

Adoption of Children of Different Religions in the Perspective of the Civil Code Juridical Review and Social Implications in North Sumatra

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This study examines the practice of adopting children of different religions from the perspective of the Civil Code with a focus on the analysis of the North Sumatra region. Through a sociological and empirical juridical approach, this study identifies the legal dynamics and social implications of the practice of adopting children of different religions in the multicultural society of North Sumatra. By analyzing data on applications for adoption of children of different religions at the District Court in North Sumatra in 2022-2024, this study shows that 73.1% of applications for adoption of children of different religions were granted with the primary consideration of the best interests of the child. The results of the study indicate a tension between the provisions of the Civil Code that do not specifically regulate adoption of different religions with developing social practices and jurisprudence, the identified social implications include challenges to family integration, adjustment of children's identity and adaptation to the community. This study recommends harmonization of adoption law that takes into account the socio-cultural diversity of North Sumatran society while still prioritizing the best interests of the child.

Keywords: Child Adoption, Different Religions, Civil Code

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1. Introduction

Child adoption in Indonesia in general and in North Sumatra in particular is a legal and social phenomenon that continues to develop along with the dynamics of society. Historically, the regulation of child adoption in Indonesia still leaves various normative problems. The Civil Code (Burgerlijk Wetboek) as a legal product of the Dutch colonial heritage does not comprehensively regulate the adoption of children, especially in the context of religious differences between prospective adoptive parents and children to be adopted [1]. This absence of explicit regulation creates a wide scope of interpretation in legal practice, particularly when adoption is carried out by parties of different religions [2] and [3]. This complexity is increasingly evident in the North Sumatra region which is known as a multicultural region with a plurality of ethnicities, religions, and cultures that have been formed over the centuries.

The people of North Sumatra consist of various ethnicities such as Batak, Malay, Nias, Javanese, and other ethnicities, each of which has its own traditions and values related to childcare and adoption. The interaction between these customary traditions with state law and religious law gives birth to a distinctive and complex form of legal pluralism [4]. In this context, the adoption of children of different religions is not only a formal juridical issue, but also touches on sensitive social, cultural, and religious dimensions in society [5] and [6]. Religious diversity in North Sumatra is an important factor in the dynamics of the adoption of children of different religions. Data from the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of North Sumatra shows that the composition of the population based on religion consists of 65.45% Muslims, 26.62% Christians, 3.04% Catholics, 2.34% Buddhists, 0.11% Hindus, and 2.44% adherents of other faiths [7].

This demographic constellation makes interfaith interaction an inseparable social reality, including in the practice of child adoption. In terms of regulations, the state has actually tried to provide legal protection for children through Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection which was later updated with Law Number 35 of 2014, as well as Government Regulation Number 54 of 2007 concerning the Implementation of Child Adoption. This regulation emphasizes that prospective adoptive parents and adopted children must be of the same religion. However, in practice, these provisions are often faced with the social reality of the plural and tolerant people of North Sumatra. As a result, courts, especially District Courts, are often faced with applications for adoption of children of different religions that require contextual and progressive interpretation of the law. This phenomenon is reflected in data from the North Sumatra High Court which shows an increase in applications for adoption of children of different religions by 18% in the 2022-2024 period.

Research by the North Sumatra Child Protection Institute (2023) also noted that of the 67 cases of adoption of children of different religions during the 2022–2023 period, as many as 76% were carried out by couples who had not been blessed with children for a long time, while the other 24% were adoptions for children from close relatives or abandoned children. This data shows that the practice of adopting children of different religions is driven by real social needs, especially in order to provide protection and welfare for children. In the context of human rights, the responsibility for fulfilling and protecting children's rights lies not only with the state, but also involves the government, society, and every individual [2]. Therefore, the practice of adopting children of different religions in North Sumatra must be understood as a legal phenomenon that is directly in contact with the social reality of a society that respects diversity, but still places religion as a fundamental identity [8].

Despite these contributions, existing literature reveals several research gaps. First, most studies focus on normative analysis of statutory regulations or religious doctrines, with limited empirical examination of court practices and social implications of interfaith adoption. Second, there is an inconsistency between the normative requirement of religious sameness and judicial decisions that approve interfaith adoption based on the best interests of the child principle. Third, prior research rarely integrates demographic, cultural, and empirical data to explain why interfaith adoption persists despite regulatory restrictions. These gaps indicate the need for a comprehensive study that bridges normative legal analysis with empirical socio-legal realities. Based on this gap, the research problems are formulated as follows: (1) How is the regulation and legal practice of interfaith child adoption implemented under the Civil Code and related regulations? (2) How do courts and society respond to interfaith adoption within a plural legal context? and (3) What legal and social implications arise from interfaith child adoption practices in ensuring child protection and legal certainty? Addressing these questions is essential to develop a more responsive and just framework for child adoption law in Indonesia.

