

The POKE Cikarang Community and the Dynamics of Life Partner Selection Among Christian Workers in the Midst of Diversity

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ABSTRACT

Marriage represents a crucial phase in human existence, encompassing not only personal dimensions but also reflecting values deeply rooted in faith, culture, and social obligations. This community service aimed to strengthen the faith-based fellowship of Christian workers within the POKE Cikarang community and to support their decision-making in selecting life partners amid workplace diversity. The program involved online and onsite mentoring, worship sessions, and small group discussions using contextual and participatory methods. Activities were conducted over six months through Zoom and WhatsApp platforms, enabling flexible engagement for participants. The results showed increased spiritual maturity, stronger interpersonal connections, and a more thoughtful approach to faith-based relationships. This initiative demonstrates that spiritual communities can foster unity, growth, and resilience in pluralistic professional environments.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage represents a crucial phase in human existence, encompassing not only personal dimensions but also reflecting values deeply rooted in faith, culture, and social obligations. Within the framework of increasingly complex contemporary societies, such as the industrial area of Cikarang, the process of selecting a life partner emerges as a multifaceted issue, particularly for individuals striving to uphold their religious convictions amid diverse religious backgrounds. Recent phenomena indicate that many Christian employees experience pressure to align with their partners' beliefs as a prerequisite for marriage, resulting in conversions that are often driven not by deep personal conviction but by relational or social imperatives. This situation presents both theological and sociological challenges that demand comprehensive examination within the domains of religious studies and social dynamics in the workplace.

From a sociology of religion perspective, the institution of marriage functions not only as a social construct but also as a manifestation of religious devotion that reinforces faith-based identity. Christian spirituality flourishes through strong and mutually beneficial relationships among individuals, particularly within the context of marriage. Consequently, the process of selecting a life partner who embodies faithfulness is critical to maintaining spiritual and ethical harmony in building a household. Prakoso, Wening, and Kristriyanto (2023) assert that couples who share similar beliefs and ethical standards are generally more adept at fostering harmonious and stable family environments. This assertion is supported by observations that individuals often choose partners with comparable religious, educational, and cultural backgrounds as a strategic approach to establishing balanced long-term relationships.

On the other hand, interfaith marriages in Indonesia remain a significant public concern that continues to spark legal and social discourse. Sinaga (2023) emphasizes that the ambiguity surrounding regulations on interfaith marriage compels individuals to adopt pragmatic measures such as religious conversion to maintain relational stability, despite the deep moral dilemmas it may create. In highly diverse industrial environments like Cikarang, such complexities are intensified by a workforce composed of individuals from various regions and religious affiliations. Consequently, it is essential to cultivate environments conducive to interaction based on shared spiritual principles in order to foster strong interpersonal connections. One manifestation of such an environment is the establishment of religious communities among employees.

The POKE (Persekutuan Oikumene Karyawan Ejip dan Sekitarnya) community serves as a vital locus of spiritual development among Christian employees from various denominations within the Cikarang industrial setting. This community functions not only as a channel for faith enhancement but also as a social arena facilitating interaction among individuals who share similar beliefs. In the context of partner selection, the presence of POKE holds significant strategic value, as it provides opportunities for interpersonal engagement, mutual acquaintance, and the cultivation of relationships grounded in shared values and spiritual dedication. Nevertheless, empirical investigations into the influence of ecumenical communities such as POKE on the social dynamics of employees, particularly concerning life partner selection, remain scarce. Previous studies have largely emphasized the contribution of local church institutions to the faith development of congregations rather than exploring the implications of inter-institutional communities within professional environments. Furthermore, there is a lack of scholarly inquiry that explicitly examines the correlation between the presence of spiritual communities and decision-making processes in romantic relationships leading to marriage.

