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An Empirical Study in Indonesia of Girl Child Marriage Determinants

By Mia Hadiati¹, Mella Ismelia Farma Rahayu², Amad Sudiro³

Abstract

Despite increasing socioeconomic development in Indonesia the issue of child marriages remains prevalent among teenage females. To date, there have not been any nationally representative studies examining child marriage determinants via multivariate regression modeling in Indonesia. The following study used data from the 2019 Indonesian Population and Health Survey and the Teenage Reproductive Health Survey to estimate the determinants of child marriage and marital expectations. Multivariate simulations were carried out in order to approximate the association between demographic and socioeconomic characteristics and the following early marriage outcomes: 1) often married or cohabited, 2) married or cohabited before 19 years, 3) married or cohabited before 16 years, 4) self-reported marital age preferences and 5) behaviours that approve female child marriage. Among the child marriage research group, 17 percent reported being married before the age of 19 and 6 percent before 16 years of age (n = 6578, females aged 20-24 at the time of the survey). At approximately 26 years, the average respondent supported marriage, and 5 percent approved of child marriage (n = 8779, unmarried females 15-24). Schooling, wages and media participation have beneficial effects on marriage results, whereas rural residency is a risk factor. There are significant regional differences, reflecting the locations of geographically disparate religious, racial, and social elements. The following study addresses a gap in the knowledge of the Indonesian determinants of child marriage. There seems to be little tolerance for child marriage by girls and young people, suggesting an entry point for systemic interventions that might contribute to lasting progress. Future projects should point to cost-effectiveness factors and assist the government and women activists in understanding programs and strategies that can halt child marriage in Indonesia. Society should prioritize vigorous testing of gender-transformative education and methods for economic improvement.

Keywords: Child marriage, Transformations for youth, Social determinants

Introduction

Child marriage is a breach of human rights; initiatives to eradicate gender-based violence, improve education, overcome discrimination, and raise health indicators for girls and children are often hampered (Paul, 2020). In Indonesia, child brides are sometimes forced into early sexual relations and thus into early childbearing (Horii, 2021). As a consequence of adolescent childbirth, young girls are in danger of contracting life-threatening or debilitating

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injuries, such as obstetric fistula and hemorrhaging, or even death (Seff et al., 2020). According to UNICEF data, married girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are more likely to die from pregnancy and birth complications than women between the ages of 20 and 24 (Miedema, Koster, & Pouw, 2020). These young girls are also more vulnerable to life-threatening illnesses. They are often married to older men who have an elevated chance of being HIV positive or have developed other sexually transmitted diseases (Rumble et al., 2020). Research by Wodon, Nguyen, and Tsimpo (2016) observes that when a girl is removed from school and compelled to marry young, her mental development is stunted. As a child-bride she has no power, and thus has no decision-making capabilities. Many child brides are uneducated and unqualified and rely solely on their husbands and families-in-law for survival (John, Edmeades, Murithi, & Barre, 2019). Child marriage also deprives girls of the essential skills needed to enter the job market, often leaving them in poverty (Male & Wodon, 2018). Removing girls from school and forcing them into early marriage ensures that the ensuing trauma will be perpetuated for decades to come (Scobie & France, 2020).

Child marriage is a significant health and human rights problem in many low and middle-income countries (LMICs). One in six young girls worldwide is married or cohabiting between the ages of 15 and 19, and as many as 700 million girls were married in 2014 as child brides (United Nations Children's Fund, 2014; Grose, Chen, Roof, Rachel, & Yount, 2021). Global research shows that child marriage exposes young girls to an elevated risk of maternal mortality (Al-Hakami & McLaughlin, 2016; Wodon, Malé, & Onagoruwa, 2019; Sharma et al., 2020). Complications linked with breastfeeding while still in puberty are among the leading causes of death among adolescent girls (Gibbs, Wendt, Peters, & Hogue, 2012). It is also more likely that children born to adolescent mothers have poor nutritional and other health related issues (Raj & Boehmer, 2013). Five selected LMICs analyses showed that infants whose mothers were 19 or younger at birth had a 20% to 30% higher chance of premature birth and low birth weight (Fall et al., 2015). Married girls are also at higher risk of dropping out of school (Fall et al., 2016) and can face an increased risk of violence from intimate partners (Brown, 2012). The United Nations General Assembly in September 2019 prioritised the elimination of all practices that pose specific risk of harm to women and children, including child marriage (Target 5.3, Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations - SDGs) (Peterman, Bleck, & Palermo, 2015). In 2030 policymakers will need detailed scientific data on the incidence of child marriage in their countries and its social determinants to advise appropriate program funding and policy responses (Kidman, 2017).

