



## The Challenges in Maturing the Age of Marriage Among Teenagers in Bandar Village, Pacitan Regency: Reproductive Health Review

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### ABSTRACT

The age of marriage is still become a dilemma for Indonesian people, especially for them who live in rural areas with a thick local wisdom. The influence of local wisdom in deciding the marriage is so great in the society so that they do not pay any respect to the regulations that have been made by the government. The impact of child marriage can affect reproductive health, which is largely ignored by society. In fact, reproductive health is one of the factors in achieving the Indonesian government's goal to have a golden generation in 2045. However, if the society's knowledge about reproductive health is lacking, will Indonesia really get the golden generation as it dreams of? This research wants to reveal the problems that occur in Indonesian society, especially people who are living in rural areas. Using qualitative methods, this research was conducted through several stages, one of which was literature studies and in-depth interviews. The results of the study show that there are several factors influence the challenges of maturing child marriage, such as local culture of the society, family economic conditions, and lack of knowledge about reproductive health. Due to the lack of knowledge on reproductive health, people experience vulnerability to child marriage, marriage by accident, and end up on dropping out of school. This is an urgent condition that requires serious handling by various parties through collaboration to provide information related to reproductive health and maturing the age of marriage.

**Keyword:** Reproductive Health, Child Marriage, Maturing the Age of Marriage, Golden Generation

### ABSTRAK

Usia pernikahan masih menjadi dilema bagi masyarakat Indonesia khususnya bagi mereka yang tinggal di daerah pedesaan dengan budaya lokal yang masih sangat kental. Pengaruh budaya lokal dalam memutuskan usia menikah sangat besar di dalam masyarakat hingga mereka tidak mengindahkan peraturan yang sudah dibuat oleh pemerintah. Dampak dari pernikahan anak dapat mempengaruhi kesehatan reproduksi, di mana hal ini banyak diabaikan oleh masyarakat. Padahal, kesehatan reproduksi merupakan salah satu faktor tercapainya cita-cita pemerintah Indonesia untuk mendapatkan generasi emas di tahun 2045. Lalu, jika pengetahuan masyarakat terhadap kesehatan reproduksi masih rendah, apakah Indonesia benar-benar akan mendapatkan generasi emas yang diimpikannya? Penelitian ini ingin mengungkap permasalahan yang terjadi pada masyarakat Indonesia khususnya masyarakat yang tinggal di wilayah pedesaan. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif, penelitian ini dilakukan melalui beberapa tahap salah satunya yaitu melalui studi literatur dan wawancara mendalam. Hasil dari penelitian menunjukkan bahwa adanya beberapa faktor yang mempengaruhi tantangan pendewasaan usia pernikahan pada remaja yaitu budaya lokal masyarakat, kondisi ekonomi keluarga, dan minimnya pengetahuan terhadap kesehatan reproduksi. Akibat minimnya pengetahuan terhadap Kesehatan reproduksi tersebut,



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masyarakat rentan mengalami pernikahan usia anak, *marriage by accident (MBA)*, dan berakhir pada putus sekolah. Kondisi yang sangat mendesak ini diperlukan penanganan yang cukup serius oleh berbagai pihak melalui kolaborasi untuk memberikan informasi baik terkait dengan kesehatan reproduksi maupun pendewasaan usia pernikahan.

**Keywords:** Kesehatan Reproduksi, Pernikahan Dini, Pendewasaan Usia Pernikahan, Generasi Emas

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## 1. Introduction

Maturing the age of marriage among teenagers is currently still become a challenge for Indonesian Government. Although the regulations have been issued to mature the minimum age of marriage from 16 to 19 years old, but the implementation in the society is not as easy as turning the palm of the hand. There are many factors affect maturing the age of marriage in the society, one of which is the local wisdom of the society itself. Maturing the age of marriage is one of the ways to prevent the risk of stunting which child marriage have a high risk of stunting. The issue of stunting has become a widely known to the public since the regulation issued by the government. It is in line with the Indonesian Government's target to have a golden generation by 2045. Presidential Regulation Number 72 of 2021 concerning the Acceleration of Stunting Reduction of Holistic, Integrative, and Quality through coordination, synergy, and synchronization among stakeholders (Cegah Stunting itu Penting, 2021). One of the causes of stunting in Indonesia is the large number of child marriages. According to the Regulation Number 16 of 2019 concerning amendments to the Regulation Number 1 of 1974 concerning about Marriage, the minimum age limit for men and women to carry out marriage is 19 years old (Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan Republik Indonesia (BPK-RI), 2019). However, the minimum age limit is not always implemented by the society. There are still many Indonesians who ignore the regulation and allow their children to marry at the age of under 19 years old for various reasons. As a result, unpreparedness of young couples both mentally, physically, and economically puts the children they will give birth to at risk of stunting.

