

## DILEMMA OF DISTANCE LEARNING POLICIES IN THE CULTURAL FRAMEWORK OF EARLY MARRIAGE IN AMBUNTEN-SUMENEP, EAST JAVA

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**Abstract:** This study analyses the influence of distance learning policies implemented in Indonesia during the pandemic period (2019-2021) on instances of early marriage in the Ambunten District of Sumenep Regency, East Java. This study utilises primary data obtained from interviews with children who were married early between December 2019 and April 2021. Five informants who had been married at an early age were selected for interview. Furthermore, observations were conducted regarding the implementation of distance learning and early marriage in the region. The findings indicate that distance learning plays a role in perpetuating the culture of early marriage in Sumenep District. This is perceived as a means of mitigating the impact of young people's association, namely adultery. The absence of parental guidance and support, coupled with the lack of environmental and structural support for early marriage, results in students prioritising marriage over education.

**Keywords:** Society, Distance Learning, Early Marriage.

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## Introduction

It was anticipated that the educational process would have a beneficial impact on students; however, it has been observed that it may, in fact, contribute to an increase in the number of students entering into early marriages. The forced confinement of children and parents at home, without the opportunity for mobility, is an unwelcome situation. The data was collected from the Sumenep District Population and Civil Registration Office and covers the period between 1 March 2019 and 30 December 2019. A total of 281 couples out of 1,257 early marriage couples were included in the study. The research focuses on couples who enter into early marriages, defined as those who meet the requisite fourteen factors influencing early marriage. The study encompasses 281 early marriage couples. Early marriage is defined as a marriage between two individuals below the age of consent, as defined by Indonesian legislation.<sup>1</sup> In Indonesia, marriage is one of the options available to school-aged children, and it is also a tradition among the Madurese people. One such tradition that is still observed by the Madurese community today is marriage at a young age. This practice is considered common and is still prevalent among the Madurese community.<sup>2</sup>

The extant literature on distance learning during the ongoing pandemic addresses three key areas. The initial area of focus is the anxiety experienced by parents in relation to distance learning. Parents frequently express concern when they observe their children exhibiting irritable behavior due to a lack of stimulation. The child is experiencing boredom due to the prolonged period spent at home, which has resulted in a lack of social interaction with peers and educators.<sup>3</sup> The second area of focus is the challenges associated with distance learning in Indonesia. The implementation of distance learning currently employs the use of technology, including mobile phones and the internet. The utilisation of this technology presents a challenge for students hailing from economically disadvantaged

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<sup>1</sup> Rohmaniyah Inayah, "Konstruksi Seksualitas dan Relasi Kuasa dalam Praktik Diskursif Pernikahan Dini," *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender dan Islam* 16, no. 1 (2018): 33–52.

<sup>2</sup> Agus Khoirotul Waqi'ah Mahfudin, "Pernikahan Dini dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Keluarga di Kabupaten Sumenep Jawa Timur," *Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 1, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

backgrounds and those residing in rural regions. This condition presents an obstacle to distance learning in the context of the ongoing pandemic. The third topic is the construction of sexuality and power relations in the discursive practice of early marriage.<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon of early marriage occurs as a result of the discourse and knowledge formed in society and legitimised by a group of people. Finally, a thought was formed to normalise the phenomenon of early marriage. One form of justification is the discourse on the sin of free sex and the dangers of the female body.<sup>5</sup>

The objective of this article is to contribute to the existing body of research on the efficacy of distance learning conducted during the period of the global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The primary focus of this study is the considerable number of instances of early marriage among students undertaking distance learning. The indirect impact of distance learning on children's cognitive and behavioural development may contribute to the decision to engage in early marriage. This article seeks to address three key questions. Firstly, the practice of early marriage is observed in the Ambunten district of Sumenep, East Java. Secondly, the factors that contribute to children's decision to engage in early marriage during the distance learning period. Thirdly, this study will examine the implications of post-marriage conditions for families, children and society.

The practice of early marriage persists within the community, particularly within the Ambunten subdistrict of the Sumenep district. The Ambunten community continues to engage in the practice of early marriage for their children. It is also observed that children who are still engaged in an educational programme may freely undergo an early marriage. The rationale behind the practice of early marriage is multifaceted, encompassing economic, educational, parental, individual, and even the impact of the global pandemic, as well as the tradition of arranged marriages. The practice of early marriage persists in the Ambunten community due to the influence of the aforementioned factors, which have become deeply entrenched in the local culture. Despite the awareness of the potential benefits and drawbacks of early marriage, it continues to be practised. The

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<sup>4</sup> N. F. Azzahara, *Mengkaji Hambatan Pembelajaran Jarak Jauh Di Indonesia di Masa Pandemi Covid-19*, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> D. Inayah, "Komodifikasi Sensualitas Perempuan dalam Film Indonesia (Analisis Isi pada Film 'Negeri Tanpa Telinga')" (Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, 2017).

discourse that it is preferable to enter into a marital union than to engage in adultery is also a benchmark for why early marriage should be practised.