In most nations, especially LMICs, there is very little data on the prevalence of child marriage or other cultural practices detrimental to young girls (United Nations General Assembly, 2019). Even less information is available with regards to (context-specific) systemic and behavioral determinants, although some research is emerging. Child marriage appears to be more common in LMICs rather than high-income nations (Evenhius & Burn, 2014). Unequal gender roles encourage child marriage. Research has shown that countries and societies with substantial gender disparities are more likely to have a high incidence of child marriage (e.g., laws and practices that exclude girls from decision-making or economic and political rights). Education provision is a major factor globally and in studies of South Asian communities, with child brides consistently receiving lower levels of education than women marrying above 19 years of age (Malhotra, Warner, McGonagle, & Lee-Rife, 2011). According to Maswikwa et al. (2015), the implementation of minimum marriage age laws is one step towards preventing child marriage. Financial insecurity and rural residence increase the likelihood of child marriage. However, it should be noted that most research on the determinants of child marriage is associational making it difficult to develop a causal link between contextual variables and adverse child marriage outcomes.

The bulk of child marriage observational studies have concentrated on countries in South Asia and Africa, where the majority of women marry before 19 years of age (Petroni, Steinhaus, Fenn, Stoebenau, & Gregowski, 2017; McDougal et al., 2020; Muchomba, 2021). By contrast there has been very little research conducted on this subject in relation to Southeast Asia. Most Indonesian research is confined to a specific geographical area, and there is no evidence or analysis available for national representation. Approximately 17 percent of Indonesian girls are marrying before the age of 19, according to the national Demographic Health Survey (DHS) conducted in 2012 (Wibowo, Ratnaningsih, Goodwin, Ulum, & Minnick, 2020). According to UNICEF, Indonesia is ranked intermediate among countries for marriage before the age of 19 in East Asia and Pacific region, with Laos and the Solomon Islands ranked highest at 37% and 28.3%, respectively, and Mongolia and Vietnam ranking lowest at 6.2% and 12.3% respectively (Baumont, Wandasari, Agastya, Findley, & Kusumaningrum, 2020). However, Indonesia features extensive child marriage practices due to the large population and is a major contributor to the global incidence of child brides, low education and poverty being the largest contributing factors to the high number of underage marriages in Indonesia (Wismayanti, O'Leary, Tilbury, & Tjoe, 2019). In 2019, the National Statistics Bureau and UNICEF Indonesia report showed that child marriage is associated with rurality, inadequate living standards, and households with lower expenditure levels, all of which are linked to poverty (Boothby & Stark, 2011). However, there is insufficient research available to understand the considerable variation in child marriage rates across the nation, even within districts and provinces.

Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim community in the world, with more than 255 million inhabitants. Geographically and culturally diverse, the nation has emerged as a significant economic and political force. Although the LMIC status is still applicable, annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth in recent years has averaged nearly 6% (Judiasih, Rubiati, Yuanitasari, Salim, & Safira, 2020). Despite these developments, there are a host of significant problems facing children in Indonesia. Studies have found that up to half of Indonesian children are living in poverty. Under-five mortality is steadily improving and currently stands at 40 deaths per 1000 live births, although there are much higher rates in some eastern provinces. Stunting among children under five remains prevalent, at approximately 37 percent (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2019a). Maternal mortality is at 359 fatalities per 100,000 live births and is rising (UNICEF, 2019). The Committee of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has urged the Government of Indonesia to take immediate steps to provide better protection for young girls against all forms of abuse, including child marriage (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2014). Although Indonesia ratified the UNCRC in 1990, its laws protecting children against child marriage are inconsistent. The Child Protection Legislation of 2002, for example, bans any child from marrying until 18 years of age, but marriage legislation allows religious courts to provide dispensation opportunities, encouraging parents to marry off their children at a younger age, even without explicit permission. Families can usually opt to conform to Indonesia's cultural rule (tradition), where the meanings of minimum age for marriage and consent differ significantly with the numerous systems and regions in Indonesia. Conventional cultural attitudes towards gender and the position of women can also impact child marriage. One analysis from 2020 found that many parents regard it as necessary to prepare young girls for marriage as a solution against rape (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2019b).

