

# Investigation of Early Marriage: A Phenomenology Study in the Society of Bawean Island, Indonesia

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Submitted: 26 January 2021, Accepted: 30 June 2021, Published: 26 July 2021

Volume 29, 2021. pp. 544-562. <http://doi.org/10.25133/JPSSv292021.034>

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## Abstract

The research aimed to interpret the perceptions of early marriage, the union of two people in which one or both are under 18 years of age, through a phenomenological approach. The analysis was performed using observation techniques along with participation in in-depth interviews supported with an inductive approach of documentation analysis. The results showed that the society in Bawean Island, Indonesia, perceived the need for early marriage of 15-16 years old girls as matchmaking, avoidance of the social sanction of fornication and out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and as an economical solution for parents to shift responsibility. The results further showed that matchmaking and the avoidance of fornication are significant motivators for early marriage. Also, it was found that early marriages caused adverse effects on the wife, husband, and children. The effects are related to cases of pregnancy complication for the wife and psychological stress for the husband. The effect on children born of the early marriage is mainly neonatal infant mortality. The solutions offered to support the population development target and decrease early marriage numbers are to improve access to health facilities and information for women, and overcome cultural and social norms by discussing the impacts of early marriage with social and religious figures and stakeholders. The research can be used by the National Population and Family Planning Board (Indonesia) to decrease the number of early marriages in society.

## Keywords

Early marriage; fornication; Indonesia; interpretation; matchmaking

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## Introduction

In general, early marriage, marrying two people in which one or both are under 18 years of age, is still a severe problem in almost two-thirds of the world's countries (Yildirim et al., 2019). Although the practice of early marriage is legal, it is extensively perceived as a violation of human rights and abuse, especially toward teenage girls. The lack of social wealth, education, and law, in addition to different cultural viewpoints, have made this practice of early marriage remain in communities. Globally, in 2005 more than 650 million women were married at a young age (UNICEF, 2005). This data corresponds with later findings by Wodon et al. (2016), who stated that everyday teenage girls are forced to leave their families to marry, experience sexual and physical abuse, and become mothers at a young age. According to human rights experts, early marriage could be defined as sex slavery (Kenny et al., 2019). Early marriage is enforced by poverty, strong cultural traditions, and expanding discrimination against teenage girls.

Decreasing early marriage has become a priority of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The SDG goals state that by 2030 all human beings must be free from poverty, and women and children should be free from health problems such as reproduction problems and sexual abuse, and should have gender equality (Wodon et al., 2017). However, the practice of early marriage has witnessed a gradual decrease to achieve sustainable development goals (Azzopardi et al., 2019; Wodon et al., 2017).

Early marriage does not only occur in developing countries but also developed countries of Europe and North America. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan are three countries in Eastern Europe that had a high percentage (31%) of early marriage (UNFPA & IPPF, 2006). Latin America and the Caribbean are two regions in the Americas that had a high percentage (30%) of early marriages (UNICEF, 2005). The contributing factors of early marriage in those regions were social and cultural issues (Jarnkvist, 2019). East Asia and Australia are included as developed regions with early marriage problems; however, both regions showed a significantly lower percentage (IPU & WHO, 2016).

Early marriage is common in developing countries as the percentage of early marriage cases is high in the total marriage cases. Nigeria had a higher percentage (77%) of early marriage of women under 18 years old. Furthermore, Mali reached 61%, and Ethiopia and Guinea were 58% (UNICEF, 2005). South Asia occupied the first rank for all regions of Asia with a significantly high early marriage rate. Bangladesh and Nepal were at 74% and 52%, respectively (UNICEF, 2005), and India was 62% (IPU & WHO, 2016).

Many factors contribute to early marriage in various countries. Raj et al. (2019) and Kenny et al. (2019) found that the common causes of early marriage in Eastern Europe and Latin America were social and cultural conditions. Early marriage is also influenced by poverty and education level, such as in African and South Asian countries (Birech, 2013; Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017; UNFPA & IPPF, 2006; Wahhaj, 2018). However, research interested in interpreting the perceptions of the girls and their parents, and religious factors of early marriage, has not been widely conducted.

Preventing the early marriage rate has been attempted globally through the dissemination of information and skills empowerment. Through education, empowerment was conducted by life-skill workshops, including sexual health and reproduction and vocational skills. The

strategies were achieved through education, including formal and non-formal education that was accessible to all societies. Many countries provide incentives for needy families for micro-business capital, health services, and education (Malhotra et al., 2011; Shah et al., 2018). This education strategy has been demonstrated by some countries, including India (Mehra et al., 2018), Kosovo (Duraku et al., 2020), and some countries in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia and Singapore (Rasmussen et al., 2019). Therefore, the Bawean island community needs more access to education by improving formal and informal education facilities and adding more competent teachers and instructors.