This research aims to examine the concept of early marriage in the Ambunten context, particularly in the context of distance learning during the pandemic. Does early marriage represent a solution to avoid adultery, by putting aside the formal education that is being pursued? Or is distance learning the main stimulus for justifying early marriage so as not to commit adultery? This question will be explored in more depth in this article.

The advent of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic in Indonesia has had a profound and far-reaching impact on the social fabric of the country. The consequences of the pandemic are being felt in a number of different areas, including social, economic, tourism and educational contexts.<sup>6</sup> In light of these developments, the government issued a circular on 18 March 2020, announcing the temporary postponement of all indoor and outdoor activities across all sectors, with the aim of reducing the spread of the virus, particularly within the education sector. On 24 March 2020, the Minister of Education issued Circular Number 4 of 2020 concerning the implementation of education policies during the emergency period of the spread of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19).

The circular explained that the learning process was to be carried out at home through online or distance learning facilities. The objective of this learning process is to provide students with meaningful learning experiences. The curriculum for learning activities conducted from home places an emphasis on life skills education, including the subject of the current pandemic of the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2.<sup>7</sup> The learning process is conducted at school with the assistance of their respective parents via online or distance learning. Online implementation encompasses the utilisation of the internet network in the online learning process. In online learning, students have the flexibility of time to learn, the ability to

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<sup>6</sup> Jawahir Gustav Rizal, "Pandemi Covid-19, Apa Saja Dampak pada Sektor Ketenagakerjaan Indonesia?" Kompas.com, 2020, [https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2020/08/11/102500165/pandemi-covid-19-apa-saja-dampak-pada-sektor-ketenagakerjaan-indonesia?page=all#google\\_vignette](https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2020/08/11/102500165/pandemi-covid-19-apa-saja-dampak-pada-sektor-ketenagakerjaan-indonesia?page=all#google_vignette).

<sup>7</sup> W. A. F. Dewi, "Dampak Covid-19 Terhadap Implementasi Pembelajaran Daring di Sekolah Dasar," *Edukatif: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan* 2, no. 1 (2020): 55–61.

learn at their own pace and convenience, and the capacity to engage with their teachers through various digital platforms, including classroom, video conference, telephone or live chat, Zoom, and WhatsApp group.

One of the most significant and pressing issues in Indonesia is the prevalence of early marriage. As indicated by data from UNICEF, Indonesia is among the top five countries with the highest prevalence of early marriage globally. As indicated in the report of the National Family Planning Coordinating Board (BKKBN), the Basic Health Research (Riskesdas) data from 2010 revealed that 41.9 percent of marriages occurred between the ages of 15 and 19. The findings of BKKBN research indicate that several factors influence the age at which women marry, including social, economic, cultural, and rural-urban residence.<sup>8</sup>

The term “early marriage” is used to describe the union of individuals below the age of consent, as defined by the relevant legislation. In accordance with Indonesian Law No. 23 of 2002 concerning child protection, Article 1, Number 1, defines a child as “a person who has not reached the age of 18 years, including children who are still in the womb.” In accordance with this legislation, early marriage, or child marriage, as defined by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), is any marriage that occurs below the age of 18 years, prior to the girl’s physical, physiological, and psychological readiness to assume the responsibilities associated with marriage and childbearing.<sup>9</sup>

One of the significant challenges confronting families in Indonesia is the prevalence of early marriage. As evidenced by data obtained by UNICEF in 2003, Indonesia ranks fifth in the world in terms of the prevalence of early marriage. As indicated in the report of the National Family Planning Coordinating Agency (BKKBN), the 2010 Basic Health Research Data (Riskesdas) revealed that the initial age of child marriage was 15-19 years, accounting for 41.9% of the total.<sup>10</sup> In 2021, the ratio of early marriages in urban areas was 26 out

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<sup>8</sup> Soebijanto Ida Ayu Sriudyani, “Perkawinan Muda di Kalangan Anak Muda: Mengapa?,” *Policy Brief Pusat Penelitian dan Pengembangan Kependudukan, BKKBN* 1, no. 6 (2011).

<sup>9</sup> Inayah, “Konstruksi Seksualitas dan Relasi Kuasa dalam Praktik Diskursif Pernikahan Dini,” 33–52.