2. Method

This study uses a type of empirical legal research (*Socio-Legal Research*) with a descriptive-analytical approach. This approach was chosen because the research not only examines written legal norms related to the adoption of children of different religions in the perspective of the Civil Code, but also analyzes their application in practice and their interaction with the social reality of multicultural communities in North Sumatra [9]. Law in this study is understood not solely as a normative text, but as a living social institution and influenced by religious values, customs, and social dynamics of society. The research approach used includes a legislative approach (*Statute approach*), conceptual approach (*conceptual approach*), and sociological approaches (*sociological approach*).

The legislative approach is used to review legal provisions related to child adoption, especially the Civil Code, Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection as amended by Law Number 35 of 2014, and Government Regulation Number 54 of 2007 concerning the Implementation of Child Adoption[10]. A conceptual approach is used to analyze the concept of interfaith child adoption, legal pluralism, and the principle of the best interests of the child (*the best interests of the child*), while a sociological approach is used to understand the practice of adopting children of different religions in the social context of the ethnically and religiously plural people of North Sumatra.

This research was carried out in North Sumatra Province with a research time span of 2022–2024. The research data consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with District Court judges, court officials, and related parties, and through the study of court decisions regarding the adoption of interfaith children. Secondary data were obtained from laws and regulations, legal literature, scientific journals, and related institutional reports [11]. Data collection was carried out through literature studies, document studies, and interviews. Data is analyzed qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing by relating legal norms, judicial practices, and social reality. The validity of the data is maintained through the source triangulation technique to obtain objective and comprehensive research results.

3. Results and Discussion

Adoption of Children of Different Religions in the Perspective of the Civil Code and Its Practice in North Sumatra

The regulation of child adoption in Indonesian positive law shows the tension between written legal norms and the social reality of society. Article 39 paragraph (3) of Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection expressly requires that prospective adoptive parents must be of the same religion as the prospective adoptive child, a provision which is then strengthened by Article 3 paragraph (1) of Government Regulation Number 54 of 2007 concerning the Implementation of Child Adoption. However, the Civil Code as a general civil law of the Dutch colonial heritage does not explicitly regulate the adoption of children, especially regarding the adoption of children of different religions. The initial regulation on child adoption was only found in Staatsblad 1917 Number 129 which was limited, discriminatory, and did not touch on religious aspects. This normative vacuum opens up space for diverse interpretations and practices of law at the local level. In the context of North Sumatra, this condition is increasingly complex due to the existence of real legal pluralism.

As stated by Lubis (2022:73), the practice of child adoption in this region is not only based on state law, but also on customary law and religious values that live in the community. This is in line with the theory of legal pluralism which states that in a multicultural society such as North Sumatra, state law does not work alone, but rather co-exists and interacts with customary law and religious law [12] The practice of adoption in the patrilineal Toba Batak community, for example, emphasizes the sustainability of the lineage through boys, while in the majority Muslim Malay society, the adoption of children is understood as a form of maintenance (*hadhanah*) without breaking the relationship of the *nasab*. This difference in practice shows that child adoption is a social institution shaped by cultural and religious values, not solely by written laws.

From the perspective of the best interests of the child theory, the provision of religious necessity between adoptive parents and adopted children cannot be narrowly understood as formal compliance with religious norms alone. This principle requires that every adoption decision is truly oriented towards the overall well-being of the child, including physical, psychological, educational, and respect for his or her cultural and religious identity [13] In practice in North Sumatra, it is not uncommon to find conditions where the adoption

of children of different religions actually provides a more stable and decent parenting environment for children, especially for abandoned children or children from families who are unable to provide optimal protection.

