



Becoming a Mother as a Teenager: Self-Acceptance of Adolescent Girls Who Choose to Get Married

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Keywords

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Abstract

Age is one of the essential aspects of everyone's life, including physiological considerations of health and psychological states. At each stage of development, in line with age, a person will face tasks and challenges in life. It is the same as when someone is married, where age also determines the readiness and acceptance of new roles. This study describes the self-acceptance of adolescent girls who do early marriage and motherhood at a young age. The research sources comprised six people, of which two were primary subjects and four were significant others. The criteria for participants used in this study are adolescent girls who married under the age of 19 and have children from the marriage. The method used in this research is qualitative with a phenomenological approach. This research shows that primary informant 1 has good self-acceptance because she can interpret the situation and be responsible for her decisions. Interpret the problem, take responsibility for the decisions, and adjust to her roles as wife and mother. Meanwhile, self-acceptance in primary informant 2 is not good enough because she has yet to view the situation positively and adapt to her role as a wife and mother.

INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is a very complex issue and is influenced by various factors such as poverty, lack of access to education, geography, social conflict, and lack of access to comprehensive reproductive health services and information. Indonesia has a high child marriage rate, 2nd in Southeast Asia and 7th in the world (KemenPPPA, 2020). Data also shows that the prevalence rate of child marriage before 18 years is around 11.21% or 1 in 9 children in Indonesia (UNICEF, 2020).

Child marriage means cutting off a child's right to receive a minimum of 12 years of education. BPS data in 2018 shows that 94.72% of children dropped out of school because they were married. Apart from that, the potential for unpreparedness in the economic aspects of husband and wife will threaten financial problems characterized by not meeting daily needs (Hadina et al., 2023). These problems will make child marriages vulnerable to conflict, leading to disputes between the two partners. So, if it is not handled correctly, it will lead to psychological problems and domestic violence (Kurniawati et al., 2023). On a more complicated level, the inability of a couple who is not psychologically ready to face serious conflict has the potential to decide to divorce (Syalis & Nurwati, 2020). It does not stop there; the potential for maternal death is also very vulnerable for girls aged 12-19 years, and this also results in the potential for increased infant mortality (Maulinda et al., 2021).

The situation of teenage girls who experience changes when going through the process of pregnancy, playing their roles as wives and mothers, will experience problems in their lives. This is confirmed by Rahmah and Anwar (2015), who state that married teenagers do not yet have sufficient insight and experience to carry out their new roles as wives and mothers for women. Becoming a parent is a big event, where there is a transition into the role of mother and experiencing the most critical changes in her life. Adolescent women who have children and take on a new role as mothers will experience a process of adjustment, a transition period from one stage to the next. One of the processes for young mothers in their teens is self-acceptance of all the impacts and consequences of early marriage and having children.

Adolescent girls who become mothers and wives after early marriage involve changes in their roles, including responsibilities as parents and partners. This impacts social adjustment, economic conditions, psychological conditions, education, career, etc. They also feel the pressure of responsibility for this role and try to understand various situations, such as lack of social support, limited interaction, etc. This impact influences how self-accepting young women choose to marry and carry out their roles as wives and mothers.

Self-acceptance in adolescent girls who marry at a young age and become mothers can occur due to various factors, such as social pressure from society, family support, the individual's emotions, and so on. Bernard (2013) defines self-acceptance as an individual's success in fulfilling two aspects, namely positive

appreciation for himself and unconditional acceptance, which is shown by a sense of pride in what the individual has.

Much research has been conducted regarding self-acceptance. However, research that often appears and is widely carried out is regarding self-acceptance of early marriage and pregnancies outside of marriage. One of the studies on self-acceptance conducted by Sari and Desiningrum (2017) used sources that were adults in their marriage and pregnancy-related to self-acceptance. Apart from that, research conducted by Fauza (2021) examined the self-acceptance of teenagers who were pregnant before marriage. Based on various previous studies, there is still little that examines the self-acceptance of adolescent girls who become mothers at a young age with legal status as wives in marriage bonds that are recognized religiously and by the state.

