“HE IS YOUR GARMENT, AND YOU ARE HIS”

Marital Well Being and Sexuality among Elderly Javanese Women

Lily Zakiyah Munir
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Sjaak van der Geest

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PREFACE

This report documents processes and findings of my study on well being and sexuality of elderly women in my culture. The title, thanks to Professor Sjaak van der Geest for his inspiration, is adopted from the Qur’anic verse on marital relationships (Al Baqarah/2: 187) which translates “They are your garments and ye are their garments.” I am indebted to Sjaak not only for his guidance during this report writing, but also for his stimulating lectures in the basic modules which have brought me into the exciting world of medical anthropology. I thank all my professors for the insight they have shared with me during the AMMA course. As a Javanese, I believe that although I am no more a student of theirs, they remain teachers to me. Dr. Ria Reis and Trudy Kannis have been helpful with administrative matters. Thanks to Dr. Els van Dongen for her willingness to co-read this report in such a short time.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the problem

Reproductive health, including sexual health, is an intrinsic and essential component of general health, for both men and women but particularly for women (Turmen 1994). Reproductive health ensures 'a state of complete ... well being and not merely absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and its functions and processes' (UN ICPD 1994) in Alcala (1994). The declaration incorporates sexual health which implies that '...people are able to have a satisfying ...sex life' (UN ICPD 1994). Though reproductive health appears to focus on reproductive functions of men and women, there is no age limit to it: childhood and adolescence is included, as well as menopause and the health of women and men in older age groups related to the broad field of sexuality and reproduction.

A study by Ford and Siregar (1998) reveals that it is the sexual aspects of the UN ICPD declaration which raise the greatest problems of integration within the Indonesian 'cultural' context. This partially reflects the general social climate in which explicit discussion of sexuality is unfamiliar (1998:3). Public discourse of sexuality has been excessively preoccupied with sexuality's negative consequences -- STDs, HIV -- and very little attention has been given to positive sexuality, despite the considerable evidence of public interest in such matters (1998:28).

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1 UN ICPD stands for the United Nations International Conference on Population Development which was held in Cairo in 1994

2 Positive sexuality is the positive concept of sexual health which is defined as 'sex that is pleasurable and free from emotional, physical and social problems for the persons practicing it, and free from...
Very little information is available regarding positive sexuality in Javanese Muslim culture, and even much less among its elderly women. Sexuality among elderly Javanese Muslim women appears to be a 'mystery'; existing information could only be tapped from informal conversations between and among friends. From my observation and introspection as a Javanese Muslim woman, I have been intrigued to study further on the relationship between old age, sexuality, and well being of women in my culture. To me, there seems to be contradiction between the positive portrayal of being old and the negative portrayal of sexuality among the old. Being an elderly woman in Javanese Muslim culture may have several positive meanings: she will gain more power in domestic sphere, will receive greater reverence from others especially the younger ones, will be identified with wisdom and success (as she has been blessed with a long life by Allah), and also will be treated with feelings of indebtedness by the youth. Nevertheless, positive sexuality, which is advocated in Beijing (1995) as part of women’s human rights is considered as saru (indecent) or ora pantes (not appropriate) for elderly women. Upon cessation of menstruation, women in my culture are expected to focus their attention on the ‘hereafter’ life, rather than on sexuality, which is viewed as a ‘worldly’ activity.

Exploring sexuality among the elderly requires a certain point of reference in a woman’s life. In the life cycle theory, menopause or the cessation of menstruation (Berger 1999:1) is viewed as a natural event and part of a transitional phase in which unwanted pregnancy and infections (IPPF 1991, in Ford and Siregar 1998, 8).

The term ‘life cycle’ has a number of meanings as it can refer to an individual’s biological process of maturation (from birth to death), the socially constructed transition of age, the variations in the social
women move from their reproductive stage into their non-reproductive stage as part of the ageing process from mid life to old age (Berger 1999:36). This event in a woman’s life is adopted in this study to mark a woman entering the twilight of her life.

This study is conducted based on the assumption that changes in marital relationship may or may not take place after menopause due to biological and cultural factors which will be explored in this study. The changes may influence, either positively or negatively, women’s values, attitudes, and beliefs related to their sexuality and well being after menopause in their marriage.

1.2. Justification of the study

Ortner and Whitehead (1981:ix) consider the attempt to understand sexuality in its social and cultural context to be among the most important tasks of contemporary social science. This study is first and foremost a contribution toward the understanding of sexuality and well being from the perspective of elderly Javanese Muslim women.

Concerned with the ways in which elderly Javanese Muslim women interpret their sexual realities and well being, this study is expected to contribute to what has come to be known as symbolic anthropology. Nanda and Warms (1998:376) refer to Geertz, who believes that ‘people use symbols to help them understand their own experience of ageing ... (Abercombie et al. 1994, in Berger 1999: 80).
culture.’ He further contends that ‘culture is like a story that people tell themselves about themselves, and in so doing give meaning and poignancy in their lives’ (1998: 375). The symbolic approach is particularly powerful in dealing with complexities of gender, including sexuality (Ortner and Whitehead 1981: ix). Ortner and Whitehead further contend that interpreting cultural phenomena in relation to sexuality as symbols enables us to avoid naturalistic assumptions and instead to raise analytical questions regarding the topic under study (1981: ix).

The sensitivity of the topic for public discourse has made it a ‘mystery’. While Indonesia is committed to implementing the ICPD Consensus and the Beijing Platform of Action (PFA) on sexual and reproductive health, there appears to be hardly any study on positive sexuality among elderly women in non-Western countries; and there exists to my knowledge no such a study among Javanese Muslim women. This study, in spite of its limited scope, may contribute to obtaining baseline information on the issue.

A study on elderly sexuality and well being is getting more important considering that Indonesia, like other Asian countries, has population structure that is on the verge of transition: from relative youth to an increasing predominance of older people (Frankenberg & Beard and Saputra 1999: 65). Between 1990 and 2025, the percentage of the population that is elderly will increase by about 400 per cent (Adlakha & Rudolf 1994, in Frankenberg & Beard and Saputra 1999: 65). Aris Ananta et al. (1997, in Niehof, unpublished paper) speak of an ‘old people boom’ in Indonesia as a
result of simultaneous processes of declining fertility, increasing longevity, and declining mortality.

Information resulting from this study is hoped to capture the attention of health policy makers, religious leaders, NGO activists, and donors on the issue of women’s sexuality and well being. Although the scope of the study is limited to elderly Javanese Muslim women, its resulting information may be useful as comparison to similar issue in other cultural contexts, especially those with Islamic background.

1.3. Literature review

1.3.1. Sexuality and old age

Several studies have been conducted in Western cultural context, among others Levy 1994; Hodson & Skeen 1994; and Berger 1999 to explore sexuality and old age. Berger (1999) reports on her findings from a comparative study of menopause among the Australians (Western) and the Philipinos (Eastern) cultures. These studies and several others will be cited in this literature review. To the best of my knowledge, no such study of sexuality among Javanese Muslim elderly women has specifically been conducted. The literature cited for this study will, therefore, be made up of Javanese and Islamic references on gender and sexuality and the Indonesian state gender ideology.

Sexuality, like gender, is culturally constructed (Ortner and Whitehead 1981; Oakley 1980; Caplan 1987; Giddens 1981; Anselni and Law 1998). Different sexual roles are
prescribed for men and women, made further distinct by sub-divisions of class, ethnicity, life cycle stage, and religion (Miller 1993). Different sexual roles may be explained by the social role theory (Eagly 1987, in Alseni and Law 1998:312), which suggests that women, associated with a communal role, exhibit a concern for others, is emotionally expressive, and is interpersonally sensitive. Men, on the other hand, who are associated with the agenic role, are independent, forceful, and dominant.

Caroll, Volk and Hyde (1984) in Alseni and Law (1998:312) contend that women and men in Western cultures under their study appear to have different motives for their sexual intercourse. Women would typically answer that their motive was due to love, to feel loved, and to express love to someone; while men would say that they have the intercourse because they need it, gratify it, and because they are tired of masturbation. The theory entails that women would demonstrate a stronger orientation toward the relational aspects of sexuality, and research by Kudek (1994, in Alseni and Law 1998:312) supports this contention.

There are different ways in which women adapt to the ageing process. The dominant view within a culture on ageing will exert some effect on a woman in terms of her physiological, psychological and social well being (Berger 1999:81). If menopause, which is part of the ageing process, is viewed as a negative life event, a partial death, or a deficiency disease, then women are likely to experience a broad range of discomforts (Lauritzen 1976; Kamfert 1984; Beyene 1986; Ballinger 1990; Baum 1990; Avis and McKinlay 1991; Koster 1991; Faust 1992, in Berger 1999:81). In
cultures where a positive outlook and appreciation of ageing predominates, menopausal women may experience few or no menopausal discomforts and an absence of depression is noteworthy (Kaiser 1990, in Berger 1999:81).

The denial of old age prevails in many developed countries, where ageing generates a preoccupation with losses in terms of youth and beauty, fertility and sexuality, femininity and good health (Buck and Gottlieb 1991, in Berger 1999:82). These societies constantly reinforce that 'normal' means youthful, exuberant, vigorous and productive and ageing is 'abnormal' (Berger 1999:82). Betty Friedan (1993, in Berger 1999:83) writes that there appears to be an increasing obsession with the problem of age and how to avoid it personally, through diet, exercise, chemical formulas, plastic surgery, moisturizing creams, psychological defences and outright denial . . . .'

Berger (1999:84) reveals that for women in non-Western societies old age and menopause is often considered to be a time of gains. One can speak of a woman's liberation from mid-life onwards. Older women become more self-confident because old age offers them the chance to achieve greater prestige and influence within the family group (Foner 1989, in Berger 1999:84). Menopause is welcomed because it allows older women a fuller participation in community life. Taboos and restrictions regarding menstruation are present in many societies and these are removed for women who have gone through menopause (Berger 1999:84). Specific advantages accumulate for women as they age. Ageing automatically brings some rewards such as increased power in the domestic sphere (Freedman 1966; Brown and Kerns 1985,
in Berger 1999:84). Age is also viewed as to imply wisdom, often acquired through experience with the blessings of life (Berger 1999:85). Ageing is furthermore a sign of success. Feelings about growing old may contain deep spiritual meaning because long life is regarded as a generous gift (from God or nature) that creates more time for enjoyment (Berger 1999:85). Age calls for greater courtesy and reverence from others (Andres and Ilada-Andres 1992, in Berger 1999, 85). In short, the socio-cultural environment may contribute to largely positive menopause experiences.

There are many myths and stereotypes surrounding the sexuality of elderly persons. Common stereotypes, held by both the young and old, view sex and sexuality as the prerogative of the youth (Levy 1994). In contrast to their younger counterparts, older people are viewed as being sexually undesirable, disinterested in sex, and unable to perform functionally (Butler and Lewis 1976, 1986 in Levy 1994). Hodson and Skeen (1994:220) contend that younger people, including family members of elders, tend to visualize older people as being sexually inhibited or totally sexually inactive. Often young people fail to realize that elders, given the opportunity, can continue to expand their sexual repertoires and are much more sexual than younger people believe (Croft 1982, in Hodson and Skeen 1994:221).

According to Hodson and Skeen (1994:221), such widespread underestimation of the sexual potential of the elderly is one symptom of the cult of youth in Western society. Levy (1994:291), on the other hand, argues that the view of sex to be the prerogative of youth partly arises from traditional values that equate sexuality with procreation.
Because pregnancy and childbirth are not part of the older person's experience, they are believed not to need or want sex (Weg 1985, in Levy 1994:291).

Images in the media and other forms of popular culture, such as cartoons and greeting cards, tend to portray older adults' interest or attempt to be sexual as humorous, ludicrous, scornful, or repugnant (Butler and Lewis 1986; Demos and Jache 1981, in Levy 1994:291). These negative views are reinforced by the popular notion that old people are too frail or functionally limited to perform sexually (Levy 1994:291). Moreover, engaging in sexual behavior in old age is perceived by the general public as being perverse (Butler and Lewis 1986, in Levy 1994:291). The labels dirty old man (Fox et al. 1978, in Levy 1994:291) or indecent old woman (Driver and Detrich 1982, in Levy 1994:291) are applied to aging old people who express interest in having sex. Such messages are so normatively pervasive that older persons come to see themselves as sexless, unattractive, and consigned by old age to an asexual existence (Eaid 1972, in Levy 1994:291). Indeed, many older people are ashamed of their sexual desires, fantasies, and interests (Burnside 1975, in Levy 1994:291).

Studies have been conducted to challenge the stereotypes of elderly sexuality, resulting in consensus among researchers that some level of sexual desire is felt throughout the life course (Weg 1983, in Levy 1994:292). Brecher (1984); McIntosh (1981); Starr and Weiner (1981) offer alternative evidence that both men and women experience sexual interest and desire well into their later years (Levy 1994:292).
While common stereotypical perceptions about post-menopausal women as asexual are not based on fact, female sexual expression does become limited in later age (Berger 1999:76). Still, studies show that in spite of a decrease in the desire for coitus, sexual activity continues to be an important activity for most women until they reach their seventies or eighties (Haas and Schiff 1988; Bachmann 1990; Youngs 1990; Bachmann and Leiblum 1991, in Berger 1999:76). However, not all middle aged women are happily engaged in a satisfying sexual relationship; problems of a sexual nature are still to some extent taboo and often repudiated (Berger 1999:76).

Positive self-concepts are probably the single greatest contributor to libido (Levy 1994:293). Men and women who feel positive about their bodies and who perceive themselves as physically desirable are more likely to have a satisfying sexual relationship than those who do not. Women, however, are more likely to construct their self images primarily on judgments about their appearance; men also consider appearance but give greater weight to sexual performance (Dressen 1975; Stimson, Was, and Stimson 1981, in Levy 1994:293). Positive attitudes toward sexuality are associated with the desire to remain sexually active among older people of both sexes (Martin 1981, in Levy 1994:293).

1.3.2 Javanese and Islamic

According to Javanese, one's speech and action can have layered meanings, both to one's self and to others (Beatty 1999:173). The deepest meaning of interpersonal relationship, reflecting the mystery of life is contained in reproduction. The deepest
mystery, the absorbing focus of symbolism, is sexual reproduction (Beatty 1999:167). The hidden truth behind a sexual intercourse, in Javanese epistemology, is the union of servant and Lord (*manunggaling kawulo Gusti*) (Beatty 1999:173). With analogies of growth and transformation taken from plant life (the tree contained in the seed, etc.), sex is not only an image of union, but of fertile union (Beatty 1999:167). It is understandable, therefore, why fertile women in Javanese tradition are more valued than barren ones.

