

Interpretive Bias in the Understanding of Hadith and Its Implications for the Persistence of Child Marriage in Indonesia

Miftachur Rifah Mahmud

State Islamic University of Salatiga, Indonesia
rifahmahmud@uinsalatiga.ac.id

Siti Muhtamiroh

State Islamic University of Salatiga, Indonesia
tami.rahman68@gmail.com

Abstract

Child marriage remains a complex socio-religious issue in Indonesia, including in regions with relatively high educational attainment such as Salatiga and Semarang Regency. While structural factors such as poverty and unintended pregnancy are frequently identified as primary drivers, the role of religious interpretation, particularly the understanding of hadith, has received insufficient critical examination. This study investigates the extent to which interpretive bias in selected Prophetic traditions contributes to the legitimization of underage marriage. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis involving eight individuals who entered marriage below the legally prescribed age. The findings indicate three principal factors underlying child marriage: (1) premarital relationships leading to pregnancy, (2) economic vulnerability, and (3) textualist readings of hadith concerning the exhortation for youth to marry and the narration of ‘Ā’ishah’s marriage. The study argues that such readings reflect an interpretive bias rooted in a decontextualized textual approach that overlooks historical contingencies and the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*). The persistence of child marriage, when grounded in literalist religious interpretation, risks generating long-term social and psychological consequences within marital life. This article, therefore, calls for a contextual and *maqāṣid*-oriented re-examination of relevant hadith, alongside strengthened dissemination of national marriage law, in order to align religious understanding with the normative principle of public welfare (*maṣlaḥah*).

Keywords: Child Marriage; Hadith Interpretation; Textualism, Interpretive Bias, Indonesia

Abstrak

Pernikahan dini masih menjadi persoalan sosial yang kompleks di Indonesia, bahkan pada wilayah dengan tingkat pendidikan relatif tinggi seperti Salatiga dan Kabupaten Semarang. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi penyebab terjadinya pernikahan di bawah umur serta menelaah bias pemahaman terhadap hadis-hadis yang sering dijadikan legitimasi teologis praktik tersebut. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi terhadap delapan pelaku pernikahan dini. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga faktor utama penyebab pernikahan dini, yakni (1) pergaulan bebas yang berujung pada kehamilan di luar nikah, (2) faktor ekonomi, dan (3) bias pemahaman terhadap hadis Nabi tentang anjuran menikah bagi pemuda serta riwayat pernikahan Aisyah. Bias pemahaman ini muncul karena pendekatan tekstual tanpa mempertimbangkan konteks historis dan *maqāṣid* syarī‘ah. Kesimpulannya, pernikahan dini yang dilandasi pemahaman literal terhadap hadis berpotensi menimbulkan persoalan sosial dan

psikologis dalam rumah tangga. Diperlukan reinterpretasi hadis dengan pendekatan kontekstual dan sosialisasi hukum perkawinan nasional agar pemahaman keagamaan masyarakat selaras dengan prinsip kemaslahatan.

Kata Kunci: *Pernikahan Dini, Interpretasi Hadis, Bias Pemahaman, Tekstualisme, Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

Child marriage, or marriage conducted below the legally prescribed age, remains a complex social issue in Indonesian society. Such marriages are often vulnerable to challenges in establishing family resilience and frequently result in unstable or unsuccessful marital relationships. According to data from UNICEF, in 2023, Indonesia ranked as the fourth-largest contributor to child marriage globally, with approximately 25 million cases recorded. The provinces with the highest prevalence of child marriage include West Sulawesi (34.2%), South Kalimantan (33.68%), Central Kalimantan (33.56%), West Kalimantan (32.21%), and Central Sulawesi (31.91%).¹

Cases of child marriage in Indonesia have also involved public figures, artists, and celebrities, raising concerns that such practices may be imitated by the broader public. Of particular interest is the fact that several religious public figures have themselves entered into or facilitated marriages involving underage individuals within their families. For instance, Yusuf Mansur, a well-known Islamic preacher in Indonesia, married his wife when she was reportedly 14 years old.² Similarly, several other religious scholars and public figures have married their children at a relatively young age. Muhammad Alvin Faiz, the son of the late Ustaz Arifin Ilham, married at the age of 17. Abdullah Gymnastiar, another prominent preacher, is known for encouraging his children to marry soon after completing senior high school. In several Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), arranged marriages between young students are also practiced, as illustrated by cases such as Gus Kafa and Ning Sheila, among others.

Meanwhile, in Semarang Regency, a controversial and widely publicized case of child marriage occurred in 2008. A local religious leader, Syekh Puji, who was 43 years old at the time, married a 12-year-old girl named Ulfa. The case attracted significant national attention and involved intervention from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (*Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia*). Legal proceedings followed, resulting in imprisonment for those deemed responsible. Nevertheless, Syekh Puji justified his actions by citing religious precedent. He argued that he was merely following the example of the Prophet Muhammad, who, according to certain narrations,

¹ Saubari, "Gawi Sabumi Menekan Pernikahan Dini," *Kamwil Kemenag Kalsel*, 2020, <https://kalsel.kemenag.go.id/opini/696/Gawi-Sabumi-Menekan-Pernikahan>.