This study examines nationally representative Indonesian data to investigate social factors forecasting child marriage patterns among a sample of women aged 20 to 24 to inform policies and programs. As Indonesia experiences a significant instance of child marriage, Indonesia's understanding of child marriage determinants is relevant to the nation's global

dynamics. However, in pursuing sustainable growth for its inhabitants, women and children also face significant challenges. A multidimensional approach to understanding and addressing child marriage is required. This study makes a valuable contribution to the research currently available in two ways; to date, this is the first analysis to utilize a multivariate review of large-scale nationally representative outcomes of child marriage determinants. Since Indonesia is a diverse country, it is relevant, from a policy perspective, to place smaller-scale findings and regionally-specific findings within a national context. Further, there is minimal longitudinal analysis of marital preferences and attitudes available, yet child marriage patterns are believed to be perpetuated at the social stage. Therefore it is helpful to consider what observable fundamental factors are associated with preferences and negative attitudes among unmarried young people. There follows a focus on the potential of political and social programs in reducing child violence rates and reflections on a study agenda to inform initiatives for ending child marriage.

Methodology

This research is a combination of normative legal research and empirical legal research. Research materials that are used in this study includes secondary data as well as primary data. Secondary data is data that comes from library materials, while primary data is data obtained directly from research subjects. Secondary data is data that comes from library materials, while primary data is data obtained directly from research subjects. Through library research, we obtain secondary data and legal materials. Data obtained in the literature research is secondary data in the form of rules or norms, legal principles, legal rules, and legal systematics. Secondary data in this study were obtained from library materials related to problems, which are contained among others in primary legal materials, secondary legal materials, as well as tertiary legal materials. The method of collecting data was through reference to documented materials. We obtained primary data directly from samples/subjects research.

This research was conducted using various approaches according to the object study to be investigated. The approach used is sociological, namely research in the form of empirical studies and legislation. The types of data used include: First, secondary data, which is collected through traced legal documents and second, primary data taken directly through field studies using observational techniques and interviews. The method of collecting data in this field research is by interviewing the sample/subject of the researcher.

Discussion

In Indonesia, based on United Nations Children's Fund data, child marriage incidence distribution and proportion of deprived people in all Indonesian provinces of the proportion of women aged 20-24 years who were married as child-brides and whose households have required food assistance, such as Non-Cash Food Assistance (NCFA) from the government, is higher (46.95 percent) than those who married at 19 and over (38.71 percent). Figure 1 shows that the largest proportion of women in the 20-24 age range who married as child-brides continues to derive from disadvantaged households entitled to social assistance. Birth certificate ownership for children born to women aged 20-24 whose first marriage was marginally higher than 19 years of age stands at 51.42% compared with children born to women aged 20-24 who were significantly older than 19 years of age at first marriage (48.33 percent). Around 12 percent of child brides were unable to provide their child's certificate, even though they appeared to have one. There are currently 36.3% of children who do not have birth certificates, and 0.36% who do not know whether or not they have a birth certificate. The same trend is often seen for children born to women aged 20-24 years whose marital age is 19 years

and over. Around 48.33 percent of this group's children have and may produce birth records. Then about 39.30 percent of children who do not have birth certificates are already there.

A report from National Population and Family Planning Board (2017) explained that The Adolescent Reproductive Health component (ARH) survey's average desired marriage age is 25.6 years (ranging from age 17 to age 50). Approximately 5% of the sample reported that females should typically marry before the age of 19, suggesting a relatively small percentage of the selection reported as endorsing child marriage. Most women had at least some secondary education (50 percent had some secondary education, 38.4 percent had more than secondary education), 11.5 percent had some primary education or had completed it, and less than 1 percent had no education. The Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) from the National Population and Family Planning Board (2017) also provides statistics for media consumption among unmarried women, with about 86 percent of women reported watching TV at least once a week, 31 percent listening to the radio, and 20 percent reading a newspaper or magazine. Around 42 percent of the study participants lived in a rural area.