The ideology of man being god and woman being servant has widely prevailed that women are generally assumed to have inferior characteristics to those of men, and which give them lower status (Keeler 1987; Hatley 1992, in Kusujiarti 1995:71). The family, viewed as a microcosm of society, reflects the hierarchical relations of the more macro structures of society. Husband and wife represent different status and roles. A Javanese father is deemed to have great spiritual potency, while effectively minimizing his direct involvement over daily household business (Keeler 1987, in Kusujiarti 1995:69). Husband and wife enter the marriage in a hierarchically based relationship. Since the hierarchical relations are perceived to be divinely ordained, individuals have to accept it.

Citing Hatley (1990), Kusujiarti (1995:71) describes the proper image for high class women as having characteristics of ‘elegance, modesty, and refinement, but also of weakness and dependence.’ But women are perceived to lack spiritual potency which is a crucial aspect of Javanese life. Because of these assumed characteristics, women
are in need of protection and guidance from their husbands. Moreover, women’s social standing and status are dependent on their husbands’ status and reputation. Since men are discerned to grant women protection, guidance, and status, women in return are supposed to care for their husbands’ emotional, and domestic needs, and to be submissive to their husbands’ desires and supportive of their interests.’ This ideological image serves as a cultural ideal of Javanese womanhood. It is supported by religious tenets as well as state policies concerning women (Kusujiarti 1995:72).

There is a great debate concerning the duties and sphere of activities of women in Islam. The Qur’an contains several ‘discriminatory statements which may reinforce and legitimize women’s subordination’ (Berninghausen and Kerstan 1992, in Kusujiarti 1995:58). However, the Qur’an contains very diverse and coded illustrations so that various interpretations are plausible (Engineer 1992; Kusujiarti 1995; Munir 1999). In fact one of the important characteristics of Islam is its principles of equality, in which women and men are viewed as equal before God and have the same rights to mercy and redemption. But in worldly life it is perceived that men and women have different roles in which women must subject themselves to the protection of a superior man and obediently subordinate themselves to him. In exchange for this, however, it is decreed that men treat women fairly and kindly.

A big discussion has been going on over the past decade, initiated by Muslim feminists in Indonesia, on how the following verse which regulates gender roles in marriage is to be interpreted in the current context: “Men are the protectors and
maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard.” (Q.S. An Nisa'/4:34).

Islam views sex as the highest expression of total physical and emotional union of a man and a woman. The Qur' an beautifully illustrates sexual relations as enjoyment and pleasure granted by God not only to men but also to women (Q.S. Ali Imran/3:14). Husband and wife are symbolized as 'garments' with which they complement each other including sexually: “They are your garments and you are their garments” (QS al-Baqarah/2:187). Sexual relation is a sacred feature in Islam; it is an act of devotion to God (ibadah) in addition to its biological and social functions (Umar 1999).

In view of the strong and powerful biological sex urge in man, it is necessary that it should be exercised within certain regulation of matrimony; otherwise, it could destroy the same community which it was supposed to maintain and preserve through procreation (Rahman 1980). The Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) encompasses intimate relations in what is termed ‘law mixed with rituals, morals, and good manners” (Farah 1984). Women and men are both accorded the right to demand sexual relations with their spouse. The Prophet Muhammad forbade the act of love before caressing (As Suyuti 1994).
However, in spite of the Qur'anic affirmation of gender equality, Muslim societies, in general, have never regarded men and women as equal, particularly in the context of marriage (Mernissi 1975). The discriminative view of gender relations is particularly rooted in the sufistic approach of operationalizing Qur'anic teachings. In his popular and widely cited book on marriage, Al-Ghazali, a renowned sufi whose work has been widely referred as an Islamic legal source, contends that marriage constitutes a form of enslavement; thus, the wife is a slave who should obey the husband absolutely in everything he demands ... (Farah 1984). Although the Qur'an constitutes a primary source of Islamic laws and such a sufistic view occupies only a tertiary level, such discriminatory view is very popular among Javanese Muslim culture and often used to justify men's subjugation over women.

Regarding leadership role in the family, Noeh (1999, in Munir 1999:151-152) contends that Islam does not specify who is to be the head of the family, the man or the woman. However, it regulates rights and responsibilities within marriage among others as follows:

- The husband is obliged to provide *nafkah* (sustenance) for his wife in the forms of food (*tha'am*), clothing (*kiswah*), and dwelling place (*maskan*), according to his capacity but within certain minimum limit. If the husband neglects this responsibility, it will be accumulated as his debts to her which cannot expire (except *maskan*).

- If the husband is incapable of providing the minimum *nafkah*, and if the wife cannot tolerate it, she has the right to complain (*raja'*) to the judge and request for
a fasakh divorce. If proven true, the judge will give three days’ time to the husband to fulfil his obligation. If he fails to do it, the judge will decide to dissolve the marriage with a fasakh. The fasakh divorce also applies if the husband is sexually impotent, suffering from leprosy, etc.

- In the case of a well off husband, the amount or value of nafkah, kiswah and maskan is also to be increased including in it his obligation to provide servant(s) for her; as a matter of fact, she has the right to claim for payment for her nursing and breastfeeding the children whose amount is in accordance with common practices.

The husband’s obligations constitute the wife’s rights, which simultaneously require her obedience to him. If the husband does not fulfil his obligation(s), his right to have his wife’s submission is nullified, and so is his title as head of the family. In such a case, family leadership position which is commonly held by the husband can now be shifted to the wife. It is fully to her discreet to determine whether she wants to assume the leadership position or not; particularly if she is the breadwinner, which means that she is responsible for supporting the children.

1.4 Objectives and research questions

Main research objective

To explore the interpretations of elderly Javanese Muslim women of their marital relationship, sexuality, and well being in the context of Javanese Muslim culture.
Specific research objectives:

1. To identify implications of menopause for subsequent marital relationship among Javanese Muslim women, including sexual roles;

2. To explore women’s perception, beliefs, and experiences regarding marital sexuality after menopause;

3. To explore women’s perception about well being in their marriage;

The main research questions that capture the objectives can be formulated as:

- What changes in marital relationship possibly take place after menopause among Javanese Muslim women in the context of Javanese Muslim culture?

- How do elderly Javanese Muslim women interpret and experience sexuality and well being in their marriage?
2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study type

Since very little information is available on this topic, this study is exploratory. It was conducted on a small scale and is more qualitative rather than quantitative. It attempts to achieve insight into women's interpretation of marital sexuality and well being by exploring the emic views of thirteen elderly Javanese Muslim women.

2.2. Study population

The population of the study is Javanese Muslim women who are above 55 years old, having reached or passed menopause. One informant is below this age limit, Rahmah who is 54, and she has passed her menopause. When I got her name, I was not informed of her precise age. I came to know her age only after the interview, and her case was too interesting to be excluded. Nine informants live in middle class residential areas of Jakarta while four of them live in upper level areas with higher standard of living. All informants are minimum high school graduates or equivalent. Two informants, Ratna and Karimah, went to formal school only up to junior high school level, but with own self education they have managed to establish career. Most informants (75%) are working women or have social activities. Three of them (25%) are pure housewives.

To focus its discussion, the study is confined to urban, educated, mid and higher level elderly Javanese Muslim women. Six informants have been involved as leaders of religious organizations or institutions, while seven others participate in religious
activities in society less intensively. This type of study population has been selected for several reasons: first, there is hardly any study previously conducted among women of this segment of society. Most researches on Javanese have been addressed to rural lower level communities (among others Geertz 1961; Jay 1969; Berninghausen & Kerstan 1992; Kusujiarti 1995). There has been no attempt to document views and experiences of women of this type regarding their marital well being and sexual experiences.

This study population appears to be in transition between traditional values and more ‘modern’ values on sexuality and well being as exposed in various media portrayal. Being elderly, they have been socialized to traditional values that discourage open discussions of sexuality and well being. However, due to their education, profession or social activities, there is a big opportunity for them to talk about sexuality openly. These women maintain two different values in communicating about sexuality. It is interesting to study how, with differing values exposed to them, they perceive the meaning of their own marital sexuality and well being in the context of Javanese Muslim culture.

The selection was also based on a more personal reason. With informants who, to a certain degree, share identities with me, I can learn about myself through their reflection. Their life stories can serve as an invaluable lesson from which I can learn for the sake of my own well being.
2.3. Sampling strategies

There are two strategies applied in selecting the informants, namely by identifying them among colleagues, friends or women I know and by selecting those who are completely new to me. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages. The first method, to a certain extent, is favorable because my informants have had trust in me as a friend. However, the disadvantage is that they may be reluctant to share their deep and honest feelings they consider as secrets. The second method, selecting women who are completely unfamiliar through networking requires me to establish rapport and trust with my informants.

Of the thirteen informants, seven were previously known and six newly acquainted ones. The fieldwork suggests that both methods have produced a similar degree of reliability of information. Keeping my informants aware from time to time during the interview that it was a communication between a researcher and an informant, rather than between two friends, I could make sure of their truthfulness. Using the internal validity checking technique, it was possible to verify about doubtful information they gave.

The first type of informants, those I have previously known, were selected by contacting my colleagues in organizations I have been attached to or familiar with such as Muslimat NU and Aisyiyah, two biggest Islamic women’s organizations in Indonesia, and the Indonesian Planned Parenthood Association (IPPA) and PKK.
I recruited the second type of informants through friends using the ‘snowballing technique’.

2.4. Data collection techniques

This study applied the loosely structured interviews related to women’s life histories on marital well being and sexuality. I realized the challenges ahead of me in getting the informants ready to unfold their life histories. First, the topic of sexuality is a sensitive one, and in Javanese culture it is believed that talking about sexuality is saru (shameful) or ora pantes (improper). Second, most of the informants are women with relatively high social or political status. They are likely to make some reservation and not to tell all the truth about their life histories in order to protect their social and political status.

However, as a Javanese Muslim woman, I have observed that there are at least two factors that may facilitate discussions on sexuality. Javanese women sometimes exchange information on their sexuality with their trusted friends, and my sharing of identities with the informants in many cases was a great help to get them talk to me. By convincing them of my status as a researcher, and that the discussion was meant for academic purposes, it was relatively easy for me to make them disclose their secrets in life. Another strategy was by avoiding the use of Javanese local terms for sexual organs or sexual activities as it may be regarded as saru. Instead, symbolic terms such as kumpul (literally means ‘getting together’) or berhubungan (lit. means ’having relation with’) and the use of more ‘scientific’ terms adopted from Islamic
jurisprudence (Fiqh) were used. Hence, the key strategy was how to make my informants perceive me as a trustworthy friend and the discussion was perceived as 'academic.

The fieldwork applied the following techniques:

(1) **In-depth interviews**

This technique was applied to get the informants talk until the conversation got 'saturated.' Interviews started with observable topics related to marriage history and family life, and proceeded to deeper and less observable phenomena including their sexual intercourse (see Annex -- Interview Guide).

(2) **Key informant interviews**

Key informant interviews were conducted before and after core informant interviews, aimed at obtaining deeper insight into the topic of sexuality from different perspectives, i.e. Javanese tradition and Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), enriching the literature studies that I have conducted. Two key informants, Wisnu and Priyo, are experts on Javanese culture and sexuality. They provided me with some tembang (lyrics of Javanese songs) and legends illustrating how a Javanese girl should maintain her sexual purity and keep her virginity until marriage. Another informant, Mas’ud, has done extensive studies on women and reproductive, including sexual, health in Islam. Marital sexuality, in his view, is ibadah (an act of devotion to God). Therefore, like other religious rituals or ibadah, it should be done following religious guidance. He emphasized the ethical dimension (akhlaq) of sexuality, not just the
laws or *Fiqh*. This means that in addition to the laws on when sexuality is or is not allowed, there is an etiquette that should be followed before, during or after a sexual intercourse.

(3) **Internal validity checks**

The secrecy nature of the study made it difficult for me to cross check doubtful information which I gained from informants. If there was any doubt or if I suspected that my informants were not telling the truth, I used the so-called internal validity checking technique, i.e. by rephrasing the question and ask it again in the middle or toward the end of the conversation.

Some interesting experiences during the fieldwork are worth reporting. First, the ‘incident’ happened when I was interviewing Sri, who felt that during her more than forty years of marriage her husband had never made her happy. In spite of her ‘unfriendly’ appearance at the beginning of our conversation, she became very emotional and could not stop crying when she was telling about her past life. Since there were many people at her house, grandchildren and even her husband, I proposed to continue the conversation outside. She agreed, and I drove her to a restaurant in a nearby mall. There, she was more free to express herself. She was so thankful being interviewed, because she could have someone to hear all her complaints. She has always wanted to channel out her sadness, but she had no one to talk to after the death of her sister. My challenge was, therefore, how not to get trapped in becoming a counselor.
Another interesting experience was with Ratna, a wife who ‘lives behind her husband’s shadow.’ When I asked her about what makes her feel well and happy in marriage, she could not answer. She said that as a wife, she never thinks of her own happiness. Happiness is what makes her husband happy. Even in sexuality, she never enjoys or feels happy about it. When the discussion came to a deadlock because she did not want to talk about it, I left and told her if she wanted it, she could write her information. Two days later, she sent me a long letter containing her views on Javanese beliefs regarding women and sexuality, but there is none about her own life experiences. She said that as a Javanese woman, she has applied what is implied in these philosophies.

Table 1

Summary of sample sizes for data collection techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Data collection tech.</th>
<th>Person interviewed</th>
<th># interview</th>
<th>Selection criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. | Key informant interviews | Experts | 4 | - Expertise  
- Knowledge of potential informants |
| 2. | In-depth interviews with loosely structured questions | Married women, living in mid-level residential area of Jakarta | 13 | Social economic status, age, ethnicity, religion |
| 3. | In-depth interview with spouse | Husband | 1 | Husband of informant with special case |
| 4. | Validation with key informants | Experts | 3 | Expertise |
| 5. | In-depth interview with psychiatrist | Psychiatrist | 1 | Knowledge of informant case |
2.5. **Data processing and analysis**

Data from this research was processed manually. Analysis was based on research questions to look for similarities and variations. Women's meanings of sexuality and well beings were explored by using their own way of talking as much as possible. Local terms related to sexuality and well beings were maintained and typed in italic. Connection between women's experiences and perceptions and confounding variables were examined.

All thirteen interviews with core informants were taped. Most informants had no objection for this recording, except one of them. At the beginning she refused to be taped, but later on after discovering the relaxing situation of the interview, she did not object to it. With the help of a research assistant, the tapes were transcribed in the Indonesian language. I did the translation myself, and due to the limited time, I managed to translate only four out of thirteen transcripts. For the nine other transcripts, I made summaries while maintaining original sentences, phrases or expressions used by the informants, to be later quoted in the report. Three interviews with key informants were summarized. Similarly, in depth interviews with the husband and the psychiatrist were summarized.

