



## The Phenomenon of Intergenerational Child Marriage Practice and Its Causes

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### Abstract

The prevalence of child marriage has not been lowered even though the age limit for marriage has been raised to 19 years according to the law. Grobogan is the region with the highest prevalence of married and pregnant women at the age of children (less than 19 years old) in Central Java in the last 5 years. The purpose of the study was to find out the practice of child marriage and its causes, the marriage pattern of boys and girls, and the relationship between parental marriage history and the incidence of child marriage in the community. Secondary data research from marriage dispensation documents at the Purwodadi Religious Court Class 1A. The study used a purposive sampling technique, namely couples married in the Grobogan district in the last 5 years (2018-2022) where one or both of them were less than 19 years old and both of their parents were still alive, a sample of 2,103 couples was obtained. The data was analyzed quantitatively using the Chi-square test. The results of the study found that women are the most likely to get married at the age of children. The most common causes of child marriage practices are dating behavior (76.8%), pregnancy (15.9%), having proposed (6.7%), having given birth to a child (0.4%), and having actively engaged in sex (0.1%). There is a significant relationship between the marriage history of mothers and the marriage of their daughters. Mothers who marry at a child's age also cause child marriage in their daughters (p-value 0.0002).

### Introduction

Indonesia currently ranks eighth in the world and second in ASEAN countries with the highest prevalence of child marriage. Central Java is one of the provinces in Indonesia with the prevalence of female marriage and pregnancy at the age of children (less than 19 years old) is a high challenge in Indonesia, and it is still a challenge that must be solved (Indraswari et al., 2023). Grobogan is one of the regions in Central Java with a high prevalence of women getting married and getting pregnant at a young age (less than 19 years old). The prevalence of child marriage in Grobogan during 2018 was 59.88%, in 2019 it was 51.24%, in 2020 it was

52.81%, in 2021 it was 54.33%, and in 2022 it was 52.15%. Likewise, the prevalence of first pregnancy less than 19 years old is also very high, reaching 30.92% in 2019. This prevalence increased in 2020 to 35.76%, in 2021 to 36.48% and 32.87% in 2022 (BPS Central Java Province, 2022).

Marriage of women at a child's age has become a serious problem. Some studies have shown that women who marry at the age of 10-19 are at almost 5 times greater risk of dying during pregnancy and childbirth compared to those who marry at the age of 20-24. Mothers aged 15-19 years are also more at risk of pregnancy and childbirth complications than

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mothers aged 20-24 years. Early marriage can cause various adverse health impacts such as miscarriage, stillbirth, high fertility, and morbidity (Adhikari et al., 2009; Nasrullah et al., 2014; Adedokun et al., 2016; Hotchkiss et al., 2016; Paul, 2019, 2020; Bappenas, 2020). This condition also occurs in the Grobogan district. Over the past three years, it has always been the region with the highest percentage of maternal mortality under the age of 20 in Central Java. There have been 3 cases of maternal deaths under 20 years old (8.3%) out of a total of 36 maternal deaths in 2019. Everything happens during the postpartum period. Likewise, in 2020 and 2021, 2 cases (6.4% of the total 31 maternal deaths) in 2020 and 5 cases (5.95% of the total 84 maternal deaths) in 2021. The case occurred during pregnancy and the postpartum period (Central Java Health Office, 2021).

The impact of child marriage also occurs in children who are born. Women who become pregnant at an early age have a 1.55 times greater risk of infant mortality when compared to women who become pregnant at an older age. Children born to underage women are also more at risk of stunting, being thin, and being underweight. Babies with low birth weight (BBLR) are more born to mothers aged 16-19 years (17.80%) than mothers aged 20-30 years (12.33%) (Raj, 2010; BPS RI, 2020). A study of 3,400 babies born to women under 30 years old in Grobogan district, Central Java, during 2020-2021, obtained the result that women who became pregnant at the age of less than 20 years had a 1,728 times greater risk of giving birth to a BBLR baby compared to women who gave birth at the age of more than 20 years (Azinar et al., 2021).

The above facts show that child marriage must be avoided so that early pregnancy can be prevented. Child marriage is caused by individual factors such as free sexual behavior, family factors such as economic factors, arranged marriage, and the existence of a culture or tradition of young marriage (BKKBN, 2012; Malik, 2014; 'Pandya YP, Bhanderi DJ. An epidemiological study of child marriages in a rural community of Gujarat', 2015). Knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy are also individual factors that greatly determine the decision of a teenager to get married at an early

age (Bandura, 2012; WHO, 2016).

