

## Psychosocial Support and Mental Health for Adolescent Girls WHO Marry Early in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the psychosocial impacts and mental health conditions of adolescent girls who married at the age of 10-19 years, as well as identify the forms of support they receive from family and community. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation with married adolescents, parents, relatives, and community leaders. The results showed that adolescents experience significant psychological distress such as anxiety, fear of pregnancy and childbirth, school dropout, and social isolation, which is exacerbated by the lack of access to counseling and mental health services. Although there is support from family and religious leaders, the form of assistance tends to be normative and has not been able to fully address psychological needs. This study recommends strengthening community-based psychosocial services through training peer counselors, integrating digital support and face-to-face services, and actively involving local leaders and educational institutions in efforts to prevent and assist child marriage

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Child marriage is a multidimensional issue that impacts on the human rights, education, health, and psychosocial well-being of adolescent girls. According to WHO (2021), nine out of ten adolescent births occur in developing countries and most of them result from child marriage. These marriages indirectly end adolescence and impose the roles of wife and mother prematurely. The long-term impacts include intergenerational poverty and social marginalization. Child marriage is therefore a serious problem that requires comprehensive intervention (WHO, 2021).

Indonesia is among the five countries with the highest number of child marriages in the world. Data from BPS and UNICEF (2020) show that one in nine women aged 20-24 were married before the age of 18. This high rate reflects weak legal oversight and dominant patriarchal social norms. The Government of Indonesia has targeted a reduction in child marriage through various programs, but the pace of reduction is still relatively slow. This requires a contextualized, region-based approach (UNICEF, 2020).

East Java Province has a high rate of child marriage dispensation applications, and Jember District is one of the highest contributors. This phenomenon shows that local norms, economic conditions and education levels play a major role in reinforcing this practice. According to the East Java Women's Empowerment Office (2023), more than 50% of the dispensations filed came from villages in mountainous areas. This includes Sukowono sub-district, which is known as an area with a strong traditional culture. This challenge requires serious attention from various parties (DP3AK East Java, 2023).

Sukowono is a rural area that still maintains a culture of young marriage, especially among the Madurese ethnic group. A study by Lestari and Hamidah (2017) found that the decision to marry young is often influenced by family pressure, honor myths, and fear of adultery. The low emotional maturity of adolescents causes them to be unprepared for the pressures of marriage. As a result, there are many cases of domestic conflict, domestic violence, and early divorce. This situation reinforces the importance of providing psychosocial support (Lestari & Hamidah, 2017).

The psychological impact of early marriage is extensive, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A study by Nour (2019) states that adolescents who marry before the age of 18 experience twice as high levels of depression as those who marry as adults. Triggering factors include loss of independence, social isolation, and unwanted pregnancy. These experiences disrupt adolescents' self-identity formation. Therefore, they require an ongoing psychosocial support system (Nour, 2019).

In the Indonesian context, an adolescent mental health survey by I-NAMHS (2022) showed that nearly 35% of adolescents experienced symptoms of mental disorders, yet only 2.6% received professional help. This service gap is exacerbated by social stigma and lack of facilities in remote areas. In Sukowono, access to psychologists or counselors is very limited, and the majority of people believe in solving problems through family. Unfortunately, families are also

often a source of pressure on adolescent girls to marry. This reinforces the urgency of community-based systemic interventions (I-NAMHS, 2022).

Access to mental health services in rural areas remains a major challenge. According to the Ministry of Health (2023), only about 38% of health centers in Indonesia provide comprehensive mental health services. The number of psychiatrists is also very limited, with a ratio of one psychiatrist per 280,000 population. In areas like Sukowono, geographical conditions and lack of transportation are the main obstacles to accessing services. This situation makes mental disorders in adolescent girls often go undetected (Ministry of Health, 2023).

Psychosocial support has a strategic role in improving the mental well-being of young married adolescents. According to Chandra and Wijayanti (2021), the psychosocial approach does not only focus on healing individuals, but also on strengthening their social environment. In practice, this support includes counseling services, education, family strengthening, and life skills training. When done appropriately, this support can prevent relapse and accelerate adolescents' adaptation to their new roles. Therefore, community-based psychosocial interventions are urgently needed (Chandra & Wijayanti, 2021).