Manually, the transcripts and summaries were classified and grouped into similar topics or subtopics and coded. This classification and grouping facilitated the process of analysis, which included comparison of similarities and differences of informants' responses and their confounding variables.
2.6. Ethical considerations

Considering the sensitivity of the topic, I started every interview with a clear explanation of what was going to be about, and sought my informants' consent for talking about their sexual experiences. I respected their views on how far they wished to uncover their life stories. I ensured my informants that their stories would be used for this academic purpose and not for anything else. I promised my informants to keep their identities confidential. All the names appearing in this report are pseudo names. I pay full respect to their local beliefs, values and norms and, therefore, local terms are maintained as far as possible.
3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INFORMANTS

Characteristics of the informants involve factors that appear to be relevant to their responses. These include their age, education, working status, cognition of religious teachings, number of children and stepchildren, and social economic status.

3.1. Age and age differences with the spouse

The fieldwork involved thirteen informants aged between 54 to 78 with mean of 61.4. The age difference between the informants and their spouses ranges from 2 to 16 years. Five informants are more than ten years younger than their husbands.

Table 2

Distribution of informants based on age, marriage, children, and economic status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age (informant - husband)</th>
<th>Marriage (informant - husband)</th>
<th># children</th>
<th># stepchildren</th>
<th>Economic status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sinta</td>
<td>61 – 70</td>
<td>2nd – 2nd</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yanti</td>
<td>65 – 67</td>
<td>1st – 1st</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Aisyah</td>
<td>55 – 60</td>
<td>1st – 2nd</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hafsa</td>
<td>66 – 68</td>
<td>1st – 1st</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dewi</td>
<td>61 – 63</td>
<td>2nd – 2nd</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ratna</td>
<td>67 – 73</td>
<td>1st – 1st</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nur</td>
<td>58 – 70</td>
<td>1st – 1st</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Umrah</td>
<td>57 – 62</td>
<td>1st – 1st</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sri</td>
<td>69 – 80</td>
<td>1st – 2nd</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Intan</td>
<td>62 – 65</td>
<td>1st – 1st</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rahmah</td>
<td>54 – 70</td>
<td>1st – 3rd</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Astri</td>
<td>60 – 70</td>
<td>2nd – 2nd</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Karimah</td>
<td>76 – 88</td>
<td>1st – 1st</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data, 2000
3.2. **Number of children and stepchildren**

The number of informants' children ranges from one to eleven. Two informants have one child each, not because of contraceptives. They wanted to have more children, but “God has trusted us only with one child,” they said. Karimah has the biggest number of children because, “at that time we had no family planning program, no contraceptives. I got married very young and almost every two to four years I had another child.” For three informants, the current marriage is the second one for them.

There are five informants who have stepchildren, ranging from one to four. The presence of stepchildren is viewed differently by these informants. Sri viewed the presence of her husband’s daughter from first marriage ‘has created a hell in this house. She doesn’t know how to behave, she is never thankful, she shows no respect to me.” Aisyah is different. Realizing that she may have difficulties in coping with stepchildren, she had the conviction that “when you understand the problem, you can always prepare yourself to resolve. Be aware of the potential problem and control yourself,” that was her way of creating harmony with her stepchildren. For Dewi, the case was different. Both she and her husband had children from their previous marriages. In this marriage, second for both of them, they have promised to each other that ‘this marriage will be devoted more to rear children from both sides.’ They agreed that all children would be treated the same by both parents, and they did not distinguish between own or stepchildren. Santi admitted that she had problem with her oldest stepdaughter, who did not want to accept her as the father’s new wife.
3.3. Social economic status

Six informants can be grouped into economically high level, and seven of them mid level. This classification is based on the condition of their housing or offices, their lifestyles and daily activities. Four informants, three businesswomen and one politician, can be categorized as living in luxury. In terms of social, not economic, reputation, eight informants can be categorized as 'public figures', in the sense that they are widely known by public because of their professional and socio-religious activities. One informant who spends her old age in simplicity is a housewife whose husband has retired as a military officer.

3.4. Education

Considering the educational facilities during the informants’ girlhood and the early marriage age of most of them, it is necessary that we include not only their formal education but also the informal one. Two informants have low formal education but they were self-educated and achieved relatively high career. Karimah, for example, did not even finish her formal secondary school, but with her husband’s guidance and teaching, she was a member of the legislative body. Ratna, with her junior secondary level formal education, took up a career as journalist and radio broadcaster overseas. She owed her self-development to guidance and teaching of her husband as well.

In terms of formal education, five informants (36%) are university graduates, two are university dropouts, five are high school graduates, and one graduated from the girl vocational school (SKP) which is the same level as junior high school. Of the university graduates, two hold master’s degree.
3.5. Working status

Ten informants (75%) are working or former working wives and three (25%) are housewives. The informants' profession can be classified as follows: politician, businesswomen, judge, social workers and NGO activists. In order to protect the informants' confidentiality, details of their working status cannot be provided in this report.

3.6. Cognition of religious teachings

I realize my limitation in judging the informants’ cognition of religious teachings just within the duration of the in-depth interviews, particularly to newly acquainted informants. For the sake of analyzing data of this study, some observable phenomena have been selected to assess the informants’ cognition of religious teachings. These include their knowledge of the Qur'anic verses and the Hadith\(^4\) relevant to the topic. Their internalization of religious teachings is beyond the scope of assessment of this study.

\(^4\) The Hadith refers to the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, collectively; individually, they are referred to as hadiths.
Table 3
Distribution of informants based on their education, work status, and cognition of religious teachings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work status</th>
<th>Cognition of religious teachings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sinta</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Social worker, activist</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yanti</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Aisyah</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>Director, preacher</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hafsah</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Politician, preacher</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dewi</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Businesswoman</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ratna</td>
<td>Junior high school</td>
<td>Journalist</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nur</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Businesswoman</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Umrah</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Politician, preacher</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sri</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Intan</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>Politician</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rahmah</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Businesswoman</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Astri</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>Director, activist</td>
<td>Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Karimah</td>
<td>Self education</td>
<td>Politician, judge, preacher</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data, 2000

3.7. Brief profiles of the informants

Santi: Santi is board member of a big NGO. She is also a social worker and is affiliated with an international agency. She has always appears neat with soft and gentle voice, but strongly adheres to her principles. Her philosophy of life is “Ojo ngoyo (don’t go beyond your limit)” and “enjoy every minute of your life.”

Yanti: Yanti is a housewife who was happy to get married late (28), preceded by two
of her younger sisters, which is a disgrace in Javanese tradition. "I was willing to wait long to marry someone who is kindhearted and with a good social status. He has proved himself to be a special husband who loves me very much."

Aisyah: Aisyah is a medical doctor and a master holder of public health. She is currently director of a health education institute in Jakarta. In spite of her 'prestigious' career, she appears to be a simple woman, always wearing simple Muslim outfit, and going about in public transport. Her philosophy is to live simply, help others, spend 2.5% of every income for the needy, and if there is extra money she will use it for umrah (rituals in the holy-land of Mecca).

Hafsah: Hafsah is a well-known religious preacher with national and international network. She was once a politician, member of the parliament. At the beginning of her career, she was a teacher. She is the so-called 'mouthpiece' of the family, as her husband is very quiet. She seems to have big power in shaping her family.

Dewi: Dewi combines family, business and social activities. This is a second marriage for her and for her husband as well. Her first husband died, while her present husband was a divorcee. Before each of them got married in their first marriages, they were lovers. Dewi's father did not approve of her marrying him because he came from a different ethnicity. Now, for the second marriage, her father did not interfere with her decision.
Ratna: Ratna was a journalist and a radio broadcaster overseas and now devotes herself fully to her husband. All her three children have settled on their own. Getting married young with low education, she managed to develop and educate herself and have a career. She always puts her success behind her husband’s role, “I can be like this because of my husband. He is everything to me, a husband, a teacher, a father, everything. I am nothing compared to him, who was a professor in a big university overseas,” she said.

Nur: Nur is a persevering businesswoman who started from the scratch and has developed her business into a big company. She was motivated to start business because her husband’s income as military member was too small to support the whole family. “Life was difficult at that time. Every month I divided my husband’s salary into 30 and put them in 30 envelopes. Each envelope was for each day’s expenditure. The amount was not the same. So, sometimes we could eat meat, and sometimes only rice and salt. Now, we have about everything, but our need is not as big as in the past,” she said. She believes that even if a wife has a bigger income than her husband, she still has to be ngabekti (devoted) to him.

Umrah: Umrah was born and raised in a strong Islamic environment. She is chairperson of an Islamic women’s organization and former parliament member. Her philosophy is that life is a learning process. Her marriage was arranged, and it took her seven years to learn to love her husband. “You can learn everything from life. When I entered menopause, I learned how to overcome the feelings of depressed. The
most difficult was when I learned to accept the fact that my husband was impotent due to his diabetics."

Sri: Sri is a pure housewife who feels that during her long course of marriage she never has been happy. Her marriage has been full of sorrow because her husband is 'insensitive, egoist, mean, and sexually over active.' Her husband’s income as military member was too small to support seven children, so she had to work by selling foods in front of her house. Her financial contribution to the family made him dependent. He used sexuality as a means to express his control over her. However, Sri never thought of getting a divorce, because she was thinking of her children. Now she feels happier because of her grandchildren.

Intan: Intan is a graduate chemical engineer but has taken up a career as parliament member for thirteen years. Her husband is a high official, leading a big state owned enterprise. She comes from a noble Javanese family who was mostly Dutch educated. The family maintains both Javanese and western values.

Rahmah: Rahmah is married to a well-known Muslim scholar who spent most of his time for religious preaching. Being married for more than 30 years with all the ups and down, her husband suddenly married another woman. Rahmah and her husband had different explanations about this remarriage.

Astri: Astri is an anthropologist and NGO activist. For her and her husband, this is
their second marriage. She did not want any child from this marriage because she did not want her husband to share his love for her and her own children.

**Karimah:** Karimah is the oldest informant. She lost her husband last year when he was 89. She has eleven children, all married, and 30 grandchildren. Getting married before she was exactly 10, she had basic formal education. However, with guidance and teaching from her husband, a professor and a religious judge, Karimah managed to develop herself and entered politics.
4. CASE STUDIES

From their life stories shared with me during the interviews, the thirteen informants can roughly be classified into four: first, those who have been happy throughout the marriage and the happiness remains until now. There are eight of them in this group. Second, two informants were happy but they lost the happiness because of the husband’s death. Third, two informants admitted that they never felt happy or did not think about own happiness in marriage. Last, there is an informant who was happy for more than three decades but the happiness ended because of her husband’s remarriage. Three stories, of Santi, Umrah, and Rahmah, will be presented to portray the different cases.

4.1 Coping with the lost of energies in life

Umrah was born and raised in a big Islamic boarding school. Her parents arranged her marriage, wishing her to marry a learned man of the Middle-East education who came from a religiously pious family. She actually had her own boyfriend but she gave up to her father’s decision. The first seven years was a hard adjustment period for her. However, as a Muslim woman, she accepted it as her destiny, obeyed him and fulfilled all her duties as a wife. “I did my best to please him, to make him happy. But sometimes, I felt empty, I cried and screamed deep inside my heart because of the conflicts of why I could not feel ‘one’ with him. Frankly speaking, this is my honest statement,” she admitted.

As time went on, Umrah finally ‘surrendered’ to her husband. She was touched by his
patience, his being ngemong (guiding and caring), his understanding, and especially his knowledge. "He was like a walking dictionary, he knew everything." Umrah is an active woman, and has always wanted to improve her knowledge related to her organizational activities. "I finally fell in love with him, seven years after our marriage. He was not only a husband but also a teacher to me," she said.

Then things changed after that, especially related to their sexual life. "At first, I did it only as an obligation. I never felt 'in' and never enjoyed it. But later I thought it was unfair. He could enjoy it and I couldn't. 'Kok enak?' So, from that time on, I learned to enjoy sex as well." During the first seven years, their sexual relations were 'asal-asalan' (not done well, as long as it is there). "Our intimate relationship was unique," she said, "Most couples have sex 'menggebu-gebu' (with full excitement) during their honeymoon or the beginning of marriage. We were the opposite. The longer we were married, the more enjoyment we had from our sexual relations. Why? First, because I did it with full love to my husband; second, because sex gave me energies and released my tension to balance my activities in the parliament and in the organization. When our sex was good one night and we were satisfied, the next morning I woke up feeling fresh. You bet that I would spend the day in happiness and I could enjoy life. I could chair meetings in a relaxed way. But if our sex was not good, my following day would be filled with bad mood, I would feel 'sumpeg' (nagging) and I would find fault with everyone in the office."

'Kok enak?' is a slang in Javanese and Indonesian to express one's feeling upset because somebody else can enjoy something while he/she cannot.
Interested by her stories, I asked her how she could change into enjoying sex. Umrah explained that it was because of her openness to her husband. “I told him what I wanted and what I liked, and he told me the same thing. We were very open to each other about everything related to sex, including the foreplay, the style, etc.” She was not ashamed of this because, “I don’t want to suffer or to get depressed because of sex. Sex is something beautiful that we should enjoy, not to make us depressed. If I were passive, my husband would wonder what was going on.”

All her happiness was gone when her husband got diabetics and became impotent. She was in her mid 40’s, ‘sedang hot-hotnya’ (at the period of strongest sexual drive). She felt that her life was ruined, “I lost confidence to face the world, I felt inferior. When I met my neighbours, I felt as if they were scolding me, ‘Look, this is the woman whose husband is sexually impotent,” she said softly. She looked emotional and shed tears when telling this story. “In the office, I got angry with everyone. I could not concentrate in my work. I often cried alone, feeling sad and not knowing what to do. I know that my husband was feeling the same. He knew and could feel my suffering and he wanted to please me but he couldn’t.” Umrah then told me about the last attempt they made for a sexual intercourse, “One night, we hugged and caressed each other, we felt the desire. It was so big and pressing because we had never had sex for the last several months. Then he tried, but failed ... several times. Then we were convinced that we could never do it again,” she said dryly.

I asked Umrah how she coped with all the pressures, because I believed it was not
easy for her to accept the fact. She said that she referred everything to God, just like
the beginning of her marriage. To regain confidence she always recited verses from
Surah Al Mulk (Dominion) of the Holy Qur’an, which illustrates about Lordship,
Sovereignty, and Power of Allah to carry out His wills, and nothing can resist or
neutralize it. Umrah believed fully in the Power of God and relied on this in regaining
confidence to face realities.

4.2. **Roso (feelings) and body language for a perfect sex**

Santi is a typical Javanese middle class woman who always appears neat, gentle and
well groomed. Her voice is soft, and she speaks slowly although she is always strong
with her principles. In meetings, she would usually defend her ideas by speaking in
low but firm tones, implying power in her arguments. She is well respected by her
colleagues, not only because of her personality but also because of her family
background. She is married, the second time, to a leader and founder of a major
Islamic student organization. “I am lucky. God has given me a husband who is a
protector and an educator for me as well. He has sincerely raised my four orphan
children with all his kindness and gentleness, just like his own children,” she
admitted.