<sup>10</sup> Soebijanto Ida Ayu Sriudyani, “Perkawinan Muda di Kalangan Anak Muda: Mengapa?”

of 1,000 marriages. This represents an increase from 2013, when the ratio was 32 out of 1,000 marriages. These figures indicate that early marriage remains a prevalent practice in Indonesia.<sup>11</sup>

In Islamic law, the purpose of marriage is not solely to procreate; it is also to fulfill religious instructions and establish a harmonious, prosperous, and happy family. A harmonious family is one in which the rights and obligations of family members are respected. A prosperous family is one in which the physical and mental needs of family members are met, leading to happiness and love between family members.<sup>12</sup>

The practice of early marriage has been linked to a range of both positive and negative outcomes. One consequence of early marriage is the emergence of domestic conflicts. This discord arises from discrepancies between the expectations and desires of the couples in question. A further factor is the state of the economy, which fails to meet the needs of households. The issue of early divorce can be attributed to the lack of psychological maturity and preparedness of the individuals involved in the marriage. Moreover, domestic violence (KDRT) is a consequence of unresolved conflicts and a lack of effective conflict resolution strategies, which may result in one partner resorting to domestic violence as a means of escape. A further issue is the lack of experience in childcare, which is often a consequence of couples having children at a relatively young age. The lack of knowledge among couples in the area of child education may be attributed to parental factors such as low educational attainment and mental immaturity.

This research employs a qualitative methodology, whereby the researcher engages directly with the research site. The research was conducted between May and June 2021 in a number of villages in the Ambunten Sumenep East Java district. The researchers obtained data from five informants who had undergone early marriage, either of whom were below the age of majority. The data obtained indicates that AN, who married at the age of 14 and had only completed elementary school, and MG, who married at the age of 15 and had only completed junior high school, married in March 2020. The second couple, G (married at the age of 23) and AZ (married at the

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<sup>11</sup> Inayah, "Konstruksi Seksualitas dan Relasi Kuasa Dalam Praktik Diskursif Pernikahan Dini," 33–52.

<sup>12</sup> Abdul Rahman Ghozali, *Fiqh Munakahat* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2010).

age of 16), completed their last year of junior high school. This couple married in April 2020. The third couple is HL (married at the age of 25) and TK (married at the age of 16), who are currently in grade 3 of high school. This couple was married in February 2021. The fourth couple is TT (married at 19 years old), who completed junior high school, and CT (married at 14 years old), who did not complete junior high school. This couple got married in November 2020. The fifth couple is SY (married at 17 years old) with the last education of junior high school and IA (married at 16 years old) currently still attending grade 11 high school. The aforementioned data represents research subjects from several couples who entered into early marriage during the ongoing pandemic. The data was obtained by researchers through random sampling.

### **The Implementation of Distance Learning Policy amid Early Marriage Culture**

The issue of early marriage in Indonesia has been the subject of growing attention and concern, with an increasing prevalence of cases reported each year. Indonesia is ranked 37th globally in terms of the prevalence of early marriages, and is the second most affected country in Southeast Asia. The prevalence of early childhood marriages in Indonesia is influenced by a number of factors, including cultural norms and population density.<sup>13</sup> In this study, the author concentrated on children who had entered into marriage contracts during the period of the pandemic, specifically between the end of 2019 and 2021. It is evident that distance learning undertaken by students is a contributing factor to the prevalence of early marriages in the Sumenep subdistrict. The implementation of distance learning has resulted in a heightened vulnerability among children to the risk of not continuing their education. Consequently, the decision to drop out of school has become a prevalent outcome of the education policy.<sup>14</sup> Policy implementation refers to the manner in which

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<sup>13</sup> Nasution Rosramadhana, *Ketertindasan Perempuan dalam Tradisi Kawin Anom: Sibaltren Perempuan pada Suku Banjar dalam Perspektif Postcolonial* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> D. S. Van Meter and C. E. Van Horn, "The Policy Implementation Process: A Conceptual Framework," *Administration & Society* 6, no. 4 (1975): 445–88. P. Sabatier and D. Mazmanian, "The Implementation of Public Policy: A Framework of Analysis," *Policy Studies Journal* 8, no. 4 (1980): 538–60. M. S. Grindle, *Politics and Policy Implementation in The Third World*, vol. 4880 (Princeton University Press, 2017).

individuals, groups, and institutions execute programmatic activities or actions in accordance with previously established policies. The distance learning policy, as it is currently operationalized, offers numerous instances where existing obstacles appear to be insurmountable. This is particularly evident when considering the diverse circumstances that exist across different regions. One of the key findings of this study is that economic factors represent a significant challenge in the implementation of distance learning policies. The lack of adequate facilities to support remote learning has led to the reliance on existing facilities, which may not be optimized for this purpose.

The existing facilities are predominantly private, with the notable exception of mobile phones. The use of mobile technology in education is constrained by limitations on mobility and the exclusive use of mobile devices for the dissemination of assignments and the sharing of information. Furthermore, the learning process cannot be optimally carried out, which is also due to economic factors. Parents must continue to generate income, and there is no time to provide their children with the necessary support and guidance. Ultimately, the children are responsible for conducting their own learning. The aforementioned system represents a failure in the implementation of distance learning policies. The existing facilities are predominantly private, namely mobile phones. The use of mobile phones imposes restrictions on mobility, and distance learning is conducted solely through the dissemination of assignments and the sharing of information via mobile devices. Furthermore, the learning process cannot be optimally carried out, which is also due to economic factors, namely, parents must continue to earn a living and lack the time to accompany their children.