One of the family-based support models that has been implemented in Indonesia is PUSPAGA (Family Learning Center). PUSPAGA Jember, which has been active since 2021, has served hundreds of cases of domestic violence and parenting problems. The program focuses on family counseling, parenting education, and child protection. In the Sukowono area, this program can be an important partner in assisting teenagers who marry young. Unfortunately, the existence of PUSPAGA is still not widely known in the village community (PUSPAGA Jember, 2022).

Another strategy that has proven effective is strengthening peer support through peer-counseling programs. According to research by Wahyuni and Santoso (2023), adolescents are more comfortable talking with peers than with parents or teachers. In Surabaya, a peer counselor training program successfully increased adolescents' awareness of the risks of young marriage and the importance of mental health. In Sukowono, this approach has great potential due to the close-knit community culture. Involving adolescents as agents of change is a transformative step (Wahyuni & Santoso, 2023).

Digitalization of counseling services is also an important solution to reach remote areas like Sukowono. Since 2022, the government launched the platform that provides free online psychological consultation services. This device-based access matches the character of the younger generation who are more familiar with technology. In the context of limited face-to-face services, this digital platform is the main alternative. However, optimal utilization is still constrained by the lack of digital literacy (Healing119, 2022).

Regulatively, Law No. 16/2019 has raised the minimum age of marriage to 19 years for both women and men. However, the implementation of this policy is often constrained by legal loopholes such as marriage dispensation. Research from Sari and Nugroho (2020) shows that cultural norms and religious beliefs often trump state regulations. In Sukowono, religious leaders and village heads

are still the main determinants of child marriage decisions. This indicates the need for cultural approaches and inclusive dialog (Sari & Nugroho, 2020).

Various studies highlight that the double burden borne by adolescent girls after marriage has a major impact on reducing their quality of life. A study by Putri and Alamsyah (2021) found that adolescents who married early experienced higher levels of stress compared to the adult age group. They have to deal with changes in social status, pregnancy, and childcare at the same time. This causes disruptions in social, emotional, and psychological functioning. Psychosocial support is the only effective way out (Putri & Alamsyah, 2021).

Meanwhile, international literature also emphasizes the importance of a cross-sectoral approach in addressing child marriage. UNICEF (2022) emphasizes that the prevention of child marriage must be integrated in the education system, health services, and social protection. Silo or sectoral approaches are not effective enough to deal with the complexity of this problem. At the village level, collaboration between schools, health centers, and religious institutions is key to successful intervention. This research will evaluate Sukowono's readiness to build such a collaboration model (UNICEF, 2022).

Based on the explanation above, this research is important to understand in depth the psychosocial conditions and mental health of adolescent girls who married early in Sukowono District. This research is also expected to produce practical recommendations for the development of locally-based support programs. Given the limited empirical data from this area, a qualitative case study approach is an appropriate methodological choice. The findings from this research can serve as a reference for local government and civil society organizations. Thus, the interventions carried out will be more contextualized, sustainable, and have a long-term impact (Amalia, 2023).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Concepts and Theories of Early Marriage*

Early marriage is when adolescents who are not ready to have responsibility for marriage relationships and the presence of children but have entered into marriage both physically, psychologically and physiologically (Wahyuningrum *et al*, 2015). Signs of an adolescent experiencing changes such as physical, social and cognitive development characterize the transition period. Physical changes such as a taller body, hormonal changes, weight, and sexual maturity characterize puberty. Cognitive changes in problem solving and how to make decisions. Psychosocial changes from how to determine the development of adolescent personality in the future (Desmita, 2018).

Here are some theories about early marriage culture according to experts, namely Sociological Theory, Anthropological Theory, Psychological Theory, and Specific Theory.

#### a. Sociological Theory

- 1) Functionalism Theory (Émile Durkheim): Early marriage as a means of maintaining social structures and fulfilling individual needs.
- 2) Conflict Theory (Karl Marx): Early marriage as a result of economic and social inequality.
- 3) Symbolic Interaction Theory (Herbert Blumer): Early marriage as a result of symbolic interaction between individuals and society.

#### b. Anthropological Theory

- 1) Diffusion Theory (Fritz Boas): Early marriage is influenced by geographical, economic and social factors.
- 2) Structuralism Theory (Claude Lévi-Strauss): Early marriage is part of the social structure that regulates relationships between individuals and groups.
- 3) Social Constructionism Theory (Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann): Early marriage as a social construction made and changed by society.