In addition, public understanding related to reproductive health for teenagers is also still very low in Indonesia. From research conducted by Mareti and Nurasa (2022) in Pangkalpinang City, it shows that teenager's knowledge about reproductive health problems is still at 75%, while the knowledge about the access to reproductive health information is 66.6% (Mareti & Nurasa, 2022). Lack of knowledge about reproductive health among teenagers can cause problems of their reproductive health. Problems will be arisen if they do not know enough about reproductive health such as sexually transmitted diseases and infections (Galbinur, Defitra, & Venny, 2021). The low fulfilment of reproductive rights can be seen by the high Maternal Mortality Rate, Infant Mortality Rate, and Mortality Rate Below Five Years. The high Maternal Mortality Rate and low level of understanding of reproductive health are indicators of the government's weakness in protecting, respecting, and fulfilling citizens' rights to reproductive health. In Indonesia, reproductive health insurance is regulated in article 72 of the Republic of Indonesia Law No.36 of 2009 concerning Health (Nisa, 2021).

The comparative percentage of child marriage rates in Indonesia is still high. One in nine girls was married underage in 2018. This prevalence makes Indonesia raked second with the highest rate of early marriage in ASEAN after Cambodia. Early marriage is not only a violation of girls' rights but can be an obstacle to several things such as efforts to overcome poverty and improve health indicators (Ayuwardany & Kautsar, 2021). National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) sets the age of 21 years old for women and 25 years old for men as the Marital Age Maturity program. At this age limit, men already have income to meet family needs, while women are mentally and emotionally and physically ready, especially for pregnancy and childbirth (Puspitasari, Nasution, & Murniati, Determinan Perencanaan Pendewasaan Usia Perkawinan Pada Remaja 10-19 Tahun di Indonesia: Analisis SKAP KKBPK Tahun 2019, 2021). The impact of child marriage can affect reproductive health, which is largely ignored by society. In fact, reproductive health is one of the factors in achieving the Indonesian government's goal to have a golden generation in 2045. However, if the society's knowledge about reproductive health is lacking, will Indonesia really get the golden generation as it dreams of? This research wants to reveal the problems that occur in Indonesian society, especially people who are living in rural areas.

## 2. Method

Research method used in this study is qualitative research method. Research activities are carried out through several stages, such as, literature studies in which activities are carried out to collect information

sourced from several related agencies such as the Bandar Sub-District Family Planning Center, Religious Affairs Office of Bandar District, and several other literature sources both from books and internet. After data collection from literature study, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 4 key informants and several additional informants including housewives, junior high school students, teachers, and Bandar Sub-District staff. In-depth interviews were conducted to deepen the data owned by researchers and to describe the life of housewives who had been married at a young age.

The implementation of the research activities was carried out for 3 months from October to December 2022 in Bandar Village, Pacitan Regency. The choice of Bandar Village as the location for the research is because the number of child marriages in this village is quite high. Researchers tried to explore data and information on the factors causing the high rate of child marriage in Bandar Village. Besides, Bandar Village as one of the stunting focus locations from 10 villages in Pacitan Regency. The relationship between child marriage, reproductive health and stunting cannot be separated, so Bandar Village become the choice of the research location.

### 3. Result and Discussion

Bandar Village is one of the villages in the Pacitan Regency. This area is the highest area in Pacitan Regency with cold air temperatures that are typical of the mountains. The distance from Bandar Village to the district capital is 39 kilometers with a population of 8,280 people and is the second highest in Bandar District (BPS Kab. Pacitan, 2023). The condition of Bandar Village which is quite remote makes access to this area quite difficult. Travelling to Bandar Village from the capital of Pacitan Regency can be by car or motorbike heading east then passing several quite steep hills with the road conditions can only be passed by 2 cars. Once, when the researchers passed a car from the opposite direction, we had to give way and look for a wider edge of the road so that the vehicle from the opposite direction could pass the road. Likewise, when using a motorbike, the risk of the car backing up when going up to Bandar District often occurs, so the journey to this village is indeed full of challenges. Given the situation, the conditions of the people in Bandar Village are not much different from the conditions of people in rural areas in general. Most of the population's livelihood is farming and agricultural labor. To meet their daily need, people in Bandar Village can be said poor or lower middle class, this is impacting on the small number of people who have graduated from higher education. The problem of costs for continuing education is one of the common reasons we will encounter in Bandar Village when discussing with the society. However, more than just a cost, unfavorable geographical conditions also result for youth in Bandar Village often burying their dreams. It is because the location of Bandar Village is quite far from the capital, so that gaining access to higher education is also quite difficult. As a result, with that level of education, knowledge regarding access outside the region is also limited, it makes the demand for youth to get married soon is also quite high.

