The Experiences of Female Teenagers in Early Marriage: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Objectives: During the teenager stage of a female child, reproductive organs are not yet properly developed. However, some emotional development begins to occur, which could cause diverse experiences when carrying out roles as a wife and becoming a mother. Although the minimum age for marriage in Indonesia is 16 years for women and 19 years for men, the practice of underage marriage, which has a variety of adverse effects, is still prevalent, especially among female teenagers. Methods: This study uses a qualitative method, with a descriptive phenomenological approach, that focuses on exploring the experiences of female teenagers that engage in early marriage. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews and field observations. Participants in this study were 10 female teenagers who live in West Kalimantan. Data was analyzed using the thematic content analysis while following the Moustakas approach. Results: This study found three themes, namely; some female teenagers engage in early marriages because they were born out of wedlock or dropped out of school, female teenagers decide to get married of their own volition, and female teenagers experience unpleasant treatment when they engage in early marriage. Conclusions: Female teenagers have different experiences during marriage. Many negative impacts experienced by them. Cross-sectoral cooperation is needed to prevent adolescent marriages.

Keywords: early marriage, female teenagers, married by accident


INTRODUCTION

Child marriage is still common in the world, including in Indonesia. The study by The Council Foreign Relations (CFR) said that the phenomenon of child marriage is found in various parts of the world, such as Latin America (29%), South Asia (46.90%), East Asia Pacific (17.60%), Sub-Saharan Africa (37.30%), Middle East and North (1). Indonesia is ranked 37th in the percentage of child marriage in the world and the second highest after Cambodia in ASEAN.

Child marriage in Indonesia was 22.82% (2, 3). On 2015, there are 20 provinces with a higher prevalence of child marriage than the national figure (22.82%). The five provinces that were in the fifth-highest ranking were West Sulawesi (34.22 percent), South Kalimantan (33.68%), Central Kalimantan (33.56%), West Kalimantan (32.21%), and Central Sulawesi (31.91%). West Kalimantan is one of the top five provinces with the highest prevalence of child marriage in Indonesia. 2013 data shows the prevalence of child marriage in West Kalimantan of 28.61% and in 2015 it increased by 12.58% to 32.21%, while in 2017 it increased again to 32.88. Most of these marriages occur in child-aged women (3).

Data presented by non-profit organizations fighting for women’s rights shows that girls are more exposed to the practice of child marriage. UNICEF Annual Report found that out of a total number of 85 million Indonesian
children, one in six (1:6) Indonesian girls are married off before the age of 18. World Fertility Policies also show the same data that in Indonesia it was found that 11.13 percent of women were married at the age of 10-15 and 32.10 percent at the age of 16-18 (4).

Women are more prone to experience the practice of child marriage because the prevailing rules and regulations stipulate the age limit for marriage for women is lower than that for men. The marriage law in Indonesia stipulates that the minimum age for women to marry is 16 years, while the minimum age for men to marry is 19 years. Other factors that cause the high marriage of teenage girls include social, economic, cultural and place of residence (village/city) (5).

Data from BPS shows that there is a difference in the prevalence of marriage among adolescent girls in urban areas and rural areas in Indonesia. Marriage of teenage girls in urban areas was 17.09%, in 2017 it increased to 17.85%. Meanwhile, the marriage of adolescent girls in rural areas is higher than in urban areas. BPS data in 2015 showed that the marriage of teenage girls in rural areas was 27.11%, and decreased in 2017 to 26.91%. Although there was a decrease in prevalence in 2017, the total number still exceeds the prevalence of marriage for teenage girls in urban areas.

The high prevalence of adolescent female marriage in Indonesia worries many parties. This phenomenon is of concern to the public and the government, considering that marriage for adolescent girls has various adverse effects. Marriage at a young age will have an impact on sexual relations at an early age, complications of early pregnancy and childbirth that can lead to the death of mothers and babies, besides that young marriage will also cause women's unpreparedness to become parents so that children who are cared for are vulnerable to violence and neglect (6).

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive phenomenological approach that focuses on exploring the experiences of young women undergoing early childhood marriage. Participants in this study were adolescents who married at an early age in Pontianak City and Kuburaya Regency. The selection of participants using a purposive sampling technique. The criteria for participants in this study were young women who were married at an early age, married for at least one year, we're willing to be participants. The number of participants in this study was ten people. Seven participants came from within the city of Pontianak, while the three participants came from Kuburaya Regency. This research was conducted in 2019. Data analysis in this study with thematic content analysis using the Moustakas approach (7). This research has passed the ethical review of the Ethics Committee of Faculty of Medicine, TanjungPura University with registered number 5427/UN.29/TA.00.03/2019.

