

# Gender Mainstreaming Strategy to Eliminate the Practice of Girl Marriage

Emy Susanti<sup>1</sup> & Siti Mas'udah<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Sociology, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Sociology, Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia*

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**Abstract:** The practice of girl marriage in Indonesia has remained to this day, mainly in poor villages. This paper is intended to reveal how women who married at a young age have been victims and how the practice of girl marriage could be eliminated by using a gender mainstreaming strategy. This paper was based on research conducted in poor villages in the province of East Java, namely in Sampang Regency and Ponorogo Regency. This study is a feminist perspective research with the research subjects being women who were married at a young age, their parents, community leaders, formal leaders, and the leaders of women's organizations. The data collection techniques applied in the study were an in-depth interview technique with 20 informants and interviews using a questionnaire with 200 respondents. This study shows that the practice of early marriage is detrimental to women, since women are the victims. The study also found that implementing the gender mainstreaming strategy potentially could reduce the practice of girl marriage in poor communities.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Various policies and regulations severely limit the practice of girl marriage in Indonesia. However, girl marriage is still happening, mainly in poor communities. Compared to other regions in Indonesia, the number of early marriages in East Java Province is quite high. One out of three women who were married in Java married for the first time when they were aged under 16, especially in West Java and East Java (Indonesia Population Data Survey, IDHS, 2007). Parents often encourage girls to marry even when they are not yet 18 years of age and still make them go to school with the aim of easing the burden of the family economy.

Early marriage has been studied in many countries (Gemignani and Wodon, 2015; Khanna, Verma and Weiss, 2013; Myers and Harvey, 2011; Nguyen, and Wodon, 2014). This study is more focused on the side of the girls who married at a young age, regardless of the age of the husbands. In an early marriage, women often bear more losses because they get pregnant and give birth dangerously early (Field and Ambrus, 2008). This

study used sociological analysis with a gender perspective to explain the mechanism of the social reproduction of gender-based power relations by Foucault (2002) that support the ongoing practice of girl marriage. This paper is intended to reveal how the practice of girl marriage could be eliminated by using a gender mainstreaming strategy.

## 2 METHOD

This paper is based on the research conducted in poor villages in the province of East Java, namely in Sampang Regency and Ponorogo Regency. This study is a feminist perspective research study focusing on women's lives. The subjects of the research were women who married at young age, their parents, community leaders and formal leaders. The data collection techniques applied in the study were an in-depth interview technique with 20 informants and interviews using a questionnaire with 200 respondents.

### 3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The practice of girl marriage has remained to this day, especially in the poorer villages of Ponorogo Regency and Sampang Regency, in the East Java province. The results of the study revealed two important things; 1) women who married at a young age were the victims of early marriage practices in poor communities and 2) a gender mainstreaming strategy (Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, 2001; FAO, 2017) needs to be implemented to speed up the process of eliminating the practice of early girl marriage in poor communities

#### 3.1 Girls as Victims of Early Marriage Practices

The practice of early marriage for girls among poor families is considered to reduce the burden of the family economically. Girls under 18 years of age revealed that their family could not afford to send them to school. The following data indicates that girls were married at a very young age both in Sampang and Ponorogo. Most of them got married at the age of 14 and under (Sampang by 74% and Ponorogo by 68%). Their parents marry off their girls just after their first menstruation or after they have graduated from elementary school. This study shows that once the girls get married, they drop out of school. This indicates that the girls were the victims of the practice of early marriage since they suffer from a loss of rights as children.

The results of this study also indicate that the girls in poor communities were married at the age of 11-18 years old. Their mothers and their sisters also got married when they were young girls, and the majority of their mothers and sisters were married at the age of 12-14 years old (Sampang by 81% and Ponorogo by 75%). The study also shows that there is a social meaning behind early marriage among the majority of wives (73% of 200 women), as it is a part of following the cultural norms and avoiding the label of spinster.

A mother of a 16 year old girl who had just got married stated the following: "... the important thing for my daughter ... She has a new family, she can ask for help from her husband. There is someone as a bread winner and it is her husband's responsibility.... This happens.... because I am not able to send her to school otherwise .... If her father was still alive .... he would be the bread-winner .... so now that she is married, she is not so dependent

on my family anymore..." (Mrs R, 40 years old, the mother of a 16 year old married girl in Sampang Regency)

When girls are married early, their educational trajectory is altered. Formal schooling and education often ceases, which means that they stop acquiring the knowledge and skills that will carry them through life, including as a part of being productive members of their households and communities. In the poor communities, the girls have no choice and have to obey to their parents and the cultural norms. It was obvious from the study that the girls were victims and that they sacrificed their lives for their families' welfare.

