

Implementation of the Regional Regulation on the Child Protection System in Mamasa Regency: A Case Study in Balla District

Alfrian R^{1*}, Andi Nur Fiqhi Utami², Husniah³, Pahrudin. M⁴, Farhanuddin⁵, Andi Patotori Arismunandar⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5}Universitas Sulawesi Barat, Indonesia

⁶Universitas Puangrimaggalatung, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: alfrianrandangayang12@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keyword:</p> <p>Policy implementation; Regional regulation; Early marriage; Child protection; Children's rights</p>	<p>This research was conducted in Balla District, Mamasa Regency. The purpose of this study was to determine how the implementation of West Sulawesi Provincial Regulation Number 1 of 2020 in preventing early marriage in Balla District. The research method used is a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation methods. The theory used in this study is guided by the theory of George C. Edward III who put forward 4 factors that influence the failure and success of a policy implementation, namely communication, resources, disposition, bureaucratic structure. The results of the study show that, the Principles put forward by George C. Edward III used by the author to examine how the implementation of West Sulawesi Provincial Regulation Number 1 of 2020 in preventing early marriage in Balla District found that of the four indicators were not fully effective. This can be seen from the existence of one indicator, namely the resource indicator where existing resources are still limited, especially at the village level, and facilities and infrastructure are not available either at the DPPP, KUA or the village level due to budget limitations. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the implementation of West Sulawesi Provincial Regulation Number 1 of 2020 in preventing early marriage in Balla District, Mamasa Regency is not yet fully effective.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The Child Protection System constitutes an integrated mechanism designed to ensure the fulfillment of children's rights and to protect them from all forms of violence, exploitation, neglect, discrimination, and practices that may hinder their growth and development, including child marriage (Amir-Behghadami & Farhang, 2026; Grant, 2026; Güzel & Beserek, 2026; Krutzinna et al., 2026; Wilson, 2026). The effectiveness of this system depends not only on the existence of appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks, but also on the synergy among government institutions, families, communities, educational and religious institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations (Irfan et al., 2026; Mohsi et al., 2025; Rosyadi et al., 2025). Accordingly, child protection should be regarded as a shared responsibility, implemented through

comprehensive policies, responsive services, continuous education, and effective monitoring to ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow, develop, participate, and live safely in accordance with his or her rights.

Within the framework of sustainable development, the Child Protection System serves as a fundamental pillar for fostering high-quality and competitive human resources (Bălăuță et al., 2019; El Husseiny et al., 2021; Lonne et al., 2013). Its implementation requires robust institutional governance, effective cross-sectoral coordination, adequate resources, and active community participation throughout all stages of implementation (Iskandar et al., 2026; Wilson, 2026; Zhu et al., 2025). Furthermore, policies should be continuously evaluated and strengthened to adapt to the evolving social, cultural, economic, and technological dynamics affecting children's lives. Thus, the Child Protection System functions not only as a legal instrument of protection but also as a social development strategy aimed at creating an inclusive, safe, and enabling environment for the realization of the rights and well-being of every child.

Marriage is one of the most significant events in human life, establishing a legal and social bond between two individuals. Under Law Number 1 of 1974, as amended by Law Number 16 of 2019, marriage is defined as a physical and spiritual union between a man and a woman as husband and wife, with the purpose of forming a happy and enduring family based on belief in the One Almighty God. In practice, however, marriage does not always conform to prevailing legal provisions and social norms. One persistent and serious concern is child marriage. According to UNICEF (2014), child marriage refers to a union in which one or both parties are under the age of 18 years. This practice constitutes a violation of children's rights, as it may deprive children of fundamental rights, including the rights to education, health, and optimal development. The consequences of child marriage are multifaceted, encompassing psychological, social, economic, and health dimensions. Girls who marry at an early age, for instance, face heightened risks of early pregnancy, obstetric complications, anemia, and maternal and infant mortality. They are also more vulnerable to domestic violence and often encounter difficulties in adapting to their new roles as wives and mothers before reaching emotional and psychological maturity.

