

Gender problems in Indonesia: The phenomenon of gamophobia in a permissive society

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Abstract:

The global discourse on sexual recession has intensified alongside the increasing trend of singlehood. The decline in the global population reflects this transformation, while a significant proportion of millennials tend to avoid marriage and long-term commitment. This study aims to analyze gamophobia as a multidimensional phenomenon reflecting permissivism, psychosocial threats, and patriarchal gender constructions. The study employed a literature review approach with critical analysis of academic sources related to gamophobia, gender, and permissivism. Data were analyzed thematically through source triangulation to generate valid findings regarding social, psychological, and gender dynamics in modern society. The findings reveal three major issues: (1) Gamophobia among millennials reflects permissivism, in which personal freedom, career orientation, and self-development are prioritized over marriage and family resilience; (2) Gamophobia triggers isolation, depression, declining birth rates, weakened family resilience, and demographic instability as consequences of shifting modern social values; and (3) Gamophobia is shaped by patriarchal constructions and relational inequality, thus requiring pre-family resilience through emotional readiness and premarital commitment. This study concludes that gamophobia represents a multidimensional social crisis driven by permissivism, gender inequality, and changing modern values, resulting in declining marriage rates, psychosocial vulnerability, and weakened family and demographic resilience. The study contributes by integrating permissivism and gender perspectives into gamophobia studies while proposing pre-family resilience as a preventive strategy through emotional readiness, self-efficacy, premarital education, and the reinforcement of moral values to foster more stable family relationships.



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INTRODUCTION

The issue of sexual recession has increasingly become a global social concern as more individuals choose singlehood and avoid marital commitment. Cuevas (2015) and Kislev (2023) explain that the shift toward individualistic life orientations has contributed to declining interest in family institutions. This phenomenon is reinforced by United Nations data indicating a 1% decline in global population growth, as well as findings showing that approximately 64.65% of millennials choose not to marry. Nickerson (1998) describes this condition as gamophobia within permissive societies, where personal freedom is prioritized over traditional social bonds. In the Indonesian context, women continue to face structural barriers in obtaining basic rights despite the growing discourse on gender equality (Larasati, 2021; Adriani & Yustini, 2021). Thus, gamophobia is no longer merely a personal preference, but has evolved into a social threat that may weaken family resilience, social harmony, and the sustainability of future generations.

Based on preliminary studies, gamophobia affects individuals across various age groups, educational backgrounds, and social strata. This study identifies three major streams of previous research. First, the increasing postponement and rejection of marriage are associated with greater individual freedom and declining commitment among younger generations toward the institution of marriage (Ossai & Chujor, 2023; Bagi, 2023; Miller et al., 2023). Second, rising divorce rates are closely linked to domestic conflicts, particularly differences in couples' financial management within modern marital life (DeLongis & Zwicker, 2017; Dai et al., 2022; Rinaldo et al., 2023; Peetz et al., 2023). Third, previous studies emphasize gamophobia alongside the importance of addressing discrimination and gender inequality within families, organizations, and society at a structural level (Padavic et al., 2020; Abraham, 2020; Rasyid, 2022). However, prior research has not simultaneously integrated permissivism, psychosocial threats, and gender construction within a single analytical framework. Therefore, the novelty of the present study lies in proposing pre-family resilience as a preventive solution grounded in emotional readiness, self-efficacy, and premarital commitment education.

This study aims to analyze gamophobia as a multidimensional phenomenon reflecting permissivism, psychosocial threats, and patriarchal gender constructions. The study seeks to address three main questions: (1) how permissivism influences the declining orientation of younger generations toward marriage and family resilience; (2) how gamophobia develops into a psychosocial and demographic threat within modern society; and (3) how gender inequality shapes fear of marital commitment and how strengthening pre-family resilience may serve as a preventive solution. This study contributes theoretically by integrating permissivism theory, structural functionalism, and feminism to explain gamophobia as a social crisis. Practically, the study proposes a pre-family resilience model grounded in emotional readiness, self-efficacy, moral values, and premarital commitment education as a preventive intervention for policymakers and practitioners.

