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Dear JIWS authors and readers: the JIWS has received such a robust number of submissions that our issues are full through January 2024. We will continue to publish special issues through 1/15/24, as well as our regular issues in January 2023, August 2023, and January 2024. As a result, we are closing submissions until December 2023 when the submission link will again be opened. As many of you know, we are a small team; the Executive Editorial team and our Editorial Review Board are volunteer positions. This suspension period will allow us to produce high quality issues that we hope will educate and inspire. Thank you for your understanding—the JIWS Editorial Staff.

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December 2019

## Women's Knowledge and the Role of Local Female Leaders in Ending the Practice of the Early Marriage of Girls in Rural Communities of Indonesia

Emy Susanti

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## **Women's Knowledge and the Role of Local Female Leaders in Ending the Practice of the Early Marriage of Girls in Rural Communities of Indonesia**

By Emy Susanti<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

The practice of the early marriage of girls (under 16 years old) in the rural communities of Indonesia has remained to this day. This article aims to examine how the role of female leaders and local women's organisations in rural communities and how they seek to eliminate the practice of child marriage. This article is based on a study conducted in 2 (two) poor villages on *Madura* Island, East Java Province, namely *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District. The subjects of this study were women who married at a young age, their husbands, parents, members of the women's organisations and the leaders of the women's organisations. The data collection techniques applied in this study included the in-depth interview technique with 20 informants and questionnaires with 200 respondents who had been purposively selected. This study shows that the knowledge of women on the issue of child early marriage reflects a lack of gender awareness. However, this study identified the important role of local female leaders in eliminating the practice of child marriage. Through empowerment activities and programs, female local leaders have been raising the knowledge and consciousness of women on the issue of early marriage. The role of local female leaders was also important in trying to raise the consciousness of local male leaders about the risks of child marriage practices for the young wives and their children and the importance of ending the practice of child marriage.

*Keywords:* child marriage, female leaders, gender issue, rural communities, Indonesia, Indonesian girls, marriage

### **Introduction**

The number of early marriages in Indonesia has increased from 15.6% in 2018 compared to 14.18% in the previous year. The provinces with the highest percentage of young marriages were South Kalimantan (22.77%), West Java (20.93%), and East Java (20.73%). The percentage of early marriage in the East Java province has increased from 18.44% in 2017 to 20.73% in 2018. Early marriages have often occurred in Indonesia, especially before the 20th century when birth records were rarely kept, and marriages tended to occur earlier under the supervision of religious authorities (Blackburn & Bessell, 1997). Compared to other regions in Indonesia, the number of early marriages in the Madura villages of East Java Province is quite large. One in of three women who were married did so for the first time when they were under 16 years old (Indonesian Population Data Survey / IDHS. 2018). In Jones's (2001) study, the Madurese residents have a low marriage age, especially among the Madurese native Muslims on the island.

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<sup>1</sup> The author is a Professor of Sociology in the Faculty of Social and Political Science, Airlangga University Surabaya, Indonesia. The author's concentration within sociology is mostly on gender.

In Indonesia, a marriage to someone who is 16 years old is considered to be legal in accordance with Law No. 1 of 1974 concerning marriage in article 7 paragraph 1. This law states that marriage is only permitted if the male has reached the age of 19 (nineteen) years and the female has reached the age of 16 (sixteen) years. Therefore, the concept of early marriage for the girls in this study is defined as the first marriage of the girl being at the age of 16 years or less. Meanwhile, international conventions, treaties, and international agreements, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights define early/child marriage as any legal marriage involving a boy or girl below the age of 18. Although there has been a Marriage Law enacted in Indonesia, the practice of child marriage under the age of 16 years is still happening in Indonesia, mainly in the poor rural communities. Early childhood marriage in Indonesia seems to make sense when looking at their economic background and the level of education, both of which are underdeveloped (Marshan, Rakhmadi, & Rizky, 2013).