² Tim Haibunda, "Cerita Cinta Istri Yusuf Mansur Menikah di Usia 14 Tahun," *haibunda*, 2021, <https://www.haibunda.com/parenting/20191212135244-64-71766/cerita-cinta-istri-yusuf-mansur-menikah-di-usia-14-tahun>.

married 'Ā'ishah when she was seven years old. However, it is also reported in these narrations that the Prophet did not consummate the marriage until she had reached puberty.³

The Marriage Law in Indonesia, which has been in force for nearly five decades and was originally intended to promote public welfare (*maṣlahah*), continues to face various implementation challenges. One of the persistent issues is the occurrence of marriages conducted outside the legal provisions set out in the law, including those involving individuals below the legally prescribed age. Child marriage refers to marriages that occur before an individual reaches the age of 18, a stage at which a person is generally considered not yet physically and psychologically mature enough to assume the responsibilities associated with marriage and parenthood.⁴

The definition of a child varies across several Indonesian legal frameworks. The Election Law (Law No. 10 of 2008, Article 19, paragraph 1) defines a child as a person aged 17 years. Meanwhile, Law No. 16 of 2019, which amended the Indonesian Marriage Law, stipulates that “marriage is only permitted when both the man and the woman have reached the age of 19 years.” According to Law No. 35 of 2014 concerning Amendments to Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, a child is defined as “any person under the age of 18, including those still in the womb.” Similarly, the Criminal Code (*Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana*, KUHP) generally considers adulthood in relation to the capacity to marry. Furthermore, Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights states that “a child is any human being under the age of 18, including those still in the womb and not yet married.” Based on the most recent amendment, Law No. 16 of 2019 establishes 19 years as the minimum legal age of marriage for both prospective spouses. However, this regulatory adjustment appears to have coincided with an increase in underage marriages in subsequent years, particularly around 2020.

Data indicate that cases of child marriage increased significantly during the early 2020s, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Population statistics from Salatiga City show that the prevalence of early marriage over the past five years was recorded as follows: 20.24% in 2019, increasing to 23.21% in 2020, declining slightly to 19.69% in 2021, decreasing further to 16.32% in 2022, and rising again to 17.73% in 2023 (BPS Salatiga City, 2024).

This study seeks to complement previous research by examining cases of underage marriage in Salatiga and Semarang Regency that, in terms of educational attainment and economic conditions, are generally considered more advanced than many other districts in Central Java.

³ “Syekh Puji: Saya Punya Dasar Agama, Nggak Ngawur,” *detiknews*, 2008, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-1024883/syekh-puji-saya-punya-dasar-agama-nggak-ngawur>.

⁴ Eddy Fadlyana dan Shinta Larasaty, “Pernikahan Usia Dini dan Permasalahannya,” *Sari Pediatri* 11, no. 2 (2009): 136–40, <https://dx.doi.org/10.14238/sp11.2.2009.136-41>.

Nevertheless, a significant rise in child marriage cases occurred during the pandemic period. According to data from the Religious Court of Semarang City, the number of child marriage cases showed a consistent upward trend: 57 cases in 2017, 64 in 2018, 109 in 2019, and a sharp increase to 217 in 2020.⁵

To date, studies on the occurrence of child marriage in Indonesia have largely focused on regions characterized by relatively low levels of education and economic development. For example, research conducted by Djamilah and Reni Kartikawati⁶ examined cases of child marriage in several districts, including Grobogan, Rembang, Indramayu, Sukabumi, and Banyuwangi. Similar findings have been reported in studies by Fadlyana and Larasaty,⁷ Rosdalina Bukido,⁸ and Zulfiani⁹, which also highlight the association between child marriage and socio-economic vulnerability. Within the global context, research conducted by Pintu Paul¹⁰ in India similarly demonstrates that child marriage is closely linked to low levels of education and economic disadvantage. Consequently, studies examining child marriage in regions with relatively higher levels of education and economic well-being remain limited.

One relevant study is Marmiati Mawardi's "*The Problematics of Underage Marriage*."¹¹ This study identifies several factors contributing to underage marriage, including the motives behind such marriages and their subsequent impacts. The findings indicate that, from a legal standpoint, children born within such marriages are formally recognized as legitimate. However, economically, many of these couples remain financially unstable, while psychologically, they are often not yet prepared to assume the responsibilities associated with marital and parental roles. Another study by Rosdalina Bukido, entitled "*Underage Marriage: Causes and Solutions*", finds that the primary drivers of child marriage include the desire to quickly establish a family and inadequate knowledge of the consequences of early marriage.¹² The study suggests that preventive measures should involve collaboration between the government and religious leaders in disseminating information about the

⁵ Ahmad Antoni, "Kasus Pernikahan Anak Usia Dini Meningkat, Ini yang Dilakukan DP3A Kota Semarang," *iNews jateng*, 2021, <https://jateng.inews.id/berita/kasus-pernikahan-anak-usia-dini-meningkat-ini-yang-dilakukan-dp3a-kota-semarang/2>.

⁶ Djamilah dan Reni Kartikawati, "Dampak Perkawinan Anak di Indonesia", *Jurnal Studi Pemuda* 3, no. 1 (2014): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.22146/studipemudaugm.32033>.

⁷ Fadlyana dan Larasaty, "Pernikahan Usia Dini dan Permasalahannya."

⁸ Rosdalina Bukido, "Perkawinan di Bawah Umur: Penyebab dan Solusinya", *Jurisprudentie* 5, no. 2 (2018): 188–98, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jurisprudentie.v5i2.6283>.