Globally, child marriage has become a major concern for international organizations, including the United Nations and UNICEF. More than 650 million women worldwide are estimated to have married before the age of 18, with the majority of cases occurring in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Siddiqi & Greene, 2022). In Indonesia, this phenomenon remains alarming. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection indicate that the number of child marriage cases increased from 23,700 in 2019 to 34,000 in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the situation, as many families married off their children due to economic hardship, unintended pregnancies, and concerns about premarital relationships. Legally, the Indonesian government has established the minimum age for marriage through Law Number 16 of 2019 amending Law Number 1 of 1974 on Marriage. Article 7 paragraph (1) stipulates that marriage is permissible only when both men and women have reached the age of 19 years. This provision aims to protect children from early marriage. Nevertheless, the law also allows parents to seek judicial dispensation to marry off children below the prescribed age under urgent circumstances. In practice, such dispensations have frequently become a loophole through which child marriages continue to occur.

The phenomenon of child marriage is also evident in West Sulawesi Province, particularly in Mamasa Regency. According to data from the Regional Office for Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DP3A) of Mamasa Regency, the number of child marriage cases has risen significantly: 23 cases were recorded in 2022, 26 in 2023, and 46 in 2024. Balla District is among the areas with the highest incidence, accounting for 14 cases distributed across several villages, including Bambapuang, Sepakuan, Balla Tumuka, West Balla, and Pidara. This upward trend suggests that government policies aimed at reducing child marriage have not yet achieved the desired effectiveness. In response, the Government of West Sulawesi Province enacted Regional

Regulation Number 1 of 2020, amending Regional Regulation Number 3 of 2013 concerning the Child Protection System.

This regulation sets forth measures to prevent child marriage through the involvement of parents, communities, and other stakeholders. However, its implementation has encountered numerous challenges, including limited public outreach, shortages of human and financial resources, and weak interagency coordination. These implementation issues warrant scholarly attention because policy success depends not only on the quality of the regulation itself but also on the effectiveness of its execution. To examine these issues, this study employs George C. Edward III's policy implementation framework, which identifies four principal determinants of successful implementation: communication, resources, implementers' disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Through this theoretical lens, the study seeks to assess the extent to which these factors shape the implementation of West Sulawesi Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2020 in Balla District.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the implementation of West Sulawesi Provincial Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2020 on the Child Protection System in preventing child marriage in Balla District, Mamasa Regency. The analysis is conducted from the perspective of George C. Edward III's policy implementation theory, encompassing the dimensions of communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure. It is expected that the study will identify the factors that facilitate and hinder policy implementation and provide strategic recommendations for strengthening the Child Protection System so that efforts to prevent child marriage may be carried out more effectively, comprehensively, and sustainably.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of West Sulawesi Provincial Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2020 concerning the Child Protection System in Mamasa Regency, with a particular focus on Balla District. This approach was selected because it facilitates the exploration of policy implementation processes, interactions among actors, and the various factors influencing both the successes and challenges of implementation in real-world settings. The study was conducted in Balla District due to its distinctive social and geographical characteristics, which make it a relevant site for examining how child protection policies are implemented at the local level. Research informants were purposively selected based on their involvement in and knowledge of policy implementation and included officials from the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (PPPA), the Head of the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), village heads, and other individuals considered to possess essential information regarding the operation of the child protection system in the study area.

Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observation was employed to obtain an overview of field conditions and the implementation of child protection programs, while in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the experiences, perceptions, and roles of stakeholders in implementing the policy. Document analysis involved reviewing relevant supporting materials, including laws and regulations, activity reports, institutional data, and administrative records related to child protection. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of analysis, consisting of data reduction, data display, and the iterative drawing and verification of conclusions until valid and comprehensive findings were obtained. To enhance the credibility of the findings, source and methodological triangulation were applied by comparing information from different informants and corroborating interview data with observational and documentary evidence, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

West Sulawesi Governor Regulation Number 1 of 2020 officially came into force in Mamuju on 20 January 2020 and was enacted by the Governor of West Sulawesi, H. M. Ali Baal Masdar, with formal promulgation by the Provincial Secretariat's Bureau of Law on the same date. In this study, the authors engaged a range of stakeholders to examine the extent to which the regulation has been implemented and to identify obstacles encountered in its execution, particularly in relation to efforts to prevent child marriage. Regional governments are vested with the authority to regulate and administer governmental affairs in accordance with the principles of regional autonomy and delegated functions. One manifestation of this authority is the issuance of policies aimed at preventing child marriage in West Sulawesi, especially in Balla District, Mamasa Regency. Such policies may take the form of regional regulations, regent regulations, or equivalent legal instruments pursuant to Law Number 12 of 2011 on the Formulation of Legislation. Article 4 of the Governor Regulation stipulates that the prevention of child marriage must be undertaken collaboratively by local government, parents, children, communities, and other stakeholders. A key actor in this effort is the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DP3A), which actively advocated for the enactment of the regulation to mitigate the adverse consequences of child marriage. These consequences extend beyond maternal and child health to encompass educational attainment and the broader socioeconomic conditions of society.