From any perspective, the practice of child marriage is a violation of their human rights, especially women's human rights. Article 1 of the 1964 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age of Marriage and the Registration of Marriage, states that, 'No marriage shall be legally entered into without the full and free consent of both parties, such consent to be expressed by them in person as prescribed by law.' Moreover, article 16.1 of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women prescribes for both men and women an equal right to enter into marriage, to choose a spouse, and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent (Mikhail, 2002). Previous studies show that the subordinate position of girls and women perpetuates the marriage practice of girls in societies where the practice is common. Other previous studies found that an economic burden and poverty were key determinants in the continuation of early marriage (UNICEF.2005; Khanna T. et. Al., 2013; Susanti, E. 2018). It is obvious that the practice of child marriage is rooted in gender inequality and it is an obstruction to social and economic development.

This study focuses on girls married at a young age, regardless of the age of the husbands. Previous studies have found that in the case of early marriage, women bear more losses because they get pregnant and give birth. The decision to get married at an early age will in turn reduce their educational attainment, result in lower living incomes, low socioeconomic status, reduce their ability to influence social welfare policies, and they will have difficulties related to improving their life (Pacheco & Plutzer, 2007). Other studies also found that parents often encourage girls to marry even though they are not yet 16 years of age and they will still go to school with the aim of easing the burden of the family economy (Matlabi H., et. Al. 2013).

The harmful impacts of early marriage related to domestic violence and the health of women and their children are well documented. Previous studies found that girls are one of the most vulnerable and neglected individuals in the world and investing in them is important in terms of fulfilling human rights. (UNICEF. 2014b). Nearly one in three girls continues to be married before they are 18 years of age in many developing countries. The extent of early marriage varies between countries and regions. South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are reported to have the highest rates, where 44% and 39% of girls are married before the age of 18. According to the data from 33 countries, trends in marriage indicate limited change since the International Conference on Population and Development / ICPD (UNFPA. 2012).

Therefore, it is important to undertake a study with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of the practice of early marriage according to the local women's knowledge and

the role of female local leaders to end the practice. This will contribute to designing and developing culturally responsive interventions and programs to end the practice of child marriage. Addressing the needs of girls in the practice of early marriage is necessary; it is not only important to reduce the negative impacts for girls but also to attain global goals such as reducing the maternal and infant mortality rate.

This study is a sociological study using a gender perspective to explain what strategies can be used to eliminate the ongoing practice of child marriage. In order to understand why the practices of early marriage continues and to strive for what can be done to eliminate early marriage practices, this research has focused on the following matters; (a) What is the knowledge of women on the issue of child marriage in rural communities? and (b) What is the role of local female leaders to eliminate the practice of early marriage in their rural community?

## Research Method

This study was conducted in 2 (two) villages on Madura Island in the East Java Province, namely (1) *Temoran* Village, *Omben* Sub-District, *Sampang* District and (2) *Dajah* Village, *Tanah Merah* Sub-District, *Bangkalan* District. The research method used was qualitative analysis, since this is a suitable method to explore and understand the social and cultural context of the phenomenon of early marriage. This research is an empirical sociological research using both qualitative and quantitative data.

The subjects of the study, the respondents and the informants, were women who had married at a young age (before 16 years old) who were born and who lived in the villages selected as the locations of the study, namely *Temoran* village and *Dajah* Villlage. The age of the women as subjects of this study varied from 25 years to 55 years old. The data collection techniques applied in this study were questionnaires with 200 respondents who had been chosen purposefully. There were 100 respondents in *Temoran* Village, *Omben* Sub-District, *Sampang* District and 100 respondents in *Dajah* Village, *Tanah Merah* Sub-District, *Bangkalan* District. This study also applied the in-depth interview technique with 20 informants, namely 10 local female leaders as the informants in *Temoran* Village, *Omben* Sub-District, *Sampang* District and 10 local female leaders as informants in *Dajah* Village, *Tanah Merah* Sub-District, *Bangkalan* District.

The interviews deployed semi-structured questionnaires and face-to-face interviews with 200 respondents conducted by 10 research assistants who were students of the Sociology Department. Meanwhile, the in-depth interviews were conducted by 5 research assistants who were students of the Sociology Master's Degree Program. All of the interview processes were under my supervision at the location of the study. The duration of the questionnaire sessions varied from 20 to 30 minutes and the in-depth interviews varied from 50 to 90 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed in both the local and Indonesian language.