This study is grounded in the argument that gamophobia is not merely an individual fear, but rather the product of interconnected social forces. Permissivism, legitimized in the name of personal freedom, has shifted younger generations' orientation away from family commitment toward career advancement and self-development, thereby weakening the social legitimacy of marriage. Ironically, however, the normalization of gamophobia ultimately undermines that very freedom by contributing to social isolation, depression, declining birth rates, and threats to the demographic dividend. From a gender perspective, gamophobia is shaped by patriarchal structures that generate asymmetrical fears: women fear the loss of autonomy, while men fear financial failure. Therefore, solutions cannot rely solely on

individual-level approaches. Strengthening pre-family resilience through commitment education, self-efficacy development, and the internalization of moral values constitutes a preventive intervention capable of balancing personal freedom with social responsibility in order to maintain family and societal stability.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study employed a literature review approach focusing on issues of gender, gamophobia, and the dynamics of permissive society in Indonesia. The sources analyzed included scholarly journals, academic books, research reports, media articles, and other relevant published documents. The literature review was conducted by identifying and critically analyzing sources containing factual data or expert perspectives related to the research questions. As emphasized by George (2008), literature review constitutes an essential component of many research methods. The selection of literature was carried out carefully based on its relevance and suitability to the topic in order to ensure the credibility and depth of the analysis. This process produced a representative body of literature reflecting the evolving spectrum of theoretical and empirical perspectives.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through an in-depth review of literature relevant to the topic of gamophobia (Naeem et al., 2023). The researchers utilized various sources, including academic databases and digital libraries, to obtain appropriate references. The selection process was carried out carefully to ensure the inclusion of diverse perspectives and methodological approaches. This strategy aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue from both theoretical and practical perspectives. By establishing a strong theoretical foundation, the study was able to proceed to a more in-depth analytical stage. This technique also enabled the researchers to identify gaps in previous studies, thereby allowing the present study to offer a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through the development of a conceptual framework derived from the reviewed literature. The researchers identified recurring patterns, emerging trends, and interconnections among the concepts of gamophobia and permissive society in Indonesia (Nowell et al., 2017). A critical analytical approach was employed to understand the social and cultural dynamics influencing the phenomenon, thereby revealing the underlying structures shaping perceptions of marriage and commitment (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis generated three central themes: permissivism, psychosocial threats, and gender construction. These themes were subsequently applied in the results and discussion sections by examining how the literature supported or challenged existing perspectives. Theoretical and practical implications were further explored to contribute to the broader discussion of gamophobia within societies increasingly open to gender diversity.

Data Validity

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researchers applied source triangulation and cross-checking procedures across literature derived from journals, books, reports, and media publications. Cross-verification of citations and references was conducted to minimize potential misinterpretations. Transparency in the literature selection process was maintained through the documentation of inclusion and exclusion criteria. This approach strengthened the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the data (Amin et al., 2020; Muthanna &

Alduais, 2023), thereby ensuring that the findings were academically accountable and possessed strong internal validity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Gamophobia, permissiveism in the name of personal rights

Marriage rates in Indonesia and several Asian countries have shown a significant declining trend. This shift reflects the strengthening of individualism and permissivism, in which personal freedom and career development are prioritized over marital commitment. Economic pressures, social expectations, and fear of marital failure also contribute to the emergence of gamophobia. As a consequence, family structures, gender roles, and social stability are undergoing profound transformation.