Judicial practice in North Sumatra shows a paradigm shift towards a more substantive and contextual approach. This is reflected in Decision Number 27/Pdt.P/2022/PN.Mdn, where the Medan District Court granted the application for the adoption of a child of different religions with the consideration that the prospective adoptive parents are able to ensure the fulfillment of the child's rights, including religious education in accordance with the religion adopted by the child, as well as the consent of the biological parents. This ruling reflects the application of restorative justice theory, where the main focus is not solely on formal adherence to norms, but rather on efforts to restore and guarantee the child's right to grow up in a safe and loving family environment [14]. Furthermore, the practice of adopting children of different religions in North Sumatra can also be analyzed through the theory of multiculturalism. In an ethnically and religiously plural society, interfaith adoption families become a social space that represents the coexistence of different values. As stated [15].

This practice reflects the dynamics of multiculturalism, in which differences are not positioned as a threat, but rather as a reality that can be managed through tolerance and respect for each other's identities. In this context, the adoption of interfaith children not only impacts the individual child, but also contributes to social learning about coexistence in diversity. From the point of view of legal protection theory, the state through law enforcement officials, especially the courts, has an obligation to ensure that every adopted child still receives maximum protection of his or her rights. Referring to Satjipto Rahardjo's thought, the law must be on the side of humans, not the other way around. In the context of the adoption of interfaith children in North Sumatra, legal protection includes guarantees for the child's religious identity, the right to receive religious education according to his or her beliefs, and the protection of emotional and social relationships with his or her biological family. Therefore, the evolving flexibility of jurisprudence in the District Courts can be seen as a progressive legal effort to bridge the tension between written legal norms and social realities in the best interests of the child.

Data and Analysis of Applications for Adoption of Interfaith Children at the North Sumatra District Court (2022–2024)

Data on adoption applications for children of different religions obtained from the District Court in North Sumatra during the 2022–2024 period show a fairly consistent trend. Of the total 26 applications submitted, 19 applications or 73.1% were granted, 5 applications were rejected, and 2 applications are still in process. The high percentage of applications granted suggests that although positive regulations require religious similarities between prospective adoptive parents and adopted children, courts in North Sumatra tend to prioritize a substantive approach by putting the best interests of the child first (*the best interests of the child*) as the main consideration.

This is in line with the view (Safri H.M. et al., 2024) which affirms that the best interests of the child include not only aspects of physical and educational well-being, but also respect for the child's cultural and religious identity. When viewed based on the distribution of regions, the City of Medan recorded the highest number of applications for the adoption of children of different religions, which was 11 applications or 42.3% of the total applications. The dominance of Medan as a location for the application can be understood from the perspective of the theory of multiculturalism, considering that Medan is a city with a high level of ethnic and religious heterogeneity and dynamic social mobility.

In this context, the practice of adopting interfaith children reflects the social reality of a multicultural society, where the adoptive family functions not only as a parenting unit, but also as a space for interaction and

learning of the values of tolerance and interreligious coexistence [16]. This pattern shows that the adoption of interfaith children is not an incidental phenomenon, but part of a social dynamic that develops naturally in multicultural urban societies. Furthermore, an analysis of the judge's consideration in granting the application for adoption of a child of different religions shows that the dominant factor is the guarantee of religious education in accordance with the religion of origin of the child, which appeared in 12 out of 19 decisions granted (63.2%). This consideration reflects the application of the theory of legal protection as stated by Satjipto Rahardjo, where the law must provide real protection for the interests of children, including the right to religious identity and religious education. In addition, considerations regarding the child's economic welfare and education (15.8%), the length of time the child has been in the applicant's care (10.5%), as well as the positive recommendation from the Social Service and the consent of the biological parents show that the court does not solely adhere to the normative aspect, but also pays attention to the factual conditions and emotional relationships that have been built.

From the perspective of the theory of legal pluralism, the judge's consideration pattern shows the interaction between state law, religious values, and the social reality that lives in North Sumatra society. As stated [9]. North Sumatra is a "living laboratory" of legal pluralism, where judges not only act as implementers of positive legal norms, but also as interpreters of social and cultural values. The flexibility of the verdict in the case of the adoption of a child of different religions reflects the court's efforts to balance the normative provisions of laws and regulations with real social and humanitarian needs. In addition, the court's tendency to grant the adoption of children of different religions can also be analyzed through restorative justice theory. In this context, adoption is seen as a mechanism to restore the child's right to a decent, safe, and caring family environment, especially for children who are abandoned or have been in the applicant's care for a long time. While still requiring respect for the religious identity of children, the court seeks to restore a balance between the needs of child protection and the religious sensitivities of the community [17]. Overall, empirical data for the 2022–2024 period show that judicial practices in North Sumatra have moved towards a more contextual and child-oriented approach. Despite the restrictive legal norms, courts tend to prioritize the principles of child protection, legal pluralism, restorative justice, and multiculturalism in deciding cases of adoption of children of different religions.