The data analysis of the 200 questionnaires was processed using the statistical package for social science (SPSS) technique, translated into frequency tables. The transcripts from the 20 informants from their in-depth interviews were abstracted, coded and sorted into categories and sub-categories. The categories were revised by the research team members and formulated as the latent content of the text. This study employed triangulation with multiple data collection. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study. To maintain anonymity, the participants' names were changed to pseudonyms.

## Results and Discussion

The main objective of this article is to answer the question of why the practices of early marriage continues and to find out what can be done to end child marriage practices in rural communities. This article is structured into two sections, namely (1) the knowledge of the women in the *Madura* rural community on the issue of early marriage and (2) the role of the local female leaders in ending the practice of early marriage in the *Madura* rural community. In the first section, we will discuss the women's knowledge in order to understand why early marriage practices continue in the rural communities. To what extent do the women have knowledge on the issues of early marriage, what are the consequences of early marriage and what are the losses that are incurred due to the early marriage practices? In the second section, we will discuss the role of the local female leaders. An analysis will be conducted on how the local female leaders in the rural communities have concerns and how they contribute to reducing the practice of early marriage in their villages. Who are the local leaders who support the practice of early marriage? What activities and programs are carried out in the women's organisations and social groups led by the local female leaders to end early marriage practices?

### The Knowledge of Women on the Issue of Early Marriage

Exploring the knowledge of women on the issues of early marriage will uncover some of the facts as to why early marriage practices continue in the rural communities. To what extent do the women have knowledge on the issues of early marriage, what are the consequences of early marriage and what losses are incurred due to the early marriage practices? The knowledge of women on the issues of early marriage in the rural communities of *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District of East Java reflects a lack of gender awareness. Some of the women saw the issue of child marriage as nothing more than a cultural inheritance, so it is not perceived as a problem. The preservation of marriage at an early age is not only related to socio-cultural and religious beliefs, but also to the adaptive local traditions to secure the future of girls and to establish family ties (Sakellariou, 2014).

Some of the previous studies found that the practice of early marriage for girls among poor families is considered to reduce the burden of the family economy. Girls under 16 years of age revealed that their family could not afford to send them to school (Gemignani, R. and Q. Wodon 2015.) Similarly, the results of this study indicate that up until 2018, girls were married at a very young age, both in *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District. Most of them got married at the age of 14 and under (*Sampang* District 74% and *Bangkalan* District 68%). Parents will marry off their daughters just after their first menstruation or after their graduation from elementary school. This study shows that when the girls get married, they drop out of school. Moreover, the results of this study also indicate that in the rural communities of *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District, their mothers and sisters also married when they were young girls at the age of 11-14 years old (*Sampang* District 91 % and *Bangkalan* District 84 %).

The continuation of early marriage in the rural communities of *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District could be rooted in the lack of knowledge on the issue of early marriage. The results of the study indicate that women have no information and knowledge about the age limit of marriage, in particular for the brides. As shown from the data demonstrating the women's knowledge in the villages of *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District, the majority of women have no information about the Marriage Law and the age limit of marriage even though there is Law No. 1 of 1974 concerning marriage in Indonesia which states that marriage is only permitted

if the male has reached the age of 19 (nineteen) years and the female has reached the age of 16 (sixteen) years.

The previous studies suggest that social and cultural norms, their socio-economic status and their education level influence the age of the girl being married early. Early marriage practices among girls are most common in the poor communities who have fewer resources and poor access to investing in alternative options. The social norms around female education and their participation in the formal labour force in some communities sees that girls are not prioritised in a household's education investment strategy. Therefore, the parents may see there to be more benefits if they marry off their daughter early in order to reduce their economic burden, which can be relieved through marriage (FIGO. 2015).

**Table 1**

The Knowledge of Women on the Regulations of the Age Limit of Marriage in Sampang District and Bangkalan District

No.	Information	Sampang	Bangkalan
		(%/N=100) YES	(%/N=100) YES
1.	No Regulation on Age Limit of Marriage	48	53
2.	After Baligh's age (After First Menstruation)	30	27
3.	After 16 years Old (as stated in Indonesian Marriage Law No 1 / 1974)	22	20
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Primary Data, 2018*

This study found that about half of women studied (in *Sampang* District 48% and in *Bangkalan* District 53%) were sure that there were no regulations on the age limit of marriage. The reason for this is that for them, the issue of early marriage is considered to be a private issue. A woman who married at a young age, now 45 years old, said;

*".... Yes, I know from the religious leaders that marriage is a family matter. This does not violate the religion's rules .... Girls in this village are married before the age of 16 years since my grand-grandmother....so it doesn't need to be regulated and limited"* (Mrs Sum, 42 years old, *Temoran* Village of *Sampang* District).

