



Perceptions of Early Marriage in Junior High School Students in Rural Areas

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Abstract. Early marriage (less than 19 years old) has a very serious impact on both the mother and the child being born. Grobogan Regency is an area in the province of Central Java, most of which is rural. The prevalence of women getting married and pregnant at an early age in this region is very high, reaching 59.88% in 2018, 51.24% in 2019 and 52.81% in 2020. This figure is much higher than the Central Java province figure, which is 37.67%. Adolescents are the main actors in the occurrence of early marriage, especially in rural communities. This type of research is a survey with a cross-sectional design. Population are junior high school students aged 13–16 years in Grobogan sub-district as the area with the highest incidence of teenage marriage in Grobogan district, Central Java. The minimum number of samples was calculated according to the Slovin formula with a 95% confidence degree, obtained a total of 185 students, consisting of 100 male students (54.05%) and 85 female students (45.95%). Sample selection purposively. Data were collected using a questionnaire. Univariate and bivariate analysis using Mann Whitney test to analyze differences in perception between adolescent boys and girls. The results of the study stated that one in eight adolescents had a favorable perception of early marriage (less than 19 years). There is not much difference in perception between adolescent boys and girls regarding early marriage. Positive perceptions of the benefits of child marriage are still found in both male and female students. This indicates that social norms that support child marriage are still strong among youth in rural areas. Comprehensive interventions are needed to promote the benefits of maturation of the marriageable age based on the cultural context of the community.

Keywords: early marriage · adolescents · students

1 Introduction

Indonesia is currently in the top 10 countries with the highest prevalence of early marriage in the world. The National Socio-Economic Survey (SUSENAS) states that in 2019, women in Indonesia who married at the age of less than 19 years were 36.22%, in 2020 to 34.34%, and in 2021 to 34.54%. Based on its distribution, early marriage is more common in rural areas than in urban areas [1–3].

Central Java is one of the provinces with the highest prevalence of female early marriage in Indonesia. 1–5 Grobogan district is an area in Central Java province where

most of the area is rural. The prevalence of women getting married and pregnant at an early age in this region is very high, reaching 59.88% in 2018, 51.24% in 2019 and 52.81% in 2020. This figure is much higher than the Central Java province figure, which is 37.67%. The prevalence of early pregnancy by women in Grobogan district is also very high, namely 60.97% in 2019 and 60.86% in 2020, always much higher than Central Java, which is 45.20% [4–6].

Several studies state that women who are married at the age of 10–19 years face the risk of death during pregnancy and childbirth almost 5 times greater than those who are married at the age of 20–24 years [7]. Mothers aged 15–19 years are also more at risk of complications of pregnancy and childbirth than mothers aged 20–24 years [8]. Early marriage can cause various adverse health effects such as miscarriage, stillbirth, high fertility, and maternal morbidity [9–13]. Early marriage also has an impact on the children born. Mother who marry at an early age have a 1.55 times greater risk of infant mortality compared to adult mothers. Children born to women who marry underage are also more at risk of stunting, thin and underweight [14]. Babies with low birth weight (LBW) are also more likely to be born to mothers aged 16–19 years (17.80%), compared to mothers aged 20–30 years (12.33%) [15, 16].

Early marriage has a very serious impact. Factors affecting early marriage must be intervened. In general, early marriage is caused by individual factors such as free sex behavior, family factors such as economic needs and arranged marriages, as well as environmental factors such as the culture or tradition of marrying young at a young age [17–19]. Knowledge, attitude and self-efficacy become individual internal factors that determine a teenager's decision to marry at an early age among teenagers [20, 21]. Teenagers become one of the main actors early marriage. Teenagers' perceptions and beliefs greatly determine decisions and predictions early marriage, especially in rural areas.

