



Traditional Muslim Birth Preparation Practices in Bali and Childcare Arrangements among Working Mothers

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Received: 7 August 2025

Reviewed: 30 September 2025

Accepted: 22 November 2025

Abstract

Parenting is an attitude carried out by parents or adults around a child to care for and educate the child. Then, custom is something that applies in a place to be implemented. This study aims to determine the procession of preparation for the birth of traditional Muslims in the village of Tegal Badeng, Negara District, Bali. Starting from before birth to welcoming the birth of a child and the daily care process for mothers who work for two families with early childhood. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach. The informants in this study were three mothers who worked as factory employees and the local community. This study found how the initial procession started from the child in the womb until the process of welcoming the birth of a child and the care provided by three informants. There are traditional and religious rituals in the procession before birth, namely holding a seven-month event and in welcoming the birth of a child, a nelai event is held. In addition to preparation for birth, in the caregiving process the three informants separated between care and their working hours. Family involvement is a factor supporting the success of the birth preparation procession to parenting.

Keywords: birth procession, working mother care, early childhood

Introduction

From a religious perspective, the island of Bali is not only inhabited by Hindus, but also by non-Hindu religions, such as Islam (Fahham, 2018). Muslim communities in Bali are known for upholding both religious and customary traditions, which are considered ancestral heritage. Daily life among Balinese Muslims is deeply rooted in ritual practices. Although these rites of passage are derived from Islamic teachings, their performance also serves to preserve local cultural heritage. In the Tegal Badeng community, several key events mark the human life cycle—birth, marriage, parenthood, and death—along with other stages of life from childhood to the end of life.

Balinese Muslims have developed distinct cultural expressions that reflect their social behaviors and community values. Some studies that have been conducted for example by (Kartini, 2011), Masyad (2014), and Diana (2016) It is said that Islam entered Bali during the Majapahit kingdom when the kingdom was ruled by King Hayam Wuruk (1350-1389 AD) and continues to grow until now. These cultural elements encompass social conduct, language, belief

systems, and traditional rituals. As such, Balinese Muslim society recognizes a series of cultural practices associated with significant stages of an individual's development—from pre-birth, birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, to death. These traditions are viewed as religious expressions aimed at strengthening the spiritual relationship between humans and Allah SWT (Cucchi and Qoronfleh 2025).

An interesting cultural phenomenon occurs in Tegal Badeng Village, where both religious and customary rituals are performed by mothers in preparation for childbirth and to welcome the arrival of a child. Prenatal rituals include the traditional “Tujuh Bulanan” (Cholistarisa et al., 2022) ceremony (a ritual held in the seventh month of pregnancy). The ritual welcoming a newborn is known as *nelai* and involves the creation of *male*—a decorative arrangement of colorful eggs crafted into various shapes such as flowers or sports fields. Eggs are chosen as a symbolic medium because they consist of three parts: shell, egg white, and yolk, which represent the stages of human life. The shell signifies birth, the white represents life, and the yolk symbolizes death (Made Saihu, 2019).

Another noteworthy finding is the prevalence of dual-role mothers in Tegal Badeng. Contrary to traditional rural views that women should primarily serve as caregivers and homemakers, the reality in this village shows a majority of women engaging in paid work outside the home. A working mother is defined as one who performs professional duties outside the household while simultaneously managing childcare responsibilities at home (Boediarsih, 2020). In most rural contexts, only a small number of women adopt this modern lifestyle shift, yet in Tegal Badeng, it has become the norm. This dual role brings its own challenges. After a long day at work, often accompanied by additional office tasks to complete at home, mothers may experience physical and emotional exhaustion. This inevitably reduces the quality and quantity of time spent with their children, as attention is diverted toward work responsibilities (Frech and Damaske 2012; Huang et al. 2025).

Preliminary data collected from Tegal Badeng Village reveals a compelling phenomenon involving childbirth rituals—from prenatal preparations to postnatal celebrations—and the reality of working mothers who must simultaneously care for their children. Information regarding these rituals and childcare practices was gathered from multiple sources. This raises intriguing questions about the purposes of religious and cultural rituals surrounding childbirth, and the reasons why mothers choose to continue working while also fulfilling caregiving roles. Therefore, this study aims to expand upon previous research by offering new insights into the childbirth rituals and parenting practices of working mothers in Tegal Badeng Village.