This study shows that only one fifth of the wives married at a young age stated that the age limit of marriage for the bride is 16 years old. The study therefore reveals that only some women have knowledge about the rules of marriage. Women married at an early age can be sure to have dropped out of education and so they do not know about the regulations, which in turn affects an absence of autonomy for themselves that can last throughout their married life (Choe, Thapa, & Achmad, 2001). The majority of the wives married at a young age have no information about the regulation on the age limit of marriage (*Sampang* District 48% and *Bangkalan* District 53%). Those women were sure that there was no regulation on the age of marriage since the issue is considered to be a private issue. Furthermore, the latest policy on the age limit for marriage has changed to 18 years old. This study shows that only 30% of wives married at a young age said that age limit for marriage for the bride is 16 years old (based on the existing Indonesian Government Regulations on Marriage).

This study found that the women in the rural communities do not have enough knowledge on the risks of early marriage for the young mothers and their children. A mother who married off her daughter early said that she was sure that there was no problem with her daughter marrying young;

*“I married off my daughter when she was almost 16 years old .... My daughter got pregnant immediately and there was no problem .... Yes .... like my experience when I was pregnant .... When my daughter was pregnant, she was doing household chores, cleaning the house, cooking, washing clothes.... No need to see a doctor .... Once I bring her to the local health centre because of a cough .... She has had a normal childbirth and the baby was normal .... healthy.... ”* (Mrs Mas, 55 years old, Dajah Village in Bangkalan District).

The narrative of the woman in the village who had married at a young age and who had married off her daughter at a young age indicates that she had never faced the negative effects of the early marriage practice.

This study shows that only one third of the women have knowledge on the high risks of the early marriage practice on the reproductive health of the young mother (31% in *Temoran* village of *Sampang* District and 28% in Dajah village of *Bangkalan* District) and on the health condition of the babies (35% in *Temoran* village of *Sampang* District and 30% in Dajah village of *Bangkalan* District). Moreover, only one third of the women have knowledge on the negative impact of early marriage related to the issue of domestic violence and divorce.

However, studies in South Asia show the strong association between child marriage and the bad condition of the reproductive health of young mothers. Early marriage can be associated with risks not only for the girls but also for their children. High rates of unintended pregnancy, abortion, preterm labour, the delivery of low birth weight babies, and maternal and infant mortality are observed among girls who have married at a young age (Godha D., et. Al. 2013). In young marriages, they are vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV / AIDS, which is exacerbated by inadequate health facilities in the countryside as well as being the result of their unsafe sexual behaviour (Santhya, Jejeebhoy, & Ghosh, 2008).

**Table 2**

Knowledge of Women on the Negative Impact of Girl Marriage in Sampang District and Bangkalan District

No.	Negative Impacts on	Sampang (N=100)	Bangkalan (N=100)
1.	Reproductive Health of The Young Mother	31	28
2.	Health Condition of the Babies	35	30
3.	Drop Off School for the Girls / Young Brides	81	90
4.	Domestic Violence	25	34
5.	Lack of Family Income	60	65
6.	Divorce	35	42

*Source: Primary Data, 2018*

Besides the women knowledge on high risk of early marriage on the health condition of the young mother and their babies, this study indicates that the majority of women are aware of the risks of early marriage on the education of the girls, including dropping out of school (81% in *Temoran* village of *Sampang* District and 90% in Dajah village of *Bangkalan* District). This

study also found that the majority of women were aware of the risk on their economic condition, including the lack of family income (70% in *Temoran* village of *Sampang* District and 78% in *Dajah* village of *Bangkalan* District). A study in Africa indicates the negative impact of early marriage on the literacy and education of girls (Nguyen, M.C. and Q. Wodon. 2015). Previous studies in Bangladesh indicate similar facts as found in the *Madura* rural communities where girls are married early; their educational trajectory is altered. When girls drop out of formal schooling to be married, this means that the girls stop acquiring knowledge and skills that are important in their life, including related to them going on to be productive members of their households and communities. In this poor community, the girls have no choice and they have to obey to their parents and the cultural norms (Field, E. and Ambrus. 2008).