#### c. Psychological Theory

- 1) Psychosexual Development Theory (Sigmund Freud): Early marriage as a result of incomplete psychosexual development.
- 2) Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura): Early marriage as a result of social learning and observation.
- 3) Needs Theory (Abraham Maslow): Early marriage as an effort to fulfill basic human needs.

#### d. Specific Theories

- 1) Theory of Early Marriage as a Survival Strategy (White, 1976): Early marriage as a survival strategy in poor communities.
- 2) Theory of Early Marriage as a Form of Socialization (Fischer, 1974): Early marriage as a form of socialization and social integration.
- 3) Theory of Early Marriage as a Risk Factor (WHO, 2011): Early marriage as a risk factor for women's health and well-being.

### *Factors Causing Early Marriage*

#### a. Parent or Family Factors

Children's decisions to marry at an early age are strongly influenced by parental power (Gitayanti *et al*, 2016). Children are required to obey what their

parents tell them is one of the consequences of a child and parent's unequal relationship (Ariesta, 2018). Parents tend to threaten and scold children because parents do not pay attention to children's wishes (Purwaningsih and Setyaningsih, 2018). Parents often still provide rules about how to behave, what are the values in marriage, what are the risks when establishing relationships with new people to their families (Nurhajati and Wardyaningrum, 2018). Marriage can be assessed from the aspect of how a person can adapt to become a harmonious family and can maintain and fight for marriage. If the value of marriage is low, it leads to an unhealthy marriage. (Nancy *et al*, 2014). Child marriage has both physical and psychological risks. Psychological immaturity allows quarrels, violence and divorce.

b. Cultural Factors

Marrying at an early age has become a culture, tradition, habit in society, so there is no need to be surprised if parents encourage children to marry at an early age (Fitrianingsih, 2015).

c. Economic Factors

Parents assume that if a male and female partner is said to be well established, it will be very supportive to lead to marriage even though they are still young (Gitayanti *et al*, 2016). Early marriage can occur in the community due to lack of employment and poverty (Naibaho, 2014).

d. Educational Factors

Educational factors have an influence on a person's perceptions and views to make decisions to choose, accept, and reject changes that lead to goodness (Naibaho, 2014). Parents have a point of view that girls will not have a big influence on their future because they will end up becoming a housewife, which is what makes parents prefer their sons to get higher education (Ropida, 2016). A child who does not have the time to continue their education has no other choice but to get married. They feel that the cost of education is expensive so they do not continue their education (Qibtiyah, 2014).

e. Self-Desire Factor

The decision to continue life to the level of marriage comes from the family, partner, and from oneself. Adolescent couples wish to get married without the premise of what risks can occur in the future after marriage (Naibaho, 2014).

*Psychosocial Concept*

Psychosocial is any change in individual life, both psychological and social in nature that has a reciprocal influence. psychiatric and societal problems that have a reciprocal influence, as a result of social change and / or social turmoil in society that can cause mental disorders (Depkes, 2011).

Adolescence is a period of rapid growth and development both physically, psychologically and intellectually. A great sense of curiosity, love adventure and challenge and dare to make decisions without careful consideration are typical characteristics of adolescents. If the decision taken is not right, it will risk various physical and psychosocial health problems. The following is Psychosocial Theory according to Baron and Branscombe:

- a. Social Influences: Social factors such as groups, norms, and roles influence individual behavior.

- b. Cognitive Processes: Individuals process social information through perception, interpretation and decision-making.
- c. Emotions and Motivations: Emotions and motivations influence an individual's social behavior.
- d. Social Identity: Individual identity is influenced by social groups and roles.

*Mental Health of Early Marriage Offenders*

Building a household ark is certainly not far from problems. One of the causes is due to the immature nature of the married couple. According to Walgito, problems such as anxiety, stress, mental unhealthiness are caused because the psychological aspects of the couple have not been formed (Walgito, 2005: 139). Dariyo (2004: 22) states that marriage at an early age can lead to mental health, namely, not being able to think rationally, stress, feeling depressed.

a. Depressed

Depressed is a situation where the anxiety that engulfs the individual is very excessive. Anxiety is a condition that is seen from a long process of mixed emotions, when pressure, tension, and inner war at the same time (Desmita 2006: 43). There are two kinds of signs of anxiety, both physical and psychological. The physical symptoms that appear are uncomfortable sleep, shortness of breath, causeless sweating, cold fingertips, dizziness in the head, indigestion, and others.

b. Stress

The definition of stress can have different meanings for each human being. Some of them have the understanding that stress is pressure, emotional response, and pressure within. Stress can have a wonderful impact, but it can also be a very negative one. The response to stress can be controlled by the sufferer. Psychological stress is a relationship that is burdened, dangerous, and exceeds the limits of an individual human being to his environment. According to Robert S. Fieldman stress is a series of events that can assess an event as something that is dangerous, threatening, challenging and has an impact on various physiological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects (Julianti, 2017).

