

## Impact and Direction of Policy on Addressing Early Marriage in Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keyword:</p> <p>Early marriage; Public policy; Gender inequality; Education access; Social empowerment</p>	<p>This study aims to analyze the impact of early marriage in Indonesia and formulate effective policy directions to address the phenomenon. This study uses a qualitative approach with content analysis of official documents such as BPS data and policy reports to holistically understand the phenomenon of early marriage in Indonesia. This approach identifies patterns, trends, and key themes to support the formulation of effective evidence-based policies. The findings of the study indicate that early marriage causes various problems such as low levels of education, poverty, high rates of domestic violence, and health risks for mothers and children. In addition, weaknesses in policy implementation, such as a lack of supervision of violations of marriage age rules, are significant obstacles. The conclusions of this study emphasize the need for holistic public policies to prevent early marriage, including strengthening access to education for girls, empowering women economically, and more effective law enforcement. Community-based approaches, such as cultural counseling and community advocacy programs, are also recommended to address social norms that support this practice. With synergy between the government, civil society organizations, and the private sector, it is hoped that the resulting policies can create structural changes that protect children's rights, reduce gender inequality, and encourage inclusive social development.</p>

### INTRODUCTION

Early marriage, which often occurs due to parental encouragement, environmental pressure, or the unpreparedness of teenagers to face free association, significantly impacts the quality of household life. In adolescence, individuals are still searching for their identity, with emotional and mental stability that is not yet fully mature. As a result, early marriage often gives rise to household conflicts such as domestic violence (KDRT), disputes, and even divorce. The unpreparedness of couples to manage emotional stress and carry out household responsibilities is often the root of this problem (Malik et al., 2022; Nabila et al., 2022).

Public policy refers to a series of actions the government takes to solve social, economic, or political problems affecting society (Monroe, 1998). This policy is designed to provide systematic and targeted solutions, involving various related sectors, and considering the needs and interests of the community (Head, 2022). The main objectives of public policy are to create general welfare, improve the quality of life, and solve structural or urgent problems (Head, 2022; McGregor et al., 2009; Utami et al., 2022). In the context of early marriage, public policy is needed to address the negative impacts caused, such as health problems, education, and gender

inequality, as well as to ensure protection for girls, reduce its prevalence, and create better opportunities for future generations (Alfafan et al., 2022; Wahhaj, 2022).

In the context of public policy, early marriage requires serious attention, especially regarding prevention and intervention. The government can develop policies that focus on increasing adolescent education access, including education on reproductive health and social norms (Anam, 2024; Khan et al., 2024). In addition, educational campaigns in the community about the negative impacts of early marriage on the quality of life and family welfare can change perceptions and prevent this practice (Suleman et al., 2023). An approach that involves various stakeholders, such as religious institutions, community organizations, and local governments, is essential to strengthen prevention efforts.

Early marriage is also often influenced by economic and social factors, such as poverty and limited education. Families with challenging economic conditions tend to see early marriage as a solution to reduce the burden of dependents. Unfortunately, this decision often sacrifices children's future in terms of education and economic opportunities (Ehsan et al., 2021; Thelma et al., 2023). Therefore, policies supporting the economic empowerment of low-income families, such as skills training programs and financial assistance, can significantly reduce the number of early marriages.

Strengthening the family through an educational and empowerment approach is very important as a long-term solution. Every prospective couple must be equipped with a deep understanding of the roles and responsibilities in the family, including physical, mental, and economic preparation, before entering the marriage stage (Litawati Lioe, 2023). Policies that encourage family education based on religious and social values can create a generation more aware of the importance of building a harmonious and prosperous household, so that early marriage can be gradually suppressed.

Early marriage in Indonesia is a phenomenon that is still a serious challenge, especially in areas with high poverty rates, low education, and strong cultural influences. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the rate of early marriage tends to be higher in rural areas than in urban areas, with economic reasons, tradition, and lack of access to education being the main factors. This practice has significant long-term impacts, such as increased risk of dropping out of school, vulnerable maternal and child health, and intergenerational poverty. In addition, early marriage often leads to household conflict, emotional instability, and divorce because the couple is not yet physically, mentally, and socially mature enough to live a family life.