Indonesia is one of the countries in ASEAN, which had a high rate of early marriage. Indonesia ranked fifth after Laos (40%), Thailand (23%), Cambodia (21%), and the Philippines (19%). The early marriage cases in Indonesia reached 18% and were categorized into: married at the age of 15 (2%) and married before the age of 18 (16%) (UNICEF, 2005). Other neighboring countries such as Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, and Malaysia had zero cases of early marriage. This is because those countries are developed countries in the ASEAN region with wide access to educational institutions and quality health services. Several developed countries in East Asia had a very low percentage of early marriage, such as Japan, South Korea, China, and Taiwan (Arthur et al., 2018).

Early marriage was regulated in Indonesia with Constitution Number 1 of 1974 about marriage, which stated that the minimum marriage age for men is 19 years old and women is 16. However, some people disagree with constitutional regulation (Arimurti & Nurmala, 2017). This mindset cannot be separated from the history of early marriage in Indonesia. Since the thirteenth century, Islam has been the major religion in the country. Therefore, the traditions and customs of the community are very closely related to Islamic values, including early marriage. Initially, early marriage was performed to prevent sexual encounters outside of marriage and to avoid sin. On 22 December 1928, the protest against child marriage issues began. Dutch women activists in Indonesia organized discussions about child marriage, which they found highly unfair to women. (Laksono et al., 2021).

Contrary to marriage regulation, Constitution Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection mentions that an individual under 18 years old is categorized as a teenager. Both regulations do not significantly correspond to the definition of teenager and the marriage age limit. It implies that most people in Indonesia have not responded well to the regulation.

In general, the early marriage research in Indonesia focused more on the cause and the impact of early marriage on teenagers. The effects include reproductive health, mental health, and childbirth (Arimurti & Nurmala, 2017; Indraswari & Yuhan, 2017; Pakasi, 2019; Rahayu & Wahyuni, 2020; Widyastari et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the general factors are culture and poverty (Fitriana et al., 2021; Judiasih et al., 2020; Laksono et al., 2021). According to the subjects, the early marriages in Bawean Island were conducted without force, and the couple would delay pregnancy after the wedding. Early marriages were carried out because the husbands would immediately leave after the wedding to find jobs. They would then return three to five years later. Early marriages are also based on Islamic values that do not have a minimum marriage age for women and men. However, the values prohibit sexual intercourse and childbirth until both individuals are physically and spiritually ready.

Based on the problem explained above, the research was intended to find the interpretations of perceptions and impacts of early marriage, specifically on Bawean Island. Early marriage certainly has various motives; *in-order-to* motive and the *because-of* motive (Susilo, 2016). The motives were revealed through the parents' and subjects' testimonies.

## Method

The research used a qualitative approach to explore the complex structure of interpreting perceptions through observation and in-depth interviews. The phenomenological study was conducted to understand the specific socio-cultural condition of Bawean Island collected through the relevant field data. By formulating phenomenology with the perspective of Alfred Schutz, this study sought to understand the behavior and actions performed by the girls and parents in the early marriage cases based on the *in-order-to* motive and the *because-of* motive (Hammersley, 2019). Schutz's theory states that phenomenology is interested in identifying problems from the meaningful sense experience, which occurs in individual consciousness separately and then collectively in the interaction between consciousnesses. It is a part where consciousness acts on raw sensory data to create meaning, in the same way that it sees something ambiguous from that distance (Hammersley, 2019).

Schutz's phenomenology concept is based on the meaning of action developed by Max Weber (Tada, 2019). Weber used the term motive that refers to the sentence (a) *in-order-to* of an action-orientated to the action towards future events, but according to Schutz, before entering the *in-order-to* stage, first there is a stage (b) *because-of* each action that has occurred in the past (Smith, 2017). Thus, it can be concluded that the main problem explained by Schutz is to see motive as a context of meaning that connects motivation with reason. The *in-order-to* motive of action shows that the motive is nothing more or less than the action itself projected in the future perfect tense. In the *in-order-to* motive relationship, the impulse from the life experience is an anticipation in the impulse, which is described in the future perfect tense as an event that will take place in the future with a definitive end date. The *in-order-to* motive is a content of understanding built on an experience with a design. This never-ending sequence is a fact from past experiences, containing the success of some part of the action. Each *in-order-to* motive hints at a variety of experiences that have been elevated to the *I-can-do-it-again* status.