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological case study design to explore in depth the psychosocial experiences and mental health conditions of adolescent girls who married early. The case study was chosen because it is able to provide a holistic understanding of the local socio-cultural context that shapes the informants' reality, especially in Sukowono District, Jember Regency, Indonesia which has a strong tradition of young marriage. The phenomenological approach in this design focuses on the subjective meaning of experiences experienced by young women aged 10-19 years who have undergone early marriage. The main focus of this research is to reveal the dynamics of emotions, social pressures, self-perceptions, and the forms of support they receive from their closest social environment, such as parents, siblings, and community leaders. Thus, this approach allows researchers to capture reality from the point of view of the direct experience of the research subjects without any initial theoretical prejudice.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with young women who married early as the main informants, as well as parents, relatives, and community leaders (such as religious leaders, hamlet heads, and PKK cadres) as supporting informants. The technique of selecting informants used purposive sampling with the criteria of direct involvement in the phenomenon of early marriage in the area, along with consideration of communication maturity, emotional readiness, and willingness to provide information openly. In the phenomenological approach, the researcher places himself as the main research instrument and maintains *bracketing* or *epoche*, which is suspending personal prejudices to truly explore the meaning of the subject's experience. All data were collected through semi-structured interview guidelines that were flexible to fit the context of the dialogue and local cultural sensitivities.

Data were analyzed using the phenomenological data analysis technique of the Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) model which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the initial stage, the researcher transcribed, coded the data, and identified the main themes from the experiences conveyed by the informants. Next, in-depth interpretation was carried out to reveal the meaning behind each experience related to social pressure, feelings of anxiety, role burden, and forms of psychosocial support received. To ensure the validity of the data, source triangulation (between informants), technique triangulation (interviews and observations), and member check techniques were used by asking informants for confirmation of the results of the researcher's interpretation. In addition, an audit trail was conducted through recording the research process in detail, as well as peer debriefing with education or psychology experts to test the interpretations that had been obtained. With this approach, the research is expected to be able to provide an authentic and in-depth picture of the psychosocial conditions of adolescent girls who married early in Sukowono District.

## RESEARCH RESULT

The first observation in five Sukowono hamlets showed that child marriage has become a social practice that is considered commonplace and even celebrated. Marriage ceremonies are conducted simply at the bride's house without any formal record keeping. Interviews with 18 adolescent girls revealed that most were unaware of the legal and health consequences of early marriage. Documentation in the form of photos of processions and religious court dispensation records confirmed the high number of dispensation applications in the last two years. These preliminary data suggest a disconnect between national regulation and local practice.

Analysis of interview transcripts revealed a dominant emotional pattern of anxiety, confusion and fear of pregnancy. Adolescents reported recurrent nightmares about complications during childbirth and husband conflict. Twelve informants used the term "deres" which locally means tightness in the chest when talking about the future. Non-verbal observations were consistent, characterized by fidgety hand movements and short eye contact when health topics were raised. These findings indicate medium to high psychological distress.

Family social support was ambivalent; parents were both proud and worried about their child's marriage. Seven of the young couples lived in their parents' home, resulting in dynamics of dual authority in decision-making. Interviews with 11 mothers highlighted economic motivation as the main reason for allowing their children to marry. However, documentation of Raskin and PKH assistance showed that families remained at the poverty line after marriage. This confirms that early marriage does not automatically improve the family's economic welfare.

Almost all of the adolescent girls stopped school after marriage, as evidenced by school records showing sudden withdrawal letters. The principal of the local junior high school confirmed that absenteeism jumped sharply in the semester after marriage. Observation of abandoned classrooms showed empty desks bearing the names of married students, signaling a loss of academic identity. Interviews revealed a longing to learn but limited time due to domestic work. This phenomenon reinforces the finding that early marriage drastically shortens educational pathways.

Visit data from the Sukowono Health Center showed that only 30% of teenage brides came for antenatal check-ups. Observations in the waiting room point to embarrassment when they have to share their stories with adult mothers. Adolescents admitted that they were afraid of being reprimanded by officers if they stated that they were under 17 years old. Some even used borrowed ID cards to avoid reproductive counseling procedures. This limited access heightens the risk of untreated pregnancy complications.