This research is essential to obtain data on how young women cope and accept themselves in early marriage. Apart from that, it is also necessary to understand the impact of early marriage to help young women understand how it affects their lives, particularly education, career, welfare, psychology, and social relationships. Then, be able to provide intervention recommendations for emotional and social support to develop positive self-acceptance.

Based on the description above, this research was conducted to determine and describe the self-acceptance of adolescent girls who marry and become mothers. The difference between this research and previous research is the characteristics of the sources, namely teenage girls who married of their own free will before the age of 19 and gave birth after one to two years of marriage. Apart from finding out the self-acceptance of the primary sources, the researcher also wanted to know what factors emerged as considerations for the sources in choosing to marry at an early age.

METHOD

Design

The design used in this research is qualitative phenomenology because it aims to describe individual experiences and understanding in responding to their choices. This description will later include how deeply the individual interprets the event. This approach is suitable for the study's aim, which is to understand the self-acceptance of girls who decide to marry and become mothers as teenagers.

Participants

This research involved two main subjects and four significant others. The main research subjects are individuals with the following characteristics: females under 19 years old at the time of marriage, married of their awareness and desire, and currently have children from that marriage.

Subject 1 is a 21-year-old housewife, a high school graduate, married at 18, and had children at 20. She lives with her parents and husband in an urban environment in South Lampung, Indonesia.

Subject 2 is a 17-year-old housewife who did not graduate from junior high school, married at 15, and had children at 17. Subject 2 parents have been separated for a long time. She lives with her mother and husband in a village in Central Java, Indonesia

Table 1

Research Participants

| No | Participants | Code | Gender | Relationship Status |
|----|----------------------------------|---------------------|--------|-------------------------|
| 1 | Subject 1 | S-1 | Female | - |
| 2 | Subject 2 | S-2 | Female | - |
| 3 | Significant Other 1 of Subject 1 | SO ₁ S-1 | Male | Subject 1's husband |
| 4 | Significant Other 2 of Subject 1 | SO ₂ S-1 | Male | Subject 1's best friend |
| 5 | Significant Other 1 of Subject 2 | SO ₁ S-2 | Male | Subject 2's uncle |
| 6 | Significant Other 2 of Subject 2 | SO ₂ S-2 | Female | Subject 2's best friend |

Instruments

The data collection techniques used were interviews and observation. The interviews conducted in this research were semi-structured and in-depth. The researcher prepared interview guidelines so that the data obtained followed the researcher's needs, and later, the questions that had been prepared could be developed in the field. The preparation of interview guidelines uses a theoretical basis adapted to the research focus, namely self-acceptance. This arrangement is essential and flexible because it is adapted to the situation and conditions during the interview process.

In this research, the observation technique used by researchers is unstructured observation. Observation data is carried out by recording incidental anecdotes, namely in the form of short notes related to observed events, to link them with other data that can provide validation and helpful clues so that they can be interpreted. The validity of the data is obtained through data sources and technique triangulation.

Procedure

The researcher conducted a preliminary study starting in early 2023. The data was obtained from introductory interviews by asking short questions to find out the condition of the potential primary subjects and get an initial picture of the phenomenon that is the focus of the study in this research. as well as being the first step to building good relationships with research sources.

When conducting research, it is necessary to apply ethics to ensure smooth data collection and research processes. The ethics that need to be applied are making a statement of informed consent, not including the source's real name, and

maintaining data confidentiality. The research involves face-to-face or online interviews with two main subjects and four significant others. During offline interviews, the researcher can also obtain data through direct observation.