2 Research Method

This type of research is an analytical survey research with a cross-sectional design with the aim of analyze the perception of adolescents and parents on early marriage in rural communities according to social and health perspectives at the same time. The population of this study was junior high school students aged 13–16 years in Grobogan sub-district as the area with the highest incidence of teenage marriage in Grobogan district, Central Java. The minimum number of samples was calculated according to the Slovin formula with a 95% confidence degree, obtained a total of 185 students, consisting of 100 male students (54.05%) and 85 female students (45.95%). The sample selection technique was determined purposively by considering: 1) the sample resides in the Grobogan sub-district which is an area in Grobogan district with the highest cases of underage marriage (less than 19 years) in 2 consecutive years (2020–2021), 2) when the research occupies the level or class IX, 3) able to read and write, 4) willing to be a respondent. Collecting data using an instrument in the form of a questionnaire that has met the validity and reliability requirements. This questionnaire was developed based on references from several standard questionnaires with modified questions to focus more on early marriage from a social and health perspective among adolescents. Data

collection was carried out by trained researchers and enumerators. Before filling out the questionnaire, the researcher and the enumerators provided an explanation and informed consent to the respondents. Sample characteristics were described by univariate analysis. Bivariate analysis using: 1) Mann Whitney test to analyze differences in perception between adolescent boys and girls.

3 Results and Discussion

A total of 185 junior high school class IX students aged 13–16 years were sampled, consisting of 100 male students (54.05%) and 85 female students (45.95%). The results showed that in general there was no significant difference between the perception of early marriage in male and female students. Based on Table 1, there are several perceptions that are still different between male students and female students, including 8% of male students agree if adolescent girls who have started menstruating mean that they are ready to marry or be married, while only 1.2% of girls agree with this statement.

The results of the study also stated that 17.0% of male students and 3.5% of female students agreed that girls marry at a young age is aimed at maintaining the honor of parents and family. In addition, there are 13% of male students and 3.6% of female students who agree that early marriage is one way to improve the economy of underprivileged families. The male students agreed that the goal of getting and adding new family members was to encourage early marriage or child marriage. In addition, 17.0% of male students and 11.8% of female students believe or agree that the existence of peers who have married at a young age is a motivation for other teenagers to also want to get married at an early age as well.

Statistically, based on the results of the Mann Whitney test (Table 2), it shows that there is a significant difference in the perception of “women are ready to marry or be married after they experience menstruation” between male students and female students ($p = 0.003$), with an average 82.96 for male students and 104.81 for female students. Male students agree more that women are declared ready to marry if they have experienced menstruation. Adolescent girls experience their first menstruation at puberty. This means that male students agree more if women can marry at a younger age as long as they are already menstruating.

Perception “girls marry at a young age in order to maintain the honor of their parents and family” also differed significantly between male and female students ($p = 0.049$), with an average rating of 86.20 for male students and 101.01 for female students. Teenage boys are more likely to approve of women marrying at an early age in order to maintain the good name and honor of their parents and family. There is a negative assessment of families with daughters marrying at an age older than the average age of marriage in the community. The same is true for responses Early marriage is one way to improve the economy of a poor family there is also a difference between male students and female students ($p = 0.013$), with an average rating of 84.41 for male students and 103.11 for female students. More boys agree that early marriage can be a solution to the economic problems faced, especially by women’s families. Through marriage, the responsibility for the social and economic life of the daughter who is married will transfer to her husband or her husband’s family.

Table 1. Perceptions of early marriage in male and female students

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Don't agree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Teenage girls who have started menstruating mean ready to get married										
Man	2	2.0	6	6.0	34	3.4	39	39.0	19	19.0
Woman	0	0.0	1	1.2	16	18.8	45	52.9	23	27.1
Girls marry at a young age to protect the honor of their parents and family										
Man	1	1.0	16	16.0	30	30.0	29	29.0	24	24.0
Woman	0	0.0	3	3.5	20	23.5	45	52.9	17	20.0
Taboo for a daughter to postpone marriage										
Man	2	2.0	10	10.0	41	41.0	29	29.0	18	18.0
Woman	2	2.4	1	1.2	40	47.1	29	34.1	13	15.3
Marrying girls at a young age can help solve economic problems in the family										
Man	1	1.0	10	10.0	21	21.0	41	41.0	27	27.0
Woman	1	1.2	7	8.2	13	15.3	42	49.4	22	25.9
Unmarried girls over 18 are a burden to the family										
Man	4	4.0	16	16.0	19	19.0	34	34.0	27	27.0
Woman	2	2.4	7	8.2	18	21.2	42	49.4	16	18.8
Girls over 18 who are not married will be a shame to parents and family										