Santi believes that she will achieve happiness whenever she does everything in her life
with roso (feelings or enjoyment). “I try to enjoy everything I do, from observable
things to sexuality. Life is full of beauty, and it is a shame if we do not enjoy it. I
could stand teaching disabled children for eleven years with no payment because I
enjoyed it.” One of her hobbies is taking pictures of beautiful scenery of Indonesia. “Whenever possible, I always come with my husband to various places in the country and attends his meetings, even if I am the only woman there. In this way I can gain two things. I can be close to him, and I can satisfy my hobby of seeing the beauty of our country,” she said.

Santi admires her husband as a romantic person. He likes to use poetic words to express his feelings. She feels flattered because he calls her diajeng. • “When he is in a romantic mood, he will speak Dutch. He said it is easier for him to express his love to me in the Dutch language. He is always gentle and never forceful.” When I asked her about the relations between roso and sexuality, she said, “Sex must be based on love, and love is a type of roso. Sex cannot take place without love. Therefore, before a sexual intercourse takes place, we have to create the condition so that both of us have the feelings and the desire,” she explained. Another condition for a perfect sex, according to Santi, is the ‘body language.’ She explained that “sex must be preceded with movements, gestures, and actions which symbolize love. You cannot go straight away and direct with sexuality. You have to go through phases,” she added.

4.3. The end of a three-decade happiness

Rahmah has been married for 32 years to a Muslim intellectual who spent most of his time for religious lecturing within and outside the country. Being a Javanese woman, she adopted her mother’s way of serving the husband. She prepared all his needs, • diajeng is a term used by Javanese noble people to call a younger woman or a girl, implying love and
physically and mentally. She understood that her husband was a public figure, and she was proud that many people needed him for consultation. She wanted him to focus on his public preaching and lectures, and did not want him to be bothered by ‘small matters.’ “When he was writing a paper, I would sit next to him in our library and was ready to pick up the books he needed. When he traveled, I would prepare all his clothes and suits, so that he would not spend time for that. I prepared different colors for every day; for example on the first day he would wear brown, then everything, from suit to socks and handkerchief, would be brown,” Rahmah explained. When he appeared on TV, Rahmah would do his hair grooming because ‘I knew best what hairstyle he liked,’ she said proudly. Rahmah had gone through all the ups and downs of marriage life with him, including the hard periods when he was detained because of his strong criticism to the Indonesian authorities and was exiled to other countries for several years. When they were back in Indonesia, she was hoping to settle peacefully with her whole family.

But all of a sudden, in a quiet morning, when they were watching TV, her husband said that he had married another woman. She was so shocked that she fell unconscious from that early morning until around 10.00 in the evening. When she regained consciousness, she discussed the situation with all her three daughters. They made a unanimous decision, that none of them would accept this second marriage. After that she was under the care of a psychiatrist and lost sixteen kilos of her weight. It took her several years to regain confidence in life. She did extensive consultations with friends who were mostly high officials and Islamic scholars. Rahmah finally
decided to forget about it and focus more on her business.

I asked Rahmah if she knew why her husband remarried. She did not understand. She felt that she had done the best for him, devoted fully to him, and there was no reason, by logic, for him to remarry. I asked her permission if I could talk with her husband and psychiatrist, and she allowed me to do it.

I came to see Rahmah’s husband, Anwar, who was living with his second wife. Anwar comes from Langkat, North Sumatra, and is closely related with some high state officials of Malaysia. Because of the close network with some universities in Malaysia, he could guarantee one’s enrollment. He told me a long story of his memorable childhood years. He was emotional and shed tears when telling about his father’s affection and care for the orphan. He also referred to the verses in the Holy Qur’an on how we are supposed to treat the orphan. One day, when he was giving a lecture, a teenage girl came up to him and asked him to sponsor her studies in Malaysia. He looked at her grades and was surprised why her grades dropped drastically. The girl answered that after the death of her father she could not concentrate on her studies. Anwar suddenly remembered his father and his testimony to care for the orphan. He automatically offered to her, “Will you be my daughter? Go home and tell your mom,” he said. Then he and the girl’s mother got married, without knowledge of his first wife. Several months later, one morning, when he and the first wife were watching TV, he disclosed this secret, which made her shocked. According to Anwar, the second marriage was not motivated by sexual reason. It was
more because of his concern to care for the orphan. He admitted that his first wife was perfect in providing all his logistical needs, but not his more basic needs of spiritual satisfaction. "She was more concerned with the worldly matters like my outfit, my hairstyle, etc. She was proud I was a public figure. But to me, these were not the most important things. It is more important how you internalize the teachings, absorb them in your heart, and practice them," he argued. He complained that she did not reflect Islamic teachings in her daily life. "For example in her outfit. I asked her to wear 'jilbab' (head covering), and she refused. I wanted to pray together with her at night because that is the sweetest moment in a marital relationship, but she did not want to do it," he added.

I checked with Rahmah on what her husband said. She said sharply that he had always tried to find fault to justify himself. "He changed completely after meeting this woman. He is not at all like he was before," Rahmah explained. Curious to know the case from a third party, I interviewed their psychiatrist, dr. Hadi. He diagnosed that he was suffering from confusion or masked depression, giving impact to impotence or hypotence. At that time he was 63 and his wife was 47. He felt disturbed because he knew that his wife was still sexually active. Anvar and Rahmah come from different cultural backgrounds. He is Sumatran, where polygamy is more acceptable, and where having no son means that no one will continue to bear the family name. She is Javanese, where there is no tradition of using a family name. He was obsessed of having a son. When his wife started using IUD and refused to have another child, he was very disappointed. His wife was too dominant, and he felt that
he had given in too much to her. He remarried because he wanted to help the widow.

Both Anwar and Rahmah felt they gave to each other more than what they received. Anwar’s second wife is a simple woman who listens to him more. She wear jilbab and prays with him at night.
5. MARRIAGE AND WELL BEING

5.1. Marriage ideology

This sub-chapter will present results of the in-depth interviews with thirteen informants on their actual practices relating to Javanese and Islamic philosophies on marriage. The ideologies will be presented in 5.1.1. and 5.1.2. while the subsequent section will be dedicated to some concluding remarks.

5.1.1. Javanese

As cited in the literature review (1.3.1.), the Javanese believe that one’s speech and action have layered meanings, both to one’s self and to others (Beatty 1999:173). The deepest meaning of interpersonal relationship, reflecting the mystery of life, is contained in reproduction. The deepest mystery, the absorbing focus of symbolism, is sexual reproduction (Beatty 1999:167), which is legitimate in a marriage. The hidden truth behind sexual intercourse in Javanese epistemology is manunggaling kawulo gusti (the union of servant and lord) (Beatty 1999:173). The ideology of man being god and woman being servant has widely prevailed that women are generally assumed to have inferior characteristics to those of men, and which give them lower status (Keeler 1987; Hatley 1992, in Kusujiarti 1995:71).

The family, viewed as a microcosm of society, reflects the hierarchical relations of the more macro structures of society. Husband and wife enter the marriage in a hierarchically based relationship. This is symbolized in one of the Javanese wedding rituals, miji dadi, which literally means ‘the sowing of seeds.’ In this ritual, the groom
will step on an egg and the bride will squat and wash his foot, symbolizing her obedience and services to him in the marriage (My personal first hand observation regarding this ritual will be presented in 5.1.3.).

The fieldwork conducted for this study, however, has shown that none of the informants was willing to be 'labeled' servant to the husband as lord. Their perception of their husbands varied, ranging from lover, protector, friend, partner, father, supporter, teacher and educator. All of them recognize the husbands' protective role, but the relationships they have established are based on a more equal footing rather than hierarchical. Karimah, for example, said, “My husband and I have different roles in the family. He is the breadwinner and I maintain and nourish the family. It does not mean that the breadwinner is more important than the maintainer. We are both important and complementing one another,” she explained.

Nur, a wife who has become backbone of her family’s economy, said, “I don’t know about that statement. What I know is that I am ‘ngabekti’ (devoted) to my husband on good things only. If he is wrong, of course I don’t believe him.” Nur remains critical, in spite of her obedience to the husband; “Actually he also obeys me, when I can convince him of my ideas. So, we are actually mutually obedient.” She added that she was more familiar with the Javanese term ‘garwo’ to refer to a spouse. It is an acronym of sigaraning nyowo, which literally means ‘half of one’s life’. According to Nur, it is more appropriate to use the term garwo because it indicates complementary relations. For Yanti, a housewife who fully dedicates her life to her husband, the
statement is not fair. She said, "If a husband is regarded as lord and we as servant, it will make him 'saenake dewe' or 'do whatever he likes' because of his limitless power. "To me, it is only Allah that is my lord, not my husband," she added. Sri, who claimed that her marriage was full of sorrow, emotionally protested, "A lord? No way. He is mean and unkind to me. How can a lord be like that?"

A similar Javanese statement, swargo nunut neroko katut which means that a wife will follow her husband to heaven and to hell, was tested during the fieldwork. The informants' responses varied, showing different interpretations. None of them, however, agreed fully to the statement. Sri, cynically answered, "Who wants to go to hell with him? Let him go there himself, if he is not a good person!"

Yanti had a different interpretation. She said that the statement is applicable for worldly matters and not for matters related to the hereafter life. She gave an example, "If a husband is respectable and has good social status, the wife will enjoy good life as well, like living in heaven. The opposite is true. If he is bad or commits crimes, she will be affected because her neighbors or friends will look down on her, too.”

Umrah gave a similar interpretation and provided an example, "If the husband becomes a 'lurah' (head of the village), everyone will call her 'ibu (madame) lurah'. This does not apply for knowledge or expertise; for example if the husband is a professor, the wife is not automatically clever like a professor.”

Comparing the informants' responses and interpretations of the Javanese philosophies
related to marriage, it can be inferred that all informants are too critical to accept the old philosophy of their husbands being 'lord' and to view themselves as 'servant.' In spite of their different interpretations of the statement swargo nunut neroko katu, none of them agrees completely to it.

5.1.2. Islamic

The literature review (1.3.2.) has briefly presented Islamic concepts of marriage and marital relations. Previous studies conducted by Berninghausen and Kerstan (1992:40) cited in Kusujiarti (1995:58) refer to 'several discriminatory statements in the Qur'an which may reinforce and legitimize women's subordination.' However, the Qur'an contains very diverse and coded illustrations so that various interpretations are plausible (Engineer, 1992; Kusujiarti 1995; Munir 1999). In fact one of the important characteristics of Islam is its principle of equality, in which women and men are viewed equal before God and have the same rights to mercy and redemption. But in worldly life it is perceived that men and women have different roles in which women must subject themselves to the protection of a superior man and obediently subordinate themselves to him. In exchange for this, however, it is decreed that men treat women fairly and kindly.

In Islam, gender relations in marriage are regulated in the Qur'anic verse which translates as follows: "Men are protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the
husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard." (An Nisa'/4:34). A big discussion has been taking place on how this verse is to be interpreted in the current context. This study has been conducted partly to explore empirically how Javanese Muslim women perceive their marital relationships before and after menopause and how this relates to the above Qur'anic verse.

From the fieldwork I have learned that while women share men's role of maintaining the family and supporting them from their means, they remain idealizing a ngabekti-ngayomi (devotion-protection) relationship with the husband. All of them recognize that they are ngabekti (devoted) to the husband, in different forms. Eight of the informants, who are relatively well known in society and have their own self-identity in public, claim that whenever they are at home, they are housewives who devote themselves to the husband and the family. The forms of their devotion vary, depending on what can make the husband feel well and pleased.

Nur, a successful businesswoman, always cooks for her husband by herself. "It's just because I like it, not because of his demand. I don't want our servant to cook his food." In this way, Nur feels that she is a perfect woman, as a wife, a mother and a career woman. Aisyah decided not to have private medical practice in the evening. She always tries to be home before the evening prayer and meal. "I feel guilty if I cannot pray or have dinner together in the evening, especially on Mondays and Thursdays when my husband is fasting. I always want to be on his side when he is breaking his fast. If I can't, I will apologize and explain. He is very sweet as he
always understands my problems," she explained.

Intan is a little bit different. She admitted that she is not fully devoted to her husband. She said, "I'm not a hundred percent ngabekti to my husband. Of course I respect him, but I don't always serve him at home. Maybe it's because of my childhood education, which was much influenced by western or Dutch values."

Both employed and non-employed women expect the husbands to give protection, physical and moral, and to create feelings of security in the family. Seven informants, whom people would see them as financially or materially independent, recognized their secure feelings in the presence of the husbands. Astri, an NGO activist, said, "You have noticed that I travel everywhere myself. But when I travel with my husband, I feel different. I feel safer and less tensed because I know that somebody is taking care of me." Dewi, a businesswoman, said similarly, "We have a guard at our house. He is supposed to give us secure feelings especially at night. But when my husband goes out of town and spends the night there, I feel a little bit scared. I even cannot sleep well. Frankly speaking, I feel safe and sleep better if my husband is on my side, hugging me," she laughed while saying this last sentence.

Karimah, a former religious judge, contends that the current context is different. "A lot of women work and have their own income. They join men in supporting the family. Basically Islam allows flexibility in shaping marital relations of each couple," she explained. Then she cited another Qur'anic verse which translates,
"Live with them (women) on a footing of kindness and equity." (An Nisa’/4:19).

Of the thirteen informants, however, only six are knowledgeable about this verse on kindness to women and equity between men and women. Ratna complained about religious lectures on TV, “I watch the early morning TV program on Islam. Sometimes they talk about men-women relations in marriage. But why do they always talk about women’s obligation that we have to be submissive to the husband, etc. Why don’t they talk about women’s rights, they we have the rights for equity and fair treatment?” The other six informants also make a similar observation. “I don’t know why these female religious preachers always push on women’s duties. As a wife, we have to do this, to do that, etc.? What about men’s duties?” Dewi remarked sharply.

In general, it can be summarized that the informants idealize a ngabekti-ngayomi marital relationship on the footing of kindness and equity, and this concept of marital relationship is manifested differently by the individuals. The Islamic concept of kindness to women and gender equity, however, is not known by many of the informants.

5.1.3. Comments: ideology versus practice

The findings of this study suggest that most of the informants believe in the egalitarian value in their marriage in a devotion-protection relationship between the wife and the husband. The Javanese philosophies of hierarchical relationship in marriage are not reflected in actual practices. The informants recognize different roles
and responsibilities between the husband and the wife, and both are viewed as equally important because they are mutually complementing. As it is based on mutual respect, the devotion-protection relationship is not necessarily viewed as a hierarchical relation. The Islamic concept on men-women roles and responsibilities – men being protector and provider of the means of living and women being obedient – is not fully reflected in the real life of the informants. Many of them join the husband in supporting the family. The informants are critical in their being obedient; they will obey the husband on good things and not on bad things. They view that the obedience may be reciprocal as well.