Subsequently, the children are responsible for conducting their own learning. Such a system represents a failure in the implementation of distance learning policies. The lack of preparation of the system in question emphasises the necessity for due consideration to be given to the readiness of the group responsible for implementing the policy in question. In this context, the existing system and other resources must be taken into account when implementing policies, as they play a significant role in the success of

distance learning initiatives.<sup>15</sup> The findings of this study indicate that resource limitations may be a key factor contributing to the failure of distance learning policies. One indicator of this failure is the high dropout rate observed during the implementation of distance learning.

The implementation of a policy is significantly influenced by the prevailing environmental conditions, both geographical and cultural. This study revealed the existence of a culture that was fundamentally incompatible with the principles of distance learning policy. The culture of early marriage, which existed long before the introduction of the distance learning policy, had a detrimental impact on the implementation of this policy. In the context of an early marriage culture, this research was conducted due to a lack of parental awareness regarding the significance of children's education. Thus, the education process is carried out without the necessity for additional effort to succeed and reach a higher and more independent level. It is evident that distance learning is conducted by middle and high school students online, yet parents and children alike often experience boredom when engaged in distance learning. Furthermore, in addition to being a culture where formal education is considered less important, numerous other cultures also present obstacles to the implementation of this policy.

The Madurese are renowned for their commitment to cultural preservation and traditional practices. A significant number of customs were transmitted from generation to generation by ancestors and have since become traditions that are still observed in the present day.<sup>16</sup> One such tradition that remains in practice today is that of marrying at an early age. This practice of early marriage is considered to be prevalent and is still preserved by the Madurese community. As an area that still preserves culture, a report by the Office of Women's Empowerment for Child Protection and Population (DP3AK) of East Java Province indicates that, as of September 2020, 4.79 percent (9,453 out of 197,068) of child marriages occurred at the ages of 19

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<sup>15</sup> H. E. Kapioru, "Implementasi Peraturan Daerah Kota Kupang Nomor 15 Tahun 2011 Tentang Retribusi Pelayanan Parkir di Tepi Jalan Umum," *Nominal: Barometer Riset Akuntansi Dan Manajemen* 3, no. 1 (2014): 101–19.

<sup>16</sup> Mahfudin, "Pernikahan Dini dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Keluarga di Kabupaten Sumenep Jawa Timur."

and 16 years, respectively.<sup>17</sup> The data indicates that Madurese society is a significant contributor to the prevalence of women's first marriages at an early age, typically below 20 years.

This is purported to be the result of the Madurese people's continued adherence to the tradition of early marriage, which remains a prevalent custom in the region. Meanwhile, the prevalence of child marriage in Sumenep regency is estimated to be as high as 60 percent. The aforementioned data was obtained from BKKBN and serves as a benchmark indicating that instances of early marriage remain prevalent among the Madurese population. The data was obtained from the Population and Civil Registration Service of Sumenep Regency and represents the period between 1 March 2019 and 30 December 2019. A total of 281 couples were identified as eligible for early marriage, representing 22% of the total number of early marriage couples in the region. These couples were selected for further study based on the presence of at least one of fourteen identified risk factors for early marriage.<sup>18</sup>

The data presented above illustrates that the practice of early marriage persists among the people of Ambunten Sumenep, East Java. The practice of early marriage remains a prevalent tradition within the local community. The practice of early marriage is deeply entrenched in the culture of Ambunten, Sumenep, East Java. Discussions within the community posit that, according to religious teachings, early marriage is the optimal means of preventing adultery and upholding the reputation of the family. This belief has led to the establishment of early marriage as a tradition among the people of Ambunten. The majority of societies permit their children to marry at an early age, thereby perpetuating the values espoused by that society. These are the values that are considered to be true and believed in by the society in question.

In the Ambunten subdistrict, some individuals conduct marriages at an early age, which ultimately hinders the realization of the intended purpose of the marriage within the community. This is due to the fact that the aforementioned discourse has become a deeply entrenched habit within the community, based on the

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<sup>17</sup> Ribut Wijoto, "Data Tahun 2020 Sampai Bulan September 197 Ribu Anak di Jatim Nikah Usia 16 – 19 Tahun, Gubernur Akan Terbitkan SE," *Berita Jatim*, 2021, <https://beritajatim.com/politik-pemerintahan/9-ribu-anak-di-jatim-nikah-usia-16-19-tahun-gubernur-akan-terbitkan-se/>.

