

## **Root and Impacts of Child Marriage in Dayak Dense-populated Villages**

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**Abstract:** *This paper aims to identify the root of early marriage in Dayak dense-populated villages and its impacts on economic, social, health, and cultural aspects of the brides in ten districts in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. A set of semi structural questions were offered to 250 respondents grouped into three clusters, namely the doers of child marriage, parrents of married children, and official/social leaders. The results show that early marriages were committed due to lack of reproductive and sexual health knowledge amongst teenagers and taboo view forgiving sex-related information to teenagers. We highlight five important points in order to reduce rate of child marriage and related problems come from it. First, the need of a comprehensive reproductive and sexual health education for teenagers. Second, synergizing the thought local stakeholders, primarily traditional and religious leaders in campaigning reproductive and sexual health. Third, synchronizing Marriage Law and Child Protection Law. Fourth, improving the awareness of legal marriages, so that the married couple getting equal certainty before the law and state recognition. Fifth, rising up the awareness of legal marriage*

**Keywords:** *child marriage, early age, health, reproduction, sex education*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Child marriage is counted as human right violation and could cause serious impacts to both phisycal and psychological health of parents and the children born from that marriage (Delprato and Akyeampong, 2017; Adhikari, 2018). Child marriage happens throughout the world and remains get less attention from governments in developed and developing countries (Robles, 2018). Study by Veen, Moorten and Durani (2018) finds that most of child marriage decision in India took by parents of the bridal for family-affair reason. Field and Ambrus (2008) mention some consequences of early marriage in Bangladesh, namely high school drop outs, family subordination, domestic violence risk, lack of control over reproductive health, and high maternal mortality opportunities. Ababa (2006) also shows the negative impact of early marriage in Ethiopia, among others: marital instability, low health status, low education and drop out, too many children, inequalities of women's status and child welfare. In other words, early marriage brings social, economic and health impacts both in the short and long term. Quite similar findings also revealed in some places in Indonesia, such as in Deli Sedang, Sumatera (Naibaho, 2014), West Java (Mahfudin and Waqi'ah, 2016), Malinau, Kalimantan (Sardi, 2016), and Manado, Sulawesi (Desiyanti, 2015).

Basic Health Research by the Ministry of Health of Indonesia (2013) revealed that first married among women at age less than 15 years old was about 2.6%, and at age 15-19 years old was about 23.9%. This means about 26% of underage women have been married before their reproductive organ functions optimally developed. In ASEAN region, rate of early marriages in Indonesia is the second highest after Cambodia. This early marriage needs serious attention because it results in the loss of the rights of girls, such as education, play, protection, security and so on, including the impact on their reproductive health.

Legally marriage is legitimized by Marriage Law (Government of Indonesia, 1974). The Law allows 16-year-old girls to marry, as mentioned in article 7, "Marriage is only permitted if the man has reached 19 (nineteen) years, and women have reached 16 (sixteen) years." For almost 30 years this law has been legalized children marriage until the Government of Indonesia (2002) passed Law number 23 on Children Protection. Article 26 of this law states that parents are required to protect children from early marriage. But this law does not mention any punishment to whom against it, so that the provision is almost meaningless in protecting children from the threat of early marriage. Weak supervision and law enforcement in Indonesia, providing a gap for anyone, including parents, government officials, groups and communities to falsify citizenship document,

especially concerning on age. Hence, it is not surprising that many girls are often married off under the age of 16 years.

Other study by the Center for Population and Policy Studies UGM (2011) on *Early Marriage Practices in Indonesia* in eight regencies reveals that average age of first marriage for women was 16 years old. The impact of early marriage according to the study, among others is related to reproductive health. Almost in all study areas, girls who mate at a young age have the potential for high-risk pregnancies. Another impact felt by girls who mate at a young age is the presence of mental health threats. Girls often experience stress when leaving their family and are responsible for their own family. In addition, early marriage also brings a bad impact for girls as vulnerable as domestic violence. According to research, about 44% of girls who do early marriage experienced domestic violence with high frequency level. The remaining 56% of girls experience domestic violence in low frequency. In addition to high rates of domestic violence, early marriage also affects the reproductive health of girls. Girls at aged 10-14 are likely to die five times more, during pregnancy or childbirth, than women at age of 20-25 year. It shows that child marriage positions women in vulnerable groups associated with reproductive health and sexuality.