RESULTS

This research produces three themes. The first theme is the cause of young women to marry early because of pregnancy outside of marriage and dropping out of school. The second theme, teenage girls decide to get married on their own accord. In the third theme, adolescent girls experience unpleasant treatment is undergoing early marriage.

The first theme: the cause of young women to marry early because of pregnancy outside of marriage and dropping out of school. The first theme in this study is the cause of young women to marry early because of pregnancy outside of marriage and dropping out of school. This theme consists of two categories. The first category is teenage girls who get married because they experience pregnancy before marriage. The second category of this theme is teenage girls who get married because they have dropped out of school, so they don't have other activities and decide to get married. The first category of the first theme was put forward by three participants. Three out of ten participants got
married because they were pregnant first. One participant said the reason for early marriage was because of promiscuity and being pregnant before marriage.

“...Karna itulah, pergaulan bebas...” (P8).

“... Because of that, promiscuity ..." (P8).

Furthermore, the tenth participant stated the same reasons as the eighth participant, deciding to marry at an early age because she was pregnant before marriage.

“...Hamil duluan...” (P10)

"... Get pregnant first ..." (P10)

The second category of the first theme was expressed by seven out of ten participants. Seven participants said the reason for choosing to get married at an early age was because they had dropped out of school so that the participants felt it was better to get married. The following is a statement from one of the participants:

“...Baru masuk SMP sebulan, langsung berhenti. Langsung kawin... ”(P6)

"... Just started junior high for a month, immediately stopped. Immediately married... "(P6)

The ninth participant also conveyed the same thing when asked about his reasons for getting married at an early age, this participant said because he was no longer in school. The following is the statement of the ninth participant:

“...Karna udah ndak sekolah lagi...” (P9)

"... Because I no longer go to school ..." (P9)

Furthermore, nine participants said they chose to marry rather than not work after quitting school.

“...Mau, daripada nganggur, pacaran pun udah lama juga...” (P9)

"... Want, instead of being unemployed, dating has been a long time too ..." (P9)

Second theme: young girls decide to get married because of their own will The second theme, teenage girls decide to get married because of their own will. This theme consists of three categories. The first category is teen age girls who marry their boyfriends. In the second category, the parents' suggestions were not considered. The third category is parents following the desire of young girls to get married at an early age. The first category on the second theme was found from all participants. Ten participants in this study decided to marry at an early age with a man who was already her boyfriend. The following statement is an expression of one of the participants:

“...ga ada paksaan dari pihak orang tua. Memang udah kesepakatan masing-masing dari semenjak udah pacaran gitu kan... ”(P1).

"... There is no coercion from the parents. Indeed, it has been an agreement between us, since dating "(P1).

The first participant said the decision to marry came from the wishes of himself and his girlfriend without coercion from parents. Other participants also said the same thing. The following statement is the expression of the third participant:

“...kan kita kan pacaran gitu bahh...dibilangnya ini lah... takut inilah katanya...(takut apa tu?) takut hamil duluan lah katene...kate tetangga-tetangga gitukan... "(P3).

"... we are dating right ... they said this ... afraid this is what they said ... (afraid of what?) Afraid of getting pregnant first, the neighbors say ... " (P3).

The seventh participant also received suggestions from their parents to continue their schooling.

“...suruh lanjut (sekolah) pun...ndak...disuruh lanjut di- saya tak mau... ” (P7)

"... told to continue(school) even ... not ... told to continue - I don't want to..." (P7)
The third category of the second theme is parents following the desire of young girls to marry at an early age. The results of the interview found that all participants did not get a rejection from their parents regarding their desire to marry early. The parents of the participants tended to agree and allow their daughters’ decisions. The following statement is an excerpt from an interview from one of the participants:

“... itulah tadi tuh katanya, yaudah mamak pun sama bapak udah pasrah dah dan dak anok lagi dah, dia kan mikir apa takutnya nanti anak apa..anaknya nih udah diapa-apain, padahal belum ...” (P5)

"... that's what he said earlier, yes, mom and dad have already given up and don't kid anymore, she's thinking about what the child will be afraid of ... what's the child doing, even though it's not ...” (P5)

A similar statement was also made by the seventh participant, who said that his parents immediately agreed when a man asked the seventh participant to get married.