<sup>18</sup> *Dokumen Dinas Kependudukan Sumenep Tahun*, 2019.

formation of a harmonious and enduring family unit, guided by divine principles. The actions taken by the majority of societies by allowing their children to marry at an early age, and children who are willing to marry, contribute to the perpetuation of values. These values are considered to be true and believed in by the society in question. In Ambunten Subdistrict, some people perform marriages at a young age, which results in the purpose of this marriage not being realised by the community. This is because the aforementioned discourse becomes a habit of the community based on the formation of a happy and eternal family based on divinity.<sup>19</sup>

In the Ambunten subdistrict of Sumenep Regency, early marriage has become a deeply entrenched tradition. This is due to the belief that it is preferable to marry at an early age than to engage in adultery, and that it is more beneficial to the reputation of the family. This belief has become a central aspect of the Ambunten community's way of life. Consequently, the deeply entrenched construction has led to a society that is accustomed to early marriage. This is corroborated by the fact that the practice of early marriage is observed even in cases where the child in question lacks an ID card and is still enrolled in school. The practice of a clandestine marriage, or *nikah siri*.

The *siri* marriage is conducted at the Islamic Boarding School with the participation of the Penghulu (Kiai), marriage guardians, and witnesses. However, children who lack a marriage certificate and ID card are detained at the KUA. The structures and systems that support the practice of early marriage have contributed to the increasing phenomenon of early marriage practices during the pandemic. In addition to the distance learning system that makes it more convenient for people to marry than schools, there are also environments and community structures that can perpetuate this practice, namely parents, religious leaders, and the government itself. This is evidenced by the fact that the term "understanding of marriage certificates" appears in KUA if they are not old enough.

### **Early Marriage and its Legalization Polemics**

The issue of early marriage is not simply a matter of the practice itself, but rather how the mechanism of early marriage is carried out

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<sup>19</sup> Inayah, "Konstruksi Seksualitas Dan Relasi Kuasa Dalam Praktik Diskursif Pernikahan Dini," 33–52.

in a way that becomes an impeachment and is legalised by local norms and customs. The practice of betel marriage (religious marriage) for children has resulted in many people in the Ambunten District conducting child marriages by manipulating the age to be legally and religiously approved and recorded by the KUA. The practice of siri marriage is a familiar phenomenon in Madura. It has become a cultural norm due to various underlying factors, including economic limitations (KUA marriage costs are expensive), limited awareness about the potential consequences of serial marriage, and the cultural and religious beliefs embraced by the local community.<sup>20</sup>

This result is consistent with the findings of previous research conducted in Madura, which suggests that age manipulation is viewed as legal within the community. According to informants, the primary purpose of age registration in KUA is to obtain a marriage certificate. One informant indicated that the marriage of AN and MG has not been recorded in KUA because the couple does not possess an ID card. If the couple is still of an age where they are permitted to marry, they will be detained. The situation is analogous to that of other underage couples who conduct their weddings in a series. Rather than being held in KUA, the marriages are conducted in Islamic boarding schools with Penghulu (Kiai Pondok), witnesses, and guardians of marriage present. The marriages are then directed at the Islamic boarding school.

Early marriages also entail the participation of both parents, and the responses of parents to marriages performed by their children are, on the whole, ambivalent. The rationale behind parents' approval of their children's marriages is their concern that their children may be subjected to slanderous remarks by neighbours due to their frequent invitation of their fiancées to play at home, as exemplified by the case of SY (17) and IA (16). This apprehension is driven by the desire to prevent any untoward incidents from occurring.<sup>21</sup> The prevalence of early marriages can be attributed to the pervasive fear of adultery and promiscuity, particularly in contexts where social norms are relatively lenient. This concern often drives parents to

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<sup>20</sup> A. F. M. Sufyan, "Analisis Terhadap Tingginya Nikah Siri di Kabupaten Pamekasan," *Al-Manhaj: Journal of Indonesian Islamic Family Law* 1, no. 2 (2019): 161–95.

<sup>21</sup> E. R. Oktavia et al., "Pengetahuan Risiko Pernikahan Dini pada Remaja Umur 13-19 Tahun," *HIGELA (Journal of Public Health Research and Development)* 2, no. 2 (2018): 239–48.

hastily arrange marriages for their children, even when they lack certainty about the appropriateness of the decision. For some parents, the primary motivation for this decision is to safeguard the reputation of the family. Conversely, there are instances where parents desire a wedding for their child, particularly when the groom's family places significant pressure for an immediate wedding.

The parents of children in the Ambunten Sumenep Subdistrict are accustomed to allowing their children to leave school, as the discourse surrounding marriage is perceived as being more favourable than that surrounding adultery. This discourse is then reconstructed by the community, becoming a cultural norm within the Ambunten Sumenep community. Furthermore, the practice of early marriage and childbearing is a source of contention in itself, as it is perceived as a source of pride for parents.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, informants have indicated that the practice of early marriage in Sumenep is viewed as a source of pride, rather than a taboo or prohibited act. Parents and the broader social environment offer comprehensive support for this tradition, particularly in light of the pandemic's impact on environmental factors and education policies, which have contributed to an increase in early marriage cases.