Literature Review

There is an interesting fact that takes place in the village of Tegal Badeng, where traditional and religious rituals are carried out by mothers as part of the preparations before childbirth and to welcome the birth of a child. The prenatal ritual involves a traditional ceremony known as *tujuh bulanan* (a ritual performed in the seventh month of pregnancy). Meanwhile, the ritual to welcome the birth of a child is known as *nelai* by the people of Tegal Badeng Village, along with the creation of *male*.

Male is a collection of colorful decorated eggs arranged into various shapes, such as flowers, football fields, and more. This tradition uses eggs as its distinctive feature because eggs consist of three parts—shell, egg white, and yolk—which symbolize the phases of human life. The shell represents birth, the egg white symbolizes life, and the yolk signifies the end of life (Made Saihu, 2019).

Another noteworthy fact is that it has become quite common for mothers to take on dual roles. While traditional communities in rural areas often view mothers solely as caregivers and homemakers, this perception does not align with the findings in Tegal Badeng Village. In fact, in Tegal Badeng, working mothers make up the majority. A working mother is defined as a woman who works outside the home to earn an income, while also raising and taking care of her children at home (Boediarsih, 2020).

Typically, very few women in rural areas choose to break away from traditional roles and adopt a more modern pattern of living that involves holding dual responsibilities (Afifah et al. 2025). As a result, when mothers become occupied with their jobs and return home carrying work-related tasks that need to be completed quickly, it can drain their energy. The effects include physical and emotional exhaustion due to their busy routines (Alverina, Hanami, and Abidin 2024; Asri et al. 2024). Consequently, the time spent between mother and child decreases or is even taken over by the constant presence of work obligations. This, in turn, reduces the amount of attention a child receives from their mother (M. Kim, Jung, and Wulandari 2022; Buchanan, Das, and McFarlane 2020; Boonk et al. 2018).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach, using a case study method. The qualitative approach with a case study design is utilized to explore and address the research problem and to gain a deeper understanding of childbirth rituals and child-rearing practices in Tegal Badeng Village. The research method applied in this study is qualitative. According to Sharan, qualitative research is characterized by four main features: (1) emphasis on process, understanding, and meaning; (2) the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; (3) the research process is inductive in nature; and (4) the results are presented in rich, descriptive narratives (Made Saihu, 2019).

The specific method employed is the case study. Lincoln and Guba argue that the case study is an effective means of illustrating the relationship between the researcher and the respondents, and it allows for the discovery of internal consistency—not merely stylistic or factual consistency, but also trustworthiness (Made Saihu, 2019).

Result and Discussion

The results of this research are a summary of interviews and observations conducted with two informants who each have children aged 3 and 5, as well as their respective significant others and members of the surrounding community. The informants in this study are mothers who hold dual roles as both child caregivers and working mothers. In addition to raising their

children, each informant works in the same occupation—as employees at a fish factory. The significant others in this study are the husbands of the informants, namely NP (husband of RH), who has a 3-year-old child, and MI (husband of AS), who has a 5-year-old child. This was based on the consideration that both husbands are directly involved in the birth preparations and parenting process. The community involved in this study served to provide deeper information regarding the birth preparation rituals. After conducting interviews and observations with the informants, the researchers carried out a cross-check with the significant others (the husbands) and then sought further information from the selected community members.

Before and during birth, a person must undergo several rituals in the community of Tegal Badeng Village. These include the “tujuh bulanan” (seven-month pregnancy celebration), “nelai” (the local term for aqiqah), and “making male.” These life-encompassing rituals are closely tied to the traditional Islamic customs practiced by Muslim communities in Bali, which hold profound meanings that are largely unknown to the broader Indonesian society. Particularly in Tegal Badeng Village, the Muslim community upholds various unique traditions that must be preserved amid the currents of globalization. These rituals possess distinct characteristics that set them apart from other customary practices.

Each region in Indonesia has its own ways of commemorating important life phases through traditional rituals. These customary practices are carried out in accordance with ancestral traditions passed down through generations. For the Muslim communities in Bali, rituals marking birth, marriage, and death are considered stages of human existence in this world. Among these, birth is seen as a sacred event in Tegal Badeng, celebrated through both traditional and religious rituals that carry cultural and spiritual significance. These birth rituals are a hereditary tradition performed with the goal of seeking safety and peace in life. Through these customs, the community believes that Allah SWT will grant protection throughout their lives.