Those studies, however, report early marriage practices and its impact in quite advanced communities. Our understanding on child marriage in ethnic communities still limited, although we know that parents' influence over children in ethnic community are greater than the advanced one. Based on this point, this study aims to understand the root and impacts of early marriage in local ethnic in Indonesia, namely Dayak ethnic, to marriage couple, and to provide policy recommendations related to reproductive and sexual health education for adolescents.

## **II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

According to Article 7 of Marriage Law it is legal for 16-year-old girls to marry. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), defines early marriage as marriage that occurs under the age of 18. Yet this formal legal definition still leaves the question of what age range a person really can be called a child and what kind of relationship a marriage might be.

The definition of marriage is a social contract recognized by the state, religious authority, or both (Douglas, Doe, Gilliat-Ray, Sandberg, and Khan, 2011). One definition, for example, mentions that marriage is a formal bond between men and women who are legally recognized as husbands and wives. In the context of Indonesia, marriages are regulated by the state through the Marriage Law. In this case, marriage is defined as the inner birth bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife in order to form a happy and peaceful family (Government of Indonesia, 1974).

Although religion or custom are considered valid, but marriages conducted outside the knowledge and supervision of the marriage certificate officer and are not registered, have no legal force and are considered invalid in the eyes of law. The Indonesian legal system does not recognize the term 'under marriage' or marriage based on religious rules and such and does not specify in regulation. Sociologically, however, this term is given to unregistered marriages and is deemed to be done without complying with the applicable laws, particularly on the registration of marriages set forth in the Marriage Law.

Early marriage -often called child marriage- is a traditional practice that has long been known and widespread throughout the world. Leeson and Suarez (2017) note two patterns of early marriage, i.e. marrying girls to adult males and matching boys with women by parents of both children. A study conducted by Choe, Thapa and Achmad (2001) revealed that the majority of women in Indonesia who married before the age of 18 thought they were married too early. Most admitted that they were married because of the wishes of parents. In this study, early marriage is defined as marriage done under the age of 18, before the girls are physically, physiologically and psychologically ready to assume the responsibilities of marriage and parenting.

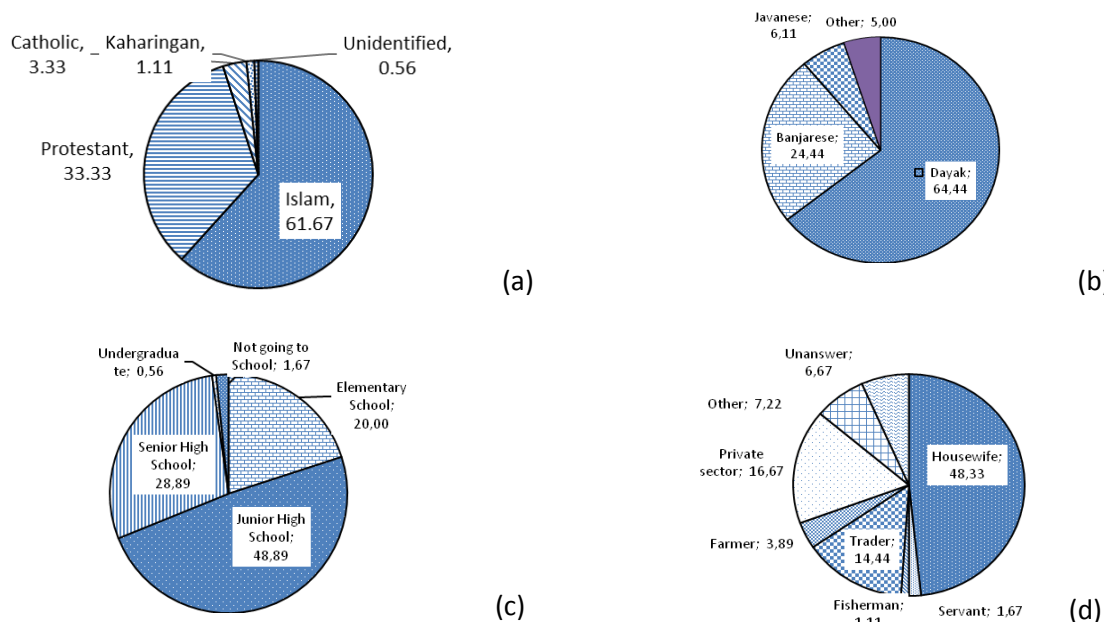
## **III. METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are conducted so that researchers can understand more in the perspective of research informants as well as the socio-cultural context in each research area (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). In this case, the research was conducted in ten districts in Central Kalimantan province, namely Kapuas, Palangka Raya, North Barito, Lamandau, Gunung Mas, Sampit, Pangkalan Bun, Kuala Pembuang, Katingan, and Pulang Pisau. Determination of the location of this study was selected based on child marriage rates provided by the Ministry of Health.