Meanwhile, the real intention of the *because-of* motive is to explain the depiction of the individual past experiences (McNarry et al., 2019). In this case, *because-of* motive does not show the future event but rather refers to something that precedes the action taken. So, Schutz stated that the meaning would be labeled by looking back at the preceded action. Thus, it can be concluded that the main problem explained by Schutz is a matter of subjective meaning in research combined with the *Verstehen* concept (an empathic understanding of human behavior), which leads to a motive action to be achieved or *in-order-to* motive (Hammersley, 2019).

The phenomenological approach was the most appropriate method to find the interpretations of early marriage perceived by parents and subjects. In general, the phenomenological investigation aimed to provide insight into individual perceptions and awareness of human experiences (McNarry et al., 2019). The interpretivist phenomenology is concerned with 'the ordinary everyday experiences that become important experiences because the person reflects on the significance of events and engages in cognition to understand it' (Smith et al., 2016). Therefore, the phenomenological approach can provide insight to the marginalized and underrepresented populations, and help researchers provide a critical look at justice issues. Phenomenology is the process of humans understanding the world through direct experience. Thus, phenomenology makes the actual experiences the primary data of reality. In

philosophy, the object of phenomenology is not limited to one area of the study. The aim is to find essential understanding so that in-depth discussion is required. Phenomenology analyzes symptoms related to social reality and the certain forms of knowledge that contribute to these conditions (McNarry et al., 2019).

Phenomenology has certain advantages in investigating social phenomena compared to other methods. First, a thorough interview will reflect the meaningful life experiences of the participants (Raggl & Schratz, 2004). Phenomenology also allows participants to present and express their thoughts, views, and feelings during the research process (vom Lehn, 2018). Thus, phenomenology enables the researcher to capture the meaningful life experiences of the participants regarding a phenomenon (vom Lehn & Heath, 2021). Also, as Kirova and Emme (2006) stated, the phenomenological method relies on narrative and words. Many layers of life experiences may be easily expressed and interpreted by narratives and words. The narrative can be a valuable tool for participants to create a more profound meaning because it can encourage them to think reflexively, remember, reflect on, and represent feelings, thoughts, events, and other problems at any given moment (Raggl & Schratz, 2004). Therefore, phenomenology may be a better method of social investigation.

## Research population

The research was conducted in 2018 in two districts of Bawean Island, Indonesia, namely Tambak, which consists of 13 villages, and Sangkapura, which consists of 17 villages. The highest rate of early marriage occurred in Sangkapura District: Daun Village (163 incidences), Sidogedungbatu Village (159 incidences), and Gunung Teguh Village (150 incidences) (SDKI, 2018). Twenty-four research subjects, ages 15-16 years old, and their parents were selected from the three villages.

Based on the Ethical clearance (No: 1717/B.1/KEPK-FKUMM/XI/2018), subjects were determined using the snowball technique. The essential information such as name and age was obtained from the Religious Affairs Office [Kantor Urusan Agama]. Other information was obtained from key informants. The in-depth interviews were used to obtain genuine data from the research subjects. The characteristics of the research subjects are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Characteristics of Research Subjects

Subject Number	Age at Marriage	Age at Interview	Educational Background	Parent Number	Age at Interview	Educational Background
1	15	20	Junior High School	1	71	Elementary
2	15	21	Elementary	2	63	Elementary
3	16	17	Junior High School	3	87	No schooling
4	15	21	Junior High School	4	59	Elementary
5	15	19	Elementary	5	61	Elementary
6	15	23	Junior High School	6	55	Junior High School
7	15	17	Junior High School	7	63	No schooling
8	15	16	Junior High School	8	72	No schooling

Subject Number	Age at Marriage	Age at Interview	Educational Background	Parent Number	Age at Interview	Educational Background
9	16	19	Junior High School	9	61	Elementary
10	15	22	Junior High School	10	63	Elementary
11	15	19	Junior High School	11	52	Junior High School
12	15	18	Elementary	12	49	Junior High School
13	15	21	Junior High School	13	57	Elementary
14	16	20	Elementary	14	51	Elementary
15	16	19	Elementary	15	63	No schooling
16	15	17	Elementary	16	52	Elementary
17	15	16	Elementary	17	56	Elementary
18	15	19	Elementary	18	67	Elementary
19	15	21	Junior High School	19	62	Elementary
20	15	18	Junior High School	20	58	Junior High School
21	16	19	Elementary	21	54	Elementary
22	15	19	Junior High School	22	49	Junior High School
23	16	17	Junior High School	23	51	Junior High School
24	16	17	Elementary	24	60	Elementary

In-depth interviews were conducted on the subject of early marriage. Separate interviews with the parents were undertaken to validate facts from the subjects in order to prevent conflicts of interest between the child (research subject) and the parents. Data were also collected using literature studies and documentation related to community phenomena on Bawean Island. Furthermore, the data validity was tested using triangulation techniques. The triangulation compared data from many sources, namely parents, children, and the head of the religious affairs office. The analysis was conducted for each individual. Furthermore, data were coded by analyzing the parents' behavior and action patterns to raise social context and interpretation.