The egalitarian marital relationship among the informants is not necessarily surprising because past studies have documented the favourable position of Javanese women. Two prominent studies by Geertz, *The Javanese Family* (1961) and Robert Jay, *Javanese Villagers* (1969) clearly portray Javanese women as having power in the domestic sphere and an important role in child rearing.

It is not surprising that the study suggests a contrast between ideologies and their actual practices. It indicates that culture is dynamic and changing. It shows that it is dangerous to ask people about their ideology with an assumption that it is what they do. As a researcher, I am aware that I should be attentive to differences between ideologies and their actual practices. My own recent experience may provide an illustration of how an ideology is not always in line with the people’s conviction. Early July 2000, we – my husband and I and our in-laws - held a full-pledged
Javanese wedding ceremony for our daughter. It was a two-day ceremony with various rituals that are full of symbols and meanings. To someone who does not really know what the details of the rituals and ceremonies mean, like me, at least the ceremonies appeared to be grand, graceful, solemn, and glamorous, particularly in the presence of almost 2000 of our friends and relatives. Some rituals were indeed touching and arousing emotion, such as when my daughter recited her poem to thank us for her life, ask for our blessings and forgiveness, etc. although these are not new as daily rituals in our family. But other rituals, such as the miji dadi, in my view as a Javanese layperson, appeared to be more superficial rather than symbolically meaningful. In this ritual, my daughter was requested to squat and wash her husband’s right foot, which was assumed to be dirty after stepping on an egg covered in a plastic bag, indicating the breaking of her virginity and the sowing of the seeds. Such scene, she squatting low and her husband standing tall is certainly out of question for most of us the Muslim feminist. However, we performed it because it was part of a package, and we wanted to sustain the ‘noble’ values of Javanese tradition. There were many other rituals during my daughter’s wedding that could not fit into our logic and conviction, but still we performed them. It has proven that there is a gap between ideologies or rituals and the actual practice.

5.2. Well being in marriage

Islam conceives marriage as a means for mates to dwell in tranquility (sakinah) and that Allah has put love (mawaddah) and mercy (rahmah) between their hearts. This is illustrated in the Qur’anic verse which translates as follows, “And among His signs is
this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with thwm, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts); verily in that are signs for those who reflect.” (Al Rum 30:21). This study has been designed partly to explore the informants’ views relating to factors that may contribute to sakinah (tranquility) or well being in marriage.

The fieldwork has suggested that the informants classify well being into material and non-material. The following section, 5.2.1, will present the informants’ views regarding material and non-material well being. The subsequent section, 5.2.2, will specifically be devoted to illustrating what the informants mean by non-material well being.

5.2.1 Material versus non-material well being

All informants agree that there are material and non-material factors that contribute to happiness in their marriage. In line with Mulder (1978) who contends that the Javanese view material wealth less positive, most informants (86%) perceive that non-material well being is more important than material one. Meanwhile, Islam conceives worldly happiness and happiness in the hereafter equally important. Only two informants, Karimah and Nur, however, hold this view on the balanced importance of material and non-material well being. Nur has worked hard for her business, starting from the scratch until it has now become a big company because as she said, "I realized that we needed money, to send the children to a good school, to buy good foods, etc. I could not depend on my husband's salary only. So I worked hard
running the business," she said enthusiastically. Karimah felt that she was not
talented for business, and therefore she just relied on her husband’s income. She said,
“When my children were small, life was difficult, not only for me but for almost
everyone. It was difficult to make ends meet, but I never complained. I learned to be
nrimo (accepting) and told myself that we cannot always get what we want in life. In
this way I could find happiness in many other things.”

In contrast to the two informants, Intan, who lives in the upper level of economy, has
a different view. She said, “To me, non-material happiness is more essential. If you
have one million, what does it mean? It can be a big amount, but it can also be small,
depending on how you spend it.” She gave an illustration of the meaning of happiness
with her husband’s case, a director of a big state company. “As you know, business
meetings are now often held in hotels or in bungalows in the mountain. It is no more
a secret that there are sometimes women who would call or come to the rooms at
night. I am very grateful that my husband is always open about this. He always tells
me of such happening. I trust him and thank God for his truthfulness and faithfulness.
It is more meaningful to me than material wealth,” she explained.

Dewi, a well off businesswoman, also emphasizes on the importance of non-material
well being. She told me about the way she educated her children, “I let them go to
school by bus, and later by ‘Kijang’⁵. They are not supposed to use the mercy
(mercedez). I want them to learn that life is basically a struggle, and that wealth is
attained only by struggle, not out of the blue. After they got married, I did not buy
them a house. I just gave them money to continue their studies to get master's degree,” she explained.

From the in-depth interviews of the thirteen informants, I can infer that ten of them have felt happy during the course of their marriage, in spite of all the ups and downs in their marital life. One informant, Ratna, did not really know whether she was happy or not in marriage. She kept quiet for a long time when I asked her about her feelings in marriage. She finally said softly, “As a Javanese woman, I feel happy whenever my husband is happy. When he got promoted or got a good position in his job, I felt happy as well. After all, his good status would also uplift the status of all of us in the family.” Another informant, Sri, emotionally shared with me about her sadness and sufferings during her marriage. “My husband was a divorcee for more than ten years before he married me. After we got married, he was like ‘catching up’ his sexual activities that he missed during those years. And I was the victim. We had sex very often, sometimes two or three times a day. For me, it was alright actually; but what I did not like was his manner. He is rough, rude, and does not care for me. He likes to cut our communication and speaks sharply to me. I have never felt happy with him in our marriage. With his salary as an army officer, he could not provide what we needed for the whole family. And he made me unhappy as well,” she shed tears saying this. Another informant, Rahmah, was happy for more than 30 years, but her marriage was ruined when her husband remarried.

5 Kijang is a type of van, very popular and widely used as a family car by middle class people.
So, in terms of marital well being, the thirteen informants can be classified into four groups. Ten informants are those who are happy most of the time of their marriage. One informant, Sri, never feels happy in her marriage. Another one, Yanti, does not really know whether she is happy or not, and the last one (Rahmah) was happy for 32 years of her marriage but everything turned into disaster when her husband remarried.

5.2.2 What is really non-material well being?

Ten of the thirteen informants, nine employed or formerly employed and one housewife, shared their ‘secrets’ of what has made them feel well and happy in marriage. Factors that contribute to non-material well being can basically be grouped into two: those relating to family life and those relating to career or social and political activities. Of the ten informants, eight stated that family well being is more important. Two politicians, Umrah and Intan, have different views. For Umrah, both family and career are equally important, while for Intan career is more important. Factors in the family that make them happy come from the husband and the children. Of the two, the husband is viewed as more influential in determining women’s well being. Various traits of the husband perceived as contributing to women’s happiness are summarized in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Factors contributed by the husband</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sinta</td>
<td>Protection without underestimation, respect, love stepchildren, romantic</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The husband’s role in shaping women’s happiness is big, as admitted by Santi. She advised her daughters to be careful in choosing her future husband, because “Your husband is someone to whom you are going to devote your life.” Santi

5.3. Post menopause

Menopause has been adopted in this study to mark the transitional phase in which women move from their reproductive stage into their non-reproductive stage as part of the ageing process from mid life to old age (Berger 1999:81). Buck and Gottlieb (1991) in Berger (1992:82) argue that the denial of old age prevails in many developed countries, where old age is viewed as losses in terms of youth and beauty, fertility and sexuality, femininity and good health. Berger (1992:84), however, has proved that such perception is not true in non-western societies. Findings of her comparative study on menopausal women in Australia (western culture) and the Philippines (eastern culture) suggest that in non-western society old age and menopause is often considered to be a time of gains.
This study has been designed partly to explore implications of menopause for women's perception and experiences relating to their well being in marriage. Findings of the fieldwork suggest that post menopause is viewed not only as a time of gains, but also as a time for reflection, contemplation, redemption, and preparation for life in the hereafter. In short, old age is viewed as a time to make one close to being a 'perfect' human being before departing to life in the hereafter by improving one's vertical relationship (with God) and horizontal relationship (with other human being). All the thirteen informants positively accept old age as part of a natural process. Such attitude is not surprising for Javanese Muslim people because in both Javanese as well as Muslim cultures old age is viewed positively. Given their lineal value orientation, the Javanese respect older people and trust their seniors and superiors (Koentjaraningrat 1985). In Islam respect to parents is explicitly stated in the Qur'an implying that parents' rights are next to those of Allah (Luqman/17:23-24). The informants' positive attitude relative to Islamic and Javanese positive portrayal of old age is in line with Berger's thesis (1999:81) that the dominant view within a culture on ageing will exert some effect on a woman in terms of her physiological, psychological and social well being.

In spite of their positive image of old age, however, the thirteen informants indicate different levels of acceptance, ranging from full and unconditional acceptance to that with worries and inferiority. The in-depth interviews have suggested that the informants' level of internalization and practices of religious teachings appear to be a significant factor influencing their attitudes toward old age. Two most contrasting
informants in terms of their religious observation, Karimah and Ratna, offered different explanations their feelings at old age. Karimah, the oldest informant and appears to be most pious said, "To me old age is a time when we calculate our investment. How much have we saved for our life in the hereafter? We can invest in many ways, by doing good deeds. When I was younger and stronger, my investment was more in the form of physical work. I taught long hours, I was in the parliament, I did social work, etc. Now, with weakening physical condition, I reverse my pattern of investment. I have 25-75% ratio, which means that my physical work is 25% and my prayer is 75%. In the past, it was the opposite. So old age is no problem at all, because Allah accepts all forms of our investment, from physical to non physical."

Ratna, who is less observant of religious teachings, told me that she was once depressed at old age, although she managed to overcome it herself. She said, "At that time, we had just returned from our overseas assignment. Life was so much changed. In that country (she mentioned a country) my husband was a professor in a big university. He was respected and everyone called him 'professor.' When we came back to Jakarta we lived in a new neighborhood, where nobody knew us. I was hurt to hear people call him eyang (grandfather). They did not know who he was. For me it was a difficult time as well. In that country I was an active working woman, then all of a sudden I had nothing to do, except taking care of my husband who was beginning to get sickly."

The above differences in perceiving old age is what Karimah may have meant when
saying that 'one’s appreciation and observation of religion can influence one’s feeling of well being at old age.' As a politician and a religious judge, Karimah also lost her positions. It did not affect her because as she said, 'my investment does not depend on my positions.' Most informants expressed their gratefulness to God because they have been granted with long lives. Umrah, for example, a former parliament member and a religious leader, said, "I am thankful to Allah for my old age, because I can continue my services to others. Old age makes us more mature, wiser, and more self-controlled. I realize that we will have wrinkles, or we will get dry (pointing to the sex organ), but it is alright. Old age does not mean that we should be less productive. On the other hand, we should exercise our brain more actively, otherwise, you will become forgetful and absent minded. Old age does not mean that we should look ugly and wear shabby clothes, or act like an old grandma who complains around." Umrah shared her experience that after entering the age of 50, she was more careful with her diet. She ate better foods and took vitamins, and that has made her stay healthy and in good shape. She noticed that her husband’s condition dropped drastically because he did not have special activities after retiring. "He was no more a walking dictionary to me; he became forgetful," she recalled.

Yanti, a housewife, who used to be less observant of religious practices when she was younger, is thankful for her old age, as she said, "I am thankful to God because I have completed my duties in raising our children. Now I want to make myself closer to God by doing more prayers and repenting. Materially, I don’t have any savings or insurance, but I am happy at my old age."
For Aisyah, a pious religious leader and a public health worker, old age is positive. She said, “I am very grateful for the long life. After cessation of menstruation, I can concentrate more for my rituals to Allah. After retiring from work, people have more time to observe and practice religious teachings which they could not do well because of their busy activities in the past. So, although they may be less productive in worldly matters, they are more productive in this sense. Old age should make us wiser because we have learnt so much from life.” Astri, former director of a big NGO involved in reproductive health, holds similar views. She said, “I felt old not after I reached menopause or after I reached 60, but after I had a grandchild. All of a sudden, I had the feeling that now I am old and a grandma. I should now prepare myself for the hereafter life. I feel happy in my old age because as a woman I feel perfect and complete. I have my sweet family and I have had my career. It’s now time to thank God only.”

Sinta, a national board member of the same organization, described that her life is better now than when she was younger. “Now, I do not have to rely on material things to gain self confidence. I used to wear ‘branded’ things, but now I prefer to wear local products. I don’t mind wrinkles on my face, because I believe in inner beauty. I am grateful to Allah because He has given me everything,” she said.

To sum up, findings of the study suggest that both Javanese and Islamic cultures portray old age positively, which may have influenced the informants’ positive acceptance of their post menopausal period. However, the level of their acceptance
varies from full and unconditional acceptance to that with worries and inferiority. Old age is perceived not only as a time of gains, but also as a time of reflection, contemplation, redemption, and preparation for life in the hereafter.
6. SEXUALITY AND OLD AGE

Much literature has documented sexuality and old age in Western cultures among others Levy (1994), Hodson and Skeen (1994), Alseni and Law (1998), and Berger (1999) (see Literature Review). However, there is not much information available on sexuality in Javanese culture and even less among the elderly women. My source of information, a key informant Ibu Asih (70), was so kind as to share with me her valuable knowledge of Javanese women and sexuality in general, not specifically related to elderly. According to her, she has never heard of stories or saying regarding sexuality among elderly women. "Talking about sex and elderly women is out of question. It's not only saru (vulgar) and ora pantes (not proper), but old age, especially for women, is no more time for sex. Mbok nyebut," she explained. According to her, Javanese people do not talk about sexuality openly. Through metaphors, stories or symbolic language messages relating to sexuality are passed on to girls with the purpose to make them aware of and guard their most precious wealth, i.e. virginity or purity. When I asked her if she knew about similar messages for boys, she said she did not know. Ibu Asih gave me some notes containing advises and sirikan (taboos) for girls that she got from her great grandmother. I am going to translate them below. She wrote for me the story of Sugriwa and Subali, a ballad about a beautiful wife who had an affair with a god. She was cursed by her husband and became a statue. Her two handsome sons, Sugriwa and Subali, fought with each other and turned into monkeys. Ibu Asih explained that the philosophy behind the story is that if a woman commits adultery, the children will bear the shame as well. In

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6 Mbok nyebut is an expression referring to something illogical or completely unacceptable. It suggests
addition to these, Ibu Asih still wrote some tembang (song) with philosophical lyrics on how to prevent one’s self from committing illicit sex.

The following is the translation of what Ibu Asih gave me.

