Early marriage and adolescent mindset
(A case study of early marriages in Donri-Donri Subdistrict, Soppeng Regency)

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Abstract: This study aims to investigate the mindset of adolescents who marry early and the impacts of early marriages. This is a qualitative descriptive study with a case study design, allowing in-depth exploration of a specific case. Following data collection through interviews, observations, and documentation, data analysis was conducted to understand the context and the characteristics of the case. The research informants were nine people from three adolescent couples who married early. The location and informants in this research were identified using a purposive sampling technique. The results of the study showed that: adolescent mindset is divided into three processes, namely encoding, storage, and retrieval. This mindset is shaped by the fulfilling of economic and familial needs, as the majority of adolescents originate from farming families with limited educational backgrounds. The informants underwent the three processes before and after getting married early. The impacts of early marriage include the loss of opportunities for further education, leading to a reduced likelihood of obtaining better jobs and finding the right partner. However, early marriage is negatively perceived by society as it has more negative than positive outcomes.

Keywords: Early Marriage; Children; Parenting Style; Adolescents; Child Marriage.

Abstrak: Tujuan dari penelitian ini untuk mengetahui bagaimana pola pikir remaja yang menikah dini dan dampak yang ditimbulkannya. Jenis penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan desain penelitian studi kasus, metode ini merupakan pemahaman mendalam tentang suatu kasus yang spesifik. Metode ini melibatkan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian menganalisis data tersebut untuk memahami konteks dan karakteristik kasus. Informan penelitian berjumlah 9 orang dari tiga pasangan remaja nikah dini. Lokasi dan informan dalam penelitian ini diidentifikasi menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pola pikir remaja terbagi menjadi tiga proses yaitu proses encoding, proses stroge dan proses retrieval. Pola pikir tersebut berdasarkan pada pemenuhan kebutuhan ekonomi dan keluarga, dikarenakan sebagian besar remaja berasal dari keluarga petani dengan latar belakang pendidikan yang rendah. Ketiga proses ini dialami oleh tersebut dialami sebelum dan setelah menjalani proses nikah dini. Dampak yang di akibatkan yaitu hilangnya kesempatan untuk melanjutkan pendidikan, yang berdampak pada semakin minimnya kesempatan untuk memperoleh kesempatan kerja yang layak, kesempatan untuk memilih pasangan yang tepat juga demikian adanya, sedangkan dari segi persepsi sosial menolak adanya pernikahan usia dini karena realitas sosial menunjukkan banyak terjadi dampak negative dibandingkan dampak positifnya.

Kata kunci: Nikah Dini; Anak; Pola Asuh; Remaja; Pernikahan Anak.

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INTRODUCTION

Early marriage refers to a union into which individuals enter at a young age, especially when they have not become medically and psychologically mature. It may happen due to individuals' urgent need to establish a legal recognition of the relationship between the bride's and the groom's families. Economic factors are often associated with early marriage among the poor, as it is believed to ease the financial burden on parents. Early marriage can cause problems in the family, such as quarrels between the husband and wife. Quarrels can be caused by emotional instability (Rubi'ah, 2023). Its most harmful impact is psychological confusion. Various social problems, particularly socioeconomically related, commonly occur in early marriages, adversely affecting the family’s prosperity. There are a number of factors contributing to the occurrence of early marriage, such as parental coercion, promiscuity, unwed pregnancy, economic reasons, cultural traditions and customs, personal desires, and religious reasons (Ainur Rofiqoh, 2017). Early marriage occurs in various regions in Indonesia. Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, typically initiated with puberty (Maryani, 2022).

The high incidence of early marriage in Indonesia necessitates serious attention and realistic actions. Indonesia is ranked at number 10 worldwide for having the highest number of child marriages. As a result, the Indonesian government passed a 2019 law that mandates women to be at least 19 years old before they can legally marry (Huda, 2022). In addition to Child Protection Regulation No. 35 of 2014, it is stipulated in Marriage Law No. 16 of 2019 Article 7 Paragraph 2 that individuals are not allowed to marry if they are underage. Marriages opposed by their parents offer the possibility of marrying other individuals who are not yet of age. Violating government regulations, two articles that appear to conflict with the relevant laws are compared and their legal significance is analyzed using a normative legal approach (Muqaffi, 2022).

In fact, the number of early marriages grew significantly at the beginning of 2023. Marriage dispensations issued by the Religious Courts in Central Java in January 2023 increased to 50 cases, averagely proposed by adolescents under 17 years of age or still in high school. Religious courts in Polman Regency, West Sulawesi reported that a total of 24 minors entered into early marriage at the beginning of 2023 (SulbarNews, 2023). In Bulukumba Regency, South Sulawesi, however, two junior high school students, a twelve-year-old boy and a fifteen-year-old girl, got married (kompas, 2022). According to the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection (PPPA), the three largest numbers of marriage dispensations were issued in West Java, East Java, and South Sulawesi.

