



Bulletin of Islamic Research

ISSN (Online): 3031-4526

Received: 14-04-2026, Revised: 15-05-2026

Accepted: 16-06-2026, Published: 09-07-2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69526/bir.v4i3.442>

Does Dowry Size Correlate with Marital Harmony? A Socio-Legal Analysis of Muslim Communities in Cibeureum District, Tasikmalaya, Indonesia

Yanti Haryanti¹

Abstract

Purpose – *Mahr (dower) constitutes an essential obligation in Islamic marriage and is intended to symbolize commitment rather than impose an economic burden. However, in many contemporary Muslim communities, the increasing value of mahr has become associated with social prestige, potentially creating financial pressure and affecting family relationships. This study examines the relationship between mahr determination and family harmony in Cibeureum District, Tasikmalaya, from the perspective of the sociology of Islamic law.* **Design/methodology/approach** – *The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through field observations and in-depth interviews with community members in Cibeureum District. The findings were analyzed using a sociological approach to Islamic law to explore how religious norms interact with local social values in shaping mahr practices and perceptions of marital harmony.* **Findings** – *The study reveals that the practice of demanding high-value mahr has evolved into a social convention driven primarily by modernization, social prestige, and symbolic status rather than customary or religious obligations. While some participants perceive a high mahr as a marker of family honor and marital stability, others argue that family harmony is more closely associated with mutual agreement, affordability, and the absence of coercion in determining the mahr. These findings indicate that the value of mahr itself is not the primary determinant of harmonious family relationships; instead, fairness, mutual consent, and economic capacity play more significant roles.* **Research implications/limitations** – *The study is limited to one district and reflects a specific socio-cultural context. Future research may undertake comparative studies across different regions or employ quantitative methods to examine broader patterns of mahr practices and marital outcomes.* **Originality/value** – *This study contributes to the sociology of Islamic family law by demonstrating that mahr functions as a socially negotiated institution whose meaning extends beyond legal obligation. It highlights the importance of contextualizing mahr within contemporary social realities and offers practical recommendations for premarital education and policy development through collaboration with local Offices of Religious Affairs (KUA).*

Keywords: *mahr; Islamic family law; sociology of Islamic law; marital harmony; marriage; Indonesia.*

¹ Institut Nahdlatul Ulama Tasikmalaya, Jawa Barat, Indonesia.

Corresponding Email: yantiharyanti@inutas.ac.id

Introduction

Dowry is one of the important pillars in Islamic marriage which has a function as a form of respect for women, not as a measure of social status or a determinant of the success of domestic life. However, in social practices in various regions, including Cibeureum District, Tasikmalaya City, the amount of dowry often undergoes a shift in meaning to become a symbol of family prestige and economic ability of the groom-to-be. This shift gives rise to the assumption in society that the greater the dowry value, the higher the chance of creating domestic harmony because it is considered to reflect seriousness, financial readiness, and appreciation for the partner. On the other hand, the sociological perspective of Islamic law views that the implementation of marriage law is not only influenced by sharia norms, but also by social, cultural, economic, and societal constructions that shape legal practices in daily life. Various previous studies have examined dowry from the perspective of normative jurisprudence, positive law, or marriage customs with a focus on the legal position, form, and nominal dowry, while studies that link the amount of dowry to the level of family harmony are still relatively limited. In addition, there has not been much research that specifically examines how the people of Cibeureum District interpret the amount of dowry as a social practice of Islamic law and whether the amount of dowry really contributes to family harmony after marriage. Therefore, this research is important to fill the gap (research gap) through a sociological approach of Islamic law so that it can explain the relationship between the social construction of the amount of dowry and the reality of family harmony and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of Islamic law in the context of local communities.