⁹ Zulfiani, "Kajian Hukum Terhadap Perkawinan Anak Di Bawah Umur Menurut Undang-Undang Nomor 1 Tahun 1974," *Jurnal Hukum Samudra Keadilan* 12, no. 2 (2017): 211–22.

¹⁰ Pintu Paul, "Child Marriage Among Girls in India: Prevalence, Trends and Socio-Economic Correlates," *Indian Journal of Human Development* 14, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973703020950263>.

¹¹ Marmiati Mawardi, "Problematika Perkawinan di Bawah Umur," *Jurnal Analisa* 19, no. 2 (2012): 201–12.

¹² Bukido, "Perkawinan di Bawah Umur : Penyebab dan Solusinya."

Marriage Law. In addition, health authorities are encouraged to provide public education regarding the health and social risks associated with child marriage.

Meanwhile, research explicitly linking the interpretation of hadith to the issue of underage marriage can be found in a collaborative study by Mudzakir et al.,¹³ that examines the responses of Muslim scholars to the hadith narratives concerning the young age of 'Ā'ishah at the time of her marriage to the Prophet Muhammad. The authors identify two major positions among contemporary Muslim intellectuals. The first consists of scholars who question the validity of the hadith reports and argue that 'Ā'ishah was in fact older at the time of marriage. The second consists of scholars who defend the authenticity of the reports and accept the narration that the marriage was consummated when she was nine years old. In this debate, Jasser Auda represents the critical perspective that challenges the reliability of the narrations, while Jonathan Brown maintains their validity. The study highlights three major differences between the analytical models proposed by Auda and Brown: first, their differing conceptions of the relationship between politics, knowledge, and collective memory; second, their distinct epistemological approaches to hadith scholarship; and third, their differing assumptions regarding the universality of modern normative frameworks.

This article focuses on examining the underlying causes of child marriage, particularly exploring the possibility that one of its contributing factors lies in interpretive bias in the understanding of religious texts, especially hadith. The study, therefore, analyzes several hadith narratives that are frequently interpreted as providing normative justification for early marriage. In addition, this research investigates the marital challenges experienced by individuals who married at a young age, as well as the strategies they employ to address them and sustain their household relationships. Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how religious interpretation interacts with social realities in shaping the persistence of child marriage.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design using a descriptive approach to explore and describe phenomena related to child marriage within communities in Salatiga and Semarang Regency.¹⁴ The research can be categorized as a case study, focusing on specific social situations in which early marriage occurs. According to Sukmadinata, a case study is a form of research

¹³ Muhamad Rofiq Mudzakkir dkk., "Sectarian Tensions, Islamophobia, and Decolonization: Comparing Jasser Auda's and Jonathan Brown's Analysis of the Hadiths Concerning Aisha's Marital Age," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 13, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v13i2.427-456>.

¹⁴ James H. McMillan dan Sally Schumacher, *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (Little, Brown and Co, 1984).

conducted on a bounded system, such as a program, activity, event, or group of individuals, within a particular context of place, time, or social ties.¹⁵ The aim is to collect comprehensive data, interpret meanings, and develop an in-depth understanding of the case under investigation. In this study, the researcher seeks to understand the meanings behind the events observed in the research setting, positioning the researcher as the primary research instrument (*human instrument*) in interpreting the data and formulating insights that may contribute to practical solutions for the community.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. To enhance the credibility of the findings, source triangulation was applied, which involves obtaining information from different sources using the same data collection techniques.¹⁶ Data analysis was conducted continuously throughout the research process. This means that the researcher systematically analyzed incoming data while simultaneously selecting, categorizing, and interpreting relevant information. During this process, the researcher also carried out procedures to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that three primary factors contribute to the occurrence of child marriage in the research area: social, economic, and religious factors. These factors interact with one another in shaping family decisions to arrange marriages for individuals who have not yet reached the legally prescribed age. The first factor is social, particularly patterns of adolescent relationships that result in premarital pregnancy. Several cases of child marriage in the research sites occurred following unintended pregnancies outside of marriage. In such situations, marriage is often perceived as a means of protecting family honor and avoiding social stigma within the community. However, marriages initiated under these circumstances frequently encounter significant challenges. Young couples often struggle with economic insecurity, limited communication skills, and emotional instability. These conditions make it difficult for them to sustain a stable marital relationship and increase the risk of long-term household vulnerability.

The second factor concerns economic pressures faced by families. In several cases, parents encouraged or arranged early marriages for their children due to financial constraints. From the perspective of some families, marriage is viewed as a practical strategy to reduce household economic burdens by transferring responsibility for the child to the spouse's family. Paradoxically,

¹⁵ Nana Syaoddih Sukmadinata, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan* (Remaja Rosdakarya, 2011).

¹⁶ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kombinasi (Mixed Methods)* (Alfabeta, 2011).

this strategy may generate new socio-economic problems. Because many young couples lack financial independence, early marriage often perpetuates a cycle of economic vulnerability, leaving newly formed households dependent on extended family support and struggling to achieve economic stability.