Addressing this gap in the literature, this study seeks to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the function of the POKE community in uniting believers who have reached maturity and are prepared for marriage. Moreover, it aims to identify the facilitating and inhibiting factors that influence the community's ability to foster interaction among religiously oriented couples, while also evaluating the effectiveness of its spiritual activities. Accordingly, this study aspires to make a theoretical contribution to the academic discourse on religious communities within professional settings and to provide practical insights for spiritual leaders and community organizers in formulating activities that promote relationships grounded in Christian principles.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious communities play a vital role in shaping interpersonal relationships and fostering social support among members who share the same faith. Koenig (2019) explains that engagement in religious activities contributes not only to psychological well-being but also to stronger social ties and relational satisfaction. These findings highlight the importance of spiritual communities as relational spaces that strengthen both emotional and social dimensions of believers' lives.

Mahoney (2021) introduces the concept of *spiritual intimacy*, suggesting that couples who actively share their faith experiences and support each other's spiritual growth tend to have more stable and satisfying relationships. Similarly, Levinger and Goodwin (2018) argue that shared values, communication styles, and life goals are strong predictors of long-term relational success. Within faith-based contexts, active involvement in communal worship and service can thus become a natural environment for relationship formation among believers.

Digital transformation has also influenced the dynamics of faith communities. Campbell (2018) and Jacobi, Andronicou, and Vaidyanathan (2022) demonstrate that online worship and digital fellowship can maintain community cohesion despite geographical and temporal limitations. These online practices extend religious engagement beyond physical spaces, enabling continuous interaction and connection that may nurture both spiritual growth and interpersonal bonding among members.

In the context of professional environments, Benefiel, Fry, and Geigle (2020) highlight that workplace spirituality enhances employees' sense of purpose, belonging, and relational harmony. Communities such as POKE represent a practical embodiment of this integration, offering Christian professional's opportunities to connect faith with relational life. Such spaces allow believers to navigate relational challenges while maintaining spiritual commitment in pluralistic industrial settings.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative methodology using a case study approach, as such a method is considered suitable for explaining the complex social dynamics and subjective experiences of members of the POKE community in cultivating faith-based relationships that may culminate in marriage. This methodological choice is supported by Creswell (2016), who asserts that qualitative methodologies are particularly effective in understanding the meanings individuals ascribe to their lived experiences within specific sociocultural contexts. The adoption of a case study framework is based on its capacity to facilitate an in-depth examination of the phenomenon under investigation within the authentic context of a Christian community situated in an industrial workplace environment.

The primary data collection method employed in this investigation was comprehensive interviews using a semi-structured protocol. This method was chosen because it allows participants to articulate their perspectives extensively while maintaining the research focus. According to Moleong (2017), comprehensive interviews play a crucial role in uncovering values, beliefs, and motivations that cannot be captured through surveys or observational methods alone. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, specifically following criteria such as being young adults (aged 25–40), maintaining active membership in the POKE community for at least one year, and having relevant experiences or observations related to faith-based interactions within the community. A total of ten participants were included in this study, consisting of six women and four men, some of whom had formed significant relationships, including marriages, with fellow POKE members.

Interviews were conducted both in person and through online platforms, with each session lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves identifying recurring patterns of meaning (themes) emerging from the data through systematic processes of coding, categorization, and interpretation. To ensure data credibility, triangulation was performed by comparing information across participants, and member checking was employed to validate the accuracy of interpretative findings with participants. The methodology also adhered to ethical research principles, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring the confidentiality of participants' identities, and granting them the autonomy to respond freely.

Through the application of this methodology, the researchers aim to provide a comprehensive and nuanced depiction of how the POKE community functions as an effective spiritual and social environment conducive to fostering healthy and enduring faith-based relationships. The community also serves as a significant alternative space for Christian employees facing the challenges of diversity within the industrial setting. As Sutrisno (2018) notes, within the context of pluralistic societies, religious communities fulfill a vital function as safe spaces that enable individuals to nurture relationships anchored in shared faith values.