To be a girl means to keep herself clean and pure. There is a lot that a girl should observe from and a lot of taboo to avoid, among others:

1. A girl is like a ketip (an expensive silver Dutch coin); if it has flaws, it is hard to sell;
2. A girl should be sought for; it is improper for a girl to come and look for a man;
3. A girl should always appear neat;
4. A girl should always be damis (being closed); when sitting she may not open her legs; her lips must always be closed; when sleeping she may not lie supine; when walking she may not step with big open steps; she may not squat with legs open; everything should be closed.
5. A girl should sweep clean, otherwise her future husband would be bearded;
6. A girl should not sit at the door step; if she does so, her suitor will not come.

During the interviews, I asked my informants about their views relating to these old beliefs. Their answers varied, and some of them will be presented in 6.4.1.

6.1. Is sex open for discussion?

Before leaving for the field, I was a little pessimistic of my success in exploring about the informants’ sexuality. First, it has been widely understood as part of Javanese belief that talking about sexuality is taboo or saru. Second, most of my informants are women of relatively high social and political interest and I assumed it would be too ‘risky’ for them to disclose their ‘secrets’ to me. But the field experiences turned out to be very encouraging. I was excited to hear my informants talk, sharing their life stories related to their sexual experiences in the marriage. Although not all of the

that one should remember or mention Allah’s name for being illogical.
informants were like this, at least seven of them, more than 50%, were willing to tell me stories of their experiences on the importance of sex in marriage and what factors contribute to their sexual well being. These findings will be presented in 6.2. and 6.3.

From my experience in social activities, I observed that women may sometimes talk about sex, either jokingly or more seriously. In an *arisan* meeting in a neighbourhood, for example, some ladies made fun of their husbands. "Didn't you notice that every morning your husband's bird would get up? And if it gets up, it will fly and perch at its partner." The other women then laughed. Topics related to sexuality appear to arouse women's interest and can create a relaxing and refreshing atmosphere. Because they are told in a humorous way and expressed using symbolic words or metaphors, the women did not feel that it was *saru* or *ora pantes*. Sometimes, some of the women would make fun of themselves. "Last night I was a *gedebog pisang*," one of them said. The metaphor *gedebog pisang* (banana tree) was used by one of them to illustrate that she acted like a dead wood in her sexual relation, because she was not enjoying the sex but she could not refuse her husband. "It's better to be like *gedebog pisang* than to refuse him. If I refuse him, he will be angry, and God will be angry with me, too," she explained. A more serious chat was made by one of the leaders of a women organization to her colleagues before deploying for field visits. "Don't forget to setor before leaving for the field tomorrow. Our field trip for social work is just secondary to our responsibilities to the husband. Somebody else can take over your duty for the field trip; but you will be sorry if

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*Arisan* is a social gathering in which certain amounts of money are collected and lot among members who take turn receiving them.
another woman takes over your place beside your husband," she said. Her sentences sounded like joking, but we realized that it was true.

My field observation suggests that despite its being taboo for discussion in Javanese cultural norms, sexuality remains an interesting topic for public discourse among limited and familiar members of a group. This finding agrees with that of Ford and Siregar (1998) who contend that there is evidence of public interest in matters relating to positive sexuality. However, public discourse of sexuality has been excessively preoccupied with sexuality’s negative consequences – STDs, HIV – and very little attention has been given to positive sexuality (1998:28).

6.2. Importance of sex in marriage

Of the thirteen informants, twelve stated that sex plays role in contributing to marital well being. The opposite is true, that if one feels happy in marriage, it is more likely that she will feel happy with sexuality. The only informant who disagreed was Ratna, who said, “As a Javanese woman, I never think about happiness in sexual life. It is just part of our marriage. I don’t know if it is important or not. To be honest, we have never had sex for more than 20 years; partly because of my husband’s sickness. But I think it’s not only that. He is a quiet and shy person, and he never talks to me about sex in our more than 50 years of marriage.” Ratna admitted that during the long span of her marital life, she never enjoyed sex. “It’s true,” she convinced me when I looked doubtful of her statement “He is shy, and he is not like macho men in

\footnote{Setor literally means to submit retribution. The contextual meaning is to fulfill one’s sexual duties.}
the films or sinetron. We are not at all like that,” she added. “But as you see, we remain husband and wife although we never have sex. So is sex important in marriage?” she asked back. Ratna admitted that she never experienced excitement or special feelings in her intercourse. Then she told me about her ‘exciting’ experience when working overseas. “I had a German colleague who was very attentive to me. He always noticed about my appearance, my dresses, my hairdo, etc. He always gave me compliment when I looked different. Oh, you look beautiful today; oh, I like your batik skirt, etc. I never heard my husband saying like that. At that time, I felt flattered by him, and frankly speaking I admired him. Then I realized, as a Javanese woman I should not go further.” When telling this story, there was a flash of happiness on her face. She may have been recollecting sweet memories in her past life. Ratna is one of my most interesting informants. I knew her from my family doctor who referred her as ‘a wife with interesting stories on sex.’ At the beginning of our acquaintance and interview she refused to talk about sex. Later she became interested in this topic and sent me some notes on her views regarding sex. Then I came again for further exploration. My communication with her proves that there is a double standard about sexual discourses in Javanese culture. In spite of the cultural restriction, people appear to be interested to talk about this topic.

Opposite to Ratna is another one of my most interesting informants, Umrah. She is a good friend of mine. Quite to my surprise, she uncovered her sexual life stories enthusiastically. At first I thought with her status as a widely known religious leader

9 Sinetron is an acronym for electronic cinema. It is a soap opera and is very popular especially among women and teenagers.
and politician, she would feel a bit 'shy' to take about the topic. But she said, "Why should we? It is for our happiness in life." Umrah elaborately told me about how important sex was in her life. "If our night was good and we were both satisfied, my following day would be productive. I would feel light, fresh, and my mind was so clear. On the other hand, if our sex was not good or I could not channel out my desire, I would be uring-uring (irritated and fault finding)." Umrah gave an example about the importance of sex in her marriage with her experience to 'keep' and defend her husband from the temptation of another woman. When they were 30's, her husband seemed to pay a special attention to a girl in his office. Knowing this, instead of getting furious at him, she pretended not to know and developed a 'maintaining strategy' through love and sex. Unlike her regular habit, she made special preparation before going to bed. She went through some 'rituals' like putting on perfume, wearing sensual sleeping gown and lipstick, etc. At first, her husband did not know what the secret agenda was behind all this change. Later when he realized about it, he apologized to her and promised to be faithful to her. Umrah’s story related to sexuality was presented as a case study in 4.1.

Ratna and Umrah provide two extreme views regarding sex in marriage. The other eleven informants are more 'neutral.' All of them agree that sex affects marital well being, to which they gave different rationalization. For Haïsah, an outspoken religious preacher and former politician, sex is God’s blessing to living being, human and animal alike. She said that quality or potency of one’s sexuality varies, depending on God’s blessing. She said, "For some people the drive is very strong; they need sex
every day or more than that. Some others do not have the potency at all. For us, my husband and I, we are in the middle. When we were young we did it two or three times a week. Now, as we grow older, maybe once in two or three months is enough.”

Hafsah believes that sex has an important role in one’s achieving marital objective, namely mawaddah (love) and rahmah (mercy). “Sex is not only for procreation, it is for pleasures as well. If it were only for creation, we would have stopped having sex after I entered menopause,” she explained.

Karimah, a former religious judge, shares the same view as Hafsah. According to her, marriage is aimed at achieving sakinah (tranquility) and peaceful mind. There are various needs to achieve sakinah, physical and mental needs. Sex is part of human needs that can make one feel peaceful and well in life. Karimah admitted that she and her husband were of ‘ordinary’ type of married couple on sexuality. “Sex is not the most important thing in our marriage, but of course it is important,” she added.

It is interesting to learn Dewi’s sexual experiences with her two husbands. Dewi’s first husband died after 17 years of marriage. She remarried her former boyfriend, who was a divorcée. At first, she was reluctant to share with me her ‘secrets’ in life. She was newly acquainted to me, through friend of a friend. She only mentioned in passing that she once consulted a psychiatrist for her marital problem. Hearing this, I patiently attempted to get her disclose this episode of her life story. To make the story short, Dewi was having problem with her first husband because the values they believed regarding sexuality. As a Javanese woman, she was taught Javanese
philosophies that she had to be prepared to serve her husband whenever he wanted her. She could not say ‘no’ when her husband asked her for sex, and she was supposed to keep him satisfied so that ‘he is not going to another woman.’ Unfortunately, her husband also upheld this value. He felt that he had the full right over her, asking her to sleep with him whenever he wanted. “I think it is unfair and unjust if only the wife who has to give in. If the husband has an affair with another woman, people will look at the wife and blame her for not able to make him sexually satisfied. Why as Javanese women we have to believe in this?” she complained.

Now, Dewi is happier in her second marriage. Her husband is not Javanese and he is more understanding and not demanding.

Another informant, Nur, admitted that she is not always ready for sex, but she never refused her husband. She could only postpone and promise. “If I am not in the mood while my husband wants me and I cannot refuse, I will do it with an imagination. I will imagine all sweet moments and sweet things in life. Remember anything that can make me happy. I don’t want to refuse my husband; he’s a nice person, and I am afraid God will be angry with me if I refuse,” she explained. While admitting that she does not always enjoys sex, Nur views that it is important in a marriage.

To sum up the informants’ views regarding the importance of sex in marriage, there are several points to note. Almost all informants agree that sex has an important role in marriage, although it is not the most important thing. They all perceive that sex is not only for procreation; it is for pleasures as well. It is a means to achieve the
objective of marriage, i.e. tranquility and peaceful mind.

6.3. Factors contributing to sexual well being

Of the thirteen informants, only seven could explain to me what makes them feel sexually happy. In general, their responses on factors contributing to sexual well being can be classified into four: love, relaxing atmosphere, communication and arousal, and mutuality. These findings extend to those previously studied by Collins (1987: 221) which include relaxation and communication.

Most informants agree that love and good relationships with the husband play a key role in achieving sexual well being. Love and good relationships and sex are mutually complementing. Good relationships contribute to sexual well being, while good sexuality enhances marital relationships and love. These findings are in line with those of Caroll, Volk and Hyde (1984) in Alseni and Law (1998:312) who contend that women and men in western cultures under their study appear to have different motives for their sexual intercourse. Women’s motive was ‘to love, to feel loved, and to express love to someone.’ The theory entails that women demonstrate a stronger orientation toward the relational aspects of sexuality, and research by Kudek (1994), in Alseni and Law (1998:312) supports this contention.

Among the informants who vividly emphasize the importance of love is Santi, who uses the term roso (feeling) to refer to love. She said, “Sex cannot take place without roso. To enjoy sex, our relationships with the husband in general must be good. I am
a type of person who enjoys everything I do, including sex, with roso. My husband understands this. He arouses my roso with his romantic words and expressions.”

Umrah, whose marriage was arranged, needed seven years before she really fell in love with her husband. “Before that, I had sex just to fulfill my duty as a wife. After I really felt ‘one’ with him, I did not see sex as a duty. It was a need to me, that could make life so beautiful,” she explained.

A relaxing atmosphere is the next important factor for most of the informants to make them enjoy sex. Yanti said, “I cannot enjoy it when there is noise outside the room. For example, now my grandchildren sometimes stay here for several days. When they make noise or turn on music aloud, I cannot enjoy it. Even the ringing of telephone in our room can disrupt our concentration.” Dewi, whose husband has a high sense of humor, feels sexually prepared with her husband’s jokes. “It makes me relaxed to hear his jokes,” she said. Dewi and her husband like to spend one or two nights in a hotel, just for the two of them without being bothered by children. For Aisyah, a relaxing atmosphere is not created by spending money on a hotel because she said that she is a ‘simple person.’ “So far as we follow our religious teachings on sexuality, I am sure we will be happy. For example, oral sex or anal sex is not allowed in Islam. As a medical doctor I learned that they are harmful to the health. So is free sex, which is strongly prohibited in our religion. And we know the dangerous effects of free sex.”

Five of the informants said that it is important to have open communication with the
husband on things related to sexuality. Dewi’s sexual problems with her first husband were caused by their lack of communication. “He did not listen to me. When I told him that I was not in the mood, he did not want to understand it. He just did it. My present husband is more understanding. We discussed about our sexual needs to avoid either of us fall into extra marital sex. When we were younger, we also watched blue movies and tried the different styles. But now not anymore,” she admitted.

Intan, a politician, said that she and her husband used to watch blue movies too. “It is just to break the monotony, and we wanted to know the different styles,” she said. Now when she gets older, she never watches them anymore. According to Intan, sexual well being can be achieved if both she and her husband can finish together; not one earlier than the other. Because women tend to start more slowly and finish later, it is important that the women get arousal so that they can finish together. This view is shared by Astri, who said that she felt happiest when she and her husband could end together.

Hafsah views sexual well being can be achieved whenever sex becomes the need of both the husband and the wife. She said, “If it is only the husband who feels the need for sex, and the wife views it as a duty or obligation, it will not give them happiness. Therefore it is important to arouse the desire first. This is what is called mutuality, just like the verse in the Qur’an that a husband and wife are like garments to each other, mutually complementing.”
6.4. Sexuality at old age

The objectives of this study are among others to identify implications of menopause for subsequent marital relationships among the informants and to explore their beliefs and practices regarding post-menopausal sexuality. The fieldwork suggests that due to non-material and non-physical bases of their marital relationships, most informants admitted that there have been no significant changes of the relationships with the husband including sexuality. Due to positive acceptance of old age according to religious and cultural norms, elderly women sustain their former good (or bad) relationships with the husband. Javanese myths negatively portraying elderly women's sexuality are not held true by most informants. More details of these findings are presented in the following sections.

6.4.1. Myths and stereotypes related to sex at old age

Both Western (1.3.1) and Javanese cultures believe in myths and stereotypes regarding sexuality at old age. Earlier in this Chapter, I presented my key informant's recollection of some of Javanese myths, which apparently are discriminative to women. She mentioned six 'noble' Javanese values for women: a girl should be flawless, passive and submissive, neat, damis (be closed), maintain cleanliness, and not sit at the doorstep blocking the way.

Regarding sexuality of elderly women, the 'noble' Javanese believe that sex after menopause can cause a woman’s belly to grow big. My other key informant, Diah, who discussed with me about this myth, gave her explanation. Since traditional
Javanese speak in a symbolic language, we have to understand the real meaning of this belief. According to her, post-menopausal sexuality will not give such effect, but it will be painful for the woman. As the woman has lost her estrogen hormone, her vagina is not fluid during intercourse which causes the pain. Because of the pain, it is not advisable for an old woman to have sex, as it will make her suffer. The deeper meaning behind this belief is a justification for the husband to remarry or to have extramarital sex on reason that his wife is no longer able to perform sexually. A woman’s inability to have a sexual intercourse is reasonable enough to justify a remarriage according to social and religious norms.