Table 2
Research Schedule

| Participants | Number of Meetings | Location | Method |
|---------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| S-1 | Three times | Mall | Offline |
| | | Coffee shop | Offline |
| | | Coffee shop | Offline |
| S-2 | Twice | S-2 House | Offline |
| | | S-2 House | Offline |
| SO ₁ S-1 | Twice | Public space | Offline |
| SO ₂ S-1 | Twice | Whatsapp Call | Online |
| | | Researcher's House | Offline |
| SO ₁ S-2 | Twice | Whatsapp Call | Online |
| | | SO ₁ S-2 House | Offline |
| SO ₂ S-2 | Twice | SO ₁ S-2 House | Offline |
| | | SO ₂ S-2 House | Offline |
| | | SO ₂ S-2 House | Offline |

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and compiling data obtained from data mining, which is then categorized and described for study and made into conclusions that are easy to understand (Sugiyono, 2020). The stages carried out in this research are as follows:

1. Data Collection Stage

At this stage, the researcher collects data or facts obtained from interviews and observations of the main subject and significant others. Then, compile the interview results in verbatim and anecdotal notes from observations.

2. Data Reduction Stage

The reduction stage is selecting and determining the data that will be used. This occurs continuously throughout the research process, starting with summarizing, writing short notes, and determining the next stage.

3. Data Presentation Stage

The data presentation stage is a stage for compiling data and providing the possibility of concluding and further action. At this stage, analysis is also carried out on data categorized as an explanation of the appropriateness of the categories and appropriate arguments.

4. Conclusion Drawing Stage

The next stage is the conclusion drawing stage, where the researcher at this stage interprets the data that has been presented. In this stage, researchers must complete the deficiencies found in the previous stages.

RESULT

The result of this research consists of several themes which explain the self-acceptance of two subjects: S-1 and S-2.

Subject 1 Theme Findings

1. Reasons for early marriage

One factor in early marriage is the existence of family culture. However, no one in their family married as teenagers, and there was no pressure to have an early marriage. S-1 decision to get married was based on her wishes.

"The average girl in my family is married at 21-25 years old..." (S-1_W1_111-114)

"...Because it's my desire, there are no indications here and there, and there's no coercion of any kind..." (S-1_W1_119-121)

2. Environmental Response

The neighborhood was surprised when they learned she was getting married as a teenager. Due to the various responses from the environment, S-1 limits her interactions and chooses to socialize with individuals who are the same as her.

"At first, in this environment, people were surprised because they never saw me bringing a boyfriend or introducing a guy..." (S-1_W1_70-83)

"... but now when I have a child, I socialize more with other people who have children, so I become selective." (S-1_W1_245-248)

3. Self-Understanding

S-1 has a different time of adjustment and self-acceptance in her roles as wife and mother. She is good at carrying out her role as a wife, but it takes longer to adjust and learn to be a mother. She also felt she lost much of the world after marriage and having a child.

"As a wife, it doesn't take long because, from the start of a marriage, I've already accepted it. What's difficult is accepting after having a baby..." (S-1_W1_180-184)

"... I've lost a lot of the world since he was with me, but I also think like my child's world now is just me..." (S-1_W1_262-264)

4. Self-Assessment

After getting married, there was a desire to do activities like other teenagers. Sometimes, she felt she could not accept her role as a wife in certain situations because she realized that reconciling views between herself and her husband was difficult, even causing her self-acceptance to decrease.

"...it turns out that even when I got married, I didn't rule out the possibility that I would want to relive that time again." (S-1_W2_28-30)

"... why am I tired, that's how it is. You could say that my self-acceptance as a wife has decreased there..." (S-1_W3_34-36)

5. Attitude Change

She feels more sensitive and worried. Two significant others also felt the change in her attitude. However, S-1 also experienced positive personal changes; she became a stronger person than before.

"I become more sensitive. Become a more thoughtful person, and you could say worry more easily..." (S-1_W1_161-164)

"...The positive thing is that I feel stronger..." (S-1_W1_170-171)

6. Support System

The support system in childcare is her parents and husband, but to help the process of self-acceptance of the new role is herself. The only person who can understand her is herself because others often compare her life with theirs, be it her parents or husband.

"In my opinion myself, because sometimes we want to expect from our parents, they will think that they are just like that, right? I can't expect anything." (S-1_W1_268-269)

7. Post-Marriage Relationship Situation

S-1 often experienced conflict in their marital relationship caused by differences of opinion with her partner. This was also validated by SO1S-1, who is her husband.