Table 1

Gamophobia and Permissivism

No	Main Theme	Research Findings	Evidence	Impact
1	Declining Interest and Marriage Rates	There has been a significant decline in marriage rates in Indonesia and several other countries, indicating changing attitudes toward the institution of marriage.	Statistics Indonesia (BPS) data: 2.01 million marriages (2018) → 1.58 million (2023); Japan recorded a 5.9% decline; similar trends were observed in South Korea	Contributes to potential demographic crises, declining birth rates, and long-term transformations in family structures
2	The Dominance of Individualism and Permissivism	Individual freedom has become increasingly dominant, leading individuals to prioritize personal autonomy over social commitment.	57% delayed marriage for career development; 53% prioritized personal life; permissivism theory (Avison & Furnham, 2015)	Shifts traditional social norms, weakens collectivist orientations, and reduces the social legitimacy of marriage institutions
3	Economic, Social, and Psychological Factors in Delayed Marriage	Marriage postponement is influenced by economic pressures, social expectations, and individuals' psychological readiness.	44% reported difficulties finding suitable partners; fear of divorce; financial burdens; low self-esteem	Increases social uncertainty and psychological anxiety, while extending the age of marriage or encouraging decisions not to marry
4	The Emergence of Gamophobia as a Modern Social Response	Gamophobia has developed as a fear of marital commitment resulting from social pressures and negative experiences.	80% of unmarried youth in China reported anxiety toward marriage; increasing marriage delays among Gen Z and millennials	Reduces intentions to marry and long-term commitment, while increasing the tendency toward non-formal relationships
5	Social Impacts and Shifts in Family Structure	Permissivism and gamophobia influence social structures, gender roles, and family functions.	The shifting role of women toward career orientation; weakening family bonds; transformation of social values	Leads to disruptions in traditional family structures, changes in gender roles, and the potential weakening of the family as a primary social institution

Source: compiled by the researcher, 2024.

Table 1 indicates five key findings related to the declining interest in marriage. First, marriage rates in Indonesia decreased from 2.01 million (2018) to 1.58 million (2023), with similar trends observed in Japan and South Korea. Second, individualism and permissivism are

dominant, with 57% delaying marriage due to career considerations and 53% prioritizing personal life. Third, economic factors, social pressures, and psychological readiness act as barriers, including 44% reporting difficulties in finding suitable partners. Fourth, gamophobia emerges as a fear of marital commitment. Fifth, the impacts include changes in gender roles and the weakening of family institutions.

Based on the findings, the dominance of individualism and permissiveness constitutes the underlying factor contributing to the decline in marriage rates and the emergence of gamophobia. Economic and psychological factors function both as triggers and as consequences of broader shifts in social values. More critically, the impact is not limited to the individual level (e.g., anxiety and social isolation), but extends to a systemic level, threatening the demographic bonus, reducing fertility rates, and redefining traditional family structures. The shifting role of women, increasingly oriented toward career development, indicates that patriarchal pressures are gradually being displaced by demands for personal autonomy. Thus, gamophobia should not be understood merely as an individual phobia, but rather as a social phenomenon reflecting a crisis in the legitimacy of the institution of marriage in the modern era.

The irony of gamophobia as a socially destructive threat

Gamophobia is an extreme fear of marriage triggered by cognitive distortions, past traumatic experiences, and family dysfunctions such as violence and divorce. This phenomenon deviates from social norms that position marriage as an ideal institution. Its impacts include psychological disorders such as depression and social isolation, as well as threats to family resilience, declining birth rates, and demographic crisis.

Table 2

Findings on Gamophobia as a Social Threat

No	Main Theme	Research Findings	Evidence	Impact
1	Gamophobia as a Complex Psychosocial Phenomenon	Gamophobia emerges as an extreme fear of marriage influenced by cognitive distortions, past experiences, and social factors.	Kefalas et al. (2011); Copen et al. (2012); Nursalam & Ibrahim (2015)	Leads to the rejection, postponement, or avoidance of marriage, while weakening long-term commitment orientations
2	Past Trauma and Family Experiences as Risk Factors	Negative experiences such as violence, divorce, and family dysfunction increase the risk of developing gamophobia.	Girme et al. (2023); Arifin & Fardiah (2023)	Increases psychological vulnerability, fear of intimate relationships, and difficulties in establishing healthy relationships
3	Gamophobia as a Social Deviation from Marital Norms	From a structural-functional perspective, gamophobia is viewed as deviating from social norms that position marriage as an ideal institution.	Structural functionalism theory (Nanik & Natalya, 2022); symbolic interactionism; feminist theory	Weakens the social function of the family, generates psychological pressure, and shifts traditional marital norms
4	Psychological and Health Impacts on Individuals	Gamophobia and prolonged singlehood are associated with loneliness, depression, stress, and risks to physical health.	Cacioppo; Zhu et al. (2022, 2024);	Reduces mental and physical well-being, while increasing the risks of depression, heart disease, and social isolation
5	Socio-Structural and Demographic	Gamophobia contributes to the weakening of family	BPS; BKKBN; Mujiwati et al.	Threatens social stability, family resilience, and the