It can be noted from this study that there was a low awareness among the women of the negative impact of early marriage. This condition could mean that the women in the rural communities are powerless. However, the women's knowledge on some of the risks of the early marriage practice indicates that there is the beginning of gender awareness among the women in the villages.

**Table 3**

Knowledge of the Women on the Issue of Child Marriage in Sampang District and Bangkalan District

No	Variables	Bangkalan %	Sampang %
1	Not an issue that needs to be discussed at meetings	15	25
2	A serious problem that has to be ended / may not occur	80	73
3	A serious problem that needs to be fought for by the women's organisation and social groups in order to give inputs to the policy of the Local Government	5	2
Total		100	100

*Source: primary data, 2018*

The result of the study also show that the majority of women saw the early marriage issue as a serious problem that has to be eliminated so then it may not occur (73% in *Temoran* village of *Sampang* District and 80% in *Dajah* village of *Bangkalan* District). Moreover, some of the women argue that the early marriage issue is a serious problem that needs to be fought for by women's organisation. This study reveals there has been an awareness of women on the issue of early marriage. This is a form of social capital to fight against the practice of early marriage in the villages. Another study conducted in Iran found that one of the most important factors of early marriage in rural areas beside traditional and poverty issues was the low awareness of the girls and their parents about the risks of child marriage (Matlabi H., et al. 2013). Research conducted by Parveen in Bangladesh (2007) found that early marriage is a consequence of a patriarchal social system that determines power relations in the household, women's bargaining power, inheritance patterns, gender segregation, and related ideologies. The study supports the argument that to end the early marriage practice, increasing the awareness of women on the negative impacts of the early marriage practice needs to be done.

However, in women's development programs, the issues related to gender injustice are not the main thing considered. Women are not included in the village meetings, which also makes important decisions for women including on matters related to the age limit of marriage. Some of the local female leaders, such as village officials, who were interviewed explained that the village office had never provided them with information about the Indonesian marriage law



regarding the minimum age for marriage for women. When we asked whether women were included in setting up a development program in their village, a village official answered:

*"... for village meetings on development program, we also invited community leaders to give input ... yes .... The majority were men ... but there were also two to three women from the PKK organisation and PEKKA organisation who often attend village meetings....". (Mrs Nuh, village official, 46 years old, Temoran Village, Sampang District)*

From this explanation, it is clear that some of the local women leaders are considered in the decision-making process of the development programs in their own villages. In the case of early marriage practices in the poor villages, the village officials see that it is very important to include women in determining the policies and programs so then the protection of the girls can be optimal. This is because girls are the direct victims of the practice of early marriage. This could mean that a gender mainstreaming strategy has been applied which requires integrating a gender perspective to the content of the different policies and addressing the issue of the representation of women and men in the given policy area. Both dimensions – gender representation and gender responsive content - need to be taken into consideration in all phases of the policy-making process to end the early marriage practice.

This study revealed that there was a degree of gender consciousness, but the women did not know what could be done to fight against the practice of early marriage in their village. It is obvious from the results of this study that there is a lack of women's knowledge on the issues within early marriage. The facts indicate that in the practice of early marriage, girls are the victims and they sacrifice their lives for their families.

### **The Role of Female Leaders**

The discussions on the role of the female local leaders to end the practice of early marriage in this section will be focused on how the local female leaders have concerns and how they contribute to reducing the practice of early marriage in their villages. Who are the local leaders who always support the practice of early marriage? What activities and programs are carried out by the women's organisations and social groups that are led by the local women leaders to end early marriage practices?

The concept of a leader is one of the most fundamental to the sociological study of collective behaviour. This is also one of the most poorly theorised since sociological theorists argue that leaders must be affiliated with an organisation. In this study, the concept of a leader, either male or female, is determined by the community's understanding of who is considered to be a leader in their community. In this study, leaders are not directly associated with formal organisations only.

