

## Research Article

# The Incest Phenomenon: A Study on the Polahi Local Tribe in Boliyohuto

Yowan Tamu\*, Gita Juniarti, and Abdul Wahab Thomas

Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Indonesia

## ORCID

Yowan Tamu: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9316-9128>**Abstract.**

Medical research generally discourages incest due to its potential to disrupt DNA formation and cause psychological trauma. However, incest remains a generational practice among the Polahi Tribe in Indonesia. This study aims to explore the realities of incest within the Polahi community, including its impact on family dynamics, physical health, and social harmony. Data was collected through field observations and in-depth interviews with members of the community. The results show that incest in the Polahi Tribe exhibits unique characteristics, particularly the absence of external tribal institutions influencing these relationships. Contrary to common medical expectations, children born from incestuous unions in this community generally appear physically healthy and capable of carrying out daily tasks. Biologically, no significant negative effects have been observed. Moreover, the family structures formed through incest are often described as harmonious, with strong emotional bonds and cultural cohesion. The physical and mental resilience of the Polahi people is supported by their isolated environment and deeply rooted traditional beliefs (*adat*). These factors contribute to the normalization and continuation of incest within the community. While this practice presents ethical and medical concerns, the cultural context offers valuable insights into human adaptability and resilience. The Polahi case may serve as a reference point for further scientific research and anthropological study.

**Keywords:** incest, Polahi community, Gorontalo, family

## 1. Introduction

The Polahi tribe is a term for a tribe that is foreign and lives in the interior of the forest in the Boliyohuto area, Tamaila Village, Tolangohula District, Gorontalo Regency. The uniqueness of this tribe is having a strong consanguineous marriage tradition. In the Polahi tribe, someone who has reached the age of maturity, both male and female, will be paired with his siblings or with his parents. So, it is no longer strange if girls marry their brothers or parents, and they still live together as a harmonious family when they grow up (Afifah & Rizkina, 2022).

The results of previous research show that incest is a bad act and will have a bad effect on fathers and children, brothers and sisters, and any gender, both male and

Corresponding Author: Yowan Tamu; email: [yowan.tamu@ung.ac.id](mailto:yowan.tamu@ung.ac.id)

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female. Previous research has written that there will be negative consequences for traumatic women who have incestuous relationships with their fathers (Gqgabi & Smit, 2019). Shame will also be experienced by boys when they marry their mother or sister (Haliburn, 2017). Marriage between biological brothers and sisters will also cause social pressure in the community and hurt the psychology of boys and girls (Tidefors et al., 2010).

Socially, incest is prohibited and opposed in society. Some perpetrators and victims of incest, even though they have been married and live like husband and wife and family, must undergo therapy with psychologists because of great pressure from social circles and the surrounding environment (Soloski & Durtschi, 2013). Incest has also been categorized as a manifestation of sexual violence in the victim's immediate environment (Retnaningrum, 2019). When referring to the Islamic religion, which is embraced by the majority of the population in Indonesia, the impact of blood relations that they live in will tarnish the honor of both men and women. Men and women bound by blood relations are not permitted to marry, which is written in Islamic law (Afifah & Rizkina, 2022).

Incest has indeed been banned in modern society, and a law has even been formed regarding the prohibition of incest, but this does not apply to the people of the Polahi Tribe. It is caused by a lack of religious knowledge and daily behavior, in which the Polahi people are dominated by individuals who are still illiterate. As long as there is no change in the mindset of the people, incest in the Polahi tribe will not stop (Tilome & Alkatiri, 2020). If we look at the history of the Polahi tribe, they have lived in the forest since Dutch colonialism, then continued during the Japanese occupation era. The Polahi tribe was originally a rattan and resin seeker during colonialism. However, they fled into the forest and formed a life there, where this life continues to this day (Hasanudin, 2004).

This study aims to raise the pattern of life of people who practice incest in the Polahi Tribe. Patterns of life are habits that are formed, such as how humans complete their daily needs. Even in farming communities, there are differences in the pattern of life experienced by farmers and those who need farming; where these differences are influenced by knowledge and habits, challenges faced, ways to improve welfare, vulnerabilities that occur, efforts to increase food security, and utilization of natural resources. Sustainable nature (Pangesti & Widiyanto, 2015). In this study, the assumption was that there were different patterns between one family and another within the Polahi tribal community. This research was conducted to prove this assumption

## 2. Literature Review

Polahi means escape. People in Gorontalo call this tribe tau lo ayuwa, or interpreted as jungle people because the Polahi people survive in the forests and mountains of Gorontalo (Husa, 2019). The people of the Polahi tribe are scattered around Mount Boliohuto, with an altitude of 2065 M and the Tilongkabila mountains, where the Bogani Nani Wartabone National Park area and the mountains in Sumalata border these mountains. The Polahi people's residence is on the slopes of Mount Lianga, where the mountain's slopes are in the middle of the Pangahu Forest. To go to the residence of the Polahi tribe, people have to go through the Pangahu River and a footpath. Another community can be found via Polohungo Village by crossing the Bongo River. Polahi people in this place are still familiar with the royal system. They call their king the word along (Pomalingo, 2015).