The third factor involves religious considerations, particularly interpretive bias in the understanding of certain hadith narratives that are frequently invoked to justify early marriage. Several hadith are commonly cited in this context, including the prophetic encouragement for young people to marry (reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Bukhārī, no. 4678), narrations advising that daughters should not have their marriage delayed (reported in *Sunan* al-Tirmidhī, no. 995), recommendations to marry individuals of good character (reported in *Sunan* Ibn Mājah, no. 1957), and the narration concerning the Prophet's marriage to 'Ā'ishah (reported in *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim, no. 2548). In many families, these narrations are interpreted in a predominantly textualist manner, without sufficient consideration of their historical context or the broader objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-shari'ah*). As a result, early marriage is sometimes perceived as a religiously commendable practice and even as an act of adherence to the Prophet's Sunnah. Within the context of this study, such interpretive bias emerged as a significant factor influencing the decisions of religiously oriented families to marry off their children at a young age. The findings suggest that the authority of religious texts, when interpreted without contextualization, may reinforce cultural practices that contribute to the persistence of child marriage.

The findings presented are derived from empirical data collected in Salatiga and Semarang Regency, which document both the causes of child marriage and the challenges faced by couples who entered marriage at a young age. The study involved eight respondents who had experienced underage marriage and were interviewed directly by the researcher. In addition, one case was analyzed based on documented reports from media sources. Data obtained from the eight respondents indicate that child marriage occurs due to multiple interacting factors and produces diverse consequences for the couples involved. These consequences include economic hardship, psychological stress, and difficulties in maintaining marital stability. At the same time, respondents reported various strategies for coping with these challenges as they attempt to sustain their household relationships.

Premarital Relationships and Unintended Pregnancy as a Trigger for Child Marriage

One of the primary causes of child marriage identified in this study is adolescent social relationships that lead to unintended pregnancy outside of marriage. In such situations, marriage is often perceived as the most immediate solution to restore family honor and mitigate social stigma within the community. However, marriages formed under these circumstances frequently encounter significant relational and socio-economic challenges.

Case 1: E and T

The first case involves E and her husband T, residents of Semarang Regency. During her high school years, E became involved in a romantic relationship that eventually resulted in an unintended pregnancy. As a consequence, she was married to her boyfriend T, who later became her husband. Following the marriage, the couple encountered considerable marital difficulties, particularly related to their living arrangements. As the youngest son in his family, T was not permitted to establish an independent household, forcing the couple to live with his parents. This situation created frequent tensions between E and her in-laws, who appeared reluctant to fully accept her into the family. Daily conflicts became common, and the situation worsened when T left for work, leaving E to remain in the household with her in-laws.

Fortunately, E came from a relatively well-off family background. Her parents provided her with capital to start a small home-based shop. This business not only offered her an opportunity to develop personal independence but also created a degree of emotional and physical distance from the strained relationship with her in-laws. However, the business did not develop as expected and eventually faced financial difficulties. Under the pressure of economic hardship and emotional stress, E sought emotional support outside her marriage and briefly became involved with another man. This incident triggered a serious conflict within her husband's family. Nevertheless, the crisis was eventually resolved through reconciliation and forgiveness from her husband. Since then, E has attempted to rebuild the relationship and maintain greater self-restraint, especially as the couple now has three children who are growing older. She reports that she has become more patient and committed to maintaining family stability.

Case 2: M and J

Another case involves M and J, who also married at a young age following an unintended pregnancy. M came from a rural, economically disadvantaged family and completed only elementary school. After leaving school, she worked as a shop assistant.

Within less than a year of employment, she met J, a young man with whom she began a romantic relationship. Due to their limited knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, combined with emotional immaturity and lack of supervision, M became pregnant at the age of 13. Despite their young age, J accepted responsibility and agreed to marry her.

At the time of this research, the couple had been married for nearly six years and had a five-year-old child. M dedicates herself to childcare and household responsibilities, while J works as a farmer. Like many young couples, they face economic challenges due to their limited income. Nevertheless, they report having managed these difficulties through emotional control and mutual commitment. An important factor supporting their marital stability is the social environment of their community. Rather than stigmatizing the couple for the circumstances of their marriage, neighbors largely accepted their presence. The absence of strong social exclusion or moral sanction allowed them to maintain their relationship and continue their family life.

Case 3: F and Ma

The third case involves F, a 17-year-old young man from a rural area of Semarang Regency, and Ma, a 20-year-old university student from Salatiga. F came from a large family with limited economic resources and left school after completing junior high school. He subsequently began working informally with relatives and neighbors involved in transportation services, including public transport and sand transport. F met Ma when he was a driver transporting university students on a field assignment to a tourist area. Through repeated encounters during similar assignments, the two developed a close relationship that eventually resulted in Ma becoming pregnant. This situation led to their marriage. Ma came from a non-Muslim family, and her parents later allowed her to convert to Islam following the marriage. Since then, the couple has continued their family life without major disruptions.

Interestingly, F stated that he had already considered marrying at a young age, even before the pregnancy occurred. He explained that he had lost interest in continuing formal education and had begun to enjoy earning income through work. However, his work environment—particularly his social interactions within the driver community—also encouraged a lifestyle of frequent spending, preventing him from saving money. In this context, marriage appeared to him as a more meaningful life direction compared to continuing his previous lifestyle. After three years of marriage, F reported not having experienced any serious marital problems. He attributed this stability largely to his wife's ability to manage household finances effectively, which improved their economic discipline.

At present, Ma has chosen to focus on childcare and household responsibilities while also caring for her mother.

According to F, the key to maintaining their marital stability lies in mutual trust, open communication, and respect between the spouses. For instance, when female travel customers call him, he allows his wife to answer the phone to maintain transparency. Likewise, when Ma attends school reunions or meets former friends, she involves her husband in those interactions. They maintain open access to each other's mobile phones and avoid secrecy in their communication. Additionally, Ma's parents have shown respect for the couple's religious choices. Although they are not Muslim, they have provided a designated space for prayer in their home. As a result, both F and Ma report feeling relatively comfortable and supported in their family life.