## Results and discussion

### Social context

Bawean Island is located in the Java Sea on the northside of Surabaya-East Java. The area of the island is 80 square miles or 120 square kilometers. The population of Bawean Island in 2018 reached 106,802, consisting of 53,869 males and 52,993 females, with 9,140 15-16-year-old (4,510 males and 4,630 females) residents (Central Statistics Agency of Gresik Regency, 2018).

The number of inhabitants based on ethnic groups in Bawean Island is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Ethnic Groups in Bawean Island

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>
Javanese	12,816
Bawean	39,518
Bugis	11,748
Madurese	19,224
Malays (Palembang)	16,020
Others	7,476

*Note: Central Statistics Agency of Gresik Regency, 2020*

The number of inhabitants based on religion in Bawean Island is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Religion Groups in Bawean Island

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Number</b>
Islam	106,771
Protestant	5
Catholic	6
Hindu	12
Buddhist	8

*Note: Central Statistics Agency of Gresik Regency, 2020*

The number of inhabitants based on the completed education level in Bawean Island is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Completed Education Level in Bawean Island

<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Number</b>
Elementary School	36,224
Junior High School	23,496
Senior High School	14,688
College or University	9,790
Uneducated/No Schooling	13,706

*Note: Central Statistics Agency of Gresik Regency, 2020*

The population growth in Bawean Island is influenced by a high Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of 2.1% in the past five years (SDKI, 2018). The high fertility rate is caused by several factors, namely women's education, access to media about family planning information, husband's education, economic status, age at marriage, and perception of the ideal number of children (Ondiba & Matsui, 2019). The most dominant factors in Bawean Island are women's education and economic status.

The high TFR changed the population structure and was identified as the main cause of the vast population growth. The study by Ahammed et al. (2019) in Bangladesh revealed that maternal education, economic status, and age at marriage significantly determined the high TFR. Furthermore, Mukhuti et al. (2019) conducted studies in India and Africa and found that women's education was essential to population growth. Hence, it is appropriate to say that the high TFR on Bawean Island was affected by women's education level.

The cases of early marriage with age at marriage of 15-16 years old on Bawean Island during 2019-2020 was 689 (Central Statistics Agency of Gresik Regency, 2020). The early marriage was mainly caused by the low level of education, with 36,224 individuals having only

completed elementary-level education. An in-depth interview was conducted on early marriage with Subject 2, who stated, "I went to junior high school, but in the second year my parents asked me to quit. I was obliged to marry. So, I could not pursue my study" (Subject 2, 21 years old). Likewise, Subject 4 stated, "I never participated in senior high school. My parents told me to get married immediately, so I had to oblige them" (Subject 4, 21 years old).

Women's education is one of the dominant factors affecting the high TFR on Bawean Island. The women's low level of education led to an increase in the birth rate (Indraswari & Yuhan, 2017). The economic status also caused an increased TFR. Low-income families tend to practice early marriage to resolve the family's financial problems (Duraku et al., 2020). Parents expect to decrease the living expense after marrying off the children.

In-depth interviews with the participants' parents revealed that most of the subjects' education was elementary or junior high level. Four parents, namely the parents from Participants 3, 7, 8, and 14, did not have any formal education background. However, the parents of Subject 3 stated, "I only participated in school until the third year of elementary school. I quit school to help my parents at home" (Parent of Subject 3, 87 years old). Meanwhile, the parent of Subject 5 (unknown age) did not know their birth age because birth registration was difficult back then. As well, they could not afford education because the school was far from home, so their parent preferred to marry at a young age. Therefore, the interview concluded that the parents struggled to get an education, so they believed that marrying was the best solution.

The subject's characteristics are similar to the parents' characteristics in the early marriage case. The parents' education levels were also elementary and junior high school, while three parents, namely the parents of Subjects 3, 5, 8, and 14, did not have any educational documents. The low level of education of the participants' parents influenced them to marry off their children soon. The parents considered the subject did not need to study until the highest level since they would be homemakers.