Studies of early marriage have shown that stunting has lifelong effects on a child’s motor, language, and cognitive development and that these effects continue into the next generation. Raising awareness of the risks of early marriage plays a role in combating stunting (Metasari, 2022). Household conflicts may be more common in early marriage. Emotional immaturity is a significant cause of such conflicts (Arifin, 2022). Child marriages are not allowed because injustice to women may have negative effects on children (Rahayu, 2022). A study revealed that according to the Kolimasan community, the contributing factors of the high prevalence of child marriages include parental neglect, financial instability, premartial sex, inadequate education, inadequate religious knowledge, and media influence (Tiruk, 2022).

Adolescents are faced with challenge of having to plan for their future. They must adhere to life principals to achieve their life goals. However, some adolescents may have a strong desire to marry early. In October 2019, the Indonesian government enacted Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 16 of 2019 amending Law Number 1 of 1974 regarding Marriage. This law concerns the restriction on the minimum age for marriage. Under this law, both men and women must be at least 19 years old to marry. Marriage at 19 years of age may prevent divorces as it is believed that both partners have psychologically matured and can produce healthy offspring (Supriadi, 2022).

The Semarang City religious court reported a 45% increase in the number of marriage license requests in 2020, rising from 125 to 226 applicants. One of the adverse impacts of early marriage is the likelihood of becoming a mother at age 18 or less, thereby increasing the risk of delivering a baby with low birth weight. Also, mothers at the age of 18 or younger have a 60% greater risk of infant mortality (Irawati, 2022). Several research findings about early marriages in Soppeng district indicated that a significant number of those who get married early in Larabata subdistrict are junior high school students. The reasons for early marriage are as follows: 1)
adhering to religious teachings, 2) demonstrating new social status, 3) providing financial assistance to parents, and 4) strengthening relationships between families. However, the causes of early marriages in Larabata subdistrict of Soppeng Regency are: 1) poor economic condition, 2) unwed pregnancy, 3) parents’ desire, and 4) poor educational background. Different reasons of early marriages may yield different impacts. The latter factors may cause divorce and inharmonious relationships between family members (Rahman, 2022).

Early marriage in Soppeng Regency is a compelling topic for research due to the objective observation data obtained from the Soppeng Regency Inquisition. Based on data from the Religious Affairs Office of Larabata Subdistrict, Soppeng Regency, 15 young couples married in 2011, 19 couples in 2019, 17 couples in 2020, and 20 couples in 2021. In Soppeng Regency, the Donri Donri subdistrict stands out as an area where several adolescents have married early. At least from the results of the initial observations, there were 3 adolescent couples who married early and became the informants of this study. They married when they were still in junior high school and senior high school. The familial backgrounds of all the three couples are farmers who work in rice fields. Most residents in Donri-Donri subdistrict are engaged in rice farming. Furthermore, a significant number of their progenies support their parents in the fields while returning from school and on holidays.

Previous research indicated that adolescent farmers in the Donri-Donri subdistrict dropped out of school due to their preference for earning money from the harvest and working on farms, often transporting rice on motorbikes. Furthermore, parents’ support for remaining in school is decreasing, as education is viewed as expensive and allowing children to work and earn their own money is seen as a viable alternative (Mauliadi Ramli, 2022). In previous research on adolescents’ knowledge about early marriage, it was found that education significantly impacts their decision to marry early and their ability to make decisions as a married couple. Late adolescents are better equipped to understand risks and overcome challenges compared to their early and middle adolescent counterparts, according to the study (Supriadi, 2022).

Based on the aforementioned data and research, it is crucial for researchers to analyze the facts and cases that frequently transpire in the surrounding environment, particularly in the Soppeng regency. The study aims to understand the thought process of adolescents who opt for early marriages and explore the impact of such marriages. To achieve this, interviews were conducted with the married adolescents to obtain firsthand information. This study applied one of psychologist Jean Piaget’s cognitive theories. Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development is a theory that describes how children are able to adapt and interpret objects in their environment. Children learn from both the functional properties of objects they engage with, including toys, food, and household equipment, as well as from other social entities such as themselves, family members, friends, and neighbors (Handika, 2022). To analyze adolescents’ mindsets and actions towards early marriage, this study employed a prominent theory from sociology: Therefore, this paper aims to examine how adolescents understand and respond to early marriage. Regarding this aim, Max Weber’s theory of social action was adopted. Specifically, this theory asserts that individuals act based on their subjective meaning. Weber identified that behavior can only be understood objectively when based on the direction of a person's conduct. Weber distinguished social behavior into four types: relationships-based, values-based, tradition-based, and emotion-based behavior (putra, 2022). Social behavior occurs when individuals attach personal meaning to their actions. According to Weber, social relations are actions that connect diverse actors and coordinate with others’ actions, as long as they possess significance. Each individual interacts and reacts in these social encounters (Budaya, 2021). School plays a pivotal role in children’s social development. It shapes their behavior and prepares them to become productive members of society (Sugiantoro, 2022). Multiple studies suggest that the social behavior of married couples is only marginally significant in several areas, including socio-cultural and economic aspects (Iswandani, 2022).