Analytical Perspective

The cases above illustrate how premarital relationships leading to unintended pregnancy function as an immediate catalyst for child marriage. In many instances, marriage is perceived as a socially acceptable means of addressing moral concerns and protecting family reputation. However, the subsequent marital trajectories vary considerably depending on factors such as family support, economic resources, and interpersonal communication between spouses. These findings demonstrate that child marriage is not solely the product of economic or structural conditions but also emerges from complex interactions between youth social behavior, family expectations, and community norms. While some couples experience significant instability, others sustain their relationships through adaptive strategies, such as emotional regulation, mutual trust, and community support.

Child Marriage Driven by Economic Factors

Another important factor contributing to child marriage in the research area is economic constraint within households. In several cases, limited financial resources shape parental decisions regarding their children's education and marriage. Marriage may be perceived as a practical solution to alleviate economic pressures, particularly when families lack the capacity to sustain educational expenses.

Case 1: L and Y

The first case involves L, who entered marriage at the age of 15 before completing her junior secondary education (*Madrasah Tsanawiyah*). Her husband, Y, was 20 years old at the time of their marriage. Their marriage resulted from a matchmaking arrangement initiated by their fathers, who had been close friends since studying together at an Islamic boarding

school (*pesantren*) in Magelang. Motivated by their longstanding friendship, the two fathers decided to unite their children through marriage. Since their marriage, L and Y have lived a modest life while raising their children. Both respondents reported that their marital relationship has generally been stable, although like most households they encounter everyday challenges. According to L, economic hardship represents the most persistent difficulty in their family life. Y works as a vegetable farmer cultivating a relatively small plot of land—approximately a quarter of a hectare. L assists her husband whenever possible after completing her domestic responsibilities as a homemaker. However, the limited size of their farmland restricts their agricultural income, making it difficult to meet the family's basic needs, including clothing, educational expenses, and healthcare costs for their three children.

Despite these financial challenges, the couple attempts to maintain family stability through patience, perseverance, and mutual support. Nevertheless, the long-term consequences of economic limitation became apparent when Y later decided to marry off one of their children, S, while she was still in the second year of senior high school. This decision was largely motivated by the family's inability to continue financing her education.

Case 2: S and A

The second case concerns S, the daughter of L and Y, who entered marriage at the age of 18 while still enrolled in the second year of a private vocational high school in Salatiga. She lived with her parents in Batur Village, Semarang Regency. S met her future husband, A, a 22-year-old man from Purworejo Regency, through activities in a local community organization. Their relationship developed rapidly, and within three months they decided to proceed toward marriage. Because S had not yet reached the legal minimum age for marriage under Indonesian law (19 years), the Office of Religious Affairs (*KUA*) in Getasan refused to register their marriage. Consequently, the couple applied for a marriage dispensation through the Religious Court of Semarang Regency, which eventually granted approval for the marriage to take place.

After the marriage, the couple lived separately due to geographical and economic circumstances. A continued residing with his family in Purworejo, while S remained in Semarang with her parents. Their relationship therefore operates as a long-distance marriage (LDM), maintained primarily through digital communication such as mobile phone calls and messaging applications. A typically visits S once every one or two weeks. At the time of the interview, the couple had not yet had children. They described their current phase of marriage as a period of adjustment and mutual learning, likening it to a continuation of courtship after

marriage. However, their most significant challenge remains economic. Neither of them has secured stable employment, and they continue to depend financially on their respective parents for daily living expenses. Both partners expressed a desire to achieve financial independence in the future and are actively seeking employment opportunities that would enable them to support their household without relying on parental assistance.

Analytical Perspective

The cases above illustrate how economic vulnerability can operate both as a direct and indirect driver of child marriage. For some families, early marriage becomes a strategy to reduce financial responsibilities, particularly when educational expenses exceed household capacity. However, this strategy often produces intergenerational consequences. Limited economic resources lead to early marriage, which in turn restricts educational attainment and employment opportunities, thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty across generations. These findings reinforce broader sociological observations that child marriage is frequently embedded within structural economic constraints rather than purely cultural or religious motivations. In this context, family decisions regarding marriage are shaped by pragmatic considerations related to livelihood, education costs, and long-term economic survival.

Child Marriage as a Consequence of Interpretive Bias in Hadith-Based Arguments

Another factor contributing to child marriage in the research context is interpretive bias in the understanding of religious texts, particularly hadith. In several cases, families justified early marriage by referring to prophetic traditions that encourage Muslims to marry in order to safeguard morality and prevent immoral relationships. These texts were often interpreted in a literal manner without careful consideration of broader ethical objectives, socio-historical context, or the practical readiness of the individuals involved. The following cases illustrate how such interpretations influenced family decisions and shaped the experiences of those who entered marriage at an early age.

Case 1: Aim and Bulan

The first case concerns Aim, a young man from Salatiga who married shortly after graduating from *Madrasah Aliyah* (Islamic senior high school) at the age of 18. The woman he married—referred to here as “Bulan”—was a first-year *Madrasah Aliyah* student aged 16. Aim grew up in a strongly religious family environment. His father was a well-known preacher (*dā'i*) in Salatiga who actively organized religious study circles (*majelis taklim*) through both traditional mosque-based gatherings and modern outreach methods such as media

broadcasting and community services. As the son of a religious figure, Aim had been educated since childhood in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and Qur'anic memorization institutions.