Marriage is one of the *sunnatullah* that applies to all living things as a means to preserve offspring and maintain the sustainability of human life. From the perspective of Islamic Law, marriage is not only understood as a biological relationship, but also as a sacred bond that is worth worship. In positive law in Indonesia, the definition of marriage is affirmed in the Compilation of Islamic Law as a strong contract (*mitsaqan ghalidzan*) to obey Allah's commands and carry them out is worship [1]. Islam giving a noble position to women, one of which is through the giving of dowry in marriage. Dowry is a form of respect, protection, and a symbol of a man's seriousness in building a household. The size of the dowry in Islam is not determined definitively, but is left to the agreement of both parties by considering the aspects of justice and benefit [2]. As one of the obligations in marriage, dowry must be fulfilled by the prospective husband both in material and non-material forms that have benefit value. This obligation is

affirmed in the Qur'an Surah An-Nisa verse 4 which commands the giving of dowry to women willingly [3].

In the development of modern society, the practice of dowry giving is not only influenced by religious provisions, but also by social, economic, cultural, and prestige factors. Legal sociology studies show that dowry often undergoes a shift in meaning from a symbol of respect to a symbol of social status so that its value tends to increase and sometimes burdens men [4]. This condition shows the interaction between religious norms and social reality in marriage practice.

Several previous studies have examined the issue of dowry from various perspectives. Research conducted by Khoiruddin Nasution shows that dowry in Islamic law functions as a form of appreciation for women and not as a means of transaction in marriage [5]. Another research conducted by Ahmad Rofiq emphasized that the determination of dowry should be based on the principle of convenience and ability of the prospective husband so as not to hinder the implementation of marriage [6]. Meanwhile, research conducted by Siti Musdah Mulia found that the high demand for dowry in certain communities is often influenced by cultural factors and social prestige that develop in the community [7].

In addition, several studies on family harmony show that household happiness is more influenced by the quality of communication, responsibility, and fulfillment of the rights and obligations of husband and wife than the amount of dowry given during the marriage contract [8]. However, these studies generally discuss dowry from the normative aspects of Islamic law or socio-cultural factors in general and have not specifically examined the relationship between public perception of the amount of dowry and family harmony in certain local communities.

Normatively, scholars have different views on the minimum limit of dowry. Imam Shafi'i argued that dowry does not have a certain minimum limit as long as it is considered valuable, while Imam Malik sets a minimum limit of three dirhams [9]. These differences of view show the flexibility of Islamic law in adjusting the provisions of dowry to the social conditions of the community. The phenomenon that occurred in Cibeureum District, Tasikmalaya City, shows that there are no customary provisions that explicitly require the giving of large amounts of dowry [10]. However, the social development of the community shows a tendency to increase the value of dowry influenced by factors of prestige, education, social status, and modernization [11]. In some cases, this condition causes psychological pressure for the prospective husband and even encourages the act of debt to meet the demands of dowry [12], [13].

In the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, it is also emphasized that the woman whose blessings are the lightest in her dowry [14]. This shows that Islam advocates ease of marriage and rejects any form of excessive burden. Thus, the size of the dowry should not be an obstacle in building a harmonious family.

Based on this description, this study has novelty in the form of an analysis of the relationship between public perception of the amount of dowry and the level of family harmony through a sociological approach of Islamic law in the people of Cibeureum District, Tasikmalaya City. In contrast to previous research which focused more on normative and cultural aspects of dowry, this study seeks to examine how the practice of dowry determination is understood by the community and its implications for domestic life after marriage. Therefore, this research is important to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the function of dowry in realizing a family that is *sakinah, mawaddah, wa rahmah*.

Method

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to understand the practice of determining dowry and its effect on family harmony based on the experiences and views of the informants. The research was carried out in Cibeureum District, Tasikmalaya City. The informants consisted of 12 people consisting of four married couples, two religious leaders, one head of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), and one community leader. The informants were selected using *the purposive sampling* technique with the criteria of having experience or knowledge of the practice of determining dowry, domiciled in Cibeureum District, and willing to provide the information needed in the research.

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were made on social practices related to dowry determination, while in-depth interviews were conducted with all informants to obtain data on their perceptions and experiences. Documentation was obtained from the archives of the Cibeureum District KUA, laws and regulations, and relevant literature. The validity of the data was tested through source triangulation, triangulation techniques, and *member checking*. Data analysis uses the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña which includes data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and inductive conclusion drawing and verification so that a comprehensive picture of the influence of dowry on family harmony is obtained.