Moreover, the educational environment was found to lack the capacity to enable teachers to influence the decision of students who had dropped out of school as a result of early marriage. Pregnant or married women are often subjected to rejection in educational institutions.<sup>23</sup> This is because teachers lack the authority to accept students who do not meet the criteria set forth by the rules and systems in place. The challenge lies in striking a balance between the regulations and policies that govern the field of education and the moral and ethical values that shape the broader society. The issue of education and early childhood marriage in Indonesia is a complex one, as evidenced by the stark contrast in educational attainment

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<sup>22</sup> D. Trisilowaty and N. D. K. S. Hidayati, "Budaya Perkawinan Anak di Madura," *Prosiding SNP2M (Seminar Nasional Penelitian Dan Pengabdian Masyarakat) UNIM 2* (2020): 196–201. F. Rahman et al., "Kajian Budaya Remaja Pelaku Pernikahan Dini di Kota Banjarbaru Kalimantan Selatan," *Media Kesehatan Masyarakat Indonesia* 11, no. 2 (2015): 108–17.

<sup>23</sup> E. Mambaya and S. Stang, "No TitleFaktor yang Berhubungan dengan Pernikahan Dini di Kelurahan Pangli Kecamatan Sesean Kabupaten Toraja Utara," *Media Kesehatan Masyarakat Indonesia Universitas Hasanuddin* 7, no. 2 (2011).

between children who are married at a young age and those who marry at a more mature age.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, education represents a significant factor in the perpetuation of early marriage as a cultural practice within a given region. Low levels of education are associated with a heightened likelihood of immediate marriage to parents, irrespective of the activities in question. This phenomenon may also be perceived as a form of parental concern when a child is in a relationship with the opposite sex.<sup>25</sup> This reality presents an opportunity for the government to compile a separate record, with the aim of facilitating access to education for all citizens. This would enable the dissemination of knowledge regarding the adverse consequences of early marriage, along with the promotion of enhanced educational standards and public awareness.<sup>26</sup>

The tradition of betrothal in childhood or adolescence establishes the school as a supplementary institution of the family. Consequently, it is not feasible to pursue education concurrently with a lifestyle of residence within the family home. It is evident that children who are still in school have already established a partnership with a married individual who is still considered a fiancée. Ultimately, the majority of these individuals ceased their formal education as a result of their decision to marry, a choice that was perceived as a means of circumventing infidelity. The policy of distance learning appears to have the unintended consequence of increasing the prevalence of early marriage. The findings of the study indicated that their frequent activities at home, without the burden of education and work, and their decision to marry were mutually reinforcing.

This phenomenon can be observed in the case of one couple who are still in school, namely SY (17) and IA (16). IA is the female partner and is still enrolled in high school, as the couple has already graduated from high school and has invited her to get married. The existence of PJJ results in an increase in the intensity of meetings and a reduction in educational activities, which ultimately leads to the

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<sup>24</sup> B. A. Pratiwi et al., "Analisis Pernikahan Usia Dini di Kabupaten Bengkulu Tengah Tahun 2017," *Jurnal Kesmas Asclepius* 1, no. 1 (2019): 14–24.

<sup>25</sup> Oktavia et al., "Pengetahuan Risiko Pernikahan Dini pada Remaja Umur 13-19 Tahun," 239–48.

<sup>26</sup> F. Bahriyah, S. Handayani, and A. W. Astuti, "Pengalaman Pernikahan Dini di Negara Berkembang: Scoping Review," *Journal of Midwifery and Reproduction* 4, no. 2 (2021): 94–105.

decision to get married. Nevertheless, if the school is aware of the incident of early marriage, it is concerned about this case because it constitutes an act that violates the regulations. This is also the case with the couple HL (25) and TK (16), who are still enrolled in kindergarten but have already married. The practice of early marriage was the subject of scrutiny by the school, but it was unable to take action since the decision had been made by the parents.

The discrepancy between the implementation of the distance learning policy and the cultural practice of early marriage in Ambuten District offers an opportunity for evaluation of the policy. The implementation of distance learning has led to an increase in children's exposure to digital devices, thereby raising the possibility of them accessing adult content. This has resulted in a significant number of early marriages due to pregnancies resulting from sexual intercourse outside of marriage.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the success of the PJJ policy is contingent upon the availability of resources and the prevailing environmental factors. If the environment is conducive and the community adheres to values that can be leveraged to support the implementation of the food policy, the desired outcomes can be achieved. In the absence of such measures, it falls upon the government to provide targeted support in accordance with the specific needs of the community and the environment. This is essential for the success and sustainability of the remote learning policy implemented during the pandemic. While the current system may have shortcomings, the introduction of the PJJ initiative represents a crucial step in the evolution of society and its environment, paving the way for a brighter future.