Despite this background, the marriage was not originally planned by Aim himself. At the time, he was still fulfilling a mandatory community service period (*khidmah*) as an alumnus of his *pesantren* and was preparing to pursue university studies. When asked about the reason behind his marriage, Aim responded simply: "It was my mother's decision." Aim's mother was a close friend of Bulan's mother through their involvement in the same religious study group. Observing that their children had reached adolescence and puberty, the two mothers agreed to arrange their marriage. They justified this decision by referring to prophetic traditions encouraging Muslims to marry early in order to safeguard their religious commitment, avoid romantic relationships outside marriage, and prevent immoral behavior.

According to Aim, both mothers actively persuaded their husbands and children to accept the arrangement. Religious arguments, such as the obligation to protect moral integrity and the recommendation to marry daughters promptly when a suitable partner is available, were frequently invoked during these discussions. Initially, both fathers resisted the proposal, but eventually the marriage was carried out. Because both individuals were still under the legal marriage age and Bulan was still attending school, the marriage was conducted informally (*nikah siri*) without official state registration. The ceremony took place at Bulan's family home, attended by her father as guardian (*wali*), witnesses, and close family members.

After the marriage, the couple did not establish an independent household. Aim continued his *pesantren* service outside Salatiga and returned only during school holidays, alternating between visiting his wife and his parents. Later, he enrolled in a university in East Java. Consequently, the marriage functioned more as a symbolic union rather than a fully operational family unit. Both partners remained students without independent sources of income and continued to rely on financial support from their families. Aim had not yet developed the economic or psychological readiness typically associated with marital responsibilities. As a result, the marriage gradually became unstable.

Over time, Bulan's father began to regret the decision to marry his daughter at such a young age. Following discussions with extended family members, he eventually supported the decision to end the marriage. The family's disappointment toward Aim became increasingly visible through both verbal criticism and interpersonal tension. Aim attempted to seek support from his own parents. However, he found little assistance. His mother—

who had originally encouraged the marriage—distanced herself from the situation, while his father avoided discussing the issue, citing his busy schedule as a religious preacher. Facing the crisis alone, Aim struggled emotionally and academically. His concentration deteriorated, and his university studies suffered. Eventually, during one visit to Bulan’s family home, he was confronted by her extended family and presented with a request for *fasakh* (the annulment of the marriage). Without being given an opportunity to contest the decision, the marriage ended after approximately one and a half years.

This case demonstrates how religious justifications for early marriage may overlook the practical readiness required for sustaining a marital relationship, particularly in terms of economic independence, emotional maturity, and educational commitments.

Case 2: Za and Ar

The second case involves Za, the eldest daughter in a family in Salatiga. At the age of 15, while still in the second year of junior high school, she was suddenly married by her father. Za’s father was a respected religious figure known for his firm convictions. When he believed a decision to be religiously correct, little room remained for dialogue within the family. One day, a guest from a coastal region of Central Java visited their home with his son, a young *pesantren* graduate who was preparing to depart for further study at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. To Za’s father, the young man represented the ideal candidate for his daughter: religiously knowledgeable, morally upright, and from a respectable family background. Convinced this was a rare opportunity, he decided to arrange their marriage immediately. The decision was justified through religious reasoning, emphasizing the virtue of marrying a righteous man without delay.

The marriage took place without seeking Za’s consent directly. As a quiet and obedient daughter, she accepted the decision with a strong sense of filial devotion. Reflecting on the event, she explained that she believed obedience to parents was a path toward divine approval: *“We married in the hope of attaining God’s pleasure through our parents’ approval. Therefore, we accepted the marriage calmly.”*

Shortly after the marriage, her husband departed for Egypt to pursue his studies for more than seven years. During that time, Za continued her own education, completing junior high school before entering a *pesantren* and continuing her studies in Semarang. Despite her marital status, she largely lived the life of a student during this period. When her husband eventually returned from Egypt, Za had matured into adulthood and was ready to establish a family household. The couple later had a child who is now a high school student.

Like most families, they faced ordinary domestic challenges, including financial difficulties, differing opinions, and parenting responsibilities. However, they reported that such challenges were addressed through communication, mutual support, and a shared spiritual outlook centered on trust in God (*ḥusn al-ẓann bi-Allah*). Za later experienced a serious illness that significantly affected her health. Throughout this period, her husband remained supportive and accompanied her during medical treatment. In reflecting on her marital experience, Za emphasized that trust in God and respect for parental intentions remained central principles guiding her family life.

Case 3: The Controversial Marriage of Syekh Puji

A widely publicized case occurred in 2008 in Semarang Regency when a religious figure known as Syekh Puji, aged 43, married a 12-year-old girl named Ulfa. The incident attracted national media attention and triggered legal intervention from the Indonesian Child Protection Commission. Legal proceedings followed, and both Syekh Puji and Ulfa's father faced judicial consequences.

Syekh Puji justified his actions by referring to prophetic precedent, claiming that his decision was inspired by narrations describing the Prophet Muhammad's marriage to 'Ā'ishah at a young age. According to his interpretation, the Prophet married 'Ā'ishah during her youth and consummated the marriage only after she had reached puberty. Despite the controversy, the marriage has continued. Ulfa, who was 12 at the time of the marriage, is now 27 years old and the mother of four children. In 2023 she shared reflections on social media, acknowledging that the experience of marrying at such a young age had left psychological effects and contributed to her becoming a more reserved individual.

