

Gender Consciousness among Students of Higher Education

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Gender equality and justice is a widely-discussed issue among various groups. Gender equality is an equal condition between men and women in terms of existence, empowerment and participation in all fields of life, both domestic and public. This study examined college students' knowledge and awareness of various gender inequality issues. A quantitative study was conducted with 256 respondents. The results of this study indicated that college students' awareness on various gender issues is quite diverse. Gender knowledge and awareness of the issue of early marriage among girls, domestic violence, women's rights in the working industry, women's reproductive rights, sexual harassment on campus, cases of maternal and infant mortality, are quite high. A small number of students agree to polygamy marriage. They consider this issue as a serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to local government and national government policies. Students' knowledge of the practice of circumcision among girls is quite low, so they consider that this issue is not a serious problem that needs to be discussed. This shows the importance of gender education among college students.

Keywords: *Woman, Gender, Knowledge, Awareness, College students.*

Introduction

Gender equality and justice is a widely-discussed issue among various groups. Gender equality is an equal condition between men and women in terms of existence, empowerment and participation in all fields of life, both domestic and public. Gender equality has come a long way, including the 1979 United Nations (UN) conference concerning the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (Hermawati, 2007). Kabeer's study (2005) explained that there are implied resources in women that need to be fought for in gender equality, namely education, employment and political participation. This issue has spread widely in various countries as an effort to defend, including the rights of women.



Not all individuals have sensitivity and understanding on gender injustice. Socialisation at the personal level is needed to have gender sensitivity (Mufidah, 2006). There are several aspects affecting the understanding of gender equality, including education, age, and information sources. These three aspects can be a benchmark for someone to understand gender inequality. A low education makes individuals or communities have limitations upon developing themselves (Amalia, 2017). A high school graduate can be different from college graduates in understanding gender injustice. College graduates can identify the occurrence of gender injustice, while high school graduates do not necessarily know an action can be called gender injustice because it has become a habit in society. Stoet et al. (2018), in their research, showed girls with education and ability in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) are likely to have a greater chance to study than women with less education. A study conducted by Taher et al. (2009) found that sensitivity to gender injustice is also understood by students. According to the research, male students agree if students become leaders of organisations.

One issue in women and gender discussion is polygamy. Polygamy is having more than one wife. The action of polygamy has been debated by many groups, both conservative and moderate. Polygamy is closely related to religion, as there are numerous discussions of religious leaders regarding this action. In Indonesia, polygamy is still a sensitive issue.

Gender injustice is also found in the phenomenon of early marriage. In some regions in Indonesia, early female marriage is common and is the product of a culture. The Blackburn et al. study (1997) found that early marriage in Indonesia is inseparable from the history of Indonesians who do not have birth records. Among ASEAN countries, Indonesia ranks second after Cambodia. Candraningrum (2016) described that the prevalence of high rates of early marriage in Indonesia is related to three factors. First, girls in rural areas are twice as vulnerable to marry than in urban areas. Second, the bride is most likely to come from a poor family. Third, the bride and groom are uneducated or dropped out of school. The Indonesian National Population and Family Planning Board (BKKBN) reported that the ratio of child marriages in rural areas in 2013 was much higher than in urban areas, which is 67 per 1,000 marriages, while in cities, it is 32 per 1,000 marriages (Desiyanti, 2015). The age of early marriage in Indonesia, with an average of 15.9 years for adolescent girls, causes problems of early sexual activity and can endanger the health of mothers and babies (Efendi et al., 2016).

The Marriage Law of 1974 regulates the minimum age for married women to be 16 years with parental consent. This figure is considered too vulnerable to women and children, and therefore was revised to Law No. 16 of 2019 with a marriage age limit of 19 years old, for both men and women, because it refers to the definition of adulthood where someone who can be called an adult is 18 years old. The law on child marriages in Indonesia is overlapping, one of which is the Law No. 23/2003 on Child Protection, which states that parents are



obliged to protect children from early marriages (Kartikawati, 2014). Therefore, it is often found that the falsification of population documents occurs so that a child marriage can take place. Jones' study (2001) explained that since the 1974 Marriage Law, early marriage in Indonesia has decreased but early marriage cannot be eliminated, especially in the Sundanese community in West Java, and Madura in East Java.