For qualitative data collection, in-depth interviews were conducted on adolescents who engaged in young marriages, adolescent parents, religious/community leaders, local government, community social organizations, principals/teachers, heads of religious affair office/civil records, health workers and health authorities, with 60 minute interview time (Baxter and Eyles, 1999). In-depth interviews were conducted to explore information related to cultural norms, sexuality, reproductive health issues and adolescent sexuality, the

causes of child marriage, and the economic, social, health and cultural impacts of early marriage issues in the study sites.

As many 250 respondents grouped into three clusters were interviewed. They are including 180 respondents who did child marriage, 47 parents of married children, and 23 key informants. Profile of subjects of child marriage are given in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Profile of married children based on (a) Religion, (b) Ethnic, (c) Education, (d) Occupation

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Socio-Cultural Context in Research Areas

Based on the demographic status of Central Kalimantan Province, unplanned pregnancy occurred at age of 15-19 years as many as 28.16%, less than 10 years as many as 4.53% (Government of Palangka Raya, 2016). The maternal mortality rate (MMR) reported in 2015 was 80 cases, decreased from 101 cases in 2014. The trends in maternal deaths in recent years are slightly fluctuating. The highest number of maternal deaths is in Katingan District (14 cases), followed by Kapuas (13 cases), Sampit (11 cases), Pulang Pisau and Kuala Pembuang (6 cases), Pangkalan Bun and Lamandau (5 cases), Palangka Raya and Gunung (3 cases) and North Barito (1 case).

There were no reports of pregnancy aborted from all unplanned pregnancy events. Based on data of maternal deaths recorded in 2016 during January to November, the maternal mortality rate in Palangka Raya Municipality was recorded at 3 persons, and this figure is still likely to increase considering national target number of maternal mortality is not more than 102 events (Antara, 2015). Thus, maternal mortality (MMR) is not only occur in 'rural' areas, but also in developing (advanced) city such as Palangka Raya.

In 2016 total infant deaths amounted to 306 cases, significantly decreased from 377 cases in 2014. The district with the lowest number of infant mortality is Katingan (6 cases) and Pulang Pisau (7 cases), while the highest one is in Sampit (73 cases), followed by Kapuas (58 cases), Pangkalan Bun (49 cases), Kuala Pembuang (34 cases), Lamandau (21 cases), North Barito (20 cases), Gunung Mas and Palangka Raya (each 19 cases).

### 4.2. Trigger of Early Marriage

#### 4.2.1. Educational factors

Interviews with married-children confirm that the main cause of child marriage is misunderstanding of reproductive health. According to them, there was no any information on reproductive health, and it is taboo to discuss. Teenagers were then getting stuck in difficult situation. When it was too late, what happens later is like a domino effect, i.e. an unwanted pregnancy, dropping out of school because of embarrassment or being forced to resign by the school for violating the prevailing school rules. In addition, physical and psychological unpreparedness to parent can cause children born to be abandoned, malnourished, and socioeconomically affect the increase in hidden unemployment and create a new cycle of poverty.

Unwanted pregnancy due to lack of understanding of reproductive health that occurs in children is one of the main factors of early marriage. The lack of proper information disclosure makes teenagers unaware of the

risk of choice in determining what happens to their reproduction. Here are excerpts of interviews with children married at an early age.