As part of its implementation strategy, the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection of Mamasa Regency has conducted outreach and awareness programs to enhance public understanding of the importance of delaying marriage. These initiatives also seek to transform community perceptions that continue to regard early marriage as socially acceptable. One notable approach has been the empowerment of the Children's Forum as peer counselors, thereby facilitating the dissemination of information among younger age groups. This strategy has been implemented in collaboration with related sectors to maximize effectiveness. In addition, the agency coordinates programs with other institutions to prevent duplication, promote budget efficiency, facilitate evaluation, and ensure that interventions remain aligned with the objective of preventing child marriage. The agency also provides support services for children who have already entered into marriage at an early age so that they continue to receive protection.

The Office of Religious Affairs (KUA) likewise plays a pivotal role, as it is responsible for the registration of marriages. According to an interview with the Head of the Balla District KUA, the office is committed to rejecting marriage applications involving prospective spouses under the age of 19, in accordance with prevailing regulations. Field findings indicate that government agencies have undertaken a variety of measures to reduce the incidence of child marriage. These efforts are consistent with Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, which affirms the obligations of the state, local governments, communities, families, and parents to safeguard children's rights and ensure their optimal growth and development free from violence and discrimination. Nevertheless, child protection measures remain less than fully effective. Many children still lack opportunities commensurate with their needs across various domains. Consequently, child protection efforts must be grounded in human rights principles, namely respect for, fulfillment of, and protection of children's rights. Although implementation strategies vary, their common objective is to educate children and parents regarding the adverse consequences of child marriage. Evidence from the field further reveals that many community members remain insufficiently informed about the substance and objectives of child protection regulations.

To assess the implementation of West Sulawesi Provincial Regulation Number 1 of 2020 on the Child Protection System in Balla District, Mamasa Regency, this study employs George C. Edward III's policy implementation framework, which comprises four dimensions: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure.

Communication

With regard to the prevention of child marriage in Balla District, it can be concluded that the implementation of the policy, particularly in the dimension of communication, has been actively pursued by the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DPPA), the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), and village governments. These stakeholders have sought to convey information in a clear, consistent, and participatory manner so that the objectives of the policy are understood and accepted by the community. The Mamasa Regency DPPA has conducted awareness campaigns in schools and within the wider community, involving religious leaders, customary leaders, and community figures as part of a participatory communication strategy. In addition, the agency provides counseling to underage prospective spouses before issuing marriage recommendations, thereby serving both preventive and educational functions.

The KUA of Balla District has further supported these efforts through cross-sectoral dissemination of information in collaboration with the Health Office and the National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN), while also utilizing social media and routine community meetings. Village governments in areas such as West Balla, Balla Tumuka, East Balla, Sepakuan, Pidara, Satanetean, and Bambapuang have consistently delivered appeals and educational messages during both formal and informal gatherings, including church services, wedding ceremonies, integrated health service posts, and customary events. Moreover, family planning cadres and family planning villages have been effectively mobilized to reach residents at the hamlet level. Overall, communication strategies for implementing the child marriage prevention policy have relied on direct, collaborative, and culturally grounded approaches, demonstrating that effective communication constitutes a critical element of successful policy implementation at the grassroots level.

The findings indicate that the communication dimension of the child marriage prevention policy has been implemented effectively through the provision of clear, consistent, and sustained information to the public. Collaboration among the DPPA, KUA, village governments, religious and customary leaders, and family planning cadres has fostered a collaborative and participatory communication pattern, enabling messages concerning child protection and the prevention of child marriage to reach diverse segments of society. Nevertheless, further strengthening is required, particularly in extending outreach to adolescents in remote areas and enhancing the use of digital media as an educational tool. Consequently, the development of adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable communication strategies is essential for improving policy implementation and ensuring the attainment of child protection objectives in Balla District.