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Don't agree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Man	5	5.0	8	8.0	17	17.0	44	44.0	26	26.0
Woman	0	0.0	4	4.7	12	14.1	48	56.5	21	24.7
Parents really expect their daughters to get married before the age of 18										
Man	4	4.0	4	4.0	16	16.0	44	44.0	32	32.0
Woman	0	0.0	4	4.7	6	7.1	44	51.8	31	36.5
Teenage girls feel embarrassed if they get married before the age of 18										
Man	13	13.0	25	25.0	17	17.0	26	26.0	19	19.0
Woman	10	11.8	15	17.6	16	18.8	25	29.4	19	22.4
Parents will look down on pregnant teenage girls										
Man	14	14.0	25	25.0	20	20.0	20	20.0	21	21.0
Woman	6	7.1	21	24.7	31	36.5	19	22.4	8	9.4
Teenage girls must obey their parents if they ask them to get married even though they are still in school										
Man	3	3.0	10	10.0	15	15.0	35	35.0	37	37.0
Woman	2	2.4	4	4.7	13	15.3	33	38.8	33	38.8
Early marriage is one way to improve the economy of the poor family capable										
Man	2	2.0	11	11.0	27	27.0	38	38.0	22	22.0
Woman	1	1.2	2	2.4	18	21.2	36	42.4	28	32.9

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Don't agree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Early marriage is an effort to prevent excessive adolescent dating behavior										
Man	5	5.0	17	17.0	35	35.0	34	34.0	9	9.0
Woman	3	3.5	16	18.8	30	35.5	26	30.6	10	11.8
Early marriage can be done if there is a sense of mutual love or fear of losing a partner										
Man	8	8.0	20	20.0	38	38.0	20	20.0	14	14.0
Woman	2	2.4	14	16.5	28	32.9	30	35.3	11	12.9
Matchmaking by parents is the cause of teenage marriage										
Man	10	10.0	37	37.0	22	22.0	24	24.0	7	7.0
Woman	6	7.1	27	31.8	25	29.4	19	22.4	8	9.4
Lack of reproductive health information and the impact of early marriage can encourage early marriage										
Man	8	8.0	30	30.0	16	16.0	36	36.0	10	10.0
Woman	7	8.2	16	18.8	26	30.6	27	31.8	9	10.6
Wanting to immediately add new family members is a driving force for young marriages										

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Don't agree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Man	8	8.0	24	24.0	27	27.0	30	30.0	11	11.0
Woman	1	1.2	6	7.1	17	20.0	40	47.1	21	24.7
Dating is often the cause of early marriage										
Man	19	19.0	32	32.0	20	20.0	20	20.0	9	9.0
Woman	5	5.9	34	40.0	16	18.8	22	25.9	8	9.4
The low level of education and knowledge of parents is a tendency to marry off their children at an early age										
Man	18	18.0	21	21.0	24	24.0	29	29.0	8	8.0
Woman	5	5.9	28	32.9	25	29.4	16	18.8	11	12.9
The incessant influence of mass media and social media can attract the attention of teenagers to choose to marry at a young age										
Man	13	13.0	24	24.0	33	33.0	22	22.0	8	8.0
Woman	5	5.9	22	25.9	20	23.5	24	28.2	14	16.5
Traditions and customs that exist in the community to date are the driving force for teenagers to marry at an early age										
Man	8	8.0	20	20.0	26	26.0	33	33.0	13	13.0
Woman	2	2.4	14	16.5	23	27.1	31	36.5	15	17.6

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Don't agree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
The existence of peers who get married at a young age is a motivation to also get married at an early age										
Man	10	10.0	7	7.0	38	38.0	28	28.0	17	17.0
Woman	0	0.0	10	11.8	16	18.8	35	41.2	24	28.2

There is also a significant difference between the perceptions of male students and female students related to the desire to immediately add a new family member to be the driving force for young marriage ($p = 0.000$), with an average assessment of 108.92 for male students and 74.27 for female students. Adolescent girls are more likely to disagree with the perception that the desire to immediately add a new family member can be a driving force for marriage at a young age at this time, compared to teenage boys. Perceptions of having peers who marry at a young age can be a motivation for teenagers to marry at an early age also differ between male students and female students ($p = 0.002$), with an average assessment of 103.72 for male students and 80.39 for female students.