The practice of early marriages carried out by children in the Ambuten subdistrict cannot be regarded as arbitrary. The rationale behind the decision to engage in early marriages, as exemplified by the case of SY (17) and IA (16), can be attributed to the impact of the pandemic on students engaged in PJJ. The disruption caused by the pandemic, and the subsequent shift in their circumstances, led to a change in their outlook and a disruption in their desire to continue their education. One of the reasons for the couple's decision to leave school was that SY was disinclined to apply himself to his studies,

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<sup>27</sup> Anik Wahyuningtyas, "Fenomena Pernikahan Dini Di Masa Pandemi," *Bhirawa Online*, 2020, <https://www.harianbhirawa.co.id/fenomena-pernikahan-dini-di-masa-pandemi/>.

having become distracted by his engagement. Similarly, HL (25) and TK (16) also encountered a comparable situation. TK, a high school student, expressed feelings of unrest, noting the challenges of accessing a cell network in their mountainous region. Additionally, TK's fiancée requested marriage, and their parents consented. These factors contribute to the underlying reasons for some couples undergoing early marriages.<sup>28</sup> As a result, the cessation of discourse and the freezing of opinions by religious leaders has led to the actions of society. This has become the accepted belief of the Ambunten community, forming the basis of marrying off their children to avoid adultery and to maintain the reputation of the family. However, some sources indicate that early marriage has a negative impact on academic performance due to the potential influence on divorce and even domestic violence resulting from the lack of psychological and decision-making maturity in children.

### **Life Implications of Early Marriage and Educational Sustainability**

The term “sexuality” is not yet etymologically established in Indonesian. The word “sex” is the source of this concept, which denotes the distinguishing characteristics between women and men. Sexuality, in its essence, is the interplay between biological, psychological, and environmental values, as well as other social factors of the individual, comprising knowledge, norms, behavioral rules, and subjectivity related to sex.<sup>29</sup> In the context of married life, there are numerous considerations and actions that must be taken into account for couples who have entered into matrimony, as well as for those who have done so at an early age.

It is of significant importance to emphasise the concept of life after early marriage. The marital practices of G (23) and AZ (16) exemplify a post-marital lifestyle wherein the husband is primarily responsible for financial provision, while the wife's role is to assist him in this endeavour. This is the outcome of the interview regarding the responsibilities of a husband and wife as espoused by the

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<sup>28</sup> Inayah, “Konstruksi Seksualitas Dan Relasi Kuasa Dalam Praktik Diskursif Pernikahan Dini,” 33–52.

<sup>29</sup> Mardiana, “Aktivitas Seksual PraLansia Dan Lansia Yang Berkunjung Ke Poliklinik Geriatri Rumah Sakit Pusat Angkatan Udara DR Esnawan Antariksa,” 2012. D. Fujiati, “Seksualitas Perempuan Dalam Budaya Patriarki,” *MUWAZAH: Jurnal Kajian Gender* 8, no. 1 (2016).

aforementioned couple. Following the marriage, the husband was engaged in gainful employment, while G undertook various forms of casual work, including agricultural labour and construction. Additionally, he participated in various projects. In the case of MG (15) and AN (14), the duties of husband and wife become the post-marital life of the couple in question, as they interpret their duties as husband and wife and carry out the portion they desire. In contrast, newly married couples SY (17) and IA (16) have yet to apply their understanding of the duties of husband and wife to their post-marital life, as they continue to reside with their parents. This is due to the hasty decision to marry and the fact that the husband has not yet engaged in any form of employment, while the wife is still a high school student. The following section will examine the factors that contribute to the high prevalence of early marriages and their impact on the sustainability of education in the Ambuten District.

#### 1. Economic Factors.

The majority of the Ambunten population is engaged in agricultural and fishing activities, resulting in a relatively low income level. In addition to the tradition of being unable to refuse proposals, there is also the assumption that child marriage reduces the economic burden on the family.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, the economic level, including the lower middle class, is also experienced by parents of underage couples. For example, in the case of MG (15) and AN (14), a couple who married at a young age, the parents with low income subsequently relocated to Kalimantan to make a living together. This was done so that the parents did not have to pay for their daughters, as they were already provided for by their husbands. The economic factors and assumption that children are a burden result in significant challenges to children's access to education. This represents a social problem, as the importance of education within the family for improving living standards is not fully recognised. Socialisation and internalisation of the importance of education and the improvement of human resources through formal and informal education are essential to address this issue.

If economic uncertainty is the primary factor contributing to the prevalence of early marriage, it is imperative to identify and

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<sup>30</sup> A. Juhaidi and M. Umar, "Pernikahan Dini, Pendidikan, Kesehatan dan Kemiskinan di Indonesia, Masihkah Berkorelasi?," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora* 18, no. 1 (2020): 1–24.

implement effective solutions.<sup>31</sup> It is imperative that the government minimises the impact of economic factors on the prevalence of early marriage by implementing effective social security policies that provide educational assistance. It is therefore hoped that assistance from the economic sector in the field of education will provide an illustration of the potential benefits of receiving education at a low cost. Furthermore, the opening of job opportunities for people living in 3T areas through the form of affirmative policies provides opportunities to achieve a better level of the economy. It would be beneficial to expand the socialisation of these programmes that support education in Indonesia on a larger scale.