Cases of girl marriage that often occur in society are not only the will of individual teenagers, but many of these marriages are also decisions and even coercion from parents or families. The motives and social phenomena of the intergenerational marriage of women and children that occur between generations in the community before and after the amendment of the Marriage Law in Indonesia are very important to analyze. The objectives of this study are: 1) to analyze the trend of child marriage cases in the period before and after the enactment of the amendment of the Marriage Law in the last 5 years, 2) to analyze the motives of child marriage that occurred, 3) to analyze the correlation of child marriage between generations in society.

### Method

The research was conducted by quantitative method with secondary data analysis, namely marriage dispensation case documents at the Purwodadi Religious Court Class 1A. The study population is women and their spouses who applied for marriage dispensation (under 19 years old) granted by the Purwodadi Religious Court Class 1A within the last 5 years (2018-2022), namely a total of 2,676 married couples. The sample selection was carried out using the purposive sampling technique, with the criterion that both parents were still alive. Based on these conditions, a sample of 2,103 couples was obtained. The data collected includes 1) the age of the woman's parents at the time of marriage; 2) the age of the woman who is going to get married; 3) the age of the man who becomes her spouse; 4) the reason for child marriage. The data were analyzed to describe the trend of cases and causes of child marriage, as well as bivariate analysis with the Chi-square test to analyze the relationship between parents' marriage history and child marriage.

### Results and Discussion

Cumulatively in the last 5 years (2018-2022), there were 2,676 marriage dispensations granted by the Purwodadi Religious Court Class 1A. This means that 2,676 male and female couples have child marriage (less than

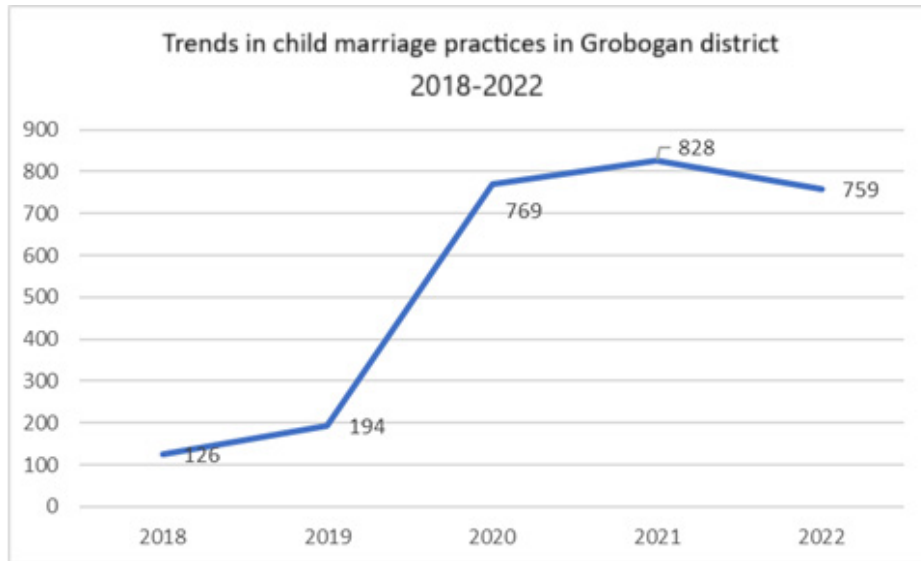


Figure 1. Trends in child marriage practices in Grobogan district in the last 5 years (2018-2022).

19 years old) and are registered at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office. Looking at the trend in the last five years, child marriage in the Grobogan district tends to increase every year even though the minimum age limit as a condition for marriage has been increased from 16 years to 19 years according to the new Marriage Law.

Figure 1 shows that the practice of child marriage in the Grobogan district of Central Java every year has experienced a significant increase. Data from the study stated that in 2018 there were 126 cases of child marriage. The following years were 194 cases in 2019, 769 cases in 2020, 828 cases in 2021, and 759 cases in 2022. Based on the causes, the following is a distribution of the causes of child marriage practices in the last 5 years in the Grobogan district of Central Java.