In fact, there are still child marriages in several regions in Indonesia. Some occur because of cultural factors, juvenile delinquency, and even criminal factors such as human trafficking. Culture developed in the community, such as marriage at the age of more than 17 years, is a taboo to be a factor in early marriage (Qibtiyah, 2014.). A similar condition occurs in Iran, where children who have experienced puberty and *najis* are considered ready to get married, and the country has a marriage age rule of 13 years old for women and 16 years old for men (Montazeri et al., 2016). However, early marriage can also occur because of the desire of the child himself, who comes from the association (Astuti, 2011). In addition, early marriage in rural areas is not realised to lead to human trafficking by a number of persons (Kusuma, 2015). Child trafficking also happens for various purposes, including sex workers or sexual tourism (Rafferty, 2007).

There is a phenomenon of temporary marriage involving children, and this practice often becomes a covert attempt in prostitution. Temporary marriage in the area of Puncak, Bogor, is used by a number of people to benefit from a sexual business that recruits women of various ages (Nurhayati et al., 2019). A person who acts as a broker, provides women from various regions around Bogor, including homeless women of various ages (Ummanah et al., 2015). A study conducted by Kosandi et al. (2017) found that women and children in villages in West Kalimantan are encouraged to work on plantation land in Malaysia, while they are not provided with youth infrastructure.

There are at least 5,500 cases of female genital mutilation (FGM) every day in the world that can cause problems in urination, menstruation, and sexual function (Cook et al., 2002). This practice is often committed by traditional birth attendants. The attendants even cut off the clitoris. The definition of this cutting is to cut or remove part or all parts of the clitoris, some even remove the vaginal lips (labia minora) (Sauki, 2010). The process of cutting the clitoris by a midwife is conducted using scissors until it bleeds and is followed by providing some iodine. Meanwhile, the process of cutting the clitoris by a shamanic midwife is conducted using a knife by scraping the clitoris until it bleeds.

A study conducted by Nurdiyana (2010) on FGM in the Banjar tribe found that the native community viewed this practice as an Islamic tradition. The Banjarese believe that circumcision is the teachings of Islam, although historically, circumcision was utilised at a time to prior to Islam being revealed, and they consider that circumcision is a religious



command that must be conducted (Wardhina et al., 2017). The practice of FGM in Banjar might be celebrated, while male circumcision is celebrated with a huge party. Usually, the celebration of FGM is held in conjunction with aqiqah by slaughtering a goat (Fauziyah, 2017).

The FGM is criticised by various parties because it is considered as one of the acts of mastery or control of the female body. Society not only controls women at the level of consciousness and ideology, but also the body, because the body in this case is a political reality (Susilo et al., 2016). Saptandari (2013) stated that when women's rights have not been fulfilled, that there are also parties who feel they have the right or authority to define, give meaning, make rules, and even exercise control over women's bodies. Although everyone is taught the fact that all children are individuals and all individuals are the same, it turns out they produce actors who take control of their bodies and inherent personal rights and obligations (Boyle et al., 2002).

The treatment of gender injustice is also found in the presence of violence experienced by women. As a product of culture, violence against women seems to be taught. This phenomenon is inseparable from patriarchal influence in society. The impact of patriarchal culture in Indonesia is included in the system blame approach, which is a problem caused by a system that is not working as expected and has a tendency to allow it to occur (Sakina et al., 2017). Domestic violence is a motive for exercising control over a partner marked with a number of tactics or treatment (Johnson, 1995).