The customary birth rituals also serve as a means of socialization, instilling values of social integration within the community, reminding them that they are part of a collective system that must uphold social solidarity (Eka Mayasari, 2017). These rituals also act as a medium to pray for safety and express gratitude for the ease and blessings granted by Allah SWT. The implementation of these rituals—starting from the preparation, tools, execution, and final stages—Involves various parties, especially members of the community. The rituals also function as a social glue that strengthens human relationships. This is evident in how no ritual can be carried out alone; it requires cooperation and participation from family and nearby community members.

The values within these traditional birth rituals in Tegal Badeng are passed down from one generation to the next. This process occurs naturally as part of everyday life. From an early age, community members are taught—especially within the family environment—to obey customary laws and traditions inherited from their ancestors. Additionally, this practice is supported by a communal belief system that holds that failure to conduct such rituals may bring misfortune to the child. Sociologically, the implementation of these birth rituals also carries the meaning of being a unifying force within society. This is symbolized by the ritual tools and

materials used, reflecting the cultural and social values held in high esteem by the community. Through the execution of these rituals, people indirectly receive messages emphasizing the importance of preserving shared values as part of a broader sociocultural system.

Birth Preparation Process

In Bali, there are Muslim customary rituals for the preparation of childbirth, starting from the pregnancy phase until the arrival of the baby, specifically in the community of Tegal Badeng. These rituals include the seven-month ceremony during pregnancy, the nelai (aqiqah), and making male.

Seven-Month Ceremony

The seven-month bath is a pregnancy celebration held when the fetus is seven months old (Sufathudin, 2020). This ceremony is meant to bless the mother and the baby, ensuring that the pregnancy and childbirth go smoothly without any hindrances, and that the baby is born safely. The ritual is performed as a medium for praying for safety, expressing gratitude to Allah SWT, and showing respect to their ancestors. The community in Tegal Badeng carries out this birth ritual as a sacred tradition. Each step of the ritual is filled with symbolic meanings that relate to religious aspects, and these symbols function within the context of the custom. Birth customs encompass various norms and regulations that must be adhered to. These norms have grown and developed through generations in the community, serving to preserve order in the execution of each ritual.

Pregnancy is considered a great blessing from Allah SWT for married couples. As a form of gratitude for the fetus, a special ritual is held for the pregnant woman, which is known as a selametan (celebration). Nenek Rukaya, a community leader in Tegal Badeng, explained: "The seven-month celebration is meant to pray that both the baby in the womb and the mother remain healthy and safe." This birth ritual is typically held at the home of the expectant family, attended by family members, close neighbors, and acquaintances who live nearby. The purpose of this ritual is to inform the family and neighbors that the pregnancy has reached the seven-month mark.

In this study, the author also interviewed several religious and community leaders. According to Nenek Monyang, "The seven-month ceremony can be held or skipped; however, if it is held, it continues the tradition of our ancestors and will be passed down to future generations." Datuk Asan also mentioned, "As a form of gratitude to Allah, the seven-month celebration is held to ensure the health and safety of both the mother and the baby until birth."

Meanwhile, Nenek Sos, who often helps with the seven-month ritual, shared, "In the seven-month ritual, there is also a selametan, such as dhikr (remembrance of Allah) and solawatan (praises to Prophet Muhammad) by the guests while water is placed nearby. The pregnant woman lies on the bed, and seven pieces of cloth (shawls) are placed beneath her. These shawls are rubbed on her body, then lifted and tapped on her head while prayers are recited to call upon the baby's spirit. Afterward, the shawls are given to seven people who are waiting. Each person takes one shawl. The pregnant woman is then taken to the bathroom and

bathed with water that has been blessed during the ceremony, and seven flowers are placed in the water. Tepung tawar (a blessing powder) is sprinkled on her body, and she is bathed with kembang (flower) water. The purpose of this ritual is for the fetus to remain healthy, the delivery to go smoothly, and for both mother and baby to be protected from harm."

Nelai Ceremony

After the birth of a child, the nelai ceremony, or what is commonly known as aqiqah in Islam, is held. Nelai is the term used by the community in Tegal Badeng for the aqiqah ceremony. Aqiqah comes from the word "aqiq" which means a newborn baby. According to Islamic law (syara), it refers to the act of slaughtering livestock on the seventh day after the child's birth, on which day the child is named and their hair is shaved. Aqiqah is an expression of gratitude, manifested through a sacrifice, whether in the form of gold, silver, or food (Jannah, 2020). As the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Every child is held hostage by their aqiqah. On the seventh day, the aqiqah animal is slaughtered for them, their hair is shaved, and they are given a name."