## **The interpretation of early marriage**

The cause of early marriage in Bawean Island is based on several factors. According to the in-depth interviews, it was found that several patterns of early marriage are as follows:

### **The early marriage as matchmaking**

Matchmaking still occurred in many rural communities and was a significant factor in early marriage. Parents usually managed the matchmaking process. To select the right spouse, parents typically choose a prospective daughter-in-law based on their socioeconomic status. Love, kindness, and appreciation were relatively insignificant before marriage, assuming that the aspects will surely emerge along with the life of the marriage (Afandi & Ardiansyah, 2019).

Matchmaking also occurred in many early marriage cases in various Sub-Saharan African and South Asian countries (Efevbera et al., 2019). Teenage girls in these areas are married to prospective husbands of very different ages arranged by their parents. The husbands are over 30 years old; some even 40 years old. Meanwhile, the brides are 14 to 16 years old (Delprato & Akyeampong, 2017).



Matchmaking is different from forced marriage. Matchmaking is carried out to select a husband; while forced marriage, one partner may disagree and is forced to obey the stipulated marriage rules (Afandi & Ardiansyah, 2019). Traditionally, parents decided the date and the person to marry. One research subject explained that "In the past, a daughter had no choice. Her father would make all the decisions about her marriage." The matchmaking showed that parents have reasons other than economic factors. The parents' reason for planning their daughters' marriage was based more on social factors, namely strengthening friendships and kinships and the desire to have grandchildren without delay. Parents will match their daughters to their friends' or distant relatives' sons. A marriage will enable parents and their friends to become closer by being related to a family through marriage.

The interview results showed that the matchmaking in Bawean Island is due to both parents' long time close relationships. It was interpreted that if the children's marriage is arranged, then the parents' status will change into in-laws and become more intimate than before (Arimurti & Nurmala, 2017). It is experienced by Subject 1, who stated, "Before I got married, my parents and my husband's parents knew each other. The friendship was made long before my marriage was arranged" (Subject 1, 20 years old).

The parent of Subject 1 (71 years old) also supported that the marriage was held to maintain the relationship with the son-in-law. They stated, "I arranged the marriage so that my relationship with my son-in-law can be maintained" (Parent of Subject 1, 71 years old). It can be concluded that the matchmaking experienced by Subject 1 was based on the long-time relationship between the parents. It was supported by Subject 1 (20 years old), who shared that their parents wanted to have a grandchild, so the marriage was arranged. The subject refused the parents' request for matching, but because the child must respect and obey the parents, the child followed the request.

Also, the matchmaking was experienced by the parent of Subject 2, who stated, "I knew my son-in-law when he became a customer in my shop. Since I felt that I had a good match with him, I introduced him to my daughter. After they got to know each other and matched, then I arranged their marriage" (Parent of Subject 2, 63 years old).

Religious factors also motivate matchmaking. The people of Bawean Island follow the Islamic religion's rules according to the Koran, especially in marrying off daughters. Therefore, the reason for parents to marry off children at an early age on Bawean Island is based on that marriage is the sunnah of the Prophets.

The marriage must meet three criteria according to Islamic law. The first criterion is having sufficient knowledge, which means that the bride should know the marriage laws such as the procedure for proposing, terms and conditions of marriage, and divorce. The second criterion is financial readiness and income to fulfill basic needs. The third criterion is physical preparation for people to continue their lineage. Physical health means the reproductive organs are mature and ready for sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and childbirth (Barber et al., 2015; Jarnkvist, 2019).

Psychologically, early marriage for a teenager of 15-16 years old is not allowed. Married women at a young age are very vulnerable to psychological disorders such as stress, anxiety, and trauma (Beattie et al., 2019). Teenagers are not ready to face the problems that will arise in married life. This unpreparedness will make women vulnerable to stress and anxiety. Furthermore, psychological disorders are also motivated by trauma caused by violence or

coercion. This case is like physical violence, household quarrels, and sexual behavior (Mazzuca et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2016).

Matchmaking for early marriage does not result in a high divorce rate in Bawean. The research findings of Wahi et al. (2019) showed that in the United States, early marriages are more likely to end in divorce. Early marriages in the United States result in a higher divorce rate than those who postpone marriage until after adolescence. The study conducted by Koski and Heymann (2018) also found that nearly 25% of 15-16-year-olds who were married, later separated or divorced before their eighteenth birthday. The high divorce rate also happens in Ethiopia, which also has a high prevalence of early marriage. Research conducted by Mekonnen et al. (2019) in Ethiopia also found that the leading cause of divorce is psychological problems resulting from matchmaking in early marriages.