Impacts	institutions, increasing divorce rates, declining birth rates, and demographic bonus crises.	(2022); Jiang et al. (2013)	sustainability of national demographic and economic development
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Source: compiled by the researcher, 2024.

Table 2 shows that gamophobia is a complex psychosocial phenomenon characterized by an extreme fear of marriage, triggered by cognitive distortions, past experiences, and social factors. Family trauma, such as violence, divorce, and family dysfunction, increases individuals’ vulnerability to fear of intimate relationships. From a structural functionalist perspective, gamophobia is viewed as a deviation from social norms that position marriage as an ideal institution. Its impacts include psychological disorders such as depression and social isolation, as well as structural threats to family resilience, declining birth rates, and a demographic bonus crisis.

Based on the findings, gamophobia is not merely an individual condition but also reflects broader shifts in social values. Cognitive distortions toward commitment such as fear of losing freedom or fear of failure are reinforced by traumatic childhood experiences. From the perspectives of feminist theory and symbolic interactionism, gender expectations and social pressures also contribute to the construction of this fear. Its consequences are systemic: at the individual level, it leads to a decline in mental and physical well-being; at the family level, it weakens the function of the family institution; and at the macro level, it poses threats to demographic and economic stability due to declining birth rates and reduced social resilience. This phenomenon requires holistic interventions that simultaneously address cognitive, emotional, and structural aspects.

Gamophobia, gender perspectives, and pre-family resilience construction

Gamophobia is shaped by social and gender constructions within a patriarchal society, where stigma against men who fear commitment and the pressure on women as objects within relationships create inequality. Gender equality movements and feminism have encouraged open discussions about the fear of commitment. Strengthening premarital resilience through self-efficacy, moral values, and realistic expectations serves as a preventive solution.

Table 3
Gamophobia, Gender, and Premarital Resilience

No	Main Theme	Research Findings	Evidence	Impact
1	Gamophobia as a Gender and Social Construction	Gamophobia is influenced by social constructions of masculinity and femininity within patriarchal societies.	Mehta & Dementieva (2017); stigma toward men who fear commitment; pressure on women as relational objects	Reinforce gender stereotypes, social pressure within relationships, and gender identity conflicts
2	Power Dynamics and Gender Hegemony in Relationships	Romantic relationships are shaped by gender hegemony that positions men as the dominant party within relationships.	Hermawati (2018); Rader (2009); Johansson & Haandrikman (2021)	Generates relational inequality, emotional pressure, and resistance toward marital commitment
3	Social Change and the Role of Modern Gender Movements	Gender equality, feminism, and LGBTQ+ movements encourage more open discussions	Lwamba et al. (2022); Fotaki & Pullen (2023)	Creates greater awareness of emotional vulnerability, while simultaneously redefining the meaning of

		regarding fear of commitment.		marriage
4	Pre-Family Resilience Construction as a Preventive Solution	Strengthening the pre- family phase is regarded as a strategy to reduce gamophobia and enhance marital readiness.	Premarital counseling programs; Certified Marriage Eligibility Tests; reinforcement of healthy relationship values	Enhances individuals' mental, emotional, and social readiness in establishing stable families
5	Self-Efficacy, Moral Values, and Hope in Relationship Resilience	Individual resilience is developed through self- reflection, self-efficacy, spiritual values, optimism, and realistic awareness in relationships.	Wong & Cloninger (2010); Silverio et al. (2022); social campaigns promoting marital values	Strengthens relationship resilience, family stability, and social cohesion within society

Source: compiled by the researcher, 2024.