Resource

Resources, as a key indicator in policy implementation theory, have largely been adequate in terms of human resources, although constraints remain with respect to facilities and infrastructure. In general, all informants at the regency level reported that the number of implementing personnel is sufficient and that responsibilities have been clearly allocated within their respective organizational structures. Each staff member performs duties and functions commensurate with his or her area of responsibility. This indicates that, in terms of both staffing levels and organizational arrangements, human resources are conducive to policy implementation, particularly in preventing child marriage. Nevertheless, implementation continues to face challenges arising from limited physical resources, including the lack of dedicated counseling spaces, educational aids, and adequate information media.

Most awareness-raising activities are therefore conducted in public venues such as places of worship, village offices, and wedding ceremonies, owing to the absence of specialized facilities. These constraints are largely attributable to insufficient budget allocations for the provision of supporting infrastructure. Despite these limitations, the implementers have remained committed to carrying out the program by undertaking direct outreach and educational activities in

collaboration with community leaders, religious leaders, integrated health service post cadres, and through the use of social media. Accordingly, while human resources have structurally supported policy implementation, inadequate financial resources and physical facilities continue to constitute significant challenges that require serious attention to ensure the more effective and sustainable implementation of child marriage prevention policies.

These findings suggest that the resource dimension of policy implementation has not yet reached its full potential, as a gap persists between the availability of human resources and the provision of financial support and auxiliary facilities. The presence of competent personnel with clearly defined responsibilities represents a major asset for policy execution; however, implementation effectiveness would be further enhanced by adequate budgetary support, counseling facilities, educational media, and other forms of infrastructure. Consequently, efforts to strengthen resources should extend beyond human capital to encompass the sustained provision of financial and physical resources. The synergy of these three components will reinforce policy implementation and contribute to the more effective, efficient, and sustainable achievement of child marriage prevention and child protection objectives in Balla District.

Disposition

With respect to the implementation of the child marriage prevention policy, dedicated organizational structures or units have been established at the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DPPA) and the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA). However, no such structures have yet been formed in any of the eight villages under study. Nevertheless, policy implementation continues to be carried out by existing actors within the organizational framework, including the women's and children's protection division of the DPPA, all KUA personnel, and village governments in collaboration with religious and community leaders. One of the principal constraints in implementing the policy is the absence of specific incentives for field-level implementers.

Despite this limitation, most implementers remain committed to their responsibilities on a voluntary basis and out of a sense of moral and professional duty. Village heads emphasized that the provision of incentives would substantially enhance the intensity and effectiveness of awareness-raising and prevention activities. Accordingly, the attitudes and dedication of implementers constitute crucial factors supporting successful policy implementation, even in the face of structural and financial constraints. To strengthen implementation in the future, greater attention should be devoted to establishing a more organized implementation structure and to providing incentives that motivate personnel to carry out child marriage prevention programs more effectively.

The findings indicate that the disposition dimension of child marriage prevention policy implementation is characterized by the strong commitment and willingness of policy implementers, notwithstanding the incomplete institutional support structure. At the DPPA and KUA levels, units with the authority to administer child protection and child marriage prevention programs are already in place. By contrast, no dedicated structures or teams have yet been established in the villages included in the study. Consequently, program implementation relies heavily on the initiatives of village governments, religious leaders, and community leaders, who perform these functions on the basis of moral responsibility and a commitment to child protection. This demonstrates that the positive attitudes of implementers constitute a vital asset in sustaining policy implementation despite less-than-optimal institutional support.

At the same time, the lack of specific incentives for implementers poses a challenge that may affect motivation and the long-term intensity of program delivery. Although implementers continue to demonstrate considerable dedication through voluntary outreach and educational activities, excessive reliance on individual commitment may lead to inconsistencies if not accompanied by adequate organizational and policy support. Therefore, strengthening the disposition dimension requires the establishment of implementation structures at the village level, the provision of appropriate recognition or incentives, and the enhancement of staff capacity so that the existing commitment can be sustained over time. In this way, policy implementation will

depend not only on individual willingness but also on an institutional system capable of promoting the effective implementation of child marriage prevention policies.

Bureaucratic Structure

The bureaucratic structure dimension exhibits varying levels of implementation across agencies at the regency and village levels. According to George C. Edward III's policy implementation theory, an effective bureaucratic structure, including the existence of clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), is essential to the success of public policy. At the regency level, particularly within the Mamasa Regency Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DPPA), SOPs are in place and are implemented effectively. Officials of the DPPA reported that child marriage prevention programs are conducted in a systematic manner and in accordance with established procedures. These findings indicate that the bureaucratic structure at the regency level has optimally supported policy implementation.