Despite the pressure, some adolescents developed spiritual-based coping mechanisms such as night recitation. Interviews with religious leaders showed that they routinely give *tausiyah* on patience as the key to household harmony. Observations of teenagers' *yasinan* activities revealed a supportive atmosphere as well as social control over their behavior. Adolescents reported feelings of calm after religious activities, although anxiety returned when faced with home

conflicts. This coping strategy is temporary and does not replace the need for professional support.

Community and religious leaders play a paradoxical role, facilitating early marriage while providing problem-solving advice. Interviews with three kyais indicate that they see young marriage as a barrier to adultery but regret the psychological impact. Documentation of Friday sermons shows calls to maintain household harmony for young couples. Observation of a taklim assembly showed teenage women sitting separately but remaining silent when the topic of domestic violence was discussed. The involvement of religious leaders has the potential to bridge intervention programs if given special training.

Most adolescents feel social isolation because their peers are still students. Field observations showed that they rarely attended youth social activities such as youth posyandu and youth organization. Interviews showed that they were worried about being considered arrogant or "out of this world." Only two out of 18 teenagers were active in their class WhatsApp group after marriage. This lack of interaction reduces an important source of emotional support during the transition.

Relationships with husbands were characterized by high economic dependency and an average age difference of eight years. Observations at home revealed a traditional division of labor, with husbands working in the fields and wives on full domestic duties. Interviews with adolescents revealed communication barriers due to disparities in life experiences. Four informants reported minor physical conflicts that were not reported to village officials. This situation increases the risk of latent domestic violence that is difficult to detect.

Documentation of family financial statements shows that income is unstable and dependent on seasonal harvests. Adolescents often supplement their income with informal work such as sewing and selling credit from home. Observation of the village market shows they are rarely involved due to limited mobility and confidence. Husbands sometimes migrate out of town, leaving adolescent wives to take care of the house alone. Economic uncertainty is a major stressor that triggers anxiety and conflict.

The community views child marriage as "the way of fate" and a solution to maintain family honor. Interviews with neighbors confirmed the perception that unmarried girls over 18 are considered "too old." Observations of celebration events show praise for parents who successfully marry off their children early. Archived local media narratives also normalize early marriage as tradition. These perceptions create ongoing social pressure for the next generation.

The Puspaga program in Sukowono sub-district has not been optimal due to low socialization in remote hamlets. The Puspaga report document recorded only four cases of consultation for married adolescents in a year. Site observation showed that the counseling room is located in the sub-district office which is difficult to reach without a vehicle. Interviews with officers complained about the lack of funds to travel to villages. This service gap opens up opportunities for collaboration with PKK cadres and counseling teachers at nearby schools.

Parents are generally unaware of the details of Law 16/2019 on marriage age limits. Interviews showed they only understood the need for dispensation,

but not the risks. Religious court dispensation documents show judges' judgments based on economic reasons and the "accident" factor of pregnancy. Observation of dispensation hearings revealed a lack of legal assistance for families. Low legal awareness prolongs the practice of child marriage despite tightened regulations.

Thematic analysis uncovered narrative congruence between adolescents and mothers regarding economic motivations, but differed on mental health aspects. Mothers tended to rate their children as "happy" while adolescents revealed hidden fears. Siblings acted as mediators of minor conflicts that arose. Community leaders acknowledged the problem, but emphasized the need for gradual change so as not to destabilize the culture. This convergence and divergence of views enriches the understanding of the local context.

The research findings crystallized into three broad themes: socio-cultural pressures, limited services and limited coping strategies. Observations, interviews and documentation corroborate evidence that early marriage reduces adolescent girls' psychological well-being. Psychosocial support exists but is scattered and poorly coordinated. Potential interventions lie in strengthening peer support, involving religious leaders, and expanding digital and field services. This study recommends the creation of an integrated program "Sukowono Safe Space" that combines mobile counseling, legal education, and economic skills training for young couples.

## DISCUSSION

Child marriage is a form of gender-based violence that has a major impact on the long-term well-being of adolescent girls. Systematic studies show that adolescents who marry before the age of 18 are vulnerable to domestic violence, pregnancy complications, and mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. In the Indonesian context, low levels of education and social pressure are the main triggers for child marriage (Putri & Kurniawan, 2020). This finding is in line with the reality in Sukowono District, Jember, where local cultural norms reinforce the practice of young marriage. This shows that child marriage is not just an individual problem, but a complex structural phenomenon (UNFPA, 2021).