Based on the sample inclusion requirements, the sample was selected from married couples whose one or both were less than 19 years old and whose parents were still alive, so the sample became as many as 2,103 couples. Table 1 shows that the most common cause (76.8%) of child marriage practices (under 19 years old) is courtship behavior (premarital sexual behavior). Courtship behavior makes their relationship even closer and even inseparable from each other. Marriage at an early age is chosen as a solution to avoid the occurrence of premarital sexual behavior that is at risk of premarital pregnancy. However, the practice of child marriage also occurs because the woman has experienced a pregnancy before marriage, known as a teenage pregnancy or unwanted pregnancy (15.9%). Other causes are having carried out a proposal or engaged

Table 1. Distribution of Causes of Child Marriage Practice in the Last 5 Years (2018-2022)

Causes of Child Marriage	Total	%
Dating	1.615	76,8
Have had sex	3	0,1
Pregnant	335	15,9
Already proposed (engaged)	141	6,7
Has given birth	9	0,4
Grand Total	2.103	100,0

Source: Religious Court marriage dispensation data (2018-2022).

Table 2. Comparison of Marriage Cases in Boys and Girls in the Last 5 Years (2018-2022).

Year		Man		Woman		Total
		≥ 19 years old	< 19 years old	≥ 19 years old	< 19 years old	
2018	Amount	52	40	78	14	184
	% total	28.26	21.74	42.39	7.61	100.00
2019	Amount	44	91	124	11	270
	% total	16.30	33.70	45.93	4.07	100.00
2020	Amount	99	544	638	5	1,286
	% total	7.70	42.30	49.61	0.39	100.00
2021	Amount	75	572	643	4	1,294
	% total	5.80	44.20	49.69	0.31	100.00
2022	Amount	95	491	579	7	1,172
	% total	8.11	41.89	49.40	0.60	100.00
Grand Total	Amount	365	1,738	2,062	41	4,206
	% total	17.35	82.55	98.05	1.95	100.00

Source: Religious Court marriage dispensation data (2018-2022).

Table 3. Comparison of Marriage Cases in Boys and Girls in the Last 5 Years (2018-2022)

Age		Woman		Total	
		Age < 19 years old	Age ≥ 19 years old		
Man	Age < 19 years old	Amount	327	38	365
	%	15.5	1.8	17.4	
Age ≥ 19 years old	Amount	1,735	3	1,738	
	%	82.5	0.1	82.6	
Grand Total	Amount	2,062	41	2,103	
	%	98.1	1.9	100.0	

Source: Religious Court marriage dispensation data (2018-2022).

(6.7%), the woman has given birth (0.4%), and the two married couples have been actively involved in sexual relations (0.1%).

Table 2 shows that of the 2,103 male and female couples who have been married in the last 5 years, where one or both of them are less than 19 years old, it is known that women who marry at the age of children (less than 19 years) reach 98.05%, while men are only 17.36%. Women are the party with the most marriages under the age of 19. In contrast, more men are married at a more mature age (over 19 years old).

Table 3 shows that when viewed from the pattern of child marriage couples that occurred

in Grobogan district, Central Java in the last 5 years, it is known that the most common pattern of child marriage is women of child age (less than 19 years old) married adult men (more than 19 years old), which is 82.5%. There are 15.5% of child marriage practices between women and men who are both under 19 years old. In addition, 1.8% of marriages occurred between adult women (over 19 years old) and men under 19 years old, and there were 0.1% of women married to men who were both 19 years old.

Child marriage when viewed based on their parents' marriage history as seen in Table 4, is known that from the 2,103 child marriage practices that occurred, 98.2% of child marriage

Table 4. The Relationship between Parental Marriage History and Child Marriage Practice.