Results

In Islam, the shari'a of dowry is a form of respect for women. Dowry is not just a material gift, but a symbol of appreciation for the humanity, glory, and honor of women. This is affirmed in the Qur'an Surah An-Nisa verse 4, which commands that men give dowry to women willingly [15]. Islam as a perfect religion regulates all aspects of human life, including the issue of marriage. The rule is sourced from the Qur'an and authentic hadith. In this context, dowry (*ṣadaq*) reflects the honesty and seriousness of men in building a household in accordance with the provisions of sharia [16]. However, in social practice, various problems related to dowry often arise, such as the form of dowry, minimum and maximum limits, the non-mention of dowry in *ijab kabul*, to the equalization of dowry with marriage fees (*jihaz*). This phenomenon shows a shift in the meaning of dowry from spiritual value to a symbol of social status in society [17].

Normatively, dowry is an obligation that must be given by the prospective husband to the future wife. The dowry is based on the agreement of both parties, especially the consent of the women. The Prophet PBUH also emphasized the importance of dowry in every marriage, as in the hadith: "Among the blessings of a woman is the ease of her dowry and the ease of her womb" [18]. The hadith shows that Islam advocates ease in determining dowry, not burdensomeness. In fact, dowry does not have to be in the form of property, but can be in the form of benefits, such as memorization of the Qur'an, as long as it is agreed upon by both parties [19].

In practice, the amount of dowry is often influenced by social factors, such as education level, economic status, and customs. This is especially seen in Indonesian society which is still strong with tradition, so dowry is often used as a symbol of prestige. In fact, in Islam, dowry is not a measure of a person's quality, but a form of seriousness in marriage [20]. Furthermore, in Islamic law, dowry can be voided under certain conditions, such as divorce before the conjugal relationship occurs, the existence of *khulu'* (divorce at the request of the wife with a ransom), or when the wife voluntarily relinquishes her right to the dowry. However, if the marriage contract is valid and there is a marital relationship, then dowry is still an obligation that must be fulfilled by the husband [21].

In the context of positive law in Indonesia, the provisions regarding dowry are regulated in the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI), especially in Chapter V which consists of several articles. Article 30 of the KHI states that the prospective groom is obliged to pay dowry to the bride-to-be, the amount, form, and type of which are determined based on the agreement of both parties [22]. Furthermore, Article 31 emphasizes that the determination of dowry must be

based on the principles of simplicity and convenience according to Islamic teachings [23]. Article 32 stipulates that dowry is the full right of the wife from the moment it is handed over. Meanwhile, Article 33 explains that dowry is basically given in cash, but can be suspended if approved by the woman, and in this case becomes the husband's debt [24]. Article 34 emphasizes that dowry is not a pillar of marriage, so the absence of mention of dowry in the contract does not annul the marriage. Similarly, if the dowry has not been paid, it does not affect the validity of the marriage contract [25]. Furthermore, Article 36 stipulates that if the dowry is lost before it is handed over, it must be replaced with goods of the same kind or equivalent. While Article 38 explains that if the dowry is defective, the wife can accept or reject it; If it is refused, the husband is obliged to replace it with a proper dowry [26].

Thus, the results of this study show that family harmony is more influenced by the quality of communication, mutual trust, responsibility, and commitment of couples in running a family life than the amount of dowry. Dowry still has an important function as a symbol of respect and sincerity in marriage, but it loses its meaning if it is based more on material orientation and social pressure than on the principle of benefit taught in Islamic law. It can be concluded that dowry in Islam has an important position as a form of respect for women, but it is not intended to be burdensome. Both from the perspective of sharia and positive law in Indonesia, the main principle of dowry is convenience, agreement, and justice for both parties.

Discussion

Determining the Amount of Dowry in the Perspective of Islamic Law and Social Reality

In Islamic law, the determination of the type and amount of dowry is not limited in nominal or form. Dowry can be in the form of money, gold, or other objects that have benefits, as long as they do not contradict the sharia and do not burden the man. The main principle in determining dowry is simplicity, convenience, and the willingness of both parties [27].