RESEARCH RESULT

The History of the Establishment of the POKE Cikarang Community

The Ecumenical Fellowship of Employees in Ejip and its Surroundings (POKE) is an interdenominational Christian community that emerged in response to the spiritual needs of workers in the Cikarang industrial area, particularly those affiliated with entities located in the EJIP region. Established in 1997, the community was a proactive initiative aimed at fostering a healthy spiritual life amid the demanding schedules of industrial employees. Initially, POKE was founded as a forum for exchanging information related to church matters, work, and socio-spiritual support, primarily serving migrant workers. Over time, the community evolved into a well-organized environment conducive to faith development, integrating various regular activities such as on-site worship, virtual services, church celebrations during significant occasions, as well as collective prayers, compassionate visits, and other social engagements.

Since 2024, POKE has also introduced biweekly online worship services, enhancing accessibility, adaptability, and participation for collective spiritual growth. The characteristics exhibited by POKE members indicate that the community largely consists of individuals within the productive age group, particularly those between 25 and 40 years old, reflecting the broader demographic composition typical of the industrial workforce. Approximately 75 percent of members fall within the 26 to 40 age range, with a relatively balanced gender distribution consisting of 55 percent women and 45 percent men. In addition, the level of member loyalty is notably high, with 45 percent of individuals having maintained their membership for more than six years. Regarding relationship status, 50 percent of members identify as single, 35 percent as married, and 15 percent as dating or engaged. These statistical insights highlight the significant potential of POKE to function as a relevant relational and spiritual environment, particularly for individuals entering the life stage oriented toward marriage.

The Role of the POKE Community in Building Faith-Based Relationships

The POKE community functions as a contextual domain of faith amid the demands of a professional environment that is often challenging and secular. Through the use of communication platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom, alongside a synthesis of on-site and virtual activities, the community skillfully integrates spirituality into the fabric of professional life. Regular practices, including communal prayer, worship, and mutual sharing, serve as channels for developing faith-based relationships that foster mutual support, equip individuals, and nurture Christian character in the workplace. Furthermore, POKE acts as a vehicle for advancing spiritual leadership and collective ministry, grounded in the unique gifts of its members (1 Peter 4:10, LAI-TB). Consequently, the community has evolved into an active and productive faith ecosystem that effectively cultivates healthy spiritual relationships.

Based on interview findings, the POKE community actively utilizes digital technology, particularly the Zoom application, as a medium for conducting online worship. One participant noted that POKE uses Zoom as a platform for online fellowship and worship every Friday during lunch breaks, allowing employees to build relationships with fellow believers across different companies and industrial zones in and around Cikarang without disrupting their work schedules. This finding indicates that POKE functions not only as a fellowship forum but also as a relevant contextual faith domain amid professional demands that are often secular. Through the integration of technology such as Zoom, the community successfully bridges geographical and time constraints, aligning with Campbell's (2018) concept of *digital ecclesiology*, which explores how faith communities create spaces for worship and spiritual relationships through digital media.

Beyond being a communication platform, routine activities such as weekly worship and spiritual mentoring serve as strategic means of fostering Christian character within the workplace. This aligns with Banks and Ledbetter's (2004) view that spiritual life at work is not only possible but essential for sustaining integrity and Christian values in professional settings.

Moreover, POKE provides opportunities for members who possess spiritual gifts to actively participate in ministry and offers guidance for talent development through both in-person and online meetings. Interviews revealed that POKE gives room for employees with spiritual gifts to take part in ministry, while its leaders provide mentoring for members who wish to develop their talents in accordance with their God-given gifts. Such gift-based ministry reflects the principle found in 1 Peter 4:10, which states, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms". POKE thus provides a space where members can actualize their spiritual gifts, ensuring that ministry is not limited to formal leaders but carried out by all members of the body of Christ according to their talents.

This approach is also supported by Van Dierendonck (2011), who emphasizes the importance of spiritual leadership in creating emotionally and spiritually healthy work environments. Therefore, POKE functions not only as a spiritual community but also as a productive faith ecosystem that supports both personal transformation and collective ministry.