“...Saya bilang ade laki-laki mau ngajak saya nikah Bu, jadi saya bilang, kate ibu saya tak apelah kate die, kalo die tuh maok kate die, jadi itulah maoklah ...” (P7)

"... I said there was a man who wanted to marry me, mother said it was okay, just marry” (P7)

Third theme: young girls experience unpleasant treatment in undergoing early marriage The third theme is that young girls experience unpleasant treatment in undergoing early marriage. This theme consists of four categories. The first category is that participants experience financial difficulties. The second category is that the participants’ husbands have close relationships with other women. The third category of this theme found participants to be victims of physical and verbal abuse from their husbands. The first category was found from the results of the interviews with six participants. Six out of ten participants experienced financial difficulties because their husbands did not work and did not have money. The following statements are the expressions of the second participant. The second participant said that many problems that arise in their household, the most frequent problem is financial problems.

“...Masalaah... yaahh, banyak lah sih hahaha...Masalah duit lah pokok e...” (P2).

"... Problems ... yaahh, a lot of hahaha ... It's usually about money ...” (P2).

The ten participants also felt the same way. Her husband did not work, so he had to ask the participant's in-laws for living expenses.

“...Dia ibaratkan masih belum ade pikiran kalau bise dibilang die tue dari sayekan.. saye yang ade pikiran.. semue semue uang dari mertue.. dari mamak jadi malu kan.. kalau pengen ape ape.. mina misalnyee.. kalo orang tak malu sih pasti mina terus.. mertuenee.. saye ndak.. saye ndak bise...” (P10)

"... He still has no thoughts if you can say he's from me .. I have a thought .. all money from my mother-in-law .. so embarrassed .. if you want something .. ask for example .. if people are not ashamed, sure, continue to ask mother-in-law .. I don't.. I can't...” (P10)

The second category of the third theme is that the participants' husbands have a close relationship with other women. The results of the interview found that the participants' husbands had a special close relationship with other women. This is experienced by three out of ten participants. Participants said they were cheated by their husbands by establishing special relationships with other women without the participants' knowledge.

“...pas aa malam dia pulang tuu kan, yang udah apa dak..dak pulang, yang dia pulang pagi tu ya...rupanya dia tidur temper pepermuun tuu...” (P5).

"... at night he came home, didn't he ... didn't come home, he came home that morning ... apparently he slept with another woman ...” (P5).

The ten participants also experienced the same thing, their husbands were attracted to other women.

“... pokoknye kayak orang takut giukan.. ketahuan same sayee.. die chat dengan pepermuun tuu...cuman suami saye tuh bedee.. asal nengok perempuan sedikit..cemanee yee.. die tuh kayak tergonee gitu...” (P10)

"... basically like a person who is afraid ... caught by me ... he chats with other women .. but my husband is different ... seeing women ... how do you think ... he is easily tempted ...” (P10)
The third category of the third theme is that participants become victims of physical and verbal abuse from their husbands. The results of the interview found that six out of ten participants experienced physical and verbal abuse in their marriage. The sixth participant said that she had experienced physical abuse from her husband for almost a year. The participant's husband often throws his hand at the participant's body and often hits it with wood.

"...die malah... melasa-melasa (memukul) tuh, bekelahi bekelahi...ndak, malam tuh, kalau biase kite tidur, kite tidur, dipangkong (dipukul) pake kayu... "(P6)

"... he hit, fought us, that night, I was sleeping, he hit me with wood" (P6)

The seventh participant said that they often had different opinions with their husbands so that they were often yelled at by their husbands.

"... pokok nih kalau dia mabuk kan, dia mabuk juga... jadi kan die kan ngusir saye, pelase saye kan... dipukul-pukul" (P7)

"... anyway if he was drunk, he was drunk too ... so he kicked me out, I was hit by him" (P7)

**DISCUSSION**

Married life is not always smooth sailing, especially marriages that are forged at an immature age. This research produces three themes related to the experiences of young women undergoing early childhood marriage. The results of the interview found that the first theme related to the causes of adolescents to marry early is pregnancy outside of marriage and dropping out of school.

This study found three participants had early marriage because of promiscuity (premarital sex) which caused the participants to become pregnant before marriage. Pregnancy before marriage caused embarrassment to participants and their families. Getting married is one way to reduce this shame even though the participants are not yet ready to get married. Free sex, especially which causes pre-marital pregnancy to have a greater opportunity for early marriage. This is in line with Pohan's research which states that young women with promiscuity are at risk of having an early marriage 3,757 times compared to young women who do not have promiscuity (8).