However, the social reality in society shows a shift in the understanding of dowry. Based on the results of research in Cibeureum District, Tasikmalaya City, it was found that some people still interpret dowry as a symbol of social status, not as a form of respect and seriousness in marriage. This can be seen from the tendency of high dowry demand without considering the ability of the prospective groom [28]. The results of the researcher's interview on June 5, 2025 show that dowry is understood as a gift in the form of property or money given voluntarily by both parties at the time of the marriage contract. However, in practice there has been a change in value, where in the past dowry tended to be

simple but household life was relatively harmonious, while nowadays dowry is often associated with prestige and social prestige. Thus, it can be concluded that although there is no customary rule that requires a high dowry in Cibeureum District, the development of the times, social factors, and a lack of religious understanding have led to the emergence of the practice of determining dowry that tends to be excessive. In fact, in Islam, dowry is a symbolic obligation and is not intended to burden men [29].

Family Harmony in Social and Religious Perspectives

Family harmony is a family condition that is psychologically, socially, and spiritually balanced. According to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA), family harmony reflects family resilience which is characterized by healthy interpersonal relationships, good communication, and the fulfillment of the emotional needs of each family member. [30]. Family harmony has an important role in shaping various aspects of life, such as children's learning motivation, personality development, and the level of spirituality in the family. However, based on the results of research in Cibeureum District, there are still families that have not reached the ideal level of harmony. One of the factors that triggered the disharmony was the conflict that started from the issue of dowry. In some cases, high dowry or forced dowry is a source of discord in the household. This is strengthened by the results of a researcher's interview on June 15, 2025 which stated that the size of dowry can affect family harmony. [31]. In addition, there is a view that family harmony can begin from the pre-marital process, including in the determination of dowry. If the future wife can accept the economic condition of the future husband, including in terms of the ability to give dowry, then the potential for creating a harmonious family will be greater. [32]. On the other hand, if the dowry is set excessively and beyond the ability of the man, it can cause a psychological burden that leads to domestic disharmony, even from the beginning of marriage.

Correlation of Dowry Determination with Family Harmony

That there is a relationship between the determination of the amount of dowry and the level of family harmony. In Cibeureum District, some people still set high dowry for reasons of prestige, social status, and the influence of modernization. In some cases, even the marriage can be canceled if the dowry given is not in accordance with the expectations of the woman. The results of interviews with informants show that there is a difference of views between the previous generation and the current generation. In the past, simple dowries were easier to accept, whereas nowadays there is a tendency to set high dowry as a form of appreciation for women. However, in some cases, it was found that high dowry was actually a source of conflict in the household. This happens because

some dowries are obtained through debt or coercion, causing insincerity on the part of the husband. This condition has the potential to trigger conflicts that have an impact on family disharmony [33]. On the other hand, there are also couples who marry with a modest dowry but are able to build a harmonious family. This shows that family harmony is not determined by the size of the dowry, but by mutual acceptance, sincerity, and commitment in building a household [34],[35].

From the perspective of Islamic law, dowry does have a symbolic value as a form of respect for women. However, Islam expressly recommends that dowry should not be excessive and not burdensome. The main principle in determining dowry is the existence of agreement, sincerity, and benefits for both parties [29] to [36]. Thus, that the determination of disproportionate dowry has the potential to cause conflicts in the household. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of dowry is needed so that there is no shift in values that can disrupt family harmony [37],[38].

Most informants stated that dowry is seen as a symbol of respect, seriousness, and responsibility of the future husband to the future wife. However, if the determination of dowry is based on the demands of social status, family prestige, or excessive economic considerations, dowry has the potential to cause psychological and financial burdens that can affect the relationship between husband and wife in the early days of marriage. These findings show that the social function of dowry is not only normative as regulated in Islamic law, but is also influenced by the social constructs that develop in society [39].