Geographically, the Polahi tribe is scattered in three areas of forest and mountains, namely Boliohuto, Alwahu and Tilongkabila in Gorontalo Regency. To get to the settlement occupied by the Polahi Tribe, people can drive to Mohiyolo Village in Gorontalo Regency first, then walk into the forest, and the trail to Alawhu is 25 kilometers away. Apart from the Alawahu route, people can follow the Paguyaman river route and be connected by a footpath with a distance of 37 kilometers to go to the Polahi tribe's residence (Husa, 2019). To go to the Polahi settlement it takes about 14 hours from Gorontalo Regency to go to the settlement (Pomalingo, 2015).

Not only in Gorontalo, there are also jungle tribes in Jambi and South Sumatra, known as the Anak Dalam tribe. The uniqueness of the Anak Dalam Tribe is its close relationship with nature. The perspective, speech, and behavior of the Anak Dalam Tribe include natural signs in it (Triana & Putri, 2022). Meanwhile, the Polahi isolated tribe who live in Gorontalo Province, this tribe has its uniqueness, namely the occurrence of incest between one family member and another family member.

The results of previous studies stated that incest occurred among the Polahi tribe due to a lack of knowledge about religion among members of the Polahi community. They also still need help to read or be literate, so interacting using media that relies on writing is still less effective. It means that if the Polahi tribe is still isolated and rarely interacts with people outside the Polahi settlement, marriage with their relatives is still normal (Tilome & Alkatiri, 2020) (Tilome & Alkatiri, 2020).

## 2.1. Incest in Indonesia

In today's modern era, sexuality is no longer something that is taboo to talk about. Discussion of sexuality does not only talk about biological structure but also relates to the social sphere. Previous studies have stated that incest is also a type of sexual violence in a small environment within the family (Retnaningrum, 2019; Tidefors et al., 2010). Incest is categorized as sexual violence because it contains violent material in it. Incest towards children can cause lasting trauma because children always think that parents are the ones who must protect and protect their children (Mujiran, 2021), not someone who marries and has sexual relations with children.

Incest violates the social environment, norms, and religion because marriages between siblings and close families are opposed by any social group, norms, and religion (Afifah & Rizkina, 2022). Previously, the story of incest was also found in Indonesian traditional stories, namely the traditional story of the formation of Mount Tangkuban Parahu in West Java. Before the Tangkuban Parahu mountain was formed, it is said that Sangkuriang almost married his biological mother, namely Dayang Sumbi (Nugraha, 2015).

The results of previous studies show that victims of incest are women. Women who experience sexual violence in the family, such as the rape of a father against a child or a brother against a child (Retnaningrum, 2019; Susilo, 2017). On the other hand, incest in the Polahi community is considered as normal things. The Polahi community does not blame family members for marrying and having sexual relations with their blood relatives. The uniqueness of incest in Polahi is the family structure that is falling apart. If a daughter and son marry and have children, it is difficult for the child to distinguish the positions of the father and uncle from the brother who married the sister. The comparison between these two premises is an interesting thing to study about this Polahi community.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach using ethnographic methods. This research was conducted by conducting direct interviews, living together, and observing the daily life of the Polahi people in the Boliyohuto mountains. The results of the interviews and observations will be recorded, and then they will become the primary data in this study. The primary data is also supported by secondary data in the form of literature or previous

studies that raise the subject of the Polahi tribe and incest, where the data from the previous research will become supporting data for analyzing problems. The acquisition of these data will be summarized in the findings and discussion chapter for further study.

## 4. Research Result and Discussion

The interviews and field observations show that the pattern of incest in the Polahi community is inseparable from three conditions. The first condition is the strong kinship within the incestuous community. The small number of the Polahi Community causes this kinship. In the Polahi settlement, there are only 16 heads of households (KK), with family members mixed due to intermarriage between relatives.