### **The early marriage to avoid fornication before wedlock**

The impact of technological developments allows easy access to information, especially social media. Social media is necessary for teenagers in the millennial era today. Social media influences teenagers to connect with people beyond regional borders. Electronic communication facilitates interaction based on particular interests and characteristics. It is also a platform for social interaction, using publishing techniques that are very accessible and scaled. Furthermore, social media uses web-based technology to transform and broadcast media monologues into social dialogue (Adegboyega, 2019).

Participant 17 stated that using social media to send erotic messages, watching movies and pornographic films leads to prohibited sexual behavior such as masturbation. It is implied that youth on Bawean Island use social media for prohibited access by violating the norms and morals that apply in Indonesia. Sari (2019) found that teenagers aged 15-17 in Indonesia use social media to access pornography. A study by Ashton et al. (2019) in Australia, and Young-Petersen and Willoughby (2019) in the United States, found that pornography increased unrestricted sex and pregnancy in teenagers, resulting in health problems in young women.

Participant 21 also stated that they watched and exchanged pornographic films with friends, saw nude photos alone, and would likely practice everything they had observed. It is aligned with research, including the study of Adegboyega (2019) in Nigeria, which found that more than 48% of Nigerian youth from 12-17 years of age used the internet, with almost half logged in every day. Furthermore, Sari (2019) also stated that the emergence of social media on mobile phones has made Nigerian youth addicted to these gadgets, causing them to no longer have time to focus on their studies.

Many teenagers used social media and ended up having a relationship with someone through the social media application. The research found that 231 teenage girls that married at a young age were active in using social media. Relationships that adolescents create exceed the limits of prevailing norms eventually. The case resulted in the rise of casual relationships in adolescents. The relationship is considered deviant behavior that violates religious standards and moral norms. Most Muslims in Bawean Island believe that these behaviors can lead to premarital sex between men and women. This assumption is reinforced by research by Blum et al. (2019) in Middle Eastern countries.

Another reason for early marriage was to avoid fornication. The parent of Subject 4 stated that the marriage was arranged to shift the supervision to the husband (Parent of Subject 4, 59

years old). The parent of Subject 5 said that fornication would receive social sanction from the society (Parent of Subject 5, no age). It is based on the negative stereotype that fornication should obtain a heavy sanction in society. It is also following the parent of Subject 5 who mentioned that the persons who participate in fornication would be paraded around by society and become badmouthed, so early marriage was the best solution to avoid such persecution. This belief aligned with Subject 4, who stated, "I was quickly married because my parents were afraid that I might get pregnant out-of-wedlock. At that time, I accepted my boyfriend's proposal. I was afraid to give my parents a bad name if the marriage was not held soon" (Subject 4, 21 Years old).

This custom is aligned with research by Wright and Vangeel (2019) in the United States and Havaei et al. (2019) in Iran. Their research found that most parents worried that teenage girls would have out-of-wedlock pregnancies. The parents also thought it would cause disgrace to the family. So, then parents will ask the girl's boyfriend to propose marriage immediately. Subject 9 stated to get married to avoid sex is the wrong approach. Also, Subject 11 said that avoiding out-of-wedlock sex was the motivation to get early marriage. Meanwhile, the parent's motivation for early marriage was to prevent fornication, as in the Islamic belief, it is a major sin and urges social sanctions from the community. In the end, the findings of the second meaning also led to punishment norms that prohibit premarital sex from affecting the decisions of parents and adolescents to conduct early marriage (Clyde et al., 2020; Coyne et al., 2019; Stark, 2016).

### **The early marriage to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy**

Early age pregnancy remains a significant issue in developed and developing countries. This is because adolescent's sexual and reproductive health is a top priority of the global health agenda (Wodon et al., 2017). The phenomenon is considered a severe public health problem worldwide (IPU & WHO, 2016). Igba et al. (2018) emphasized that early age pregnancy always refers to a pregnancy that occurs to teenage girls under 18 years of age. Out-of-wedlock pregnancy was caused by sexual harassment that happens to a teenager, which leads to premarital sex. This aligned with the findings of Luk (2019) and Wodon et al. (2016), who stated that out of wedlock pregnancy is affected by social and cultural factors, including adolescents who are more open to sex, lack of formal and comprehensive sex education in schools, parents who failed to lead agents of sexuality outreach for their children, and teenagers in disadvantaged areas (rural and outermost). It happened a lot to teenagers in Bawean because dating is not only limited to being close friends. Relationships that have been established are at the stage of premarital sex. Premarital sex symbolizes a modern lifestyle and a form of love for a girl and boyfriend (Asare et al., 2019).