During the nelai ceremony, the parents slaughter a goat and prepare a name for their child. NP shared: "Yes, usually as part of the tradition there is aqiqah, which involves slaughtering a goat. Since my child is a boy, we slaughter two goats, but if it's a girl, only one goat. However, during my child's aqiqah, I only slaughtered one goat because I didn't have enough money at the time. So, I'll pay for the second one when he's circumcised, and the name has also been prepared for my child." The parents also prepare various offerings during the nelai ceremony, such as traditional snacks, making satay from the slaughtered goat, and preparing scissors, a container, rose water, a comb, and powder for the baby's hair shaving. After the baby is born, the community believes that the hair the baby is born with is called bulu panas (hot hair). Therefore, this hair is removed through a ceremony and prayer, usually performed during the nelai. Datuk Hasan explained: "This nelai tradition, just like aqiqah, is found in the book *Al-Barzanji* (in Alfaishal), which contains praises for the Prophet Muhammad SAW. From these praises, we hope to receive his intercession on the Day of Judgment." The person who shaves the baby's hair is typically a respected individual, such as a religious leader. The implementation of this birth ritual is considered essential, as it is believed to bring safety to the child. Nenek Rukaya stated: "Not all guests cut the baby's hair, only a few people like religious leaders who are invited to attend."

Making Male (Egg Craft)

In addition, there is also a tradition of making male, which involves attaching the child's name to colorful eggs that have been decorated. The male tradition comes from the Muslim community in Jembrana. Male refers to eggs that are boiled without peeling (leaving the shell intact), arranged in various shapes that hold high aesthetic and religious philosophical values. These eggs are threaded onto a banana tree trunk, which is then decorated with colorful paper. Some even thread dozens of boiled eggs (Made Saihu, 2019). This arrangement or formation of eggs is referred to as male by the Muslim community of Tegal Badeng. Male is also often given

as a gift (blessing) to guests who attend. Particularly, when a family experiences the birth of a child, a male is created to "celebrate" or "welcome the birth of the child."

Although making male is not mandatory in the traditional Muslim rituals in Bali to welcome a newborn, if the parents are financially able, they are expected to hold this ritual by making male for their child, with the eggs wrapped and distributed to the guests. The purpose of male is to express gratitude to Allah SWT for the birth of the child and to share blessings with the guests. Male is originally made during the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (Maulid Nabi), but it can also be used to welcome the birth of a child. The male tradition has meaning: the shell represents birth, the egg white symbolizes life, and the egg yolk represents the end of life. Male is typically made by the Jembrana community during the nelai ceremony and Maulid Nabi.

During the nelai ceremony, male is placed in a room and accompanied by the reading of asrakal (praises for the Prophet Muhammad SAW). The decorated eggs are threaded onto bamboo and then stuck into the banana tree, creating the appearance of a banana tree bearing eggs (pajegan). The guests sing praises (solawat) together, followed by reading syair solawat diba', which contains the life story of the Prophet Muhammad SAW as a way to express their love for him. Following this, a prayer is recited as the closing ritual before the eggs are distributed to the guests. When the eggs are distributed, the guests are very enthusiastic to receive the male, even if it means pushing and scrambling, as they believe they will receive blessings and safety from the eggs that have been prayed over. Datuk Sis, a community leader, explained:

"Male consists of eggs, and it has meaning that signifies birth because the egg is made up of the shell, egg white, and egg yolk, which represents the shell as birth, egg white as life, and egg yolk as the end of life."

Mother's Role in Childrearing

The parenting process referred to in this research includes all the activities carried out by working mothers to accompany and assist in their child's growth and development (Carbines et al., 2017). According to Rizka & Yulisetyaningrum (2018) parenting is a process of interaction between parents and children through actions such as protecting, caring, nurturing, teaching, and guiding them, so that children can live well during their developmental years. The actions of mothers towards their children can influence both the physical and mental development of the child in the way the mother desires (Purnama et al. 2024; Ansari and Sanaei 2018).

In Tegal Badeng village, the parenting process has become a unique phenomenon where most primary caregivers, who are mothers, play dual roles: as caregivers and workers. Working mothers are responsible for both their family and their work (Putrihapsari & Fauziah, 2020a). This is a challenging role, as not all mothers are able to balance these two responsibilities due to time constraints. However, in Tegal Badeng village, something extraordinary happens. A mother plays a significant role in her child's development, having a method of "shaping" their children according to their expectations.