Gender injustice is also found in educational institutions, including on campus. On average, gender injustice on campus includes sexual harassment, both in equal relationships or even between students and lecturers. Sexual harassment committed by lecturers mostly uses the opportunity of their position to give bad grades to students.

Victims of sexual harassment on campus are threatened by perpetrators, so many of them choose to remain silent. The victims are afraid of threats and feels that everything that happened to them is a disgrace. If the victims try to blow up the incident, most of them feel that later they will be blamed for not keeping their responses. A study¹⁹ conducted by Wardhani et al. (2007) found that victims of sexual harassment experience a Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III, which is characterised by strong fear and helplessness or haunted by feelings of excessive fear.

Sensitivity to gender issues is especially important for the younger generation, including students. Students are educated individuals, therefore they should have enough knowledge to recognise and realise gender injustice and strive for gender equality.



Method

A qualitative study was conducted in Surabaya (Java) and Ambon (Maluku). The respondents in this study were 131 students at Airlangga University (UNAIR), consisting of 106 women and 25 men. The respondents from Pattimura University (UNPATTI) were 125 students, consisting of 79 women and 46 men. The respondents were between 18–22 years old. The data was obtained through interviewing the respondents using a questionnaire. The obtained data was processed using SPSS. Data analysis was performed on the tables of the results of the field data processing.

Results and Discussion

Age of Marriage Expectation and Students' Knowledge about 'Female Child Marriage'

⁸ The minimum age for marriage in Indonesia is 19 years old, for both men and women. Nineteen years old is mature enough, so that it is permitted by the state to have a marriage. The data in Table 1 showed there was no longer any discourse on early marriage among college students. Most students admitted that they wanted to get married at 25 and above, while only a few students answered they wanted to get married before 25.

Table 1: Age of Marriage Expectation

No.	Answer	UNAIR				UNPATTI			
		Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%
1	21	1	4	0	0	0	0	1	1.3
2	22	0	0	3	2.8	0	0	0	0
3	23	1	4	9	8.5	1	2.2	9	11.4
4	24	0	0	17	16	0	0	7	8.9
5	25	8	32	45	42.5	18	39.1	30	38
6	26	1	4	8	7.5	4	8.7	10	12.7
7	27	5	20	6	5.7	12	26.1	7	8.9
8	28	4	16	5	4.7	5	10.9	9	11.4
9	29	0	0	0	0	1	2.2	1	1.3
10	30	4	16	0	0	4	8.7	2	2.5
11	32	0	0	1	0.9	0	0	0	0
Total		25	100%	106	100%	46	100%	79	100%

Early marriage in Indonesia is still common. Previous studies showed that early marriage can cause children to drop out of school (Munawara et al., 2015; Otoo-Oyorley et al., 2003; Fadlyana et al., 2009). In contrast to previous studies where marriages take place at a young age, this study found that students did not wish to have early marriages. They argued that



they want to work and have a career before marriage. Some even want to get married at 30 and above because they want to be economically "established" and have psychological readiness. Previous studies found several things that must be prepared to achieve a successful marriage. Economically, someone who is going to get married should be financially and psychologically prepared. Previous studies also showed that successful marriages are happy marriages that are supported by the education of men and women, and the economic conditions of the couple (Handayani, 2016; Cartwright et al., 1993; Trihantoro, 2013).

Table 2: Students' Opinion about 'Female Child Marriage'

No.	Answer	UNAIR				UNPATTI			
		Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%
1	Not a problem that needs to be discussed on campus	3	12	15	14.2	18	39.1	19	24.1
2	Serious problem that should not occur and needs to be addressed on campus	7	28	24	22.6	10	21.7	23	29.1
3	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to local government policies	3	12	19	17.9	6	13	17	21.5
4	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to central or national government policies	12	48	48	45.3	12	26.1	20	25.3
	Total	25	100%	106	100%	46	100%	79	100%



Table 2 showed that students' knowledge of female child marriage was very diverse. Some students stated that female child marriage is an issue that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input for central or national and local government policies. Although there is no student who wants to get married early, there were still students who argued that early marriage is not a serious problem that needs to be discussed. This finding indicated a low gender awareness among some students.