Research on early marriage generally focuses on individual aspects, such as psychological, social, and health impacts on young couples (Herliana et al., 2018; Nhampona & Maritz, 2024). However, there are limitations in the analysis that connect this problem with relevant public policies to prevent or reduce the phenomenon. The phenomenon of early marriage is greatly influenced by social, cultural, economic, and technological factors. However, there are not many studies that discuss holistic public policy-based solutions that take local conditions into account. This study offers novelty by providing policy recommendations. In addition, this study proposes a multi-stakeholder approach that involves various parties, such as local governments, religious leaders, community organizations, and educational institutions, in designing sustainable preventive and intervention campaigns. To address economic factors as the primary trigger, empowerment programs for low-income families through skills training and access to economic opportunities are also the focus of the policy. Social and religious value-based approaches are also integrated to build public awareness of the importance of physical, mental, and economic readiness in building harmonious and prosperous families.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach to deeply understand the phenomenon of early marriage in Indonesia in general, focusing on the social, economic, and cultural aspects that influence the practice. This approach aims to explore the meanings, patterns, and dynamics hidden behind the available data to provide a comprehensive picture of the problem being studied. Qualitative research allows researchers to analyze phenomena holistically, by adjusting

the analysis to the local and regional contexts relevant to early marriage in Indonesia. The primary data sources in this study are documentation in the form of official government reports, such as data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), ministerial policy reports, and national survey results related to the issue of early marriage. This documentation was chosen because it is valid, reliable, and can provide a national perspective on early marriage in Indonesia. The data was analyzed using content analysis techniques, which allowed researchers to identify patterns, trends, and central themes in these documents. By relying on official documentation sources, this study ensures data accuracy and supports the formulation of evidence-based public policies to address the problem of early marriage in Indonesia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Early marriage in Indonesia

Early marriage in Indonesia is a phenomenon that is still a major challenge, with ongoing impacts on the quality of life of individuals and families. This not only affects the physical and mental health of young couples, but also the social and economic stability of society. Discussion on early marriage is very important to formulate effective prevention policies, to protect children's rights and build a healthier and more empowered generation.

**Table 1.** Information regarding child marriage in Indonesia 2023

Aspect	Information
Indonesia's Ranking	Ranked 4th in global child marriage
Number of Cases	25.53 million cases
Percentage	1 in 9 girls gets married and has children before the age of 18

*Source: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2023*

Table 1 presents important information on child marriage in Indonesia in 2023. Indonesia ranks fourth in terms of global child marriage, with the number of cases reaching 25.53 million (Eko, 2023). This phenomenon is very worrying, considering that around one in nine girls in Indonesia are married and have children before reaching the age of 18. This figure reflects the magnitude of the challenges faced in efforts to prevent child marriage, which not only impacts the physical and mental health of children but also worsens poverty and gender inequality. This data underscores the need for serious action and collaboration between sectors to address this problem.

**Table 2.** Child marriage figures in the last three years and achievement of RPJMN targets

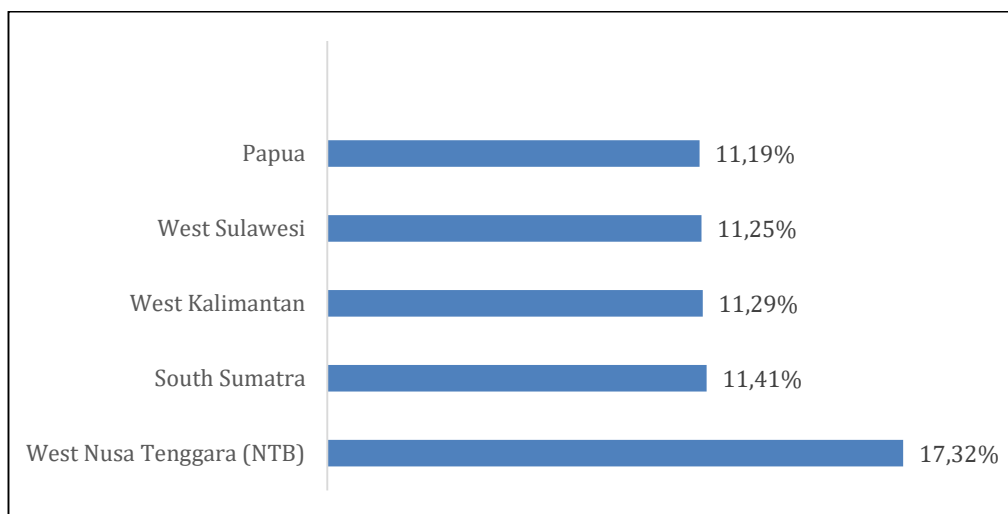
Year	Child Marriage Rate	RPJMN Target	Remarks
2021	9.23%	-	Decrease from 10.35%
2022	8.06%	-	Further decrease
2023	6.92%	8.74%	Exceeded the 2024 RPJMN target
2024 (Target)	-	8.74%	RPJMN target

*Source: Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, 2024*

The number of child marriages in Indonesia has decreased significantly in the last three years. In 2021, the number of child marriages was recorded at 9.23%, down from 10.35% in the previous year. The decline continued in 2022 to 8.06%; in 2023, it reached 6.92%. This figure exceeded the target set in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), targeted at 8.74% in 2024 (Menteri PPPA, 2022). However, efforts to eliminate child marriage must continue to be carried out consistently by all parties, both the government and development partners. As part of this effort, the government has prepared a Practical Guide for the

Implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Child Marriage (STRANAS PPA) in the regions to accelerate the achievement of this goal.