These findings reinforce the view [18] that courts in North Sumatra take a pragmatic and humanist approach in handling cases of adoption of children of different religions, by making the welfare and rights of children the main starting point. The adoption of interfaith children in North Sumatra has complex juridical implications because it involves the meeting of state law, religious law, and social values that live in society. From the perspective of legal pluralism theory, this practice of adoption cannot be understood singularly based on positive legal norms, but rather as the result of interaction and negotiation between various legal systems. This can be seen in the regulation of the legal status of adopted children who create a new legal relationship with adoptive parents, but are still limited by the provisions of certain religious laws, especially related to inheritance [19].

In the context of North Sumatra, the court seeks to balance the legal relationship while maintaining the child's religious identity and blood relationship with the biological parents. The application of legal protection theory is clearly seen in judicial practice which consistently includes a clause to protect children's identities in determining the adoption of children of different religions. Stipulation Number 32/Pdt.P/2023/PN.Mdn, for example, emphasizes that child adoption does not change the religious status of children and requires adoptive parents to respect and facilitate the implementation of children's worship in accordance with the religion they adhere. This clause reflects the progressive legal view as stated by Satjipto Rahardjo, that the law must be present to protect human interests, in this case children as vulnerable subjects of law. Other juridical implications relate to the inheritance rights of adopted children of

different religions. In the perspective of the Civil Code, adopted children do not automatically become the heirs of adoptive parents, except through the appointment of a will.

However, the practice of jurisprudence in North Sumatra shows a more responsive development through the application of *the concept of mandatory wills*. Based on a study by the Faculty of Law, University of North Sumatra (2023), as many as 85% of inheritance disputes involving adopted children of different religions are resolved by giving a share of the property through a mandatory will. This practice reflects the application of restorative justice theory, where the law functions to restore the economic rights of children without causing conflict with the provisions of religious law that apply to adoptive parents. In addition, the obligation to maintain the child's religion is a very prominent juridical implication in every decision to adopt a child of different religions. All applications granted during the 2022–2024 period require the obligation of adoptive parents to educate children in accordance with their religion of origin.

This provision shows that the court explicitly internalizes the principle of the best interests of the child, which is not only interpreted as the fulfillment of material needs, but also the protection of the child's cultural and religious identity [1]. [1]In the social context, the adoption of children of different religions in North Sumatra reflects the dynamics of a multicultural society characterized by ethnic and religious diversity. Based on the theory of multiculturalism, interfaith adoption families can be understood as a social space that allows for the learning of tolerance and appreciation for differences. Findings from the Center for Socio-Religious Studies of the University of North Sumatra (2023) show that 73% of interfaith adoptive families develop patterns of religious accommodation, where different religious practices can coexist in domestic life.

This pattern shows that religious differences are not always a source of conflict, but can be managed through dialogue and mutual understanding. From the perspective of the theory of the best interests for children, the process of identity adjustment experienced by children adopted by different religions is part of the dynamics of psychosocial development that needs serious attention. Empirical data shows that although 58% of children experience a phase of identity confusion in adolescence, the majority of them (83%) are able to develop a healthy self-identity in early adulthood with proper family support. This confirms that the success of the adoption of children of different religions is highly dependent on the quality of parenting and the sensitivity of adoptive parents to the psychological and spiritual needs of children. Other social implications can be seen in the process of adapting adoptive families to the community environment.

The difference in acceptance rates between urban (87%) and rural (64%) areas shows that socio-cultural factors and the level of community openness have a significant effect on the success of adoption family integration. This phenomenon strengthens the thesis of legal and social pluralism, where local social and religious norms also determine the legitimacy of the practice of adopting children of different religions in the eyes of the public [20]. In addition, the adoption of children of different religions also encourages the birth of adaptive and innovative religious education models. The findings that 68% of families send their children to religious educational institutions according to their religion, while others combine formal and informal education, reflect the application of restorative justice in the social sphere. Adoptive parents not only fulfill their legal obligations, but also seek to restore and maintain the child's right to religious education in accordance with his or her identity. Thus, the adoption of interfaith children in North Sumatra not only has juridical implications, but also contributes to the formation of social practices that are more inclusive and oriented towards the protection and welfare of children.