In the perspective of Social Exchange Theory developed by George C. Homans, every social relationship is built on the consideration between benefits (rewards) and burdens (costs). In the context of marriage, dowry can be understood as a form of the husband's initial commitment to his wife, but family harmony does not depend on the amount of economic value of dowry. Harmony is more determined by the existence of fair mutual relations, good communication, mutual respect, and the fulfillment of the rights and obligations of each partner. Therefore, when dowry is determined proportionally and mutually agreed, marital relationships tend to develop harmoniously. On the other hand, if dowry is excessively determined to cause economic pressure, the social costs that arise can reduce the quality of family relationships.

The findings can also be explained through the perspective of legal sociology, which views that law always interacts with the social values of society. The provisions regarding dowry in Islamic law basically give the parties the flexibility to determine the form and amount of dowry based on the agreement and ability of the prospective husband. However, in practice, people often associate the size of dowry with family prestige, education level, occupation, and

social status of the bride-to-be. This condition shows that legal practice is influenced by local culture and the social structure of the community so that the implementation of legal provisions is adjusted according to the social context [40]. From the perspective of social change theory, the practice of determining dowry has also undergone a transformation along with changes in economic conditions, education, and people's mindsets. For the younger generation in Cibeureum District, dowry is no longer interpreted solely as a symbol of social status, but rather as a form of appreciation and moral responsibility. This shift shows that people are starting to prioritize the value of simplicity, deliberation, and readiness to build a household compared to material value alone. These changes are in line with the growing understanding that the main purpose of marriage is to form a harmonious family, not to show economic ability through the high value of dowry.

The results of this study are in line with Yasrony's research which found that in some groups of Javanese people there is no direct relationship between the amount of dowry and household harmony because harmony is more influenced by the quality of interpersonal relationships of couples [41]. Mansyur, Rosman, and Netti's research also shows that domestic problems arise more when there is an unclear fulfillment of dowry obligations or a lack of good faith in their settlement, not solely because of the nominal size of the dowry [42]. In addition, the research of Amar Alhaq, Mahfuzh, and Maulana emphasizes that dowry has legal, social, and philosophical dimensions as a form of respect for women's dignity so that it should not be interpreted as an instrument of economic transactions or a symbol of social prestige [43],[44],[45],[46].

Conclusion

Dowry or maskawin is an obligation in Islamic marriage which has a meaning as a form of respect, seriousness, and responsibility of the prospective husband to the future wife. Normatively, dowry is not determined by the minimum or maximum limit, both in form and value. The main principle in determining dowry is convenience, simplicity, and the existence of agreement and willingness from both parties without elements of coercion. Family harmony is basically an ideal condition characterized by calmness, affection, mutual respect, and good communication between family members. Harmony is not only determined by material factors, but rather by the quality of emotional relationships, mutual acceptance, and commitment to building a household.

Based on the results of research in Cibeureum District, it can be concluded that there has been a shift in the meaning of dowry in society. Dowry, which should be simple and non-burdensome, in practice is often influenced by social factors such as prestige, social status, and the development of the times. Even

though there is no customary provision that requires a high dowry, some people still set a large amount of dowry as a form of prestige. In addition, there are different views in society regarding the relationship between dowry and family harmony. Some think that a high dowry can reflect respect for women and contribute to domestic harmony. However, others argue that harmony is more determined by agreement, sincerity, and the ability of the male party to fulfill the dowry without burden.

Thus, it can be emphasized that the amount of dowry is not the main factor in creating family harmony. On the contrary, harmony is more determined by the values of mutual understanding, openness, and sincerity from the beginning of marriage. Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding is needed in society about the nature of dowry so that there is no shift in value that can have an impact on the quality of household life.

Author Contributions

Yanti Haryanti: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration and Investigation.

Acknowledgement

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Institut Nahdlatul Ulama Tasikmalaya, Jawa Barat, Indonesia, for its support and encouragement throughout the completion of this paper. The author also extends appreciation to the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments, constructive suggestions, and insightful feedback, which have significantly contributed to improving the quality of this paper.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Funding

This research did not receive any financial support.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the preparation, analysis, or writing of this manuscript

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