Table 3 shows that gamophobia is influenced by gendered social constructions within a patriarchal society, including stigma toward men who fear commitment and pressure on women as objects within relationships. Power dynamics and gender hegemony position men as dominant actors, leading to inequality and resistance toward marriage. Social changes through gender equality movements, feminism, and LGBTQ+ advocacy encourage open discussions about the fear of commitment. As a solution, strengthening premarital resilience through premarital counseling, marriage readiness assessments, as well as the development of self-efficacy, moral values, and realistic expectations can enhance individuals' preparedness to build stable families.

Based on the findings, gamophobia is not merely an individual phobia but a product of patriarchal structures that shape unequal gender expectations. Men are stigmatized when they display emotional vulnerability, while women are pressured to become unconditional recipients within relationships. Gender hegemony reinforces power imbalances, making marital commitment feel threatening to personal autonomy. However, contemporary social movements such as feminism and LGBTQ+ advocacy have begun to open space for healthier dialogue, although they may also relativize the meaning of marriage. The proposed solution is preventive in nature: strengthening the premarital phase through commitment education, mental and emotional readiness assessments, and the internalization of spiritual values and realistic expectations. This approach balances individual freedom with social responsibility, thereby helping to maintain family resilience and social cohesion.

Discussion

This study finds that gamophobia (fear of marriage) can be understood in three key dimensions: (1) among millennials, gamophobia reflects increasing permissiveness, where personal freedom, career orientation, and self-development are prioritized over marriage and family institutional resilience; (2) gamophobia represents a psychosocial threat that triggers isolation, depression, declining birth rates, weakened family resilience, and demographic instability as a reflection of shifting social values and modern commitment patterns; and (3) gamophobia is shaped by patriarchal gender constructions and relational inequalities, indicating the need to strengthen premarital resilience through emotional readiness, self-efficacy, moral values, and premarital commitment education. Thus, gamophobia is not merely an individual fear of marriage but a contemporary social crisis influenced by permissiveness, gender inequality, and value transformation, requiring the strengthening of premarital resilience to maintain social and family stability.

The phenomenon of gamophobia is highly relevant to social issues in Indonesia, where marriage rates continue to decline while the demographic bonus reaches its peak. A Populix survey shows that only 18% of Gen Z and 19% of millennials plan to marry in the near future (Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Data from the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN) indicate that delayed marriage may affect population growth and middle-class income levels. Similar phenomena in Japan (Dommaraju & Tan, 2023; Utomo & McDonald, 2023) and China (Chang, 2024) demonstrate that economic pressure, urbanization, and cultural change have created a complex environment in which younger generations feel overwhelmed by marital responsibilities. In Indonesia, there is also an observable shift in the paradigm of women's roles, with an increasing emphasis on career development and higher education over marriage (Lee et al., 2020; Matsuda et al., 2023).

Based on permissivism theory (Avison & Furnham, 2015), these findings indicate that permissive attitudes encourage individuals to act freely without structure and with reduced empathy (Hammarström et al., 2020; Doyle et al., 2017). Permissivism creates an environment in which individuals feel no obligation to marry (Grabbe et al., 2023), thereby reinforcing gamophobia. From a structural functionalist perspective (Nanik & Natalya, 2022), marriage as a social pillar is increasingly deviating from established norms. Meanwhile, symbolic interactionism suggests that high social expectations and post-marital pressures contribute to fear of marriage (Adamczyk et al., 2021). Feminist theory (Adamczyk, 2018) highlights that traditional gender norms make women afraid of marriage due to perceived loss of autonomy. Men also experience financial pressure and concerns related to social prestige (Mehta & Dementieva, 2017; Johansson & Haandrikman, 2021). Thus, gamophobia is not a neutral personal preference but rather a form of cognitive distortion toward commitment.

This study provides an understanding that unrestricted individual freedom may trap individuals in loneliness and health disorders. Cacioppo (in Cai, 2023) found a relationship between loneliness and arterial stiffening; Robert Kaplan (Wei, 2022) stated that single living increases the risk of heart disease. Individuals who are unmarried exhibit higher levels of depression and anxiety compared to married couples (Zhu et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2024). This study suggests that life resilience is not only about freedom of choice but also about readiness to assume responsibility. Continuous self-reflection (Herland, 2021; Silverio et al., 2022) and the development of self-efficacy (Wong & Cloninger, 2010) are key to building healthy relationships. Without a balance between expectations and real actions, excessive optimism may lead to negative outcomes (Brands & Fernandez-Mateo, 2016).