The following research provides a graphical representation of provincial metrics to explain the composite elements of Indonesia's performance. The study presents means for the entire survey, followed by means for each section sorted in terms of our lead predictor, child marriage, from highest to lowest prevalence (married before 19 years). Figure 1 indicates that child marriage prevalence (solid grey bar) ranges from a high of 36 percent in Papua to a low of 6 percent in Yogyakarta. Eighteen regions have child marriage rates above 20 percent (or 1 in 5 males), with Papua, West Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, and Central Kalimantan reporting the highest prevalence (all above 30 percent). Related patterns are accompanied by the prevalence of marriage before the age of 16 (solid black bar), with the most prolific instances being situated in Papua (19 percent), West Papua (15 percent), West Sulawesi (14 percent), and Jambi (13 percent). The incidence of marriage before the age of 16 is almost non-existent in the provinces (Yogyakarta, Bali, and Aceh, all under 2 percent). The prevalence of stable marriages (shaded bar) ranged from 76% in Jambi to 35% in East Nusa Tenggara and did not always follow the same pattern as the age-specific markers of child marriage. The regional difference in registering under 19 as a preferred age of marriage varies from 15% in West Sulawesi to less than 1% in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and the Riau Islands, then shifting areas endorsing child marriage among the population. Finally, there was relatively little difference in the chosen marriage age, fluctuating from 24 to 27 years. Overall, there seem to be substantial variations in terms of findings across the regions when disaggregated by provinces with limited sample sizes.

marrying girls off. Economic capital has proved an influential factor, with the likelihood of early marriage less for affluent families. With higher quintiles, this effect usually increased in magnitude. Women in quintiles 2 and 3 were 4 pp less likely to be married or cohabiting before 19 years of age as opposed to the poorest households (first quintile), whereas women in quintiles 4 and 5 were 7 and 11 pp less likely to be married or cohabiting before 19 years. In general, media reportage was beneficial, but it is possible that these tests are heavily co-linear and that only stable marriages gain joint significance. Rural aversion was a risk factor in both models: rural females were 2-11 pp more likely than urban equivalents to be married early (before 16 and 19 years of age, respectively). Provincial fixed effects were collectively important across all models, reflecting the importance of residence and other geographical contextual determinants, such as religious and ethnic diversity.

This study compared the mean descriptive measurements of our sample that reported having married or cohabited before the age of 19 with those who reported having married or cohabited at or after the age of 19 to contextualize married young people's circumstances. Weighted means for five proxy marital equity and match consistency indicators were found: (1) average age at first marriage or cohabitation; (2) where the age difference between spouses is greater than five years; (3) where a spouse has received only partial schooling; (4) whether or not a partner has been unemployed in the last 12 months; and (5) a summary indication of the left by partner. In the literature, women's decision-making questions are mostly used as a surrogate test for female intra-household bargaining power, although the number and extent of operationalized problems differ throughout the survey (van den Bold, Quisumbing, & Gillespie, 2013). The findings of the mean difference analyses found that women who marry or cohabit before 19 years of age had unequal marital relationships in three out of five cases than their counterparts who marry or cohabit at or after 19 years of age. 16% of early-married or cohabiting women had little premarital education compared to 6% of later-married or cohabiting women. The proportion of women in the former group with a difference of more than five years of age between partners (approximately 58 percent) was especially striking, relative to women in the latter group (38 percent). However, in terms of the spouse being unemployed or not working and female decision-making control, there was little disparity. This may be due to the percentage of non-working participants being very low on average (< 2%), with women being involved in a high number of decisions (3.3 on average out of 4). Since marriage equality and efficiency are multidimensional and are expected to differ by cultural context, decisive proxy steps will capture additional disparities. Nonetheless, the comprehensive study found that structural determinants impact participant age at the time of marriage and cohabitation and indirectly lead to higher inequality between partners in child marriage.

Marital Desires and Behavior Determinants

The research results confirmed the marital age choice of young single women and behaviours endorsing child marriage. Age was a powerful indicator of marital age preference, as predicted, with older unmarried women more likely to report a higher age preference. Higher levels of education (especially post-secondary education) have also been related to higher marriage age preferences. Income was not a major indicator of marriage age choice, except in the highest wealth quintile (raising the preferred age of marriage by 0.19 years). Media engagement did not show any direct correlation with marriage age preference; higher marriage age preference is minimally linked to interaction with newspapers and magazines (by 0.11 years), whereas other forms of media had no substantial impact. Finally, rural residency, similar to child marriage, was linked to lower marriage age preference (by 0.21 years). Analysis of the prevalence and determinants of negative behaviours implying that women are less than 19 (child marriage) at the best age of marriage, using probit models was then undertaken. Age was

not found to be associated with child marriage behaviours. However, it was more likely that women with lower qualifications and women in rural areas shared the attitude that child marriage is appropriate. Household capital was significantly influential, and there was no substantial attention to newspapers in this group. As in previous DHS studies, there were jointly significant provincial fixed effects in both models, reflecting the importance of residence and other geographically systemic determinants.