This study shows that there are some organisations and social groups in the villages of *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District as follows;

**Table 4**

Types of Organisations / Social Groups and the Participation of Women in Sampang District and Bangkalan District

No	Variables	Bangkalan (N= 100)	Sampang (N=100)
1.	PKK (Local Women's Social Organisation with a link to the Village Officials)	82	70
2.	Fatayat (Religious Islamic Young Women's Organisation)	60	53
3.	Muslimat (Religious Islamic Women's Organisation)	91	86
4.	PEKKA (Non-Government Organisation of Female-Headed Households)	64	0
5.	Posyandu (Local Health Care Group for Children)	65	71

*Source: Primary Data, 2018*

The results of this study conducted in the villages of *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District show that there are 5 organisations and social groups where women are involved in their activities, namely *PKK*, *Fatayat*, *Muslimat*, and *Posyandu*. The *PEKKA* organization only exists in *Bangkalan* District. *PKK* (Local Women's Social Organisation linked to the Village Officials), in addition to *PEKKA* (Non-Government Organisation of Female-Headed Households) and *Posyandu* (Local Health Care Group for Children). *Muslimat* and *Fatayat* are religious Islamic women's organisations. Based on the table, we can see that most of the women participated in the *PKK* organisations (*Bangkalan* District 82%; *Sampang* District 70%) and *Muslimat* (*Bangkalan* District 86%; *Sampang* District 91%). Women's activities in organisations and social groups in *Bangkalan* District were found to be higher compared to *Sampang* District. It is argued that women's participation in organisations and social groups is important to increase their knowledge and to raise awareness, which in this case relates to policies and women's human rights issues. As seen from the previous study in Morocco, the determinants of child marriage were the individual's perspective on policies and human rights (Sabbe A., et. al. 2013).

The specific strategy that pays attention to the experiences, aspirations, needs and problems of women and men in policies and programs is gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is widely understood to be a strategy for institutionalising and integrating gender concerns into the mainstream' (Tiessen, R. 2007: 12). This strategy is built on the assumption that women and men do not enjoy equal legal, social or economic rights. In Indonesia, a presidential instruction was issued - number 9 of 2000 - concerning gender mainstreaming in order to carry out program preparation by considering the issues of women needs in policies, programs and activities. This strategy can be implemented through a process that incorporates gender analysis into work programs and by integrating the experiences and aspirations of women and men into the development process.

Implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy could reduce the practice of child marriage in poor villages since the gender mainstreaming strategy is based on local wisdom. In addition, the gender mainstreaming strategy empowers women to be the agents of change, where the women here are those who have been the 'victims' of early marriage. In contrast, this study shows that the practice of child marriage is still supported by the respected informal leaders, who are mainly male. Education for women is as in the slogan "If you educate a man, you educate an individual but if you educate a woman, then you educate a whole nation" (Grabska, 2011).

The gender mainstreaming strategy should be taken into consideration in the entire development process as an integral part of all functional activities in all government agencies and

institutions at the central and regional levels. In this case, gender mainstreaming strategy will optimise the efforts to eliminate the practice of early marriage. The main prerequisite condition of the gender mainstreaming process is empowering women through the dissemination of information that is important to women. When women have sufficient information and knowledge about things that are detrimental to their lives and their families, it is hoped that the women can take precautions. However, the result of this study found a contradictory situation as described in the previous explanations.

The types of programs in women's organisations to eliminate girl marriage practices in *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District included Qur'an recitation, discussions, door to door help, assisting women teachers, mentoring informal local leaders, assisting female village officials and collaboration activities with the Puskesmas (Local Government Health Clinics). The programs are 'traditional informal activities'.

The activities programs are organised by women and involve the majority of women who grow up in the local communities. The activities within the women's organisations and social groups in terms of pursuing gender justice are based on the women's empowerment's strategy. The role of female leaders is very important. Activities organised by women and involving the majority of women who grow up in the local communities have the characteristics of a new type of social movement. This is where social movements are based on the women's empowerment strategy. The movement is not concerned with certain ideologies but rather on specific issues concerning their life.