Male respondents at UNAIR and UNPATTI had a higher gender awareness than female students. Although the data were varied across several opinions, the percentage of male respondents who have considered early marriage was greater than the percentage of female respondents.

According to UNICEF records, Indonesia ranks in the top ten in the world with the highest absolute number of child brides. UNICEF also noted that the trend of early marriage in Indonesia declined during the period of 1977–1992, after which it experienced an increase (Maula, 2014). Families in Indonesia make early marriage decisions because of their socioeconomic status and as a solution to escape from poverty (Marshan et al., 2013).

The concern and awareness of women's fates is important for students because they will be the future generation of nation leaders. Discourse about the need for the serious attention of female child marriage should come from all parties. In this case, especially from the campus. Knowledge and gender awareness need to be prioritised and included in the learning curriculum in and outside the classroom.

Gender Perception and Awareness among College Students

Polygamy is a form of gender injustice. The concept of polygamy is to marry more than one wife (Wartini, 2013; Hidayat, 2008). In Indonesia, polygamy is still widely practiced for various reasons. Previous studies showed that polygamy is a pre-Islamic Arab product, in which women are like slaves, have no legal standing, and are considered movable property (Rehman, 2007). In Islam, there are opportunities for polygamy, but it is difficult for ordinary men who fear of not being fair (Imron, 2012; Sunaryo, 2010; Ulfah, 2011). According to Quraish Shihab, fair is what is meant in QS An Nisa verse 3, which is fair that cannot be realised in the heart continuously, that is love for wives, because love is beyond the ability of humans to regulate (Asiyah et al., 2019).

Table 3 showed that students' perceptions of polygamy were quite varied. Most students disagreed with polygamy. Surprisingly enough, there were still students who agreed and even strongly agreed with polygamy, even though the number was relatively small.



Table 3: Students' Opinion on Polygamy

No.	Answer	UNAIR				UNPATTI			
		Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%
1	Agree	0	0	4	88.7	0	0	0	0
2	Disagree	25	100	102	11.3	46	100	79	100
Total		25	100%	106	100%	46	100%	79	100%

All students, both from UNAIR and UNPATTI, disagreed with the same reason, which was being afraid of hurting others and could not be fair in sharing love, as well as future conflicts because of polygamy. The respondents argued that women in polygamy marriages are vulnerable to various forms of violence and injustice, especially if polygamy is not officially carried out, which is recorded in state documents. The impact of polygamy on women is the loss of women's self-confidence and leads to violence experienced by women (Hikmah, 2012; Shepard, 2013; Ansor, 2014).

Studies in various countries have found that polygamy is a form of injustice against women (Kholis et al., 2017). Many women in polygamous marriages are disadvantaged, such as having feelings of hurt, having to share their husbands, receiving negative labels from the community, and it can afflict families (Sadnyini, 2007; Hassouneh-Phillips, 2001; Dickson, 2007).



Table 4: Students' Opinion on 'Genital Mutilation Among Girls'

No.	Answer	UNAIR				UNPATTI			
		Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%
1	Not a problem that needs to be discussed on campus	14	56	54	50.9	34	73.9	60	75.9
2	Serious problem that should not occur and needs to be addressed on campus	1	4	20	18.9	5	10.9	7	8.9
3	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to local government policies	4	16	12	11.3	1	2.2	6	7.6
4	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to central or national government policies	6	24	20	18.9	6	13	6	7.6
Total		25	100%	106	100%	46	100%	79	100%

Table 4 showed that the students' awareness on genital mutilation among girls was still very low. Most students considered that it is not a serious problem that needs to be discussed. Apparently, many students were not aware of the practice of circumcision in girls. In fact, previous studies showed that some communities in Kalimantan, West Java, Madura, and even in Africa, still practice FGM (Paristi, 2016; Njambi, 2009). A study conducted by Worsley (1938) in Sudan found that the purpose of female circumcision is to maintain virginity. When a girl reaches puberty, circumcision is performed by enlarging the vaginal opening and tearing it down with three fingers tied with string.