The community leaders in Bawean Island considered out-of-wedlock pregnancy as an embarrassment, and the person would be isolated or even expelled from the village. Then to avoid these sanctions is to marry immediately. Three subjects explained that they were married at an early age due to being pregnant before being officially married. Therefore, the marriage was to cover up the disgrace.

The community viewed early marriage as a solution to out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Subjects 19 and 20 experienced bleeding during childbirth, and the babies were born with low body weight. The research found that early age pregnancy is associated with a higher risk of maternal and infant complications (Yildirim et al., 2019). Teenage mothers are at risk of developing complications, including hypertensive pregnancy, unsafe abortion, urinary tract

infections, and early rupture of uterine membranes (Barber et al., 2015). Complications arising from pregnancy and childbirth are indicated as the number one cause of death among teenage girls (15-19 years) worldwide (IPU & WHO, 2016).

Subject 7 (17 years old) got married at 15 years old due to out-of-wedlock pregnancy. The marriage was held to avoid the family from the social sanction. The subject clearly described that the adolescent's circle was susceptible to premarital sex, then cause out-of-wedlock pregnancy. Therefore, marriage was needed to be conducted so that the disgrace would not spread, and the family would not get a sanction from society. It aligned with a statement by the parent of Subject 7, who said, "The marriage was held because she was already three months pregnant. She was often at home by herself, so her boyfriend would often come over. Her pregnancy was a disgrace that needed to be covered up. Then I immediately married her off" (Parent of Participant 7, 63 years old).

### Early marriage due to economic factors

Early marriage was also seen as a solution to a financial problem by the parents. Therefore, many parents encourage quickly getting married even though the children's age is still not enough for marriage. Families living below the poverty standard force parents to immediately marry off the children to alleviate parents' dependence (Kenny et al., 2019; Lang & Weinstein, 2015; Raj et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2016).

Parents cannot send their children to school because there is no money to support the children. So, for the man to propose, the parents immediately accept the proposal and determine the marriage date. Interviews showed the motives in early marriage as a solution to financial problems were because the family was living in poverty. The parents marry off their children immediately, so then the economic burden on parents will be relieved.

Table 5 is a summary of the above findings.

**Table 5:** The Interpretation Matrix of Early Marriage in Bawean Island Based on Schutz' Phenomenology Perspective

Subject Number	Age at Marriage	Current Age	Education Background	The <i>in-order-to</i> motive	The <i>because-of</i> motive	Interpretation	
1	15	20	Junior High School		1. To maintain the friendship between parents	Matchmaking	
2	15	21	Elementary School	Both parents know and are familiar with each other	2. Want to have grandchildren soon		
3	16	17	Junior High School		3. Parents have found a good husband candidate		
4	15	21	Junior High School		The rise of free sex and the development of information		Avoiding social sanction
5	15	19	Elementary School				
6	15	23	Junior High School				
7	15	17	Junior High School				Avoiding fornication
8	15	16	Junior High School				
9	16	19	Junior High School				

Subject Number	Age at Marriage	Current Age	Education Background	The <i>in-order-to</i> motive	The <i>because-of</i> motive	Interpretation
10	15	22	Junior High School	technology (social media)		
11	15	19	Junior High School			
12	15	18	Elementary			
13	15	21	Junior High School			
14	16	20	Elementary			
15	16	19	Elementary			
16	15	17	Elementary	Pregnancy	Covering up the family's shame	Out of wedlock pregnancy
17	15	16	Elementary			
18	15	19	Elementary			
19	15	21	Junior High School			
20	15	18	Junior High School			
21	16	19	Elementary	Poverty	Relieving parental burden	Economic solution
22	15	19	Junior High School			
23	16	17	Junior High School			
24	16	17	Elementary			

Early marriage due to economic factors is a common issue in the society of Bawean Island. Early marriages also occurred for some specific reasons, such as limited natural resources owned by an area, low levels of education, and lack of employment opportunities also add to the high cases of early marriage in Indonesia (Rumble et al., 2018). Therefore, early marriage was one of the solutions to decrease the family's responsibility. However, it is added more responsibility because the husband lives with the wife's family.

One of the early marriage subjects married at a young age due to the economic factor was Subject 10, who stated, "I am the third of seven children in my family, and my siblings were still kids. My parents worked as fish sellers in the fish market with unreliable income. I decided to get married to ease their burden" (Subject 10, 22 years old). It is aligned with the parent of Subject 10, who stated, "I supported the marriage because it would ease the responsibility in the family." (Parent of Subject 10, 63 Years old)

## The effect of early marriage in Bawean Island

The typical ages of early marriages in Bawean Island is 15 to 16 years old. The subjects tended to have low levels of education, mainly elementary or junior high school levels. Marriage and education are considered contradictory as married teenage girls will face mobility limitations during pregnancy and responsibility for childcare. The interviews revealed that early marriage subjects dropped out of school and did not continue their education. In other developing countries, such as Malawi and Zambia, early marriage also directly impacts education (Efevbera et al., 2019).