The Indonesian government has successfully exceeded the target for reducing child marriage set in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), achieving 6.92 percent in 2023, exceeding the target set at 8.74 percent. This achievement demonstrates the government’s commitment to addressing social issues related to child marriage, which have long-term impacts on the quality of life and welfare of girls. To continue this success, the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection (Kemen PPPA), together with the Coordinating Ministry for Human Development and Culture (Kemenko PMK) and the Ministry of PPN/Bappenas, supported by development partners, launched the Practical Guidelines for Implementing the National Strategy for Preventing Child Marriage (STRANAS PPA). This guide aims to provide more precise and more effective direction for local governments to implement policies to prevent child marriage and strengthen collaborative efforts between the government, communities, and related sectors.



**Figure 1.** Top 5 provinces with the highest early marriages in Indonesia in 2023

*Source: Central Statistics Agency, 2023*

Figure 1 shows the five provinces in Indonesia with the highest proportion of early marriage in 2023. West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) Province is in first place with a figure of 17.32%, indicating a significant level of early marriage. Followed by South Sumatra with a proportion of 11.41%, West Kalimantan 11.29%, West Sulawesi 11.25%, and Papua with a figure of 11.19% (Fatika, 2024). These figures reflect the significant challenges related to the practice of early marriage that still occurs in several regions in Indonesia, which are often influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors.

Early marriage in these provinces not only impacts the physical and mental health of girls but also contributes to gender inequality and limited access to education and economic opportunities for them. The government and various organizations need to work together to reduce the number of early marriages through various interventions focusing on women’s empowerment, increasing public awareness, and policies supporting education and poverty alleviation. Success in reducing early marriage rates in these provinces depends heavily on commitment and collaboration between the government, communities, and the private sector.

Early marriage in Indonesia remains a significant challenge that requires serious attention from various parties. Although the number of child marriages has decreased significantly in recent years and has exceeded the target set in the RPJMN, there are still significant challenges in several provinces that show high numbers. Therefore, prevention efforts must continue to be carried out consistently with an approach that involves the government, society, and related sectors. Cross-sector collaboration and implementing more effective policies, such as the Practical Guidelines for the Implementation of STRANAS PPA, are the keys to creating more significant and sustainable changes in reducing early marriage in Indonesia.

**The impact of early marriage in Indonesia**

Knowing the impact of early marriage is essential to raise public awareness of the serious consequences that can arise, both in terms of health, psychology, and education. This understanding can encourage more effective preventive measures and policies that support the welfare of girls in Indonesia.

**Table 3.** The impact of early marriage in Indonesia

<b>Impact</b>	<b>Type of Impact</b>
Health	- Risk of pregnancy and childbirth complications
	- Risk of anemia and malnutrition
	- Risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS
	- Risk of osteoporosis
	- Risk of cervical cancer
Psychological	- Higher risk of maternal death during childbirth
	- Stress, depression, and serious mental health issues
	- Baby blues, anxiety, and difficulty bonding with the baby
Education	- Suicidal thoughts or desire to harm the baby
	- Inability to pursue higher education
Others	- Lack of self-confidence in social environments
	- Domestic violence and divorce

*Source: Processed by researchers, 2024*

Early marriage has severe health impacts on girls, especially related to complications in pregnancy and childbirth. Teenagers who become pregnant at a young age are at higher risk of anemia and malnutrition, which can affect the health of the mother and fetus. In addition, they are also vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS, due to their physical and mental unpreparedness to face a healthy sexual life. The risk of osteoporosis also increases due to hormonal changes that occur during pregnancy, while cervical cancer can develop more quickly in young women who marry and give birth. The high risk of death during childbirth at a young age shows the need for serious attention to health protection for girls trapped in early marriage.

Early marriage not only has an impact on physical health, but also causes a heavy psychological burden for adolescent girls. They often face stress and depression due to emotional pressure arising from the responsibilities of being a wife and mother at a young age. This condition can worsen other mental problems, such as baby blues and anxiety, as well as difficulty in building an emotional bond with their babies. More serious psychological impacts can include suicidal thoughts or even harming the baby, reflecting the depth of the emotional crisis experienced by those trapped in early marriage.

Early marriage has a significant impact on the education of adolescent girls, as they are often forced to drop out of school to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. As a result, many cannot continue their education to a higher level, reducing their chances of gaining the skills and knowledge needed for the future. In addition, early marriage can also lower their self-confidence in their environment, as they are often seen as different from their peers who are still focused on education and personal development, thus exacerbating gender inequality and narrowing their opportunities in social and economic life.