The increase in marriage dispensation applications in Jember District indicates that child marriage is increasingly being formally legalized. Data from the Religious Court shows a significant spike in dispensation applications in 2022-2023 (PA Jember, 2023). This shows a gap between national policy (Law No. 16/2019) and social practice at the grassroots. Interviews with community leaders in Sukowono revealed that early marriage is considered a "way out" of poverty or to maintain family honor. This reality indicates the weak internalization of the law and the strong legitimacy of patriarchal culture (Sari & Nugroho, 2020).

The legal approach alone has proven ineffective in preventing early marriage. The marriage dispensation article in Law No. 16/2019 is often used as a legal loophole by parents and village officials to circumvent the minimum age restriction (Wulandari, 2021). In interviews, judges also acknowledged that many

applications were granted for social, economic, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy reasons. This shows that legal practices are often subject to the more dominant social logic in local communities. Thus, interventions need to target the cultural level and power relations in the family (Lestari, 2022).

From a psychological perspective, early marriage has a serious impact on the mental development of adolescent girls. A study by Susanto and Rahmawati (2023) showed that adolescents who married at a young age had higher levels of stress and depression than their peers. The interviews in this study support these findings, with informants reporting nightmares, chest tightness and pregnancy anxiety. This indicates that early marriage is emotionally taxing and shortens the transition period of adolescents' psychosocial development. The burden of the dual role as wife and mother-to-be exacerbates their psychological condition (Susanto & Rahmawati, 2023).

Spiritual experiences such as attending pengajian or majelis taklim do provide temporary peace. However, most adolescents admitted that anxiety returned when facing household conflicts or the first pregnancy. A study by Kurniawan and Setiawati (2022) suggested that religious support is short-term if not balanced with professional counseling. Field observations show that adolescents often seek help from their peers rather than experts. Thus, community-based psychosocial support needs to be developed in a structured manner (Kurniawan & Setiawati, 2022).

Early marriage also has a direct impact on adolescent girls' formal education. All the main informants in this study dropped out of school within 6 months of marriage. This is in line with the findings of the Bappenas (2020) study, which states that early marriage is one of the highest factors causing school dropout among adolescents. When access to education is lost, opportunities for formal employment and economic independence are cut off. As a result, economic dependence on a partner is higher and increases the risk of domestic violence (Bappenas, 2020).

In terms of health, teenage pregnancy increases the risk of obstetric complications and stunting in children. Data from the Ministry of Health (2022) shows that pregnancy under the age of 18 is associated with an increased risk of eclampsia and severe anemia. In Sukowono, access to antenatal care (ANC) services is very limited, and adolescents are often embarrassed to come to the health center. Observations show low visits to health facilities due to embarrassment and ignorance. This reinforces the importance of adolescent-friendly health services (MOH RI, 2022).

Legal understanding among the Sukowono community is low. Interviews with parents and community leaders showed that many were unaware of the change in the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 19 years for women. Most only knew that dispensation could be applied for "provided there is sufficient reason." A study by Rahmatika and Dewi (2021) revealed that the level of legal literacy of village communities about the Marriage Law is still very minimal. Therefore, a village-based legal education program is needed (Rahmatika & Dewi, 2021).

The peer support approach has proven to be quite effective in reducing the psychological burden of married adolescents. A peer support program run by an NGO in Yogyakarta increased coping skills and courage to access psychological services (Fitriani, 2020). In Sukowono, a similar program has not been found, but adolescents showed interest in informal support groups. Training adolescents as peer counselors could be a strategic step in building psychological resilience. This initiative is also relevant to the gotong royong culture of the village community (Fitriani, 2020).

Digitalization of counselling services is an important option amidst the limitations of face-to-face services. Platforms such as *Healing119* have been used by adolescents for psychological consultation anonymously and safely. A study by Arifin et al. (2023) mentioned that online counseling applications can reduce anxiety levels in adolescents by 37%. However, limited internet access and low digital literacy are still major barriers in villages like Sukowono. Therefore, a hybrid approach between technology and field services is needed (Arifin et al., 2023).