*"The first time of ML (making love) is for trial and error because many friends said that it was pleasure. I don't know if it was risky. They said that first ML will not lead to pregnancy"(In-depth interview, N. Adolescent married at an early age, in Palangka Raya, May 15, 2018).*

Some girls admit that they had first intercourse to pleasure their boyfriends and as a form of service and loyalty. One respondent testified:

*"I did not want to have sex with my boyfriend. But he kept pushing and said that I have to prove my words. I ended up obeying because I was afraid of being cut off. Moreover, he said that making love once or twice is the common in courtship "(In-depth interview, R. Teenage Women, Sampit).*

Another risky behavior is the presumption that premarital sex with multiple partners, especially for boys is a pride and symbol of masculinity in their age. This is revealed from interview with young woman who is not married young in Pangkalan Bun. She said:

*"A boy may have ML with different girls, he proud of himself and become arrogant when he did it with a rich girl. He told his friend and felt that he is like a popular man. The cute girl is usually more closed. She is ashamed when people know she did it, and she becomes so depend on the guy". (In-depth interview, E. Women Youth unmarried early age, Sampit).*

Risky sex is closely related to lack of knowledge or education regarding reproductive and sexual health. The danger of risky sex behavior coupled with the ease of getting information through smart phone. The use of social media makes children easily to make friends with people they do not know, and none can halt it. Unfortunately, access to negative content is so easy and fast, while at the same time supervision from the family or school very limited. Proper reproductive health knowledge is still considered taboo, and it makes children have no sufficient information on function of their own reproductive organ.

Another factor triggering early marriage is level of education. Access to education is still being the problems. Although the government promoting scholarship program or low-cost school fees, the transportation cost to get that school is frequently unreachable for many families. One informant in Sampit said:

*"I do not go to school anymore because the school is far away. School fee is inexpensive, but transportation cost to go there is expensive. In this village there is only one junior high school (SLTP), so if you want to go to high school you must move to the city. My parents unable to fund me to go to high school, and they said that going to elementary school is enough". (In-depth interview, T. married early, Sampit).*

#### **4.2.2. Poverty**

Economic factors are motivated by the reasons of poverty is one of the causes of early marriage. Generally this factor occurs due to matchmaking or dropping out of school because it does not have the cost for education. This is almost the case throughout the study area. In Pangkalan Bun, there are more educational priorities for boys, especially when parents have limited ability to send their children to school so that girls are married off as soon as possible to reduce the economic burden. According to some community leaders, boys are not only getting priority education until high school but also looking for work. The reason for the parents to marry off their children is because the non-permanent income is also low in the characteristic areas of the farmer's family group and in the rural areas.

#### **4.2.3. Tradition/custom/religion**

Another factor that causes early marriage is cultural factors of tradition, custom, or religion. Information on reproductive health is regarded as something taboo, pornographic, and sinful. This became one of the reasons for the early marriage. In this case the gray talk about issues related to reproductive health education and sexuality in children to be one cause children do not understand about reproductive and sexual health so want to try and find out for themselves from other media such as internet (porn video), in addition to schools, teachers and parents. This is stated because they do not get complete information and sometimes get stigmatized and at the same time experience the refusal to talk about.

*"I'm a bit embarrassed to talk about it because I myself do not understand and confused to talk about. I think it was given in school by the teacher and it is more appropriate for them to explain and get an explanation from the teacher than our parents who are foolish about it ". (In-depth interview, parents, Sampit).*

It was found that the notion of early marriage became one of the best solutions for undesirable pregnancy and avoidance of sin, and the public "talk" of the status of the child being born later. On the island of Hanaut Sampit area there are habits or traditions abstinence refuse an application because it will complicate the child's future mate. So it becomes a reason to marry off children at an early age. While large areas of research, except Palangka Raya and Katingan, girls are considered "spinster" if not married before the age of 18 years and this will be gossip among the community. In addition, there is the assumption that religion allows young married to avoid adultery and this became one of the factors driving the legalization of early marriage.