This research highlights the increasing evidence of child marriage in both Southeast Asia and internationally. Our findings indicate that in Indonesia a substantial percentage of women continue to adhere to child marriage and cohabitation conditions, putting young mothers and their children at serious risk. It was found that many of the same vulnerability and pro-active variables are significant predictors of child marriage-related outcomes. Evidence indicates that education is a good preventive factor against child marriage and various other negative marital preferences and attitudes in Indonesia. These results suggest that policies facilitating the completion of secondary education by young girls will lead to substantial decreases in instances of child marriage. The preventative impact of urban residence and income as opposed to rurally based factors affirm and draw on other Indonesian studies results (UNICEF, 2015), and indicate that further commitment is being made by the government and partners in social security and poverty eradication. Low income households may consider child marriage to be economically advantageous in the short term. However, it does not boost families' long-term economic status or provide financial stability, due to the lack of financial resources of married girls and unemployed young women (Marinescu & Triyana, 2016). Indeed, Indonesian women are less likely than men to have ever worked for pay, and women are more likely to work longer hours than men (Kalamar, Lee-Rife, & Hindin, 2016). This means that child marriage is expected to maintain or intensify poverty in Indonesia rather than mitigate it. Importantly, our results suggest that single women (aged 15 to 24) almost unanimously oppose child marriage and would prefer to enter into relationships as adults. It is reflective of a rising norm and may discourage the practice of child marriage. These results provide convincing evidence in support of Indonesia's more comprehensive prevention of child marriage, including the possible constitutional reform of the Indonesian Marriage Statute.

There are drawbacks for the current study due to the necessarily retrospective nature of the review. Although the information provided is cross-sectional, we were unable to monitor respondents to investigate whether variables apparent at earlier ages are causally related to later marriage outcomes or whether early marriage is triggered by unforeseen detrimental later-life health or well-being outcomes. For example, while education is a preventive factor for child marriage and should continue to be encouraged, it is essential to investigate the relationship between marriage and education further to inform programming choices adequately. Although it seems that women who are able to access comprehensive schooling are generally shielded from child marriage, on the other hand child marriage is also a cause for leaving school. Results show that the greater number of siblings a young female has when growing up decreases the likelihood of child marriage, which is counterintuitive and merits further study as it may be an element of co-linearity with other omitted variables. Therefore, there may be important risk factors that we are currently unable to define, such as religious and ethnic diversity or societal gender stereotypes. Despite these restrictions, the data is geographically representative and will inform comprehensive policy and programming recommendations based on necessary population-level dynamic assessments.

Conclusion

The practice of child marriage is still rampant. In fact, child marriage is one of the most complicated social problems in Indonesia, complex and multi-dimensional. Child marriage, for both present and future generations, has lifelong negative consequences. This study shows that similar systemic factors are significant in predicting child marriage and resultant attitudes. Our research shows that the Indonesian government, the private sector, and civil society partners prioritize secondary education for both girls and boys and ensure that social security funding meets the most impoverished households. In this regard, Indonesia's Village Law offers incentives to utilize local government services by allocating large amounts of social welfare funds (up to IDR 1 billion) per village. This allocation is influenced by strong civil society voices and facts about child marriage, including measures to combat it. Opportunities relevant to increasing girls' access to preventive measures such as economic stability, must also be addressed globally, following good practice. The government and other authorities, including religious and cultural leaders, can also initiate public awareness programs, and community participation must be ensured to encourage the rights of young girls, to tackle gender discrimination, and the trauma of child marriage. In addition, this campaign can take advantage of the awareness that most of the population has strong views regarding marriage before 19 years of age. Therefore, the gender objectives of the SDGs and the global 2030 agenda are each fundamental in the elimination of child marriage practices. Although the Indonesian government has implemented the SDG goals to fulfill the 2030 agenda, the government is taking bold steps to place equality, particularly girls' rights and security, at the center of future growth initiatives. Rigorous testing of gender-transformative education and approaches to economic strengthening should be prioritized in future research activities, including cost-effectiveness factors to help understand how interventions and policies can be implemented to terminate child marriage in Indonesia and globally.

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