This study aligns with previous research indicating a decline in marriage rates in developed Asian countries (Dommaraju & Tan, 2023; Utomo & McDonald, 2023), while also reinforcing the finding that local factors, such as social and economic pressures in Indonesia, have distinct characteristics. One-quarter of Indonesian women reject marriage due to career-related barriers, which is consistent with Utaminingsih (2017), who highlights modern life as providing opportunities for career development. In contrast to Western studies that emphasize childhood trauma (Girme et al., 2023; Arifin & Fardiah, 2023), this study shows that high divorce rates and exposure to family disharmony also play significant roles. Furthermore, earlier studies by Willoughby et al. (2014) and Leonhardt et al. (2020) focused on individual anxiety, whereas this research integrates gender and social structural perspectives (Hermawati, 2018; Rader, 2009) and offers premarital solutions that have not been widely explored.

Based on the study findings, three practical actions are recommended. First, mandatory premarital counseling programs for prospective brides and grooms (catin) should be implemented in all Offices of Religious Affairs (Kantor Urusan Agama (KUA)) through binding

regulations, rather than being voluntary. Second, a certified Marriage Readiness Test should be introduced, conducted by the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN) in collaboration with psychologists, to assess individuals' mental, emotional, and financial readiness before marriage. Third, a national collaborative campaign involving the government, religious leaders, and social media platforms should be launched to reduce negative stigma toward marriage and to promote the idea that healthy marriages can enhance well-being. Schools and universities should integrate family resilience education into their curricula, focusing on self-efficacy development, conflict management, and effective communication. Local governments should also provide accessible and affordable premarital counseling services for young people.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that fear of marriage is no longer merely an individual psychological issue, but rather a reflection of contemporary social change influenced by permissiveness, gender inequality, economic pressure, and the transformation of family values. Millennials increasingly prioritize personal freedom, career development, and self-growth over marital commitment, thereby contributing to declining marriage rates and weakening the legitimacy of the family institution. At the same time, gamophobia generates serious psychosocial consequences such as social isolation, depression, anxiety, and threats to the demographic bonus. This study also shows that patriarchal constructions and gender expectations reinforce fear of commitment in both women and men, indicating that gamophobia has evolved into a multidimensional social crisis that requires simultaneous structural and cultural interventions.

This study contributes to enriching the literature on gamophobia by integrating perspectives of permissivism, structural functionalism, symbolic interactionism, and gender theory into a comprehensive analytical framework. The research demonstrates that gamophobia is formed through the interaction of social value changes, gender power relations, and the construction of meaning surrounding marriage in the modern era. Practically, this study offers the concept of premarital resilience as a preventive strategy to reduce fear of marital commitment. This approach emphasizes the importance of emotional readiness, strengthening self-efficacy, premarital education, self-reflection, as well as the internalization of moral values and social responsibility. Thus, strengthening the premarital phase can help build relationships that are healthier, more stable, and adaptive to the challenges of modern life.

This study has several limitations. First, it is based on a literature review and is not supported by empirical field data that can specifically measure the level of gamophobia among particular social groups. Second, the analysis is primarily focused on the Indonesian context and several Asian countries; therefore, generalizations to other cultural contexts should be made with caution. Third, this study has not deeply explored the influence of digital media, popular culture, and changes in virtual relationship patterns on the development of gamophobia. Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and in-depth interviews to obtain a more comprehensive empirical understanding. Longitudinal and cross-cultural comparative studies are also important to better understand the dynamics of gamophobia within global social change.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Khamdan Safiudin: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Investigation; Methodology; Validation; Writing Original Draft; Writing Review & Editing. **Rasheedat Modupe Oladimeji:** Formal Analysis; Supervision; Visualization.

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