METHODS

This qualitative descriptive study was conducted through a case study approach by involving three young couples. This approach allows an intensive and detailed examination on specific cases. It also requires in-depth analysis, allowing the attainment of extensive and holistic knowledge about the case. (Martono, 2021) The informants of this study were three adolescent
couples getting married at the age of 17, and were 19 years of age at the time of data collection. The location of the study was Donri-Donri Subdistrict, Soppeng Regency. The data was analyzed using psychological social and sociological approaches in order to explain the phenomenon of early marriage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that the mindset of adolescents who married early is divided into three processes, namely encoding, storage, and retrieval. Cultural values can affect the encoding, storage, and retrieval processes of adolescents. In the encoding process, the language and symbols affect adolescents in encoding information based on their cultural background. Moreover, cultural values also affect information storage. During the storage process, adolescents store information that is consistent with their cultural values. Lastly, in the retrieval process, adolescents tend to retrieve information that aligns with cultural values because it is easier to access such information in long-term memory. Different cultures may result in different ways of encoding, storing, and retrieving information. The study observed three processes among three pairs of informants, recorded through an encoding process. These processes involved misperceptions occurring before the decision to marry and after undergoing early marriage. Before marriage, all participants shared a positive perception of marriage, influenced by the positive feedback from the married people around them, including relatives, friends, and parents. However, the conditions after marriage differ greatly from their initial expectations, and getting there involved a process of varied interactions and communication. Negative experiences and interactions frequently occurred after marriage with their partners and those around them, which contrasted sharply with their original positive outlook. The informants experienced unhappiness and conflicts after marriage. They had no initial desire to marry early. However, parents’ advice, financial difficulties, and unaffordable education convinced them to marry at a young age. Then, in the storage process, adolescents perceive negative conditions more strongly due to their lack of psychological resilience when encountering conflict. This exacerbates their thought patterns, making them increasingly overwhelming. Research shows that the majority of respondents struggled to cope with conflicts within their families. Furthermore, they recognize that prolonged conflict can negatively impact the continuity and harmony of their family.

Lastly, during the retrieval process, adolescents are susceptible to less realistic mindsets, in which they tend to see themselves and others as they want, rather than as they are. As a result, when their desires exceed their expectations, disappointment can be difficult to manage. This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that they have not yet achieved their family goals, an experience reported by most of the informants, particularly among newlywed couples. Economic disagreements and conflicts often arise during this phase. These results suggest that adolescents view early marriage as the solution to maintain their good image. It is believed that having legal marriage is better than having a romantic relationship while in school.

Several aspects related to the adolescent mindset, particularly the perceptions and attitudes towards early marriage, suggest that most informants do not support it due to concerns about psychological and physiological unpreparedness, as well as a lack of understanding of the concept. Having a stable household is important. However, the lack of opportunity for further education can negatively impact the chances of getting a decent job and choosing the right partner. Early marriage is often rejected in terms of social perception. In reality, there are more negative than positive impacts. This early marriage phenomenon was analyzed using a cognitive theory.

According to Piaget, a child undergoes a series of developmental stages to increase the quantity and quality of their cognitive abilities. Piaget’s cognitive development theory can be used to examine adolescents’ perceptions of early marriage. At the concrete operational stage (ages of 7 and 11), adolescents can think logically about an event and understand the concepts of causality. Regarding early marriage, students can logically and systematically consider the consequences of actions. At the formal operational stage (age 11 and above), students can make inferences about possibilities, and understand abstract concepts, such as love, responsibility, and future. Regarding early marriage, students can logically and systematically consider abstract concepts of marriage, such as emotional preparedness, responsibilities, and future plans.

Max Weber classified social behaviors into several types, including an instrumental rational social behavior, which prioritizes rationality in decision making. In the early
In a marriage context, rationality can help people specifically what considerations youngsters have for marriage and how such behavior can be affected by other people. Social behavior theory by Max Weber can be used to investigate the underlying factors of early marriage and the impacts it has on the household.

Thus, the early marriage phenomenon can be explained more in-depth from the sociological point of view.

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

It can be concluded that the mindset of adolescents who married early is divided into three processes, namely encoding, storage, and retrieval. These three processes were experienced by the three informant couples in this study. All the processes describe the process before and after undergoing the early marriage process for the three informant couples in the Donri-Donri subdistrict, Soppeng regency. The resulting impacts of early marriage include the loss of opportunities for pursuing higher education, leading to limited chances for obtaining decent work. This also applies to choosing the right partner, as society rejects early marriage due to its negative effects outweighing the positive ones perceived in social reality.

Future research can focus on preventing early marriage, while families can pay greater attention to the continuity of their children’s education. This will ensure that children’s mindset about getting married early is taken into account until they are psychologically and physically ready.

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