The Puskesmas in Sukowono actually has a mental health service program, but it does not specifically reach married adolescents. Observations showed that there are no permanent counselors, and psychological services are only available on certain days. This shows a lack of integration between physical and mental health services. The study by Dewi and Haryanto (2020) highlights the importance of training mental health cadres at the village level. This is particularly relevant for expanding the reach of mental health services (Dewi & Haryanto, 2020).

Religious leaders play an important role in influencing family decisions regarding marriage. Interviews with several kyai in Sukowono revealed ambivalence: they advocated young marriage to avoid zina, but were also concerned about the number of early divorces. The study by Fauziah and Hakim (2019) suggests involving religious leaders in campaigns to delay the age of marriage. Educating religious leaders can be an effective entry strategy in changing community perspectives. A cross-sector and cross-value approach is needed (Fauziah & Hakim, 2019).

Some national programs such as PUSPAGA have not reached remote areas optimally. Field documentation shows that information related to PUSPAGA services has not reached villagers as a whole. A study by KPPPA (2021) shows that the effectiveness of PUSPAGA is highly dependent on synergy with community and village leaders. Hamlet-based socialization activities and collaboration with PKK could be a solution to expand outreach. This can raise collective awareness about the importance of psychosocial support (KPPPA, 2021).

Globally, the practice of early marriage is correlated with economic instability, natural disasters and low human development indices. Studies in Bangladesh and Pakistan also show that poverty and disasters accelerate the rate of child marriage. Sukowono, where the majority of income comes from the agricultural sector, experiences seasonal economic pressures that contribute to the drivers. Family-based social protection programs and scholarships can be a

deterrent to early marriage. Therefore, cross-sector interventions are a necessity (UNICEF, 2022).

Based on all the findings, the analysis shows that the practice of child marriage in Sukowono is the result of an interaction between structural, cultural, economic factors and weak services. The impact on adolescent girls' psychosocial and mental health is very real. While informal forms of support exist, they do not adequately replace the need for professional intervention. This research recommends strengthening village-based services, training peer counselors, and integrating digital and face-to-face services. With appropriate strategies based on local contexts, interventions can be effective (Amalia, 2024).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study shows that early marriage in Sukowono Subdistrict is not only a matter of tradition or family decision, but is also closely related to structural factors such as poverty, low education, and lack of legal literacy and access to psychosocial services. Adolescent girls who marry at the age of 10-19 years experience significant psychological stress such as anxiety, loss of identity, and social isolation, which has a direct impact on their mental health and educational continuity. Family and religious support tends to be normative and not fully responsive to adolescents' psychological needs. Inequalities in health and social services, as well as cultural legitimization of the practice, reinforce a cycle of vulnerability that is difficult to break without cross-sector interventions. Therefore, child marriage needs to be viewed as a multidimensional crisis that requires a comprehensive, contextual and sustainable approach.

Local governments and stakeholders need to develop community-based early marriage prevention strategies by involving religious leaders, PKK cadres, and schools in legal counseling, reproductive education, and psychosocial counseling. Programs such as peer counselor training, youth-friendly clinics, and digital counseling services need to be implemented in an integrated manner at the village level. In addition, strengthening the family economy through skills training and access to scholarships for adolescent girls should be a priority to prevent the practice of early marriage as an economic solution. Regulatory reform is also important, especially in tightening the requirements for marriage dispensation so that it no longer becomes a legal loophole. Collaboration between health, education, religious and legal institutions is key to building a protection system that is fair and adaptive to the needs of adolescents.

## ADVANCED RESEARCH

Advanced research could take the form of sequential explanatory mixed-methods mapping the macro-meso-micro impact of policies and service ecosystems after the 18-month Sukowono Safe Space intervention. The quantitative phase will track 300 adolescent girls-both early married and single-across Sukowono sub-district with a three-wave panel test, evaluating changes in mental health scores (DASS-21), educational sustainability, and family economic resilience index through multilevel growth modeling. The next qualitative phase used realist evaluation to explore the context-mechanism-outcome configuration through in-depth interviews with policy makers, health workers, teachers, and religious leaders to understand why and under what conditions the intervention succeeded or failed. Data integration is then analyzed with a critical realist triangulation approach to formulate a more precise program theory, as well as develop a geospatial-based adaptive policy map that visualizes child marriage risk hotspots and service readiness in each hamlet. The results of the research are expected to produce recommendations for scalability and cost-effectiveness, as well as the basis for creating a district-level early-marriage prevention dashboard that can be replicated in other rural districts in Indonesia.

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