Supporting Factors in Building Faith-Based Relationships Toward Marriage

The presence of POKE creates a conducive environment for interaction among Christian individuals who share similar life stages and comparable socioeconomic circumstances. The compatibility of professional backgrounds, religious beliefs, and emotional intimacy cultivated through collective engagement strengthens the likelihood of forming faith-oriented romantic partnerships. Field (2019) found that participants who were deeply involved in ministry often discovered themselves in relationships that culminated in marriage. This observation aligns with the perspective that faith-centered relationships, catalyzed by mutual spiritual commitment, are more likely to result in harmonious and enduring marital unions.

The POKE community plays a vital role as a spiritual interaction space for Christians, particularly those within similar life stages and professional environments. Active participation in this community not only strengthens one's spiritual life but also opens opportunities for deeper interpersonal relationships oriented toward faith-based marriage. Based on interview findings, one informant explained that although she and her partner came from different professional backgrounds and church denominations, POKE became the setting that united them both spiritually and emotionally. She stated: "Our professional backgrounds are quite diverse, but despite those differences, we found connection when discussing general matters such as communication, report writing, and career development. Once we found those similarities, understanding each other became easier."

This harmony in communication forms an essential foundation for emotional and intellectual closeness, as emphasized by Levinger and Goodwin (2018), who assert that compatibility in values, life goals, and communication patterns serves as a strong predictor of long-term relational success, including marriage.

From a faith perspective, the informant shared that although denominational differences existed at the beginning of the relationship, an open and dialogical approach eventually led the couple to join the Catholic Church. The process occurred voluntarily, marked by openness and willingness to learn about Catholic traditions. She added: “We talked about the differences between Protestant and Catholic beliefs, and my partner was very open. He even became a devoted Catholic. We learned from each other and grew stronger together.” This finding highlights the importance of *spiritual communication* in relationships progressing toward marriage. According to Mahoney (2021), couples who actively discuss faith values and demonstrate religious support for one another tend to experience greater emotional and spiritual stability in their relationships.

Furthermore, the informant emphasized that POKE did not become an obstacle but rather a supportive force in their relationship, even though denominational differences initially raised concerns. Community support was manifested through shared prayers, home visits, and words of encouragement from fellow members. She explained: “We felt strengthened through prayer, verbal encouragement, and visits from friends. POKE became our new family.”

This reinforces Field’s (2019) conclusion that individuals actively involved in faith-based communities often form relationships that lead to faith-aligned marriages due to shared spiritual commitment and communal support. Spiritually healthy communities not only bring individuals together but also sustain them throughout the process of relational growth. This principle resonates with the biblical message of 1 Peter 4:8–10 (LAI-TB), which emphasizes love and service as the foundation of relationships within the faith community. By using their gifts to serve one another, members strengthen each other and create a safe space for personal and relational growth.

Challenges in Building Faith-Based Relationships

Despite its great potential, POKE faces significant obstacles in nurturing faith-based relationships. Temporal constraints resulting from extended working hours and rotating shifts present substantial barriers to members’ physical attendance. Furthermore, residential distance and limited transportation options exacerbate participation challenges in communal activities. Theologically, denominational differences can create tension if not approached through an inclusive and dialogical framework. Additionally, increasing work pressure often diminishes spiritual motivation and engagement in religious activities. The absence of organizational support—manifested through the lack of policies conducive to religious involvement—also emerges as a structural barrier that hinders the advancement of workplace spiritual communities.

Although faith-based communities such as POKE have great potential to strengthen relationships among Christians in professional settings, several structural, social, and theological constraints hinder the optimal development of relational engagement among members. Interview results confirm that the main challenges lie in time constraints, denominational diversity, and the lack of institutional support from workplaces. One of the most significant challenges is limited time due to shift schedules and overtime work. As one informant noted: "Because of shift work and overtime, it's difficult for members to actively participate in spiritual or relational activities."

This condition aligns with findings by Nugroho, Prasetyo, and Yanti (2022) in the *Journal of Christian Service Management*, which explain that flexible or shift-based working patterns are the primary factors reducing employees' participation in spiritual activities within industrial workplaces. Spiritual gatherings or religious formation activities conducted outside working hours are often inaccessible to shift workers, resulting in unequal levels of spiritual engagement among individuals.