To find out what can be done to end early marriage practices in the rural communities, it will be discussed how the local female leaders contribute to the elimination of early marriage practices. This study found that the female chairpersons of the local organisations and social groups, namely *PKK* (Local Women Social Organisation linked to the Village Officials), *PEKKA* (Non-Government Organisation of Female-Headed Households) and *Posyandu* (Local Health Care Group for Children), *Muslimat* and *Fatayat* (Religious Islamic women's organisations), are considered to be leaders. Some of the women said that they got a lot of information that they needed when participating in the activities and programs, meaning that they followed the advice of the female local leaders. One woman shared her experience of participating in the *PKK* and *Posyandu* activities as follows:

*“.... during the activity, Mrs. Sum (the leader) .... gave examples of nutritious foods for pregnant women and babies.... Coincidentally at that time, my daughter who was newly married and who was 5 months pregnant was present ... Mrs. Sum then told my girl. ... be careful and take care of her vulnerable pregnancy since my daughter was not yet 16 years old .... Ms. Sum explained the risks of underage pregnancy and said that it was better to get married after graduating from high school (age over 18 years) ....”* (Mrs. Hab, the mother of an underage married girl, *Temoren* village, *Sampang* District).

The issues brought into the local organisations and social groups in the *Madura* community today are not always explicitly on issues of gender justice. They are focused on the specific issues that the women experience in their daily lives, such as the issue of child marriage. These issues have raised the collective awareness of local women on the high risks within the early marriage practice.

Similar findings were also found by the previous studies that indicate that early marriage is most likely to occur among women who have a low education level and who live in rural areas (Klugman et al. 2014). The rural communities in this study deny girls the opportunity to be educated and to build their life skills related to health promotion practices and timely care. In the *Temoren* and *Dajah* villages of *Sampang* and *Bangkalan* District, women and girls have no access to lessen their vulnerability to considerable health and social problems.

Furthermore, this study reveals that the types of programs in the women's organisations and social groups used to eliminate the early marriage practice in *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District include recitation, discussions, door to door help, assisting female teachers, mentoring informal local leaders, assisting the female village officials and collaboration activities with the *Puskemas* (Local Government Health Clinics). These activity programs are organised by women and involving the majority of women as well.

The results of this study show that the role of female local leaders is very important to end the practice of early marriage. The female local leaders have raised the knowledge and consciousness of women through their activities in both organisations and social groups. The majority of women in this study attended recitations by the *Muslimat* and *Fatayat* religious organisations (90% in *Bangkalan* District; 86% in *Sampang* District). A local women leader of the *Muslimat* organisation recounted her experience when giving a lecture in the form of a recitation activity as follows:

*“ .... during recitation, I often add some examples of disadvantages to getting married young, especially for girls. I think that the mothers who took part in my recitation lecture are gradually becoming aware and understand the risks of the early marriage practice .... Lately, the mothers have encouraged their daughters to finish high school up until the age of 18 ....”* (Mrs. Nur, 54 years old, *Muslimat* leader, *Dajah* village, *Bangkalan* District).

This study supports the argument as in a study conducted in India which indicated that local female leadership increases the knowledge and educational attainment of women and girls (Beaman L. et. Al. 2012).

The role of women leaders in organisations is very important when encountering the opinions of local male leaders who support the continuity of the early marriage practice. The previous study reveals that it is important to provide useful information for use in such a dialogue by documenting what is known about the impact of child marriage on the girls who marry early, their children, and their families. Such information could help to increase the awareness of faith and community leaders about the consequences of the practice and the need to eliminate it (Walker. 2015).

**Table 5**

The Types of Programs and Activities in the Women's Organisations and Social Groups to Eliminate Early Marriage Practices in which Women Participate in *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District

No	Information	Bangkalan	Sampang
1.	Qur'an Recitation (by Fatayat and /or Muslimat)	90	86
2.	Group Discussions (by PKK)	54	51
3.	Door to door help (by PEKKA)	24	0
4.	Assisting Women Teachers (by PEKKA)	10	0
5.	Mentoring the Informal Local Leaders (by Muslimat)	7	1
6.	Assisting Village Officials (by PKK)	20	14

*Source: Primary Data, 2018*

This paper argues that what can be done to end child marriage is interventions, not only to reform the legal and policy framework but also to raise the consciousness of the people, especially women and girls who are the victims of the early marriage practice. Interventions are the most powerful when they empower women and girls with information, skills, and support networks. It is also important to offer economic support and incentives for girls and their families to keep girls in school or for them to marry later. Educating and mobilising the parents and community members in opposition to the practice is also a key intervention.