#### 3.1 *Perawan Tua, Social Stigma in a Cultural Wrapping*

Bandar Village has had a high record of early marriages over the last few years. The results of records from the Religious Affairs Office of Bandar District, as many as 25 child marriages were held in 2021 and 39 child marriages in 2022. This data is also offset by the still low level of education where in 2022, there were 6 elementary school graduates, 40 middle school graduates and 49 people who graduated from high school or equivalent applied for marriage. Age limits and certain levels of education are not a benchmark for someone to postpone marriage for people in Bandar Village because the social conditions of the community influence them to get married immediately. There are many other factors that make people in Bandar Village married at a young age.

One of the factors causing the high number of child marriage in Bandar Village is the culture of the society that still perpetuates marrying at a young age is better than being late for marriage and is referred as “perawan tua” or “spinsters” by the neighbors. The stigma that arises in society when girls do not marry immediately will get the label of *perawan tua* has long been a scourge for society for both parents and their own teenage children. The labeling age limit arises when girls living in Bandar Village have reached the age of over 17 years old but are not married or no one has proposed yet, or when they have completed Junior High School and do not continue to a higher level or do not work (unemployed at home after graduating from school). In the applicable law in Indonesia, the minimum age of marriage is 19 years old. However, marriage dispensation can be applied for the youth who want to marry under the age of 19 years old. Although not all applications for marriage dispensation are approved by the Religious Courts, the number of early marriages is sufficient to prove how large the community has made such applications. According to the data held by the Pacitan Religious Court, it was recorded that during 2022 there were 308 dispensations granted marriage requests. Although it is high, this figure has decreased when compared to 2021 which reached 370 cases.

Meanwhile, at the beginning of 2023 until entering the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, the Pacitan Religious Court has received 20 cases of marriage dispensation, while 10 cases have been decided (wibowo & Tim Tvone, 2023).

Cases like this often occur in adolescents who live in Bandar Village, one of the contributing factors is parenting style. In the case of Bandar Village, parents often work outside the area to make ends meet and entrust their children to grandparents. The age gap occurs between the teenagers and their grandparents makes there is no control in the use of children's gadgets by adults. This is also accompanied by teenagers' lies to their grandparents when going out of the house. So, the activities outside the house are also not controlled, as a result, the teenagers do as they please and causes unwanted events. Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Amendments to Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection in Article 26 point C that parents are obliged to prevent child marriage. Efforts to protect children and fulfill children's rights need to be made regulations related the efforts to prevent child marriage and the efforts to assist and empower children who have married at child age by prioritizing the principle of the best interests of children (Undang-undang Republik Indonesia, 2014). However, in the Bandar Village, there are still many practices carried out by parents who allow their children to marry at a young age, some of them even advise their children to get married immediately after graduating from secondary school, both junior and senior high school. This is due, to the culture of society which considers that children (especially girls) are not good if they do not immediately get married because they will be called as *perawan tua* both by their neighbors and by their relatives.

### 3.2 Knowledge of Reproductive Health among Adolescents is Still Low

Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so (World Health Organization, n.d.). Meanwhile, in Indonesia, reproductive health is still a taboo topic to discuss, so education regarding reproductive health in Indonesia is still very rare. One of the informants who is a secondary school teacher has made an observation about her students' behavior. It said that the delinquency of teenagers is also influenced by the uncontrolled use of gadgets. The use of gadgets by school-age teenagers is often misused to distribute pornographic information, there are even some students who exchange messages by sending pictures of their respective reproductive organs. This has an impact on premarital sex activities carried out by them. As a result, unwanted pregnancy occurs so that it is prone to abortion in adolescents and/or dropping out from school when the teenagers carry out marriage (marriage by accident).

On the other hand, marrying at a young age has the potential to the risk of stunting because the teenagers' reproductive organs are still not ready to conceive. In addition, from a psychological point of view, teenage couple are vulnerable to divorce at a young age, excessive stress due to various pressures, one of which is economic pressure, and neglect of children. The impact of early marriage is the lack of nutrition, the risk of anemia, the increased incidence of depression, divorce, and increasingly susceptible to cervical cancer. The results of the analysis test of the relationship of knowledge with teenagers' attitudes towards early marriage at SMA Negeri 1 Gamping Sleman concluded that there is a meaningful relationship between knowledge and teenagers' attitudes towards early marriage with a correlation Coefficient value of 0.426 which means medium (Mutmainah & Nuzuliana, 2017). The occurrence of child marriage is not accompanied by education related to reproductive health, so, often they do not get information related to the dangers of their reproductive health if they have free sex. And a marriage that is too young can also cause neuritis, depression, because of a protracted process of disappointment, and because there are excessive feelings of pressure. Socio-economic maturity in marriage is very necessary because it is a buffer in turning the wheels of the family because of marriage (Syalis & Nurwati, 2020).