Table 5: Students' Opinion on 'Right of Female Reproductive Health'

No.	Answer	UNAIR				UNPATTI			
		Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%
1	Not a problem that needs to be discussed on campus	3	12	10	9.4	13	28.3	34	43
2	Serious problem that should not occur and needs to be addressed on campus	6	24	20	18.9	9	19.6	13	16.5
3	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to local government policies	5	20	25	23.6	11	23.9	12	15.2
4	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to central or national government policies	11	44	51	48.1	13	28.3	20	25.3
Total		25	100%	106	100%	46	100%	79	100%

Table 5 showed diverse opinions between UNAIR and UNPATTI students. Most UNAIR students, both male and female, expressed their opinion on the importance of reproductive health rights in women. Meanwhile, UNPATTI students had diverse opinions, which can be concluded that their awareness of women's reproductive health rights was still low.

Women have the right to maintain, recognise and understand their reproductive organs to avoid contracting sexually transmitted diseases (Anas, 2010). The Wang et al study (2001) explained that women's reproductive health approaches involve enhancing women's rights, which are human rights, and ensuring that women are free from gender discrimination.



Table 6: Students' Opinion on 'Women's Rights in Working Industry'

No.	Answer	UNAIR				UNPATTI			
		Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%
1	Not a problem that needs to be discussed on campus	3	12	11	10.4	13	28.3	27	34.2
2	Serious problem that should not occur and needs to be addressed on campus	5	20	9	8.5	10	21.7	14	17.7
3	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to local government policies	6	24	24	22.6	8	17.4	13	16.5
4	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to central or national government policies	11	44	62	58.5	15	32.6	25	31.6
Total		25	100%	106	100%	46	100%	79	100%

Table 6 showed diverse opinions among students at the two universities. UNAIR students showed their awareness of the importance of women's rights in the working industry. Meanwhile, most UNPATTI students considered that women's rights in the working industry was not a serious problem. More male respondents agreed that the issue of women's rights in the working industry needs to be fought for at the national policy level.

The women's rights in the working industry that need to be fought for include the right to get menstrual leave, get pregnant, and give birth. This finding indicated that students see women and men as having the same opportunity in getting a job. Women's rights in the working industry need to be fought for. Previous studies showed that many companies neglect



women's rights related to leave rights (Waldfoegel, 1998; Aini, 2018; Baum, 2003). The companies argue that they do not want to lose from the production process because its employees take their days off. These actions ignore the rights of women, and workers rarely want to speak out because they are worried that their salary will be reduced.

Sylvia Walby's patriarchal theory states that there is a shift in the patriarchy from private patriarchy to public patriarchy (Walby, 1990). Women still face a patriarchal barrier when they choose to work. Various forms of gender injustice may occur, for example in obtaining employment, occupations, job promotion, and so on. Women don't always get the same rights as men. Women also do not always get rights related to reproduction, for example, menstrual leave and maternity leave.

Various studies in Indonesia showed that women's rights in the working industry have not yet been fully fulfilled. Salama's study (2012) pointed out that female workers, especially in garment, electronics, textile and beverage industries, are vulnerable to unilateral termination of employment (Salama, 2012; Limoncelli, 2009). Women's struggle to obtain rights in the working industry has been carried out mainly in relation to their welfare (Hera, 2015; Gillespie, 1971). Female workers fight for their destiny by participating in workers' organisations, in order to deal with issues against women (Haq, 2015).