Teenagers, especially boys, are more likely to have the mindset that marriage will protect the honor of the family as future successors. So, marriage must still be carried out to maintain family honor because it has been planned, even though he is still young or has not met the marriage requirements as stipulated by law. In some areas in Indonesia, the practice of child marriage has received social and cultural support. People often believe that if women marry late or remain single, it is said that their prosperity and fortune are 'covered and late' which means it can bring shame to family honor. Often society blames women and has a negative perception of those who are not married. Most of the Indonesian people are Muslim [22].

Marriage is sometimes used as a means to escape poverty and rise to a higher social status. Some youth see aspects of marriage as a means to help improve the economic life of a married couple or child. Perceptions of improving living standards and solving economic problems carry more benefits than the negative consequences of underage and illegal marriage. Research in Vietnam, families with low economics have a tendency to marry off their children at a younger age than families who are in the upper middle economy [23]. There is also research that states that poverty and poor education are the underlying causes of the practice of child marriage, which is usually against the wishes of girls who want to be educated [24]. In Indonesia, child marriage is also sometimes used as a way out of poverty [25].

Table 2. Analysis of differences in perceptions of early marriage in male and female students

Statement	Respondent Type (Mean Rank)		U value	p-value
	Man	Woman		
1. Teenage girls who have started menstruating mean ready to get married	82.96	104.81	324,600	0.003
2. Girls marry at a young age to protect the honor of their parents and family	86.20	101.01	357,000	0.049
3. Taboo for a daughter to postpone marriage	91.00	95.35	405,000	0.558
4. Marrying girls at a young age can help solve economic problems in the family	91.20	95.12	407,000	0.598
5. Unmarried girls over 18 are a burden to the family	91.95	94.24	414,500	0.761
6. Girls over 18 who are not married will be a shame to parents and family	89.33	97.32	388,300	0.275
7. Parents really expect their daughters to get married before the age of 18	88.02	98.86	375,200	0.137
8. Teenage girls feel embarrassed if they get married before the age of 18	89.39	97.25	388,900	0.308
9. Parents will look down on pregnant teenage girls	94.06	91.76	414,400	0.765
10. Teenage girls must obey their parents if they ask them to get married even though they are still in school	90.58	95.85	400,800	0.479
11. Early marriage is one way to improve the economy of a poor family capable	84.41	103.11	339,100	0.013
12. Early marriage is an effort to prevent excessive adolescent dating behavior	92.62	93.44	421,200	0.914
13. Early marriage can be done if there is a sense of mutual love or fear of losing a partner	86.71	100.40	362,100	0.072
14. Matchmaking by parents is the cause of teenage marriage	96.10	89.35	394,000	0.375
15. Lack of reproductive health information and the impact of early marriage can encourage early marriage	94.41	91.34	410,900	0.687
16. Wanting to immediately add new family members is a driving force for young marriages	108.92	74.27	265,800	0.000
17. Dating is often the cause of early marriage	98.10	87.01	374,000	0.146
18. The low level of education and knowledge of parents is a tendency to marry off their children at an early age	94.64	91.07	408,600	0.642

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Statement	Respondent Type (Mean Rank)		U value	p-value
	Man	Woman		
19.The incessant influence of mass media and social media can attract the attention of teenagers to choose to marry at a young age	99.90	84.88	356,000	0.050
20.Traditions and customs that exist in the community to date are the driving force for teenagers to marry at an early age	98.41	86.64	370,900	0.122
21.The existence of peers who get married at a young age is a motivation to also get married at an early age	103.72	80.39	317,800	0.002

4 Conclusion

This study found that there were not many differences in perceptions between adolescent boys and girls regarding early marriage. Only a few some perceptions that are still different between male students and female students, among others, are perceptions related to teenage girls who have started menstruating are ready to get married, the perception of marriage girls at a young age is to maintain the honor of parents and family, perception early marriage is a way to improve the family's economy, perception adding new family members as a driving force for early marriage, as well as the perception of peers who marry at a young age, is a motivation to also marry at an early age.

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