Promotion of reproductive health in Indonesia is still not that massive, both at school and at home. This happens because of society's belief in taboo matters related to discussing sexuality, so that education regarding reproductive health is hampered by this. The problem is that promoting reproductive health in schools always clashes with the believe of taboo on discussion of sexuality. One of them can be seen from the lack of material linking reproductive health and sexuality in the education curriculum in schools (Dewi, 2012; Pakasi and Kartikawati, 2013 in (Pebrianti, 2020). According to Ekasari (2007) in Pebrianti (2020), the family is the first socialization agent which plays an important role in forming reproductive health values and behavior in adolescents. In the family context, reproductive health promotion is carried out face to face by both parents, in this case the father. However, the intensity of providing information regarding reproductive health by parents is still low and is not related to work status, education, and exposure to information to the media of parents, as well as the child's gender. Parents tend to convey information through conversations in their free time to their teenage children. However, delivery intensity tends to be low (Pebrianti, 2020). Furthermore,

Ekasari (2007) stated that in the family, parents provide outreach regarding the dangers of drugs and alcohol (for boys), as well as promiscuity and its impacts (for girls). The differences in material discussed based on gender show that women are subjects who are vulnerable to becoming victims or perpetrators of casual sex. This gives rise to a discourse of gender bias because reproductive health information for adolescent girls is more associated with negative stigmas in society (Pebrianti, 2020). This also happens to the society where reproductive health education is not provided by parents due to various factors, one of which is because parents go to work and migrate to other areas so that the child's growth and development cannot be monitored directly. Meanwhile, grandparents who are given full custody by their parents do not have sufficient knowledge regarding the importance of reproductive health education for teenagers, in fact most of them think that talking about reproductive health is taboo because it concerns sexuality.

### 3.2 Family Economic Conditions

People in Bandar Village have a low average economic condition, most of the people in Bandar Village make their living as farmers with middle to lower economic conditions so this affects the education level of the youth in Bandar Village. This is because parents do not have the funds to send their children to higher education. This condition causes the youth in Bandar Village to easily accept a man's proposal. People in Bandar Village still adhere to the system that the sooner children marry, the sooner family's economic burden will be reduced. In this way, parents seem to be telling their children to get married soon to ease their family's economic burden.

This economic condition is supported by the geographical condition of the region which is quite far from the district capital so the access to this location is quite spend time. This situation is a factor, especially for the youth in Bandar Village to decide not to continue their education from lower secondary to upper secondary level. It is also the reason for them to remain in the village even though the economy is mediocre. This reason was given by one of the village residents who said that if they wanted to go to work as shop or restaurant staff in the district capital, they would have to incur additional costs because they had to pay rent for a room or boarding house to live in, even though the wages they received were not that big. As a result, they choose to marry in order to lighten the family's economic burden. Although, they finally experienced regret after their marriage lasted several years and exceeded their expectations when they were teenagers. They begin to experience economic difficulties; mental stress also often occurs when they have children and their living needs increase. Mental unpreparedness makes their lives difficult even though they still have to survive to maintain the integrity of their household. There are also cases of miscarriage during pregnancy due to women's unpreparedness physically and mentally, added with a lack of knowledge regarding reproductive health.

The difficulty in breaking the chain of family economic conditions in Bandar Village is influenced by many interrelated factors, but one of the main factors is the low level of education in the society. If the youth in a family dare to take risks to get out of this condition and decided to continue their education to a higher level, the hope for economic change will be greater because the opportunity for the youth to be able to get a more decent job will also be greater. To be able to get this opportunity, there needs to be direction from several parties, one of which is the school and the awareness from the youth's parents themselves.

## 4. Conclusion

The challenges faced by Bandar Villages in reaching the age of marriage are still far from the expectations. This is caused by several fundamental factors, one of which is that society's culture regarding early marriage is better than being called *perawan tua* is still deeply ingrained. This ingrained culture is accompanied by a lack of public knowledge regarding reproductive health which makes people unaware of their own reproductive health. Even discussing reproductive health is still considered as a taboo by society because it is related to discuss about sexuality. Apart from that, the economic condition of the society, which on average is still in the lower middle class, is also a chain that is difficult to break because it resulting the youth not being able to receive higher education. As a result, these youth are also unable to have decent jobs so that the family's economy does not improve. Therefore, various parties need to address the issue of maturing the age of marriage so that the chain of ending poverty can be handled well.

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