Among the 24 subjects, some stated they experienced bleeding complications and anemia during pregnancy and giving birth. These complications occurred because women under the

age of 20 are at risk of early birth, low birth weight, and labor bleeding, increasing maternal mortality (SDKI, 2018). Early age pregnancy is at high risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. The highest risk of death happens to mothers under the age of 17, mainly caused by pregnancy and childbirth complications.

The early marriage in Bawean Island also burdens the girl with the responsibilities of being a wife, a sex partner, a mother, and various other roles that are aimed at adults. The teenage girls around 15-16 years old are considered not ready to do those duties. Various studies showed that adolescent girls at an early age had a high risk of experiencing anxiety, depression, or suicidal thoughts, partly because they had no status, power, support, and control over their own lives (UNICEF, 2016).

Early marriage also brings about psychological influence on the girl, especially for a divorce. National data reported that Indonesia's divorce rates have continuously increased from 16% in 2009 to 20% in 2018 (SDKI, 2018). It is found that most divorces are carried out by married couples under the age of 25 years old. The woman was married early and ended up divorced for some reason experienced a problematic psychological situation characterized by sadness, disappointment, frustration, discomfort, anxiety, unhappiness, self-blame, stress, depression, fear, and worry for individuals (Beattie et al., 2019).

It is experienced by Participant 3, who stated,

*“I got married because my parents arranged it. My husband was ten years older than me. At the beginning of the marriage, we often argued about not being careful of the household. Until the following years, I regret this arranged marriage. Now I am worried that my marriage will continue in these uncomfortable conditions, until one day I can divorce my husband” (Participant 3, 17 years old).*

Wives in the sample were much younger than the husbands. The average age of the subject's husband in this research was 30 to 35 years old. The excessive age gap makes the husband's maturity level higher. Most of the research participants still needed help from their husbands, especially when caring for children.

Early marriage has an intergenerational effect. Babies born from early marriage have a higher risk of death, with a two-time greater chance of dying before one year rather than children born by a twenty-year-old mother (SDKI, 2018). The babies also have a higher probability of being born early, with low birth weight and malnutrition.

The health facilities available in Community Health Centers also support the lack of monitoring of children's growth and development by health workers. The health facilities in Bawean Island cannot handle cases such as malnutrition, slow growth, and severe developmental cases such as Down syndrome. Parents must take their children to the nearest city (Surabaya) to receive adequate health services. They must travel for four to six hours for one trip. Therefore, it can take much time, energy, and costs.

Early marriage does not only underlie but also supports gender inequality in society. Early marriage can lead to sustainable poverty, ignorance of inadequate education and health for the next generation, and deprivation of people's productivity in both the short and long term. The early marriage subjects in Bawean Island could not improve their potential because they do not have an education qualification for minimally senior high school. Therefore, the wife's

role in family and community life is lacking. The wife did not have a role in family decision-making, only to care for children and homes.

Regarding health, early marriage harms women and their children. Moreover, it will worsen the area's health level if this case happens in an area where the health facilities are inadequate. Married teenage girls are more likely to experience domestic violence and have lower status in society. They are often denied pursuing education, employment, or entrepreneurial opportunities. Finally, the child bride will lose justice in social life.

## Conclusion

The findings showed that the significant causes of early marriage in Bawean Island are the parents' low education and family economic status. Also, religious and cultural factors influence parents' decision to marry off their children at an early age. The poor economic status of their parents causes them to decide to marry their children early to reduce the family responsibility. Schutz's phenomenological perspective revealed that early marriage is interpreted in several meanings by the people in Bawean Island. The need for early marriage is interpreted as 1) matchmaking, 2) avoiding fornication, 3) avoiding out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and 4) a solution for the financial problem of the family and community.

Early marriage has affected the wife and the child, especially their education and health. It will ultimately cause the people on this island to remain in poor condition. It also impacted Indonesia's development targets which focus on reducing poverty, hunger, health, and encouraging gender equality. The solution to reducing the cases of early marriage on Bawean Island is by increasing access and health facilities, such as providing health information for women, mainly information about the risks of early marriage to women's physical and mental health. In addition, discussion sessions are needed with community, religious, and stakeholder leaders regarding the negative impact of early marriage on teenage girls.

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