Reconstructing the idea of the girls' transition to adulthood without marriage requires a dialogue with religious and community leaders who have a great deal of influence within those issues. This study shows how many of the local male leaders support the continuity of early marriage. One woman said that one day when she attended a recitation, a man who was a religious leader stated:

*"... I don't think early marriage should be a problem .... In this village, it has become the culture for girls to be married off immediately .... According to religious rules, people are encouraged to get married soon, so when a daughter has her first menstruation .... that is the time to get married .... In our religion's rules, there is no mention of the age limit for marriage ...."* (Mrs. Nur, 50 years old, *Dajah* village, *Bangkalan* District)

This situation harms girls since people will follow the suggestions of the local leaders. To compare this with another study in Nigeria, it showed that Islamic leaders influence the perceptions of child marriage (Walker, J. A. 2015).

This study indicates that the aim of a consciousness-raising program in women's organisation and social groups is to avoid the reinforcement of inequalities which could have more of an effect on women. The program and activities include analysing the existing situation with the purpose of identifying inequalities and to reduce these inequalities and undo the mechanisms that caused them. This study also found that these activities and the programs run by local women leaders use the gender mainstreaming perspective. The gender mainstreaming approach is more effective at supporting the transfer of knowledge among women to fight for gender inequality issues, such as the practice of early marriage. This has been proven by previous studies which show that the gender mainstreaming approach makes public interventions more effective and this ensures that inequalities are not perpetuated, such as in the case of the practice of early marriage. (Gemignani and Wodon. 2015).

Integrating the gender perspective into a policy means that the equality between women and men should be taken into consideration in all decisions in each phase of the policy-making process, by all actors involved. This study revealed that some of the local male leaders continue to support the early marriage practice. In this case, the role of the local female leaders is important to hold a dialogue with the male religious leaders and village leaders on the high risks within the early marriage practice. The local female leaders in the villages of *Sampang* District and *Bangkalan* District emphasise the importance of gender consciousness in the women's empowerment programs as part of the village local government program within a mandatory national government program.

Child marriage is an issue that is associated with a range of health and social consequences for the young wives. Interventions for managing early marriage need to apply community-based approaches. However, it has received less attention from policymakers. The high level of literacy has not automatically led to the empowerment of girls and education without the corresponding life skills. It argues that the role of female local leaders is important to support the goals that need to be achieved to empower women and to eliminate the practice of child marriage. Even though early marriage has been a common practice for generations, families and educational institutions appear to have not put sufficient effort in to empower girls to prepare for marriage and to accept marital responsibilities.

## Conclusion

Based on this study, it is obvious that the practice of child marriage in rural communities has been going on for a long time. This paper argues that the practice of early marriage is not an economic issue. It is more of a gender issue. The lack of knowledge on child marriage issues among the women in rural communities was profound. However, this study revealed that there is the beginning of awareness about the risks of the early marriage practice.

The activities conducted within organisations and social groups directly or indirectly will increase the knowledge and awareness of women who are a part of the gender struggle, including child marriage practices. However, some of the local male leaders have been supportive of the continuity of child marriage practices. The role of female leaders is very important. The activities and programs organised by women involving the majority of women who grow up in local communities based on the women's empowerment perspective play an important role in reducing the early marriage of girls.

The important role of local female leaders is very evident from their activities in terms of increasing knowledge and awareness and encouraging the enthusiasm of women to end the practice of child marriage. Local female leaders have contributed to increasing the knowledge of women on the issue of child marriage. They also play a key role in the successes and failures that are a part of fighting against this practice. Local female leaders implement a gender mainstreaming approach in their programs and activities. The gender mainstreaming strategy can empower women as the agents of change, as women are the 'victims' of the child marriage.

Young girls are the foremost victims of early marriage practices. The local government does not have specific programs for the prevention of early marriage. This research shows the importance of implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy so then any efforts aimed at eliminating early marriage practices can run optimally. It is obvious that child marriage practices are not an economic issue but more of a gender issue. Many local male leaders are supportive of the continuity of child marriage practices. The role of the female leaders is very important in

terms of organising activities and programs involving the majority of women in the local communities based on the women's empowerment perspective.

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