This kinship also makes the Polahi tribe unwilling to occupy proper residential land like other people living in Gorontalo Regency. The Polahi tribe prefers to live in the Polahi Settlement on the mountain's slopes rather than occupying residential land provided by the Regional Government of Gorontalo Regency in Tolangohula District. The rejection was due to the Polahi tribe experiencing difficulty adjusting to their lifestyle. Polahi people are used to hunting and gathering, while people in the Tolangohula sub-district are used to buying and selling systems. This difference in lifestyle makes the Polahi tribe not want to join the community in villages in Gorontalo District.

The second finding in this study is the lack of knowledge about religion and reproductive health. The interviews and observations show that the Polahi people are not familiar with the laws governing the prohibition of incest outside their community. They also do not know about the meaning of reproduction and things that women should not do to maintain reproductive health. One that was strongly opposed to doing this was marrying a brother or marrying one's father.

Regarding religious knowledge, the results of interviews with the community and traditional leaders from the Polahi tribe show that the tribe does not have any belief in any religion. The people of the Polahi tribe do not understand the meaning of religion, so it can be concluded that the Polahi tribe lives naturally. They live to hunt, gather, and carry out activities to continue their lives regardless of religion.

The third finding is the belief in the customs of the incestuous community. The results of the observations and interviews show that the Polahi tribe carries out their custom by giving a blunt knife to children who are considered to be teenagers. These children

are considered to have understood how to hunt, gather, and survive. The following is an excerpt from an interview with the Polahi people:

*“Wanu ma bohu lotawu-atw ma dilolahu, mawohiya liyoma’o pito ngomato bungolo, wawu ma popolahu liyo tumumula tutuwawu, pata’o woluwo ta ma ma’o mududung-gaya monikawa”* (When they reach the age of teens, boys and girls, they will be given a blunt knife and asked to leave to live alone so that the teenagers, both boys and girls, will meet and live together.)

Another custom from the Polahi community is the marriage custom. The marriage ceremony can be carried out by bringing two individuals who love each other to the river, and then the tribal chief reads the prayers. After that, the two individuals carried out husband and wife activities in the place provided by the tribal chief. The ritual will continue to be carried out, regardless of the blood relationship of the two individuals who love each other.

The marriage will mostly produce children who also come from the Polahi tribe. The observations showed that the incestuous children grew healthy and had no defects. These children can also perform normal physical activities outside the Polahi Tribe. In this study, the incestuous marriage did not produce children with physical or mental limitations or disabilities.

The observations also showed that the household life lived by the Polahi tribe proved to be normal and went well when the observations were made in Polahi settlements. The community experienced no obstacles from interviews conducted in the field. For them, as long as the interaction between family members goes well, problems in the family will not be created. Each family member is often involved in joint deliberations and interactions and sometimes involves the tribal chief in resolving these problems. Based on the results of observations, there were no serious problems between the incestuous family members, so no adverse effects were created from the relationship between family members.

Several things cause disputes between family members. First, the Polahi tribe does not allow other tribes to enter their community area. As previously described, not all Polahi family heads are willing to move to a more modern place, such as a residential area. Members of the Polahi tribe prefer to live on the slopes of the mountains to maintain their territory.

The law of the jungle also applies to members of the Polahi tribe. Who is strong, then he will win. In warring families, deliberation is no longer the only way to solve problems. The law of the jungle is more enforced than listening to each family member's opinion.

Previous research has written that the results of observations in the field show that children from the Polahi tribe can already use cell phones. Even though they do not know what they are pressing or typing, they already understand the symbols from their cellphones to listen to songs or other entertainment (Tilome & Alkatiri, 2020). It must be a serious concern because illiterate people can also use technological developments.

Previous research also describes that some new knowledge has been developed among the Polahi community, namely about not being allowed to eat animals such as pigs, snakes, and animals prohibited in Islam. Previously, the Polahi tribe hunted animals at night and consumed them, such as hunting pigs and snakes. Over time, the people of Polahi realized that pork and snakes should not be consumed (Tilome & Alkatiri, 2020). So, in the future, people from the Polahi tribe can understand the law on incestuous marriages. Even though their bodies are healthy, not biologically constrained, and they are prosperous households, the Polahi people need to acquire more in-depth knowledge about reproductive health and religion.

## 5. Conclusion

The conclusion obtained from this study is that the exiled Polahi people still practice incestuous marriages. The incestuous marriage did not negatively impact the Polahi community, both bad for physical health and household life. The results showed that children from incestuous marriages still grow healthy and normal. Households of couples who marry incest do not encounter any obstacles because the law of the jungle is still in force, and access is closed from other tribes who are outside the Polahi community.

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