Nevertheless, she chose to remain married. She explained that although the marriage contract was signed when she was 12, she began fulfilling her marital role more fully at 17, when she gave birth to her first child. Today, Ulfa serves as the director of a design company founded by her husband and reports maintaining a harmonious family life with her husband and their children.¹⁷

¹⁷ Amirullah Amirullah, "Sosok Lutfiana Ulfa, Istri Syekh Puji yang Dinikahi di Usia 12 Tahun yang Kini Kembali Jadi Sorotan," *Serambinews.com*, 2022, <https://aceh.tribunnews.com/2022/10/12/sosok-lutfiana-ulfa-istri-syekh-puji-yang-dinikahi-di-usia-12-tahun-yang-kini-kembali-jadi-sorotan?page=all>.

Analytical Perspective

The cases above demonstrate how religious interpretations can function as a powerful legitimizing framework for child marriage. When prophetic traditions are understood through a strictly textual approach, families may interpret them as normative prescriptions applicable to contemporary social contexts without considering historical circumstances, legal objectives, or the psychological readiness of those involved. However, the cases also reveal that the outcomes of such marriages vary significantly. Some marriages collapse due to a lack of preparedness, while others endure through social support, gradual maturation, and shared spiritual commitments. These findings suggest that the issue lies not merely in the presence of religious texts themselves but in how those texts are interpreted, contextualized, and applied within contemporary social life.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that child marriage in the research areas of Salatiga and Semarang Regency is driven by at least three interrelated factors: social, economic, and religious considerations. First, social factors arise from adolescent relationships that lead to unintended pregnancies outside marriage, prompting families to arrange marriage as a means of preserving social honor. Second, economic constraints influence family decisions when limited financial resources reduce educational opportunities and encourage early marriage as a perceived solution to household burdens. Third, religious factors emerge through interpretive bias in the understanding of certain hadith texts, which are sometimes perceived as normative encouragements to marry at a young age.

Several prophetic traditions are frequently cited in support of early marriage, including the hadith encouraging youth who are capable to marry in order to safeguard chastity (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 4678); the narration recommending the acceptance of marriage proposals from individuals whose religious commitment and character are considered commendable (Sunan Ibn Mājah, no. 1957); the report advising that certain matters—including the marriage of a woman who has found a suitable partner—should not be delayed (Sunan al-Tirmidhī, no. 995); and the narration describing the Prophet Muhammad’s marriage to ‘Ā’ishah at a young age (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 2548). When interpreted without adequate contextualization, these narrations may be understood as direct religious justifications for early marriage.

The findings also indicate that couples who enter marriage at a young age frequently encounter various challenges in their household life. These challenges include economic hardship, communication difficulties, tensions with extended family members, and in some cases marital infidelity. The ability of couples to sustain their marriages largely depends on their level of

emotional maturity, their capacity for communication, and their willingness to assume shared responsibilities within the family. Couples who demonstrate a commitment to developing emotional maturity, strengthening mutual trust, and cultivating constructive communication tend to show greater resilience in maintaining marital stability. In many cases, religious values also play a supportive role when interpreted in ways that emphasize patience, gratitude, and trust in God (*ḥusn al-ẓann bi-Allāh*). Conversely, marriages entered without adequate preparation—particularly in terms of psychological readiness, educational continuity, and economic stability—are more likely to encounter serious difficulties and may ultimately end in separation.

From a broader perspective, these findings suggest that addressing child marriage requires not only legal regulation but also more contextualized religious interpretation. A reinterpretation of relevant hadith through the framework of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* is essential so that religious teachings are understood in ways that promote human welfare (*maṣlaḥah*), protect the well-being of families, and support the development of responsible and sustainable marital relationships.

REFERENCES

- Anshary, M., 2010, *Hukum Perkawinan di Indonesia*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Belajar.
- Astuti, Rahayu Puji, 2015, Hubungan antara Pernikahan Usia Remaja dengan Ketahanan Keluarga, *JKKP (Jurnal Kesejahteraan Keluarga dan Pendidikan)* Vol 2 No 2
- Bukindo, Rosdalina, 2018, “Perkawinan di Bawah Umur : Penyebab dan Solusinya”, *Jurisprudentie*, 5 (2), pp. 188-198.
- BPS Kota Salatiga, 2024
- Darondos, Sherlin, 2014, “Perkawinan Anak di Bawah Umur dan Akibat Hukumnya.” *Lex et Societatis*, 2 (4), pp. 51-58.
- Djamilah & Kartikawati, Reni, “Dampak Perkawinan Anak di Indonesia”. *Jurnal Studi Pemuda*, 3 (1), pp. 1-16.
- Ensiklopedi Hadis, Aplikasi Lidwa, 2010
- Fadlyana, Eddy, & Larasaty, Shinta, 2009, “Pernikahan Usia Dini dan Permasalahannya”, *Sari Pediatri*, 11 (2), pp. 136-140.
- Ghani, Abud Abdul, 1987, *Keluarga Muslim dan Berbagai Masalahnya*, terj. Mudzakkir AS. Bandung: Penerbit Pustaka.
- Imron, Ali, 2013, “Perlindungan dan Kesejahteraan Anak”, *Al-Tabrir*, 13 (2), pp. 253-272.
- Inayati, Inna Noor, 2015, “Perkawinan Anak di Bawah Umur dalam Perspektif Hukum, HAM dan Kesehatan”, *Midwife Journal*, 1 (1), pp. 46-53