### **4.3. The Impact of the Early Age Marriage**

#### **4.3.1. Economic Impacts**

Early marriage often creates a new 'cycle of poverty'. In common, teenagers at age of  $\leq 15-16$  years have not having good job or enough income for finance their new families. Private sectors in Indonesia usually ask the applicants to provide senior high school (SMA) certificate when they applied a position in the company. Unfortunately, married children usually dropped out from the school when they married, so they can't hold any certificate from school. This causes married children depend on the family, especially the parents of the male (husband). As a result, parents have a double burden, in addition to living the family; they also have to support new family members. This condition will take place in a repetitive manner from one generation to the next so that structural poverty will form. The economic impacts as above are found in all research sites. The condition would be better if the male partner is much older and has a fairly education, so has a decent job and income to support the family.

#### **4.3.2. Social Impacts**

Married children have more potential of divorce and having affair with friends. Their unstable emotion also makes them easily to quarrel while facing even only a petty problem. The argument often raised for divorce by conflicting couple among others is to avoid domestic/sexual violence. Other social impacts such as incest and sexual assault also often ended with illegal abortion. There are also cases where teenagers with unwanted pregnancies had to be moved out of their social environment, then married off, and eventually forced to give birth. In this case, they become less acceptable (discriminated) by both their own family and their social environment.

#### **4.3.3. Health Impact (Reproduction and Sexual)**

Young married are at risk of being unprepared for childbirth and caring for children and when they have an abortion, potentially performing unsafe abortions that could endanger the safety of the baby and mother to death. Early marriage also has the potential for violence by the partner and in the event of an unwanted pregnancy, tending to cover up the pregnancy then not get adequate health care pregnancy care. Meanwhile, according to data from Sampit Health Office, maternal mortality cases occur between the ages of 20-23 years and it is suspected that they are women who have early marriage, although the record in the Health Office is not recorded at their marriage age.

Meanwhile, in the health sector, infant mortality rate in Sampit, although not up but still the highest category in Central Kalimantan. One of the causes of high rates of infant mortality is low weight due to malnutrition. According to the results of interviews with the Department of Maternal and Child Health, in Central Kalimantan Province one of the significant impact of early marriage is that young mothers do not know or do not understand the problem of pregnancy, so that sometimes children born become malnourished to cause low body weight and eventually died after birth. In addition, maternal mortality is also one of the effects of early marriage.

#### **4.3.4. Psychological Impact**

Psychological impacts are also found in whole study area where couples are mentally unprepared for changing roles and facing domestic problems. Lot of domestic violence often ended with divorce, and caused traumatic syndrome to the girls. One respondent in Sampit said:

*"I am desperate and traumatized by marriage because I was once pulled down, and my head was banged on the door. I cried, but he did not release me, until my mother-in-law helped to persuade him to stop torturing me. I then went home on foot to my parents' house. I don't want to see him again because I was traumatized and scared. Now I feel hopeless and feel have no future. I quit school and work in the kiosk. My child is cared by my mother."*

In addition, girls who are married at early age and experiencing an unwanted pregnancy will tend to be inferior, confined, and not confident. Their personality is split when they have to behave as mother or wife and at the same time want to play with their school mate.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

We highlight five important points in order to reduce the rate of child marriage and related problems come from it. First, it is necessary to give teenagers a comprehensive reproductive and sexual health education.

Second, the need for community synergy with community organizations and government agencies. Reproductive and sexual health education can also be supported by the use of community and religious organizations, such as religious studies, devotional, family welfare development, school committee, provincial national family planning welfare board or community health centers and other government programs.

Third, strengthening the role of traditional and religious leaders.

Fourth, review Act No. 1 of 1974 on Marriage and Law No.23 Year 2002 on Child Protection. Related to this, the two laws have differences regarding the minimum age of marriage so that sometimes the community becomes confused and instead use one of the Act (Act No.1 of 1974 about marriage) to legalize early marriage. Ideally, government regulations give certainty to public and not to cause confusion and certainly see various important aspects not only from a health point of view but also in terms of economics, education, psychological, and others

Fifth, rising up the awareness of legal marriage, so that the legal power as a citizen or individual is recognized by the State.

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