Table 7: Students' Opinion on Domestic Violence

No.	Answer	UNAIR				UNPATTI			
		Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%
1	Not a problem that needs to be discussed on campus	1	4	4	3.8	9	19.6	19	24.1
2	Serious problem that should not occur and needs to be addressed on campus	5	20	16	15.1	11	23.9	12	15.2
3	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to local government policies	6	24	16	15.1	9	19.6	16	20.3
4	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to central or national government policies	13	52	70	66	17	37	32	40.5
Total		25	100%	106	100%	46	100%	79	100%

The students' awareness of domestic violence is quite high. Although there were still students who argued that it is not a serious problem that needs to be addressed, most students stated that domestic violence is an issue that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input for central or national and local government policies. Abdurrachman (2010) pointed out that people see domestic violence as a personal problem, and victims of domestic violence do not get definite legal protection during the investigation process.



Table 8: Students' Opinion on 'Sexual Harassment at the Workplace'

No.	Answer	UNAIR				UNPATTI			
		Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%
1	Not a problem that needs to be discussed on campus	2	8	1	0.9	7	15.2	12	15.2
2	Serious problem that should not occur and needs to be addressed on campus	3	12	12	11.3	9	19.6	11	13.9
3	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to local government policies	7	28	17	16	12	26.1	19	24.1
4	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to central or national government policies	13	52	76	71.7	18	39.1	37	46.8
Total		25	100%	106	100%	46	100%	79	100%

The students' awareness of sexual harassment cases on campus is quite high. Most students stated that this is an issue that the student organisations need to fight for, to provide input to the policies of the central or national government and regional governments. Sexual harassment is still highly found in various places due to the practice of power relations between women and men (Sitorus, 2019). Victims of sexual harassment on campus feel frightened and humiliated, resulting in a decrease in the concentration of work. If the work environment does not support them, they will experience a decline in organisational self-esteem (Peirce et al., 1997). As a result, victims feel uncomfortable, disgusted, afraid, depressed, hateful, and even guilty with long-suffering.



Table 9: Students' Opinion on 'Maternal and Infant Mortality'

No.	Answer	UNAIR				UNPATTI			
		Male	%	Female	%	Male	%	Female	%
1	Not a problem that needs to be discussed on campus	3	12	9	8.5	6	13	16	20.3
2	Serious problem that should not occur and needs to be addressed on campus	4	16	20	18.9	12	26.1	22	27.8
3	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to local government policies	5	20	21	19.8	11	29.9	18	22.8
4	Serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input to central or national government policies	13	52	56	52.8	17	37	23	29.1
Total		25	100%	106	100%	46	100%	79	100%

Table 9 showed diverse opinions among participants at the two universities. Most students stated the case of maternal and infant mortality is a serious problem that needs to be fought for at the national policy level. However, Table 9 also showed that the UNAIR students' answers to question number four (4) were dominated by women, while previous studies showed that cases of maternal and infant mortality still occur in many areas due to social and economic disparities (Syalfina et al., 2019; Palupi et al., 2014). Some of the causes of maternal and infant mortality are poverty (Kholif et al., 2014; Aisyah et al., 2011; Gortmaker, 1979), low health (WHO, 2005; Pranata et al., 2011), and early marriage (Afifah, 2011; Breirova et al., 2004). Previous studies found that gender awareness among students is quite high, and they are sensitive to gender issues (Taher et al., 2009; Stock et al., 2001). However,



a study conducted by Haruna (2018) showed that the level of student literacy on gender issues is still relatively low.

Conclusion

This study concludes that student awareness on various gender issues is quite diverse. Gender knowledge and awareness of the early marriage issue among girls, domestic violence, women's rights in the working industry, women's reproductive rights, sexual harassment on campus, and cases of maternal and infant mortality, are quite high. A small number of students agree to polygamy marriage. Students consider this issue as a serious problem that needs to be fought by student organisations to provide input into local governments and central or national government policies. The students' knowledge of the practice of genital mutilation in girls is quite low, so they consider that this issue is not a serious problem that needs to be discussed.



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