During the fieldwork, I tested this Javanese ideology with my informants. None of the thirteen informants believed it. Yanti said, “I don’t believe that sex after menopause can make my belly big. You can see my figure.” Then she stood up and showed her slim waistline. At the age of 63, she still has a beautiful figure and is strong enough to somersault when doing aerobics.” Astri, a cultural anthropologist, told me an interesting story, “Before menopause I used IUD. After menopause I had it removed, and I felt like entering a free world. Our sexual relations were positively affected. When I had the IUD, I was afraid to perform the various styles when we had sex (she used the term ‘jumpalitan’ which means somersault). I was afraid that the IUD would be displaced. But after menopause, with no IUD, I was free. It’s funny, the older we are, the more I can enjoy sex.” It should be taken into account, however, that these responses were from women’s perspectives, and should be triangulated with men’s perspectives.
Traditional Javanese values hold women responsible for the husband’s sexual satisfaction. Traditionally, women sustained the belief by taking good care of their bodies and beauty using *jamu* or follow certain food taboos (see 6.4.4.) My informants in general did not accept the idea that maintaining sexual harmony is to be placed on women’s shoulders only. However, from my observation, the informants have different levels of internalization and practices, ranging from completely disagree and reflect it in actual practices to disagreement but show ambivalence in the actual practices. Umrah could be taken as example. She believes in shared responsibilities between husband and wife in sustaining marital well being. But when she sensed that her husband was attracted by another woman, she resorted to sexuality (see 6.2.) to save their marriage. It appears to me that in spite of the egalitarian view at the discourse level, some women use sexuality as power, as has been stereotypically labeled as women’s power.

Other informants view that it is unfair to burden only the wife with sexual well being of both husband and wife. Among them is Dewi who experienced having two husbands with different cultural backgrounds. Her first husband, a Javanese, was a believer of the value that a wife should be sexually ‘responsible’ for their marital well being. She felt depressed because of the demand and saw a psychiatrist. It is quite understandable that during the interview with me, she was enthusiastic in speaking against these discriminatory values. She said, “I don’t understand why various obligations and restrictions in sexuality are imposed on women. Even when a husband is unfaithful, people will look at the wife and find fault with her.”
To sum up, the fieldwork suggests that none of the informants believe in Javanese myth on post-menopausal sexuality which, according to them, implies a ‘hidden agenda’ to justify a man’s remarriage or to have an extra marital sex. They neither agree to the stereotype that women are solely responsible for sexual and marital well being of both husband and wife.

6.4.2. Does sex last until old age?

The fieldwork interviews have shown that of the thirteen informants, eleven remained sexually active when they entered menopause. Two of them, Umrah and Ratna, were sexually inactive because of the husband’s condition. Umrah’s husband suffered from diabetics and became sexually impotent, while Ratna’s husband has been sexually inactive for more than twenty years for a reason that Ratna was not willing to tell me. Of these eleven informants, eight remained sexually active till now, although, according to them, the ‘quantity and quality has decreased.’ When the interviews were conducted, Rahmah, Karimah, and Sri were completely inactive. Karimah’s husband died, while Rahmah and her husband live separately, and Sri said that her husband could not perform anymore when he was almost eighty.

The eight informants reported different frequency of sexual relations ranging from once in two weeks, once in several months, to once in the last two years. Most of them admitted that although the desire was still there, it was not as big as before. Two informants felt the change when they were sixty, as told by Hafsa. “A woman can enjoy sex until sixty, after that her capacity will decrease. Actually a woman can do it
until she is old because she just receives. But after menopause, it is sometimes painful to have sex.” Hafsah added, “We still have sex after my menopause, but very rare; maybe once in several months. My husband did not want to hurt me as it was painful for me. We do not like to use any medicine or jelly, we are natural people.” Similar to Hafsah, Astri’s sexual activities decreased when she reached sixty, not because of her age, but because of her new status as a grandmother. “When I entered menopause, I did not feel old. But when my daughter had a baby, I suddenly felt old because I was a grandma now,” she said.

Other informants reported higher sexual frequency, as told by one of them. “Our sexual relations continue until now, maybe once or twice a month. It does not last as long as when we were young. We often end very quickly. To reduce the pain, we use water for my husband. We don’t use cream because it makes my husband weak again.” But another informant uses cream instead of water. Dewi said that her friend got a hormonal injection and she was thinking of getting one, but she cancelled. “I was afraid of the side effects. It’s better to use something external, from outside,” she said. Umrah, whose husband became impotent before she entered menopause, was sure that if he had remained sexually active, they would have sustained their sexuality even at later age. For her, sex can ‘stimulate life and make it more peaceful’ and therefore it should last till later age.
Table 5

Distribution of informants based on their sexual activities after menopause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>When entering menopause</th>
<th>During interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sinta</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yanti</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Aisyah</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hafsa</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dewi</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ratna</td>
<td>Not active</td>
<td>Not active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nur</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Umrah</td>
<td>Not active</td>
<td>Not active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sri</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Not active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Intan</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rahmeh</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Not active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Astri</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Karimah</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Not active</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data, 2000

6.4.3. Meaning of sex at old age

Discussions with my informants have convinced me of the close relationship between love and sex, and even more so among the elderly. With a weakening physical condition due to old age, sex in the form of physical lovemaking is then transferable to a more intense non-physical bond of affection and love. Sometimes, physical contacts remain in the form of non-genital sex\textsuperscript{10} and can fulfill their desires. Since all of my informants have been growing old together with the husband, they hardly face

\textsuperscript{10} I have used this term 'non-genital sex' to refer to physical contacts such as caressing, hugging, etc. but without genital penetration.
problems in transferring physical sexual contacts into non-genital sex or into a stronger bond of love and affection.

One of the informants, Karimah, illustrated similarities between marital well being in general and sexual well being. She said, "When I was younger, my happiness lied more on physical activities such as taking care of the children, teaching, social work, etc. The proportion between these physical activities and non-physical activities like praying or reading the Qur'an was probably 75:25. As I grew old, the proportion was reversed. It's the same with sex. Our physical sexual contacts were reduced because our physical condition became weaker and were replaced by a stronger feeling of love."

Santi has a similar view, and uses the term roso (feelings) which implies love and affection and 'body language' which implies physical contacts. She said, "When we were young, both roso and body language were equally important. We needed roso to stimulate the desire, and the body language was various because we were physically strong. Now we are physically weak, and the body language is changed, not menggebu-gebu (sexually hot) anymore. Hugging, caressing, and sweet words without penetration is enough. For me, roso is now more important than body language."

Most informants agree that at old age love, affection, attention, feeling unity and oneness, and caring are more important than sex. However, they do not agree that sex
is viewed as ‘dirty’ or inappropriate for old people. Hafsah argued that “For old people, sex remains a means to achieve the objective of marriage, i.e. peace and tranquility in one’s life. Sex is God’s blessing. If some people are blessed with a sexual capacity until old age, how can you judge that their sex is dirty?” Then she gave an example of his neighbour, who got married at 70 to a wife in mid forties. He got a child from this marriage, “Can we label their sex dirty?” she asked.

6.4.4. Jamu and special diets

Many Javanese believe in the efficacy and effectiveness of jamu (herbal medicines), including the different types of jamu for enhancing the pleasure of sexuality for men and women. For men, jamu is basically intended for virility, not fertility, and is believed to make men more macho or perkasa (virile). Men who take it regularly believe that they have a longer period of erection, and they can finish together with the wife, which enhances their sexual satisfaction. For women, jamu has two purposes: to clean white discharges that may be excessive in younger women and to shrink the enlarged vagina especially among women who have repeatedly given birth. The white discharge can make the vagina fluid and avoids pains during intercourse, but when excessive, it can reduce women’s as well as men’s sensation during intercourse. The Javanese believe that enlarged vagina due to repeated childbirth can reduce sexual sensation. Many women, therefore, will ask their midwives or obstetricians to perform jahitan or even obras¹¹ to make them ‘go back like virgins.’

¹¹ Jahitan means sewing, either by hand or by machine. In this context, it means suturing. Obras is close-meshed sewing by machine usually for lining or seam.
Jamu relating to sexuality appears to be a good business. There are quite a few brand names of jamu that are believed to affect men’s and women’s sexuality. Some of them are presented in the following table.

**Table 6**

Names of jamu relating to sexuality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOR WOMEN</th>
<th>FOR MEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sari Rapet</td>
<td>Kuku Bima</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srikaton</td>
<td>Pasak Bumi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Ma</td>
<td>Strong Pa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pil Binari</td>
<td>Sehat Lelaki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awet Ayu</td>
<td>Kuat Lelaki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galian Rapet</td>
<td>Pil Ekstrak Bumi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galian Singset</td>
<td>STMJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tresnasih</td>
<td>Olor Kambing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pil Tuntas</td>
<td></td>
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In addition to jamu, which is taken orally, beetle leaves are used to clean the vagina, to get rid of the white discharge and the odour. The leaves are usually boiled and when the boiled water has come to a lukewarm temperature, it is used for washing the vagina. It serves more for hygienic rather than sexual purposes. This formula has been brought into business as well by a modern jamu producer, Sari Ayu.

Certain foods are believed to affect sexuality for men and women. Younger women
should avoid eating banana especially the *ambon* banana as it can cause the vagina fluid. Other watery vegetables or fruits such as cabbage, cucumber, and pineapple are believed so, too. Men are not recommended to eat eggplants as they can reduce their virility, making them weak. The opposite, mutton, lamb, and hot food like chilly are believed to arouse desire or enhance sexuality.

The following is an example of the producer’s description of the efficacy of *jamu* Srikaton, produced by PT Nyonya Meneer – Semarang. This *jamu* is exported, and therefore has a bilingual description, English and Indonesian. The English version is not a literal translation of the Indonesian one. Notice the use of ‘physical’ rather than ‘sexual’ in their expression ‘a physical relationship,’ (line 1) which symbolically means a sexual relationship. It indicates that sexuality is such a subtle topic that people do not even use the word explicitly.

"It is prepared for women to maintain a close physical relationship with their husband. It prevents vaginal discharge, strengthens the uterus, slims the stomach and waistline, stimulates blood circulation and makes the face radiant. 40 days after giving birth, women are recommended to take it."

Most of my informants admitted that they took *jamu* during childbirth and its subsequent forty days. However, as they grew older, they did not take *jamu* any longer. Only three of them take *jamu* irregularly more for maintaining health rather than sexuality, including Dewi who sends *jamu* to her friends overseas for business. Ten other informants believe that non-sexual bond is more important, as said by Astri, "*Jamu may have effects to our reproductive organs, like shrinking our uterus, etc. I am not sure. But if your husband is basically an unfaithful person, he will remain*
unfaithful in spite of our efforts to remain young. Thank God my husband is not like that.” Intan, who told me that a high official like her husband is often at risk of being seduced by younger women, did not rely on jamu for their sexual well being at old age. “Fidelity, faithfulness and trust are more important. I am thankful to God that I have a faithful husband and wealthy as well,” she said.

One of my friends, Ida, is a strong believer of jamu and special diets relating to sexuality. When she and her husband were entering the twilight of their sexual drama in their marriage, both over sixties, she would always prepare jamu rituals for her husband twice a week. She mixed Kuku Bima with egg yolk and honey and served it to her husband who took it after his morning meal. Once a week she served lamb curry or satay and hot chili sauce. For her, there was no special food restriction; but she took Sehat Perempuan regularly and did senam sex (a type of aerobics to strengthen her reproductive organ muscles). She believed that by doing so, her husband could appear ‘manly’ in their weekly sexuality. She said, “I did not want him to have another woman, or even think of one,” she said. It lasted for several years and had to end as her husband grew older and suffered from diabetics.

6.4.5. Final episodes of marital sexuality

I wish to start this part by offering my sincere thanks to my informants for their frank accounts of the final episodes of their marital sexuality. I understand the emotion and tears involved in some of them when telling these stories. I am sure there is a lot to learn from their stories to uncover the ‘mysteries’ of sexuality of Javanese women.
There is always an end to everything, including sexuality. Nothing in the world is eternal. But I never imagined that a final sexual episode could be this ‘dramatic’ for the woman involved. For Ummah, for example, facing the reality of her husband’s impotence was ‘the hardest trial’ that God has ever given her. She lost self-confidence, felt inferior to meet people whom she thought knew about her husband’s sickness. Further account of her life story has been presented in 4.2.

What struck me more was Ratna. Despite her confession that ‘sexual well being is not important for a Javanese wife,’ still, seeing the reality that her husband could not perform sexually aroused her pity for him and herself. As we have seen before, she and her husband are ‘typically traditional Javanese’ who never talk about sexuality. It was hard for me to believe that they never talked about sex during the long span of their marriage. But she did tell me an interesting story about the end of their sexual life. It happened twenty years ago, when she was 47 and he was 53. One night, her husband wanted to have sex, but failed. He was disappointed (*at this point of the story Ratna looked sad and shed tears*). Ratna was suspicious why he was like that. She did not understand what was happening, and asking him a question about it was too embarrassing. She could only cry and said a ‘symbolic’ sentence, “Please take me back to my parents’ home.” ¹² Her husband understood what she meant with the metaphor, so they tried again. But again, he failed. Ratna finally understood what was happening. After that he never tried again and never asked for it.

¹² As stated in the Literature Review, one’s sentence in Javanese may have layered meanings. This expression in the Javanese language is a subtle way to indicate that a wife feels she is not needed any longer. It’s better for her to go back to her parents’ home than to live with her husband while she cannot be of any use to him.
Hafsah’s story is different. During the interview, her husband was sitting next to her, making the atmosphere more relaxing with his jokes. He used the metaphor of a train and railways to illustrate about elderly sexuality. He said, “It is like an old train that always slips out of the railways. You know what I mean?” he asked. I pretended not to know, and he explained. “A new train runs fast on its railways because it is strong and straight. An old train is the opposite. It cannot get straight and is getting weak. Because it is weak and not hard, it always slips out of its track.” Then he mentioned the popular joke among educated people, “There are three stages of sexuality in a man’s life. When he is young, it is pandangan hidup, when he gets older, it is pegangan hidup, and for an old man, it is perjuangan hidup,” he ended with all of us laughing.

Sri and her husband ended their sexual life with his anger. She has told me before that her husband is a hot-tempered man. Sri complained in tears that since the first time they got married, her husband had been sexually over-active. “When we were just married, he could do it two or three times a day. Maybe because he wanted to catch up for his being alone for several years as a divorcee. Now, he was almost eighty when we did it the last time. He wanted to try it, but he failed. He tried again, still he failed. Then he got angry at himself. From that time on, I slept separately from him, in a different room. Sometimes, he wanted to sleep in my room, but I refused. I did not want to have that experience again,” Sri said.

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13 Pandangan hidup literally means a view of life. Here it means that for young people, just by seeing (the partner), his sex is alive. Pegangan hidup is something that one holds true in life. Here it means unless he holds his partner, his sex is not alive. Perjuangan hidup literally means struggle for life. In
Karimah, 78, my oldest informant, is now a widow. Her husband died last year when he was 89. Karimah said that the last sex they had was around two and half years before her husband died. I did not imagine that they could have sex at that late age, her husband 86 and Karimah 75. It ended when he fell ill because of old age.