Legal Harmonization in the Settlement of Cases of Adoption of Interfaith Children in North Sumatra

Legal harmonization efforts in the settlement of interfaith child adoption cases in North Sumatra show a development that is increasingly oriented towards the Theory of the Best Interests for Children (*the best interest of the child*). The court no longer positions the law in a purely formalistic manner, but rather places the welfare of the child as the main consideration. This is in line with the view [21] which affirms that the best interests of children include not only the fulfillment of physical and educational needs, but also the protection of children's cultural and religious identities. Statement [22] that courts in North Sumatra developed a contextual approach reinforce the finding that judges are increasingly internalizing this principle in their legal considerations. Data from the North Sumatra High Court for the 2022–2024 period shows a paradigm shift from a procedural approach to a substantive approach based on children's rights and human rights. This shift reflects the application of Legal Protection Theory as proposed by Satjipto Rahardjo, where law is understood as an instrument to protect the interests of vulnerable groups, including children. In the context of the adoption of interfaith children, legal protection is not only realized through the ratification of the legal status of children in the adoptive family, but also through ensuring the sustainability of the child's religious identity and relationship with his or her biological family. Furthermore, judicial practice in North Sumatra also reflects the strength of the Theory of Legal Pluralism. As stated by [23]. North Sumatra is a space of interaction between state law, customary law, and religious law. This is reflected in Determination Number 18/Pdt.P/2023/PN.Pms, where the Pematangsiantar District Court not only bases the decision on national laws and regulations, but also considers local customary values and religious norms that live in the community.

This approach shows the court's efforts to avoid conflict of norms and build harmony between legal systems in the practice of adopting children of different religions. From the perspective of Restorative Justice Theory, legal harmonization in the adoption of children of different religions can be understood as an effort to restore the child's right to grow up in a proper family environment without losing his or her identity of origin. [24] affirms that restorative justice in this context is not oriented towards punishment or uniformity, but rather on restoring the best conditions for children. The determination of additional requirements in the form of the obligation of adoptive parents to ensure religious education according to the child's religion as found in 76% of cases according to the North Sumatra Legal Aid Institute (2023) is a concrete form of implementing restorative justice centered on the needs and rights of children. In addition, the harmonization of laws can also be analyzed through the Theory of Multiculturalism. The practice of adopting interfaith children in North Sumatra reflects the dynamics of a multicultural society that demands tolerance, respect for differences, and the coexistence of diverse values.

[4] states that the adoptive family in the context of different religions becomes a multicultural learning space, both for children and adoptive parents. Thus, the court not only plays a role as a law enforcer, but also as a social actor that encourages the formation of social harmony in a plural society. Overall, legal harmonization in the settlement of interfaith child adoption cases in North Sumatra shows a relatively balanced integration between the principles of the best interests of children, legal pluralism, restorative justice, multiculturalism, and legal protection. This approach shows that the law is not rigidly positioned, but adaptive to the social realities and needs of the child, so that the adoption of children of different religions is not only legally legal, but also socially just and humanly meaningful.

4. Conclusion

The adoption of children of different religions from the perspective of the Civil Code with a regional focus in North Sumatra shows the complexity between legal norms, social values, and the cultural and religious

diversity of the community. Based on the Civil Code, child adoption emphasizes more on civil aspects such as inheritance and family relations, without clarifying the provisions regarding religious differences between adoptive parents and adopted children. This creates a legal vacuum that has the potential to cause conflict, especially in the midst of a multicultural society like North Sumatra. From a juridical perspective, interfaith adoption has not been strictly regulated, so its implementation depends on the interpretation of judges, as well as policies from the local judicial institution or social service. In practice, although the adoption of a child of different religions is possible, it often faces administrative obstacles, rejection from extended families, or conflicts of religious norms. Socially, the adoption of different religions in North Sumatra has various implications, both positive and negative. On the one hand, this practice shows the existence of a spirit of humanity that transcends religious barriers. On the other hand, it can cause stigma, social pressure, and challenges in the formation of a child's identity. Religious differences can also affect the parenting process, religious education, and inheritance of cultural values in the family. Therefore, a more comprehensive and contextual legal reform is needed, which is able to accommodate the diversity of Indonesian society, especially related to sensitive issues such as interfaith adoption. In addition, an interdisciplinary approach involving legal, social, and religious aspects is important to ensure the best interests of the child as the main subject in the adoption process.

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