Mother's Involvement in Parenting

There is no doubt about the significant role mothers play in parenting (Magda, 2018). This can be seen from the struggles mothers go through, from the time the child is in the womb, during birth, and in various rituals and religious ceremonies like nelai, the seventh-month ceremony, and making male. The effort and preparation mothers put in ensure the child is born healthy and normal. The post-birth parenting process is just as remarkable, where working mothers, despite their busy careers, still strive to provide the best for their child's development.

According to Panca Dharma Wanita (Wibowo et al., 2018), a wife's duties include: 1) giving birth to healthy, normal, and intelligent children, 2) possessing knowledge about child-rearing and maternal health during pregnancy and childbirth, 3) providing security and love to the child, and 4) maintaining consistency in raising children so they grow into individuals with good character, behavior, and manners.

In addition to the preparations for the child's birth, working mothers also show efforts to provide comfort and affection for their children in various ways. For instance, NP and MI choose to share child-rearing responsibilities with their husbands and in-laws. Working mothers believe that their children will benefit from having enough time with their parents. As such, working mothers in Tegal Badeng still consider child-rearing as their primary activity, apart from their careers. This can be seen with NP and MI, who both work at the same place, and during their breaks, they make time to go home and spend time with their children or simply have lunch together and make time at night to listen to the children's daily stories.

Additionally, both informants have high hopes and dreams for their children, wishing for them to grow into well-rounded individuals. For example, NP has high hopes for her child to attend university and become a doctor. Similarly, MI hopes for her child to pursue higher education. In conversations with the researchers, NP and MI mentioned "dreams" and "education" as follows: "Yes, I work so my child's needs are met, especially for schooling." "Yes, I have high hopes for my child to become a doctor so that when they're grown up, even after marriage, they can stay with me and open a practice here." "Education is expensive, so I'm saving money for my child's schooling." "My hope is to see my child succeed, as that is my dream, to educate them as much as possible as long as my husband and I can."

Balancing Parenting and Work

As we all know, the role of a mother in a family is very important, especially in child-rearing. Parenting at home makes it easier for working parents while providing the best possible education and opportunities for the child's development (Ang & Tabu, 2018). However, as times change and knowledge advances, a mother's tasks go beyond just child-rearing. According to Panca Dharma Wanita (Wibowo et al., 2018), a mother's roles include being a companion to her husband, managing the household, continuing the lineage, being an educator, an additional income provider, and an active member of society. These are the challenges a mother faces. Success in one aspect does not guarantee success in others, as is the case with working mothers. Focusing too much on a career can lead to a decrease in the quality of child-rearing. Therefore,

careful planning is necessary to balance these roles (Dal Forno Martins et al. 2019; A. Kim and Hahn 2022; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Torres et al. 2024).

In Tegal Badeng village, the way working mothers manage to divide their time between child-rearing and work is extraordinary. This is achieved through various strategies, in line with what Hemas (Wibowo et al., 2018) describes: a mother or wife must be adept at child-rearing, satisfying family needs, working, and being independent. Based on these expectations, both informants can be considered ideal wives, as they manage to maintain comfort and stability for their children despite working (Pratiwi, Sari, and Fatmawati 2025).

Conclusion

This research concludes that birth preparation and early caregiving among working Muslim mothers in Bali are deeply rooted in religious and cultural traditions that begin during pregnancy and continue after childbirth. Key rituals include the tujuh bulanan ceremony, which serves as a form of gratitude, protection, and prayer for the health and safety of both mother and unborn child, as well as respect for Allah SWT and ancestors. After birth, the nelai ceremony or aqiqah is performed, accompanied by the making of male as a symbolic expression of gratitude and sharing blessings with the community. These traditions reflect the strong spiritual meaning attached to birth and motherhood, emphasizing the central role of the mother in nurturing, protecting, and guiding her child, even while balancing work responsibilities.

The study also highlights how working mothers manage caregiving alongside employment through shared family support and adaptive strategies. Caregiving responsibilities are often distributed among husbands and in-laws, allowing mothers to continue working while ensuring their children receive proper care. Although work-related fatigue can occasionally limit caregiving activities, such situations are infrequent, as caregiving remains a priority for these mothers. Family support emerges as a crucial enabling factor, while physical exhaustion after work is identified as a minor hindrance. Overall, the findings illustrate that working mothers strive to maintain strong emotional bonds and active caregiving roles despite the demands of employment.

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