The pregnancy that had occurred caused the participants to drop out of school and eventually marry a partner who had impregnated her. Research by Hastuti and Aini found that adolescents with pre-marital pregnancies will be a shame for themselves and their families because they are pregnant without marriage, adolescents feel guilty if they end the pregnancy, a race against time because pregnancy is getting bigger. This encourages teenagers to get married without waiting for adulthood (9). Teen marriages need to be prevented, one of them is by providing education and counseling. Education and counseling have been proven to increase adolescent knowledge and attitudes towards promiscuity (10).

There are many negative effects of motherhood at a very young age. Very young maternal age is associated with lower child birth weight, gestational age, childhood nutritional status (malnutrition and stunting), school attainment, and adult glucose concentrations. Higher, compared to the offspring of mothers aged 20-24 years (11) (12). States should undertake country-specific studies to measure the minimum age of motherhood in women (13).

The cause of early marriage in participants in this study was not only due to premarital pregnancy. Some of the participants decided to get married at an early age because the participants had dropped out of school. Participants drop out of school for a variety of reasons. Some participants said they were lazy to go to school because the school was far from home. Some of the participants said they had dropped out of school because they were no longer able to think and study at school. Some of the participants again said they quit school because of cost factors and administrative problems. Some of the participants who dropped out of school continued to work for a living.
The absence of school activities makes participants feel bored, there is no activity, they feel they are a burden on the family, and participants feel tired of working to live their lives. Young marriages generally occur in young girls. Their suffering is the result of widespread and systematic human rights violations (14). Getting married to a man is the choice of this participant because they hope that their life will be better after marriage. This is supported by Septianah research which found that there is a correlation between education level and early age marriage (15).

Adolescents who married early in this study decided to get married on their own accord. There was no reason for matchmaking or coercion from other parties so that teenagers should marry. All participants in this study were married to men who became their boyfriends.

This study is not in line with the results of research conducted by Zahab which found that there was no relationship between dating behavior and marriage under 20 years of age. Although it is not in line with this research, this study found that the decision to marry came from teenagers and their boyfriends. Teenage girls make their own decision to get married, which can be related to pregnancy outside of marriage and dropping out of school. In this condition, the parents of teenagers cannot refuse. The consideration is that teenagers who get pregnant out of wedlock are a family disgrace and teenagers who drop out of school have no hope of a better future and will only become a burden on the family. This consideration is what causes parents to tend to agree and even support the decision of young girls to marry at an early age (16).

The decision to marry at an early age has its consequences for young girls. This study found that young women who married early experienced unpleasant treatment in undergoing marriage. The results of the interview found that adolescents experience financial difficulties in their household. This research is in line with the research of Iustitiani and Ajisuksmo which states that early marriage has an impact on economic instability (17). Adolescents who are married to men who are almost the same age and do not have a job feel economic instability so that the cost of living still depends on their parents.

Not only financial difficulties, teenagers who marry early also experience physical and verbal abuse from their husbands. Based on the research of Fini, Arum, and Noor, it is said that domestic violence is more common in a younger woman, have low educational status, have low economic status, and live in rural areas (18). In this study, adolescents who experience domestic violence are teenagers who have older husbands. In Mauritania and Nigeria girls are often married to considerably older men. More than half of adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 who are currently married have husbands who are 10 or more years older than they are (19). About 29.0% of women reported physical or sexual violence in an intimate partner (IPV). Among ever-married women who experienced post-union violence for the first time, harassment began, on average, 3.5 years, after marriage (20).

Child marriage also has an impact on the psychological development of young girls who practice it. Research Setyawan, et.al found that the marriage of teenage girls causes feelings of shame to interact, hopeless, hurt and fear when domestic violence occurs even to the point where ended in divorce (21)(22). Research by Kidman, 2017 shows globally, 9% of women were married before the age of 15. Another 25% are married between the ages of 15 and 17. Domestic violence was higher among women who married as children (29%) compared to those who married as adults (20%) (23). Child marriage, especially girls, is a form of gender inequality that reflects social norms related to discrimination against girls (19). The many problems both physically and psychologically experienced by young women who marry do not necessarily decrease the prevalence of child marriage in Indonesia. Female teenagers have different experiences during marriage. Many negative impacts experienced by them.

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