In contrast, at the village-government level, most village heads have either not received or do not fully understand the written SOPs governing child marriage prevention. Consequently, implementation procedures tend to be informal and based on local initiatives, such as public awareness campaigns, appeals delivered through religious leaders, and information dissemination during community meetings. This situation reveals a structural and communicative gap between the regency and village governments, resulting in grassroots implementation that does not consistently adhere to standardized guidelines. Therefore, the successful implementation of child marriage prevention policies in Balla District continues to face challenges, particularly with respect to the comprehensive dissemination of SOPs and the capacity building of village-level implementers. More effective implementation requires strengthening the bureaucratic structure through the development and distribution of standardized SOPs and enhanced coordination between the DPPA and village governments to ensure consistent and integrated policy execution.

The findings further demonstrate that the existence of a clear bureaucratic structure at the regency level has not been fully accompanied by corresponding institutional strengthening at the village level. This vertical gap in policy implementation indicates that operational standards formulated by the regency government have not yet been fully translated into practical guidelines that are understood and applied by village officials. As a result, grassroots implementation relies more heavily on the experience, customary practices, and initiative of individual implementers than on standardized procedures. Such conditions may lead to variations in service quality and program effectiveness across villages.

From a policy implementation perspective, the absence of, or limited familiarity with, Standard Operating Procedures affects not only administrative processes but also interorganizational coordination. SOPs serve as instruments for harmonizing perceptions, clarifying the division of responsibilities, establishing coordination mechanisms, and guiding case management procedures, thereby providing a common framework for all implementers. When SOPs are not disseminated uniformly, implementation tends to proceed in a fragmented manner and becomes dependent upon individual interpretations. This situation may undermine policy consistency and complicate monitoring and evaluation by local authorities.

At the same time, the willingness of village governments to continue outreach activities through religious leaders, community leaders, and various community forums demonstrates an element of adaptive governance in response to the limitations of formal bureaucracy. Such approaches constitute a strength insofar as they allow policy implementation to be tailored to the social and cultural characteristics of the communities of Balla District. However, unless integrated into a formal bureaucratic framework, these local innovations may generate divergent implementation practices, making policy outcomes difficult to assess objectively. Accordingly, local flexibility should complement, rather than replace, established formal procedures.

Based on these findings, strengthening the bureaucratic structure dimension should focus on developing more integrated coordination mechanisms among the DPPA, the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), district authorities, and village governments. In addition to the comprehensive dissemination of SOPs, technical training, implementation assistance, and periodic evaluations are

required to ensure that all implementers share a common understanding and standard of practice. Such strengthening should also include the establishment of sustainable cross-sectoral communication mechanisms so that policy changes can be promptly addressed by all stakeholders. In this manner, policy implementation will not only achieve procedural certainty but also foster a more effective, accountable, and sustainable system of child protection governance.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the implementation of West Sulawesi Provincial Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2020 on the Child Protection System in preventing child marriage in Balla District has involved a range of strategic measures undertaken by the Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DPPA), the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), and village governments. These efforts have included premarital guidance, outreach activities in schools and communities, the provision of advice during marriage ceremonies, the use of social media, and character education for children. Viewed through the lens of George C. Edwards III's policy implementation theory, the communication dimension has functioned effectively through the clear dissemination of information and the involvement of multiple stakeholders. The resource dimension has likewise been relatively adequate in terms of human resources, as designated units are responsible for child marriage prevention, although implementation continues to be constrained by limited facilities and budgetary support.

Furthermore, the disposition dimension reveals that community members, parents, and students have responded positively to the outreach programs, thereby providing substantial social support for policy implementation. The bureaucratic structures of the DPPA and KUA are also clearly defined, with work mechanisms and divisions of responsibility based on the applicable Standard Operating Procedures. Nevertheless, policy implementation has not yet achieved its full potential due to persistent challenges at the village level, particularly the lack of supporting facilities, uneven understanding of the SOPs, and the absence of dedicated structures for child marriage prevention in all villages. Accordingly, continued evaluation and policy strengthening are required through enhanced cross-sectoral coordination, increased budgetary and infrastructural support, and capacity building for village-level implementers to ensure that the objectives of child protection and child marriage prevention in Balla District are achieved more effectively and sustainably.

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