Parents' Marriage History < 19 years old (age of child)		Male Marriage		Female Marriage	
		≥ 19 years old (adult)	< 19 years old (age of child)	≥ 19 years old (adult)	≥ 19 years old (adult)
Father					
Married young (< 19 years old)	Amount	23	93	112	4
	%	19.8	80.2	96.6	3.4
Married adults (≥ 19 years)	Amount	342	1,645	1,950	37
	%	17.2	82.8	98.1	1.9
		<i>P-value</i>	0.551	0.282	
Mother					
Married young (< 19 years old)	Amount	356	1,730	2,049	37
	%	17.1	82.9	98.2	1.8
Married adults (≥ 19 years)	Amount	9	8	13	4
	%	52.9	47.1	76.5	23.5
		<i>P-value</i>	0.001	0.0002	

Source: Analysis of marriage dispensation data of the Religious Court (2018-2022).

practices occurred on the side of women whose mothers also had a history of marriage at the age of children. Data analysis showed that no relationship between the father's marital history and child marriage occurred in their boys or daughters ( $p$ -value > 0.05). This means that there is no significant difference in the age of child marriage between boys and girls between those whose fathers married at a young age or adulthood. On the other hand, on the mother's side, there is a significant relationship between the mother's marriage history and the marriage practices carried out by their daughters and sons. This means that mothers who married at a young age (less than 19 years old) tend for their daughters to also practice marriage at a young age ( $p$ -value 0.0002). Likewise, mothers who married in adulthood tend to be followed by their children to marry at an adult age as well ( $p$ -value 0.001).

Based on the results of the study, it is known that the practice of child marriage in Grobogan district is most often caused by courtship behavior (premarital sexual behavior), pregnancy before marriage (unwanted pregnancy), and there has been a proposal. Social norms give a negative stigma to these behaviors. Therefore, marriage at an early age is the solution to this problem. These findings are in line with previous research that

states that sexual behavior before marriage is the cause of unwanted pregnancy (KTD) in adolescents. This pregnancy encourages the practice of child marriage (Karjono et al., 2017; Hardiani and Junaidi, 2018; Windiarti and Besral, 2018). Similar findings in another study also found that poverty, teenage pregnancy, and cultural norms such as engagement, and pressure from those closest to them as drivers of child marriage (Ahonsi et al., 2019; Psaki et al., 2021). Adolescent pregnancy is a driving factor significant occurrence of child marriage (Petroni et al., 2017; Asnong et al., 2018; Misunas et al., 2021; Harvey et al., 2022).

Based on the incident, the practice of child marriage occurs more in girls than in men. Women are the most likely to get married under the age of 19. This makes women the most vulnerable group to marry or be married at a young age (early marriage). These findings are in line with WHO data, which states that child marriage is often the result of deep-rooted gender inequality in society, causing girls to be disproportionately affected by the practice. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among boys is only one-sixth that of girls. The results of the study are in line with research in Nepal which shows that female marriage at an early age is common compared to men (Choe, Thapa and Mishra, 2005). The research

is in line with other studies that have found that women are more likely to marry due to gender inequality. An estimated 650 million girls and women today are married before the age of 18 (Efevbera et al., 2017; Efevbera and Bhabha, 2020; Tomar et al., 2021).

Based on its relationship with the marital age history of its parents, the results of the study stated that almost all marriages of women under the age of 19 occur in children whose mothers also have a history of marriage at the age of less than 19 years. This finding is in line with research that states that there has been a phenomenon of marriage and childbirth at an early age that is repeated from generation to generation. This social phenomenon has explained how the younger generation follows their parents in starting to give birth early. Although the younger generation has their value in making decisions related to marriage, their attitudes and practices are shaped by their observations of their parents' marriages (Widyastari, Isarabhakdi and Shaluhayah, 2020). There is a strong pattern of early marriage and motherhood between mother and daughter, thus reinforcing the hypothesis of this study and consistent with the existing literature. The age of the mother first getting married and giving birth affects the risk of early marriage and the first birth of her daughter (Bates, Maselko and Schuler, 2007; Rijken and Liefbroer, 2009; Kolk, 2014; Morosow and Trappe, 2018; Kavas, 2022). Child marriage is a social problem that has a major impact on the entire life of a person, family, and society. Projections from the study (E.P. and Poonia, 2015), child marriage will continue in the future and will have an impact on at least two generations if the prevalence and attitudes continue to the present.

### Conclusion

Child marriage (less than 19 years old) occurs more often in women. The cause of the practice of child marriage in the community is due to dating behavior that does not follow societal norms, teenage pregnancy (unwanted pregnancy), being proposed, having given birth, and has both been active in sexual intercourse. Women who practice child marriage often occur in families where parents, especially mothers, also marry at a young age. Mothers'

marital histories are significantly related to their daughters' marital practices. Mothers who marry at a child's age (less than 19 years old) influence the occurrence of child marriage in their daughters.

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