To sum up this part on sex at old age, the findings suggest that eight of thirteen informants remained sexually active during the interview. Quality and quantity of their sexual relations have decreased compared to those when they were young. However, they rejected the view that sex is dirty or inappropriate for old people. For most informants, sex, which is a physical activity, is transferable into a stronger bond of love and affection and non-genital sex at old age. It is in line with the pattern of their marital well being in general, i.e. non-physical and non-material rather than physical and material one. However, some informants prefer to have separate rooms from the husband because they ‘do not disturb each other.’ The informants do not believe in Javanese myth that sex after menopause can make the belly to grow big. They reject that only women are to be responsible for sexual well being of both partners. Most of them do not take *jamu* to enhance sexuality as they believe that at old age sex is not always in the form of a physical relationship. To help reduce the pain due to dryness, some informants use water or cream, but none gets a hormonal injection.

These findings agree with those of previous studies in Western cultures to challenge the stereotypes of elderly sexuality resulting in consensus among researchers that

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some level of sexual desire is felt throughout the life course (McIntosh 1981; Starr and Weiner 1981; Weg 1983; Brecher 1984, in Levy 1994:292). The findings have refuted Javanese myths about post-menopausal women as asexual and common stereotypes which perceive elderly sexuality as ora pantes (indecent) or kotor (dirty).
7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conducted among thirteen urban, educated, mid and higher level elderly Javanese Muslim women, the study is aimed at exploring their interpretations of their marital relationships, sexuality and well being in the context of Javanese Muslim culture. It attempts to answer two main questions; first, what changes in their marital relationships took place after menopause, and second, how do the informants interpret and experience sexuality and well being in their marriage. The study is based on an assumption that changes in marital relationship may or may not take place after menopause due to biological and cultural factors to be explored in the study. The changes may influence, either positively or negatively, women’s beliefs and practices related to their sexuality and well being after menopause.

Findings of the study suggest that both Javanese and Islamic cultures intermingle in shaping the informants’ beliefs and practices regarding sexuality and gender relations in their marriage. There is no clear-cut distinction which cultural phenomena are more influential to the informants. Four of them are religious leaders and vividly demonstrated their familiarity to Islamic, rather than Javanese, teachings regarding marital relationships as depicted in the Qur’an and Hadith. However, the Qur’anic verse regulating gender roles and responsibilities in marriage implied in An Nisa’/4:34 (see 1.3.2) is not reflected in the actual practice as these women join the husbands in supporting the means of the family. The other informants are less eloquent of Qur’anic verses and Hadith. By blending Javanese and Islamic values they emerge with new interpretations and practices. This seems to continue the history of Javanese
culture, which is influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism (Koentjaraningrat 1985, in Kusujiarti 1995:47), and which may have distinguished Javanese Islamic culture from that of Middle Eastern Muslims.

The study shows that none of the informants believe in Javanese ideology that marriage and sexuality are *manunggaling kawulo gusti* (the union of lord and servant). Another Javanese ideology implying that a wife will follow her husband to heaven or to hell (*swargo nunut neroko katut*) was also tested empirically. The informants said they did not believe in this ideology and gave their reasons.

Perceiving marital relationships as *ngabekti-ngayomi* (devotion-protection) between wife and husband, the informants hold true a marital gender relationship which is based on a footing of equity and kindness. The different gender roles in marriage, men being providers of the means and women being maintainers and sustainers of the family are not perceived as discriminatory which should produce a hierarchical relationship in marriage. Both are equally important, as these roles are mutually complementing. This conviction seems to derive from their cognition of such teaching in the Qur’an. However, further studies need to be conducted to test this thesis.

The egalitarian marital relationships remain unchanged before and after menopause. To most informants, marital well being and relationships are based more on non-physical and non-material factors. Therefore, physical changes due to old age or
material changes due to decreasing productivity because of old age do not necessarily affect their feeling well or their relationships with the husbands after menopause.

Most informants value non-material well being more, which is in line with Mulder (1978) who contends that the Javanese view the material world less positively. The two most important factors that contribute to a woman’s happiness or unhappiness in marriage are the husband and the children. The husband’s factor includes responsibility, understanding, open communication, respecting, faithfulness, and consent for the wife’s activities outside the house. The children’s factor includes their being settled, independence, and usefulness to society.

Positive portrayal of old age in Javanese and Islamic cultures have positively affected the informants in going through their elderly period. Unlike Western societies where ageing is viewed as generating a preoccupation with losses in terms of youth and beauty, fertility and sexuality, femininity and good health (Buck and Gottlieb, in Berger 1999:82), the informants view old age as a generous gift from God that creates more time for enjoyment. The predominant positive outlook and appreciation of old age in Javanese Muslim cultures may have contributed to the informants’ absence of menopausal discomforts and depression. This finding agrees with that of Kaiser (1990) as cited in Berger (1999:81).

Findings of this study have added to what Berger (1999:84) found among the Philippino that old age is often considered to be a time of gains. For the informants of
In this study, old age is not only a time of gains but also a time of reflection, redemption, expression of gratitude to God, and preparation for life in the hereafter. The proportion between physical and non-physical activities during their youth, 75:25, is reversed due to weakening physical condition. More time is spent for spiritual and non-physical activities at old age.

The study has revealed that despite its being taboo for public discourse in Javanese culture, sexuality appears to be an important and interesting topic for most informants. This finding agrees with that of Ford and Siregar (1998:28) who contend that very little attention has been given to positive sexuality (see 1.1 for the definition), despite the considerable evidence of public interest in such matters in Indonesia.

All informants agree that sex significantly contributes to marital well being. Sex is viewed as one of the means to achieve objectives of a marriage, i.e. peace and tranquility in life. However, they differ in their level of enjoyment of sex and in seeing the importance of sex.

They all agree that the most important factor contributing to sexual well being is love and good relationships. This seems to contradict Collins' (1985) sociological view that 'love is not sex and sex is not love.' Next to love and good relationships are open communication and mutual needs. Contrary to Javanese myth that it is taboo for a woman to initiate sex or to be sexually active, some informants reveal that sexual well being is achieved whenever both husband and wife feel the need for it. This
reciprocity seems to be in line with the Qur'anic concept of sexuality, which views men and women as 'garments,' complementing each other (see 1.3.2).

Myths and stereotypes regarding the sexuality of elderly people prevail in Western cultures (Butler and Lewis 1976, 1986, in Levy 1994) as well as in Javanese culture (Ibu Asih, Ida, personal communication 2000). Javanese culture portrays negative views of older adults’ interest in sexuality as humorous and scornful. Negative labels are applied to old people who express interest in having sex. There seems to be a double standard regarding sexuality at old age, as men are relatively more acceptable than women. The claim that post-menopausal sexuality can make a woman’s belly to grow big not only looks down on women’s sexuality, but also provides men with an excuse for remarriage.

This study rejects the above myth. Eleven informants were sexually active when they entered menopause, and eight remained so during the interviews. Karimah holds the lead; the last sex she had was at 74 and her husband 86. It is recognized, however, that the quality of their intercourse is different from that when they were young. Most of the informants complain about pains due to dryness or lack of fluids during intercourse. Some of them attempt to overcome it using water, jelly, etc., but some prefer to remain natural. Only a few informants follow certain diets or take jamu to maintain health and strength, especially in sexuality.
Since their marital relationships have been based more on non-physical, rather than physical, factors, most informants hardly face difficulties in maintaining and sustaining them after menopause. This is enhanced by their perception of the close relationship between sex and love. When the sexual capacity decreases due to decreasing physical strength, they shift their physical relations to non-physical one. Intimate relations do not necessarily mean genital penetration, but more as love, affection, caring, attention or non-genital sex such as hugging and caressing. These seem to be fulfilling some of the informants' sexual desires. If these forms of sex can be accepted as positive sexuality (see 1.1), this study has suggested that most informants experience positive sexuality at their old age.

Referring to the research questions, it can be summarized briefly that among the thirteen informants, the marital relationships generally remain unchanged before and after menopause. Most of them accept old age as a gift from God. This may have contributed to their happiness in marriage and sexuality, although it takes different forms at old age.

The study has demonstrated the various views, beliefs, and experiences relating to marital well being and sexuality among its thirteen informants. It shows how individual backgrounds and experiences have influenced and shaped one’s beliefs, attitude and practices. As a researcher I have been made more alert of the danger of generalization. Among my thirteen informants, I have learned of their rich and diverse experiences which are invaluable to me.
I am aware of the limitations of this study in terms of its sampling quantity. All my informants were women, and triangulation with men was beyond the study design. Women's views especially on matters relating to their husbands may be seen differently by men. Men's perspectives, which are not presented in this study, are important and may be explored in further studies. The study is confined to urban, educated, mid and higher level women. Had it been conducted among women of another segment of community, it may have yielded different results. It is recommended that further researches be done to explore on a similar topic from different perspectives.
ANNEX: Interview Guideline

A. Introduction

Aim: Get to know each other, establish rapport, start building trust and confidence

1. I started by explaining about my name, address, student status, how and why I selected her as partner/informant (if she knew me, I would convince her to see me as a researcher), purposes of visit, what her data would be for;

2. I thanked her for her time and willingness to be my informant, explained approximate time of conversation, and asked permission to come back if I need further data.

3. I ensured her of her confidentiality and anonymity in data collection (notes, etc) and report, then I would ask for her consent for the use of tape recorder. She could refuse if she did not agree.

B. Data of Informant:

4. Name, address, place/date of birth, which part of Java, how long has lived in the present address, how long married, number of children (age, sex, education, marital status of the children).

5. Occupation: used to work/not? If so, name of the office, address, position, manage time between occupation and family, husband support her carrier? Use of income.

6. Hobbies and social activities: hobbies (what, how, reason, husband support?) Active in social organization? (role/position, reason/motivation, self development, husband support?)

C. Data of husband.

7. Name, place of birth, ethnicity/which part of Java.

8. Occupation: name of office, address, last position, (describe briefly about his work)

9. Hobbies and social activities: hobbies (what, how, reason, her support?); social organization? (roles/position, reason, motivation, self development, her support?)

D. Marriage
D. Marriage

10. How long have you been married? Was it an arranged marriage? How did you meet each other?

11. What made you attracted to him? Why do you think he was attracted to you? Has this feeling of being attracted remained over time/until now? Probe: What she likes about him, what she dislikes about him?

12. In general would you say your marriage is a happy one? Probe: happy moments in marriage, sad moments in marriage, why and how she copes with them.

13. How do you perceive the status of your husband (leader, friend, superior, supporter, dependent, breadwinner, protector, lover, etc). Please give detail description or give examples. Has the perception remained until now?

14. How does your husband perceive your status (lover, cherisher, supporter, domestic manager, child rearer, family educator, dependent, co-worker, friend, subordinate, etc). Please give detail description or examples. Do you think he feels the same to you as before (when you just newly married)?

15. What is your opinion on the statement in Javanese culture that 'a wife will follow her husband whether he goes to hell or heaven'? If you agree why, if you disagree, why?

16. There is Javanes statement that a woman's roles are cooking, washing, serving sex and making herself beautiful (dapur, sumur, kasur, pupur). What is your opinion of this statement? What does your husband think about this statement? Please explain.

17. In your experience, what are women's responsibilities and tasks as wives? Please explain your answer. What are women's rights as wives? Did they change after you entered menopause? Please explain your answer.

18. What are men's responsibilities and tasks as husbands? Please explain your answer. What are their rights as husbands? Please explain. Did it change after you entered menopause? Please explain.

19. What are the characteristics of a good wife and of a good husband? Please explain. Are these same for young couples and old couples? Please explain.

20. What are the characteristics of a good marital relationship? Please give examples. Is the marital relationship different before and after you entered the menopause?
F. Well being

34. What material factors contribute to happiness in the life of men and women in general? Please explain and give examples. What non-material factors contribute to happiness in the life of men and women in general? Please explain and give examples.

35. In your opinion, what are factors that determine well being in marriage? Please explain and give illustration from your marital experience.

36. How can sexual relations in marriage contribute to well being perceived by husband and wife? Please explain your answer and give examples from your experience.

G. Sexuality

37. What, according to you, is a happy sexual relationship between husband and wife? Is it the same for elderly people? Please explain and give illustration.

38. What, in your opinion, is the aim of sexual relations in marriage? What is the aim of sexuality for elderly people? Please explain and give illustration.

39. Do people talk about sex if they have problems? With whom do they talk? Please explain.

40. What, in your experience, can contribute or enhance the pleasures of a sexual relationship? Is it the same for old people? Please explain.

41. Can you recall the most exciting sexual relations you have ever had with your husband? Please explain.

42. Can you recall sexual experience with your husband which has made you suffer? Please explain.

43. What is your opinion about sexual portrayal in mass media (e.g. video, magazine, films, television, novels, tabloids, etc? How do these affect people’s attitude and behavior on sex in general? Please explain.

44. What is your opinion about sexual stimulants like tonic, ginseng, herbs, ointment, pills, etc? Please explain your answer.
21. In your opinion what may inhibit the achievement of a good marital relationship? Please give detailed description and explanation.

22. Do you think that a husband should be older than his wife? Please explain. Do you think that a husband should have higher education than his wife? Please explain. Do you think a husband should have higher career/bigger income than his wife? Please explain.

23. Do you think that it is appropriate for a man to have more than one wife? Please explain. Did your husband ever talk about having another wife? If yes, what was your reaction?

24. What is your opinion of a man who has extra marital sex? Please explain your answer.

25. What do you think of a woman who has extra marital sex? Please explain.

E. Menopause

26. At what age did you enter menopause? How did you know about it? Did you notice the symptoms? What are they? How were your feelings after knowing you had menopause?

27. Did you experience any physical or emotional changes after menopause? If so, what physical or emotional changes took place after you entered menopause? Please explain your answer.

28. How did your husband know about your menopause? What was his reaction about it? Please explain your answer.

29. What are the characteristics of a good woman after menopause? Please explain with examples.

30. What are the characteristics of a good man when he reaches 55? Please explain with illustration.

31. There is a Javanese belief that old people are "malati" (having the power to make his/her wishes more possible to come true). What is your opinion about this? Please give illustration.

32. Do you think a woman's socio-economic roles should change after menopause? Please give detailed explanation of your answer.

33. The Javanese term to call old women and men is 'simbah' which is close the meaning of 'sembah' (worship), implying that old people deserve 'worship.'
45. In general, do you think sexual relations with your husband can make you feel well and happy? Can they enhance your personal communication with your husband? Please explain and give illustrations.

46. Did you experience changes in sexual relations with your husband after you entered menopause? If yes, how did the changes affect you? Please explain.

47. In your opinion, until what age can a man have sex? Until what age can a woman have a sex? Please explain.
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