Early marriage also increases the risk of domestic violence (DV), as young couples are often not emotionally, psychologically, or socially prepared to deal with the dynamics of marriage. Immaturity in communicating and managing conflict can lead to tension, injustice, and abuse of power in relationships. Furthermore, instability in marriages that begin at a young age often leads to divorce, which not only adds to the emotional burden for the couple but also negatively impacts the children involved, with the potential for further psychological and social disorders.

Early marriage has a very detrimental impact on adolescent girls, both in terms of their physical health, psychology, education, and social life. The risk of serious health complications,

such as anemia, malnutrition, sexually transmitted infections, and death during childbirth, is very high for those who become pregnant at a young age. Psychologically, they often experience stress, depression, and other emotional disorders that can harm their well-being and relationships with their children. Regarding education, early marriage prevents them from continuing their studies and developing themselves. No less importantly, early marriage also triggers domestic violence and divorce, which further worsens their emotional and social conditions. Therefore, serious and coordinated efforts are needed to prevent early marriage and protect the rights of girls in Indonesia.

### ***Public policy in addressing early marriage in Indonesia***

Public policies to address early marriage are essential to protect children's rights and ensure sustainable social development. Early marriage has the potential to cause various negative impacts, both physically, psychologically, educationally, and socially, which can harm individuals and society. Therefore, public policies are needed to regulate and implement adequate preventive measures, such as improving education, empowering women, health education, and stricter law enforcement. The right policies can create social change that supports child protection, reduces gender inequality, and opens wider access for girls to education and better life opportunities.

Public policies to address early marriage must be based on a deep understanding of the phenomenon's root causes. In Indonesia, cultural, social, economic, and gender inequality factors are often the main drivers of early marriage. Many girls, especially in rural or less developed areas, are forced to marry at a young age due to social norms that view marriage as a solution to avoid shame or as a way to maintain family honor. Therefore, public policies must address the cultural factors that support this practice by taking a more inclusive approach through programs that involve families and communities as agents of change.

In addition, public policy should strengthen the education system throughout Indonesia, especially for girls. Providing quality and affordable education can be an effective preventive solution in reducing the number of early marriages. The government needs to ensure that girls have access to basic education and are encouraged to continue to higher levels. Limited access to education is often a trigger for early marriage, as many girls feel they have no other options to improve their fate. Therefore, education policies that prioritize inclusivity and gender equality are essential to breaking the cycle of poverty and inequality that is rooted in early marriage.

Integrating aspects of women's empowerment into broader public policies is also important. Women's empowerment is related to education and increasing access to decent work, skills training, and active participation in political and social decision-making. Women who have stronger economic and social positions will be better able to oppose early marriage and provide better life choices for themselves and their children. Women's empowerment policies must be supported by clear and firm protection mechanisms, so that women can feel safe and protected from social pressures or violence that they may face in their families or communities.

In addition, stricter law enforcement against early marriage practices is also a crucial step. Although Indonesia has regulations prohibiting underage marriage, implementation and monitoring of these regulations are often weak. The government needs to ensure an effective system to identify and handle cases of early marriage and provide strict sanctions for violators. In addition, the role of law enforcement officers in educating the public about the dangers of early marriage and the rights of girls must be strengthened so that the public better understands the importance of protecting girls from early marriage. Overall, effective public policies to address early marriage should not only focus on preventing marriage itself, but also on changing the social structures that support the practice. The government needs to work with non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and the wider community to create a more supportive environment for girls, where they have the opportunity to develop without social pressure to marry at a young age.

## CONCLUSION

Early marriage in Indonesia is a significant challenge that has far-reaching impacts on the health, psychological, educational, and social well-being of girls. This practice increases the risk of serious health complications, such as anemia, malnutrition, sexually transmitted infections, and death during childbirth. It triggers stress and depression due to the pressure of heavy responsibilities. In addition, early marriage often forces adolescent girls to leave education, reducing their opportunities in social and economic life, and exacerbating gender inequality. Although the number of early marriages has shown a significant decline, especially with the achievement exceeding the 2024 RPJMN target, prevention efforts must continue to be strengthened through collaborative and empowerment-based policies to protect children's rights and create a healthier and more empowered generation.

Public policies to address early marriage in Indonesia should focus on comprehensive efforts that include education, empowerment, and law enforcement, while addressing the social, cultural, and economic root causes that support the practice. Strategic steps include increasing access to quality education for girls, especially in rural areas, to prevent them from dropping out of school and opening up opportunities for a better life. Women's empowerment programs should be integrated to increase economic independence and decision-making skills, so that women are not trapped in the cycle of poverty that triggers early marriage. In addition, law enforcement against violations of laws related to the age of marriage must be strengthened with consistent supervision and strict sanctions, accompanied by public education about the dangers of early marriage and the importance of protecting children's rights. With collaboration between the government, non-governmental organizations, and local communities, these public policies can create significant social change and a brighter future for future generations.

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