lloréns et al., 2021). Such policies must foreground culturally responsive education that enables women to interrogate normative biases while fostering informed decision-making. Equitable access to reproductive healthcare, particularly within rural and marginalised communities, is imperative, as is the substantive inclusion of women in legislative and policy-making arenas concerning family and health. Furthermore, legal reform in inheritance, guardianship, and family registration is essential to institutionalising gender equity (Dancer, 2017). In concert, these measures do not seek to negate tradition, but rather recalibrate it—aligning cultural practices with principles of justice and autonomy. Reproductive Justice, underpinned by gender-sensitive governance, thus offers a framework through which women's rights to bodily integrity, self-determination, and cultural belonging may be reconciled and advanced (Burger et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion

As Bali flourishes as the “Blooming Island,” where tradition meets modernity, the *KB Krama Bali* policy serves as a cultural safeguard, shaping women's fertility choices in accordance with ancestral values. The four-child households echo a desire to preserve heritage amidst rapid socio-economic

change. Yet, this blossoming has intensified the burdens borne by Balinese women, who must navigate expectations surrounding reproduction, financial limitations, and ritual obligations. In choosing smaller families, they quietly redefine their roles, reflecting both the resilience and transformation at the heart of Bali's evolving identity.

The results also underscore the interplay between demographic shifts, cultural traditions, and economic realities. While some respondents view the policy as necessary to sustain Balinese identity, others perceive it as an impractical demand that does not align with contemporary economic pressures and personal aspirations. The research further reveals that gendered expectations, particularly son preference, continue to shape reproductive decisions in Balinese households. Women's voices are evident in their critiques of policy demands, with some acknowledging its role in preserving Balinese identity. In contrast, others highlight its misalignment with modern financial constraints and personal aspirations.

Despite these insights, this study has certain limitations. First, the findings are based on purposive sampling with a small number of participants, which restricts the generalisability of results. However, the qualitative approach offers nuanced insights into participants' lived experiences. Second, excluding male and policymaker perspectives constrains the analysis of broader decision-making structures and institutional influences. Further research incorporating diverse voices, including men, policymakers, and religious leaders, is necessary to develop more inclusive and effective family planning policies. Additionally, combining quantitative analysis would deepen understanding of *KB Krama Bali's* demographic and socio-economic effects by revealing patterns across income, education, and household dynamics. Future research targeting economically secure families could further clarify how financial capacity influences adherence to or divergence from traditional reproductive norms. Despite these limitations, the study makes a novel contribution by applying Bourdieu's habitus theory and Reproductive Justice to examine fertility decisions in Bali, situating reproductive autonomy within intersecting cultural norms and structural constraints.

Given these findings, the Indonesian National and Bali Provincial governments must review family planning policies comprehensively. This review should assess the policies' impact, relevance, and effectiveness in the current socio-economic landscape. Policymakers must engage women in developing family planning policies to ensure they address their needs and interests while balancing cultural preservation and economic sustainability. By incorporating women's voices and experiences, future policies can better support gender equality, reproductive rights, and overall societal well-being in Bali.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this manuscript. The authors have been involved in different aspects of this paper. The authors read and approved the publication of the final manuscript.

Acknowledgement

The authors want to show the deepest gratitude to all the people whose assistance was invaluable in completing this paper. The authors sincerely acknowledge and appreciate Evalina Franciska Hutasoit for her valuable contribution during the data collection and preparation of the manuscript. Carol Warren and Anja Reid assisted Anastasia Septya Titisari in the first study (2020). Also, Ni Luh Nyoman Sumiati and Made Anggia Paramesthi Fajar helped to collect the second data (2022). Judi Mesman and Marian Klammer reviewed and provided helpful feedback for this manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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