Differences in denominational background also pose a unique challenge to building holistic spiritual relationships. One participant stated: "Because of differences in prayer and worship styles, it slightly affects our ability to connect. But since we share the same faith, it's not a major barrier." This response reflects a conscious effort to adapt through the use of neutral prayer language and open approaches. Such openness supports Vaidyanathan and Edgell's (2019) view on the importance of *spiritual openness* and *inclusive religious language* in developing interdenominational worship spaces within modern workplaces. Without inclusivity, liturgical differences can easily become sources of exclusion or emotional distance within the community.

Another emerging challenge is the absence of formal workplace policies supporting participation in faith-based activities. One informant mentioned: "So far, there has been no policy from the company regarding joining community activities, but there are also no obstacles as long as they are done outside working hours." This finding indicates a *vacuum of policy* in the domain of workplace spirituality. Benefiel, Fry, and Geigle (2020) similarly note that the absence of official policies recognizing or facilitating employees' spiritual needs often limits institutional support, even if organizations do not explicitly prohibit spiritual engagement. Organizational backing is crucial, whether in the form of flexible break-time policies, prayer facilities, or acknowledgment of faith-based communities as part of employees' holistic well-being.

Beyond structural and theological factors, job-related pressure also contributes to reduced spiritual engagement. Employees experiencing heavy workloads tend to suffer from mental and emotional fatigue, which decreases their motivation to participate in religious activities. Koenig (2019), in *The Handbook of Religion and Health*, observes that employee spiritual involvement declines significantly when work-life balance is disrupted.

Geographical distance between workplaces and residences presents yet another challenge. In industrial regions such as Cikarang, the spatial dispersion of companies makes physical coordination for communal activities difficult. Consequently, online worship platforms like Zoom have become a strategic solution. Although not explicitly mentioned in the interviews, prior studies support this approach. Jacobi, Andronicou, and Vaidyanathan (2022) found that *digital religious gatherings* provide flexibility for participation across locations and time zones, effectively mitigating spatial barriers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The POKE community functions as an interdenominational Christian fellowship in the Cikarang area, which, at its inception, primarily sought to facilitate communication among professional acquaintances regarding local ecclesial matters. Over time, this initiative has proven to play a significant role in nurturing faith-oriented relationships amid the complexity and pluralism of contemporary professional environments. By employing a contextual and adaptive approach, POKE has successfully provided a relevant space for spiritual fellowship tailored to individuals in their productive years, particularly those navigating single life or preparing for marriage.

The implementation of digital platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp has enabled the community to overcome barriers posed by temporal constraints, geographical distance, and varied work schedules. Through online worship and spiritual mentoring, POKE has emerged as an important resource for cultivating the spiritual life of its members while simultaneously fostering interpersonal relationships grounded in Christian principles. Within this framework, unity of faith serves as a foundational element that facilitates faith-based, marriage-oriented relationships, even amid denominational diversity and differing church backgrounds. Empirical findings indicate that elements such as transparency, faith-based dialogue, and communal support are crucial factors that strengthen the bonds among Christian couples. Communication initiated within a spiritual context has been shown to facilitate the development of healthy and harmonious relationships.

Nevertheless, challenges remain, including differences in worship practices, organizational policy constraints, and substantial workloads. However, innovative adaptations such as the use of neutral worship language and the strategic utilization of work breaks for fellowship engagement demonstrate that spiritual vitality and faith-based relationships can continue to flourish amid diversity. Consequently, communities like POKE play a vital role not only in promoting individual spiritual growth but also in significantly influencing the dynamics involved in faith-oriented partner selection. Policy initiatives from companies that accommodate spiritual pursuits, together with the strengthening of transformative community leadership, are essential to ensure that faith-based environments such as POKE remain spaces that unify, equip, and empower individuals within pluralistic workplaces.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Still conducting further research to learn more about The POKE Cikarang Community and the Dynamics of Life Partner Selection Among Christian Workers in the Midst of Diversity.

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