#### 3.2 Gender Mainstreaming Strategy and Women Empowerment in the Villages

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy that is carried out rationally and systematically to achieve and realize gender equality and justice through policies and programs that pay attention to the experiences, aspirations, needs and problems of women and men. 'Gender Mainstreaming is widely understood as a strategy used for institutionalizing and integrating gender concerns into the mainstream' (Tiessen, R. 2007: p.12). This strategy is built on the assumption that women and men do not enjoy equal legal, social and economic rights. In Indonesia, a presidential instruction was issued - number 9 of 2000 concerning gender mainstreaming - in order to carry out the program preparation by considering issue of women's needs in a series of policies, programs and activities. This strategy could be implemented through a process that incorporates gender analysis into work programs, integrating the experiences and aspirations of women and men into the development process.

The gender mainstreaming approach is an improvement on the gender approach in previous developments and it is one of the most effective ways to achieve gender equality. This improvement can be found in the strategy of shifting the focus of policies from the subordination of women to mainstreaming or integrating women into all developmental sectors with the aim of achieving equality and empowerment.

Implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy could reduce the practice of girl marriage in poor villages, since the gender mainstreaming strategy is based on local wisdom. In addition, the gender mainstreaming strategy empowers women as agents of change, where women are the 'victim' of the girl

marriage. This study showed that the practice of girl marriage is still supported by the respected informal leaders, who are mainly male.

The gender mainstreaming strategy should be put to the consideration of the entire development process as an integral part of the functional activities of all governmental agencies and institutions at both the central and regional levels. In this case, the gender mainstreaming strategy will optimize the efforts to eliminate the practice of early girl 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 the things that are detrimental to their lives and their families, it is hoped that women could take precautions. However, the results of the study found there to be a contradictory situation, as follows;

Table 1: Knowledge of Wives on the Regulations of Age Marriage in Ponorogo and Sampang

No.		f	(%)
1.	No Regulation on Age of Marriage	108	54
2.	After baligh's age (After First Menstruation)	62	31
3.	After 16 years old (based on Indonesian Government Regulations on Marriage)	30	15
	<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows that the majority (54%) of wives who married at a young age have no information about the regulations on the age of marriage. The women were sure that there were no regulations on the age of marriage since the issue is considered to be private. However, the Indonesian Government actually has regulations related to marriage and the age limit for brides is 16 years old. Furthermore, the latest policy on the age limit of marriage has been changed to 18 years old. This study showed that only 30% of wives who got married at a young age said that the limit for marriageable age for brides was 16 years old (based on the existing Indonesian Government Regulations on Marriage).

The facts revealed from the study are that women do not know enough information and have no knowledge at all about the rules of marriage. This condition could mean that women in poor villages are powerless toward the betterment of their own lives. Especially in women's development programs, women's issues are the main thing that need to be considered. Women are not usually included in

village meetings which also produce important decisions for women, including the age limit of marriage. Some of the village officials interviewed explained that the village office has never provided information about the Indonesian marriage law regarding the minimum age for women to get married. When we asked whether women were included in setting up the development program in their village, a village official answered; "...village meetings on the development program? We also invited community leaders to give input ... yes .... the majority were men ... but there were also two women from the PKK organization who often attended the village meetings..." (Mr N, village official, 45 years old).

From this explanation, it is clear that women are not considered in the decision making process of the development programs in their own villages. In the case of early girl marriage practices in poor villages, it is very important to include women when determining policies and programs so then the prevention and protection of girls can run optimally. This is because girls are the direct victims of the practice of early marriage. Gender mainstreaming requires integrating a gender perspective to the content of the different policies and addressing the issue of representation for both 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 (Susanti, 2009).

Gender mainstreaming ensures that policy-making and legislative work has a greater relevance for society, because it makes the policies respond more effectively to the needs of all citizens – women and men, girls and boys. Gender mainstreaming makes public interventions more effective and ensures that inequalities are not perpetuated, in this case, the practice of early girl marriage. Gender mainstreaming does not only aim to avoid the creation or reinforcement of inequalities which can have adverse effects on both women and men. It also implies analyzing the existing situation, with the purpose of identifying inequalities, and developing policies which aim to reduce the inequalities and undo the mechanisms that caused them. Integrating the gender perspective into policy means that equality between women and men, as the overarching principle, should be taken into consideration in all decisions and in each phase of the policy-making process by all of the actors involved.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study, this paper argues that young girls are the victims of early marriage practices. The practice of early marriage in poor communities has been going on for a long time and has continued for generations until now. It is obvious that early girl marriage practices were not an economic issue but more of a gender issue.

Early marriage practices in poor communities has been going on for decades since the government did not previously have specific programs designed for the prevention of early marriage. This research shows that the majority of the girls and wives who have been early marriage victims have no knowledge at all about the marriage laws that apply in Indonesia. This research shows the importance of implementing gender mainstreaming strategy so then any efforts aimed to eliminate early marriage practices can run optimally.

Implementing a gender mainstreaming strategy potentially could reduce the practice of girl marriage since gender mainstreaming strategy is based on local wisdom. In addition, the gender mainstreaming strategy seeks to empower women as the agents of change, particularly where the women have been the 'victims' of girl marriages.

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