- Indra, Hasbi, 2004, *Potret Wanita Sholehab*, Jakarta: Penamadani.
- KP3A, 2016, *Pembangunan Ketahanan Keluarga 2016*, Jakarta: CV Lintas Khatlistiwa
- Mawardi, Marmiati, 2012, “Problematika Perkawinan di Bawah Umur”, *Jurnal Analisa*, 19 (2), pp. 201-212.
- Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M., 1984, *Qualitative Data Analysis A Sources Book of New Methods*, Beverly Hill, C.A.: SAGE Publication.
- Moleong, L.J., 2007, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Mudzakkir, Muhamad Rofiq, Siti Sarah Muwahidah, Royan Utsany, Rohmansyah (2023), “Sectarian tensions, islamophobia, and decolonization: comparing Jasser Auda’s and Jonathan Brown’s analysis of the hadiths concerning Aisha’s marital age” *IJIMS* [Vol 13, No 2](#)
- Paul, Pintu, 2020, "Child Marriage Among Girls in India: Prevalence, Trends and Socio-Economic Correlates", *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 14 (2), pp. 304–319. in.sagepub.com/journals-permissions-india. DOI: 10.1177/0973703020950263
- Satori, D. & Komariah, A., 2010, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sugiyono, 2011, *Metode Penelitian Kombinasi (Mixed Methods)*, Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Sukmadinata, Nana Syaoddih, 2011, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan*, Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya.
- Syarifuddin, Amir, 2006, *Hukum Perkawinan Islam di Indonesia: Antara Fiqh Munakahat dan Undang-Undang Perkawinan*, Jakarta: Kencana.
- Taqiyuddin, 2005, *Kifayatul Akhyar*, Juz II, Bandung: Al- Haromain Jaya.
- Triyanto, Winardi, 2013, “Dampak Pernikahan di Bawah Umur dalam Perspektif Hukum Islam dan UU Nomor 1 Tahun 1974”, *Lex Privatum*, 1 (3), pp. 71-80.
- Yuliani, Mimi, & Nastasia, Krisnova, 2017, “Faktor Penyebab Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga terhadap Istri pada Pasangan yang Menikah Muda”, *Jurnal PSYCHE 165 Fakultas Psikologi*, 10 (1), pp. 29-36.
- Zulfiani, 2017, “Kajian Hukum Terhadap Perkawinan Anak Di Bawah Umur Menurut Undang-Undang Nomor 1 Tahun 1974”, *Jurnal Hukum Samudra Keadilan*, 12 (2), pp. 211-222.
- Undang-Undang Nomor 1 Tahun 1974 tentang Perkawinan.
- Undang-Undang Nomor 52 Tahun 2009 tentang Perkembangan Kependudukan dan Pembangunan Keluarga.
- Undang-Undang Nomor 16 Tahun 2019 tentang Perubahan Atas Undang-Undang Nomor 1 Tahun 1974 tentang Perkawinan.
- Undang - Undang Nomor 35 Tahun 2014 tentang Perubahan Atas Undang-Undang Nomor 23 Tahun 2002 tentang Perlindungan Anak.

Undang-Undang Nomor 19 Tahun 1999 tentang Hak Asasi Manusia

Peraturan Pemerintah No. 9 Tahun 1975 tentang Pelaksanaan Undang-Undang Nomor 1 Tahun 1974 tentang Perkawinan.

Situs:

<https://sumsel.idntimes.com/hype/entertainment/erfah-nanda-2/artis-ini-memilih-menikah-regional-sumsel/3>, (diakses pada tanggal 19 Maret 2021).

<https://www.popbela.com/relationship/married/windari-subangkit/artis-indonesia-menikah-muda-langgeng/5>, (diakses pada tanggal 19 Maret 2021).

https://sippa.ciptakarya.pu.go.id/sippa_online/ws_file/dokumen/rpi2jm/DOCRPIJM_1510217_240BAB_4_PROFIL_KOTA_SALATIGA_SL3.pdf, (diakses pada tanggal 21 Maret 2021).

<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2010/12/01/09462197/twitter.com>

<https://jateng.inews.id/berita/kasus-pernikahan-anak-usia-dini-meningkat-ini-yang-dilakukan-dp3a-kota-semarang/2>

<https://www.solopos.com/salatiga-panen-68-perkawinan-dini-pandemi-turut-memicu-1098719>

<https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/pernikahan-dini-di-semarang-melonjak-didominasi-pasangan-hamil-dulu-1tfYMe9kHIY>

<https://jokawinbocah.id/gerakan-bersama-pencegahan-perkawinan-anak/>

<https://schoolmedia.id/lipsus/3898>

<https://www.haibunda.com/moms-life>

<https://news.detik.com/berita/d-1024883/syekh-puji-saya-punya-dasar-agama-nggak-ngawur>.

<https://www.insertlive.com/hot-gossip/20250504124251-7-366069/dinikahi-saat-usia-12-tahun-kabar-terbaru-lutfiana-ulfa-kini-sudah->

<https://aceh.tribunnews.com/2022/10/12/sosok-lutfiana-ulfa-istri-syekh-puji-yang-dinikahi-di-usia-11-tahun->