"There are often conflicts, especially since I can't match my will with him, right?" (S-1_W2_NO_56)

"Once, sis, we had a disagreement when it came to making decisions, especially for children." (SO1S-1_W2_1-3)

Apart from disagreements, there is also a feeling of anxiety about the uncertainty of family finances. Her family had high expectations in their household, namely that they were required to be sufficient in terms of finances, which made S-1 feel pressured.

"Expectations are definitely there, sis... My father also thinks Semarang is easy to earn money, so my husband and I also feel a little pressure, so when we return, we have to bring much money..." (S-1_W2_98-107)

8. Control Over Herself

After getting married, S-1 revealed that she did not have control over determining her desires because she had to care for her husband's feelings.

"I feel like I don't have it anymore. "Because now I'm not alone. I have a husband whose feelings I have to take care of." (S-1_W2_40-44)

Subject 2 Theme Findings

1. Reasons for Early Marriage

S-2 revealed that the factor that caused her to marry as a teenager was that she no longer wanted to continue school, so she accepted her future husband's proposal to marry at that time.

"Years ago, my husband suddenly asked me to marry him, and I was annoyed at the thought of going to school, so I told my mother." (S-2_W1_32-34)

2. Family Response

In S-2 families, no one marries when they are teenagers. This situation triggered different responses in her family. S-2's mother agreed with her decision to get married, while her grandmother and other relatives responded less agreeable.

"My mother's response was normal, but my grandmother and uncle were a bit different." (S-2_W1_59-61)
"...my brother is upset, but my mother allowed me..." (S-2_W1_64-66)

This was also conveyed by S01S-2, S-2's uncle and a substitute figure for her father. S01S-2 also said that S-2 received less attention from her parents, who had been divorced for a long time.

"...I feel sorry for her; that little girl is already married..." (S01S-2_W1_27-28)
"She lacks attention; her father has separated from the mother." (S01S-2_W1_34-35)

3. Environmental Response

S-2 received various unfavorable responses from the surrounding environment. S01S-2 and S02S-2 revealed that S-2 became a topic of conversation in the neighborhood because she married very young.

"S-2 is still a child; she should go to school... So that's why the village is talking about her." (S01S-2_W1_111-115)
"...definitely be discussed, if people don't gossip it feels like something is missing." (S02S-2_W1_73-75)

The social environment judged S-2's decisions and always blamed her for her actions. S-2 chose to remain silent, did not respond to the various unfavorable responses she received, and limited herself more.

"Sometimes when I'm about to say something, people will blame me right away. It's like who told you to get married and have children..."
(S-2_W2_60-64)

"I just keep quiet, don't listen to them." **(S-2_W1_92)**

4. Self-Understanding

Once, she felt happy because she had a life partner and was not lonely. However, now, S-2 sometimes feels disbelieving in her role as a mother and needs to adjust. Sometimes, she regrets marrying early and wants to do activities like her friends. S-2 has difficulty accepting herself in carrying out her roles, especially since she is always considered wrong by those around her.

"...But when I became a mother, I still didn't believe it, didn't accept it, still felt strange..." **(S-2_W1_133-135)**

"...seeing other people can still hang out while I now have to feed my child, have to look after..." **(S-2_W1_139-143)**

5. Self-Assessment

S-2 considers that she still needs to have the ability to overcome new situations in carrying out her role as a mother.

"I think it's all difficult. Right now, I feel like I have a younger sibling, not a child... I still tremble when I hold my child, especially if my child is fussy; it makes me dizzy, and I want to leave" **(S-2_W1_151-154)**

6. Attitude Changes

The change in S-2 attitude after marriage was that she became more of a quiet individual than before. The two significant others also validated this.

"...I'm quieter, sis...because I don't want to talk anymore" **(S-2_W1_81-84)**

"...Previously she was cheerful, now she is gloomier, doesn't want to tell stories, rarely jokes." **(SO₁S-2_W1_70-75)**

However, there were positive changes from S-2 after she became a wife and mother, namely becoming a more patient individual than before.

"I think I become more patient..." **(S-2_W1_166-167)**

7. Support System

The only person who is considered a support system by S-2 is her mother because she does not have sufficient skills and knowledge to care for children and carry out her two roles as wife and mother.

"Sometimes sis, sometimes mom helps. But sometimes she gets angry when I can do nothing." (S-2_W1_194-195)

8. Control over herself

S-2 said that she did not have freedom over herself because she had to follow her husband and family. This is because S-2 is still considered 'a small child' and cannot make wise decisions.

"Sometimes I have to follow my husband, grandma, or other relatives because I'm being treated like a child, so my words were ignored, sis." (S-2_W2_31-36)

S-2 currently feels pressure from her family, who always wants her to continue her education, but this does not align with her wishes.

"...they want me to go to school, but I can't do it, sis. When my brother graduates from school, it will be discussed. Sometimes I feel like I can't accept myself..." (S-2_W2_71-76)

Table 3

Findings of Subjects' Self-Acceptance

| Similarities in S-1 and S-2 Findings | Differences in Findings | |
|---|--|---|
| | S-1 | S-2 |
| They were confident in marrying off their free will because their future husband was already working. | Feeling ready to get married because S-1 has graduated from high school and has had time to work | She chose to get married because S-2 does not want to complete her studies in junior high school. |
| Unable to accept and carry out the role of mother rather than wife. | She often feels confused and overwhelmed when caring for her child. Feeling more able to accept the role of wife, shown by a diligent and caring attitude towards her husband | She does not have the courage to care for her child, especially when the child is fussy and often cries. She still needs to be fully able to act as a wife, especially regarding domestic duties (not yet able to cook). |
| There is still a desire to do activities like unmarried teenagers of her age. | This is because sometimes she feels tired, especially when there is conflict with her husband regarding their child and finances. | This desire arose because she once regretted her decision to marry early. |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| She feels like she does not have complete control over herself. Limit herself in interacting with the surrounding environment | The reason is because she already has a husband whose feelings must be protected Prefer to socialize with other people or friends whose status is the same as already having children | The reason is because she is still considered a 'little child' by her husband and family She prefers to stay home because other people have wrong opinions regarding her decision to marry early. |
| There is a change in attitude after getting married and having children | Become a person who is more sensitive, easily worried, and closed but feels stronger | Becoming quieter and gloomy, even though she used to be cheerful. |
| Receive social support in terms of childcare Receiving demands from family regarding her future | Support from parents and husband Family expectations regarding S-1 financial capabilities to be better | Support from S-2's biological mother The family still wants S-2 to continue her studies |

DISCUSSION

The two subjects were still teenagers when they married and had children, so their knowledge, experience, and readiness to carry out these roles were still lacking. This is a condition that can influence how the subjects accept themselves.

They had an age difference when they got married, where S-1 was 18 years old, and S-2 was 15 years old. Before carrying out a legal marriage, S-2 carries out a sirri marriage. The decision to get married at a young age was also conveyed by both sources, who said that there was no pressure anywhere to get married, but purely from their own desires. This gave rise to various responses from the family. In contrast to S-1, who had already graduated from high school, S-2 received a lot of opposition from her family regarding her decision to get married because she was still very young and had not completed her education at the junior high school level. Both accepted their prospective husband's proposal to get married because their partner was considered to have their own income then. The educational level and spouse's working status are factors in early marriage, as mentioned in research by Hermambang et al. (2021).

S-1 and S-2 experience difficulties caring for children at the beginning of birth, especially in S-2. She is still very young in her new role as a mother and has new demands to learn to care for children. Both resource persons are still assisted by their parents in raising their children today, especially as the two are the youngest. S-1 also said that she often felt anxious and worried, which were negative emotions that S-1 experienced at the beginning of her child's birth. This condition was also experienced by the informants in Sari & Syafiq's (2022) research, but what is different is the factor that causes these emotions to arise. The sources in previous research were caused by their relationship with their husband, who had broken down in communication and separated from their house.

In this study, the social support they received was the difference in the cause of negative emotions experienced by the two main subjects. S-1's close friends and family and her husband's family provide support and help in caring for their child.

Meanwhile, S-2 received little reinforcement from family other than her mother, especially her husband, who was rarely at home because he worked as a fisherman, so S-2 took care of the children alone with his mother. S-2 often tries to open up and express her complaints to other family members, but the response given to S-2 makes her feel even worse and sad to hear. Hence, S-2 chooses to withdraw from several situations that make her uncomfortable. This causes S-2 to limit herself from interacting with the environment. According to Wulandari et al. (2019), individuals with good self-acceptance can improve their ability to interact with others and establish good relationships with the surrounding environment without seeing their shortcomings because they realize each individual has shortcomings. This shows that S-2's self-acceptance is still not good because she limits herself from interactions with the surrounding environment.

During their initial marriage, until they gave birth, the two sources went through a specific process to be able to accept themselves regarding the current conditions they were experiencing. In the research of Funaidi et al. (2021), Chaplin stated that self-acceptance is an individual behavior based on feelings of satisfaction with one's abilities and awareness of the individual's limitations.

The role transition experienced by the two sources gave rise to several changes in themselves, which were felt by the two sources and those around them. The change in attitude felt by S-1 after marriage was that she became more sensitive and easily worried about several things. S-1 often cries when she looks at her child's face because she feels she has lost the world to do the things she loves now and enjoy her young age. However, on the other hand, S-1 also realizes that her child needs her role. S-1 also often feels anxious because she fears failing to meet her child's needs. In a situation like this, S-1 tries to accept herself more and interpret every condition she is going through in order to be able to provide good treatment for her child and carry out her role as a mother with full responsibility, in contrast to S-2, who became more closed and quieter due to the response to the surrounding environment, which was less pleasant for her.

Individuals with good self-acceptance will think about the possibilities that will happen to all their decisions and take responsibility for all their actions. Individuals with good self-acceptance are also confident in control of every action and the surrounding environment (Nopirda et al., 2020). S-1 and her husband want to work together to prepare their child for higher education and not have an early marriage like them. Meanwhile, S-2 stated that she did not have a plan for his marriage relationship or children because currently, S-2 still has much help from his mother, so S-2 cannot yet think about what she wants to achieve in the future.

Bernard (2013) states that individuals who have good self-acceptance have fulfilled two aspects, namely positive appreciation for themselves and unconditional acceptance, which is shown by a sense of pride in what the individual has. Santrock (2012) also states that self-acceptance is a form of awareness to accept oneself in

any circumstance and can motivate oneself to live a better life. In this case, S-1 and S-2 still need time to improve and learn their current roles. Both of them already understand the condition or situation, but S-2 has not been able to motivate her to live a life according to her current role, so her self-acceptance is still insufficient.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion results, it can be concluded that the self-acceptance of Subject 1 and Subject 2 is different. S-1 has good and positive self-acceptance, shown by gradually adjusting to the situation. S-1 found it easy to adapt and accept the role of wife, but anxiety arose at the beginning of the birth of her child. S-1 received excellent social support so that she could accept and try to carry out her role as a wife and mother even though several things did not meet her parents' expectations. In contrast to S-2, her acceptance was less good and tended to be negative. S-2 limits herself from socializing with the surrounding environment, even some of her family. The lack of social support caused S-2 to become quieter and more introverted. S-2 could also not carry out her role as a wife and mother well because she was still too young, so accepting herself in those situations was difficult. However, there were positive changes experienced by the two main subjects in this research, namely, becoming more patient and responsible for the decision to marry when they were teenagers.

Suggestions that can be given to future researchers who are interested in this topic include adding subjects with equal age characteristics, educational background, and socio-economic conditions. This is necessary to obtain more comprehensive data regarding the factors that cause early marriage and things that influence adolescent girls' self-acceptance of their roles as wives and mothers.

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