## 2. Personal Factors

One of the factors contributing to the prevalence of early marriage in the Madurese community is the influence of parents and family. The construction of the Madurese community is such that the expectation is that children will be married off at an early age, as this has been a practice for generations. Parents will not cease their efforts to arrange marriages for their children, as this is a long-held desire that they believe will alleviate their concerns about their children's fidelity.<sup>32</sup> A suitable couple will therefore proceed with the marriage, as this is a significant factor. If the parents approve and support the marriage, then the early marriage will proceed. In addition to economic factors, underage marriages occur in the Ambunten subdistrict of Sumenep regency as a result of the couple's own volition. This is because the two individuals in question have already fallen in love with each other and thus desire to marry immediately, regardless of their respective ages. The case of the couple SY (17) and AI (16) is illustrative. Despite the female partner's status as a student, this does not present an obstacle to the couple, as they adhere to the belief that marriage and love are compatible.

Therefore, parents may choose to arrange an early marriage for their children in order to protect them from the negative influences and slanderous comments that may arise from their neighbours. The primary responsibility of the family lies in the inculcation of values pertaining to the significance of education. In the absence of familial support for the inculcation of values pertaining to the significance of

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Kohno et al., "Why Girls Get Married Early in Sarawak, Malaysia - an Exploratory Qualitative Study," *BMC Women's Health* 20 46, no. 1 (2020).

education, children are unlikely to be motivated to pursue advanced academic qualifications. Education and knowledge are often perceived as inconsequential aspects of life. The quality of human capital is a pivotal determinant of societal advancement. The potential for environmental transformation hinges upon the capacity of individuals, as agents of change, to effect positive change in their surrounding environment.

It is of significant importance to instill the value of pursuing education well before marriage, both for families and individuals. The capacity for knowledge acquisition and a certain mentality are the essential prerequisites for the institution of marriage. They are not merely a means of fulfilling desires or needs. Therefore, education must be the primary instrument for reducing the principal factor underlying this phenomenon, namely personal desire. Education through government programs must be made accessible in the home to facilitate the development of a superior generation.<sup>33</sup> It is not the sole responsibility of the teacher in the school, but rather a collaborative effort between the teacher and parents to foster a robust mental state in the child.

### 3. Cultural Factors.

The perpetuation of hereditary discourse has resulted in the formation of a societal construct wherein the practice of early marriage is perceived as a superior alternative to extramarital relationships, and the preservation of family reputation is considered a paramount value. This construction is deeply entrenched in the social fabric of the Madurese people, resulting in the emergence of numerous practices pertaining to arranged marriages and engagements. This has led to the prevalence of early marriage, as evidenced by the couples previously discussed. Furthermore, the prevalence of arranged marriages from an early age also serves to accelerate the incidence of early marriage. The rationale behind child-arranged marriages is to serve the interests of the individual and their family. The objective of both parties is to unite their children for the sake of a specific interest. The objective of the marriage is to maintain the lineage of the family.

Consequently, parents arrange marriages within their families. In some cultures, girls are betrothed from an early age and married

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<sup>33</sup> S. Nurjanah and M. Ikhsanudin, "Dampak Pernikahan Dini Terhadap Pendidikan Anak Dalam Keluarga," *Al-I'tibar: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 1 (2018): 38–44.

shortly after they begin menstruating. In most cases, girls begin menstruating at approximately 12 years of age. The practice of hereditary marriages is often initiated at an early age due to the cultural tradition of engagement from a young age, which results in children having a partner from an early stage of their lives. The couple HL (25) and TK (17) were matched and engaged in junior high school, fostering a close relationship between them. They subsequently proceeded with a wedding ceremony. Similarly, the couple G(23) and AZ(16) initiated their relationship after meeting with the family and subsequently developing a mutual affinity and compatibility, which led to the decision to proceed with the wedding.

In the case of the Madurese, the decision regarding a child's future spouse is made based on three fundamental criteria. The first of these is a parental agreement, which is reached while the child is still in the womb. This agreement is designed to ensure the continuation of a friendship or relationship. Secondly, the parents may also choose to match their children from an early age, regardless of whether the children themselves are consulted or not. Thirdly, the prospective bride or groom may also select their own future life partner, with the blessing of their parents.

This culture represents a manifestation of modern education that is inherently flawed and cannot be built properly. Therefore, the practice of simply marrying and marrying as a means of advancing in life represents a form of conservative action that is not a viable long-term solution. The prevalence of child marriage indicates that the capacity of law enforcement to enforce marriage laws remains limited.<sup>34</sup> It is therefore imperative that socialisation and internalisation of the law of marriage be undertaken as a matter of urgency if a new, more expansive culture is to be formed. One strategy for socialising and internalising Islamic values and positive laws about the importance of mental strengthening and readiness before marriage is to present the concept of modern and religious education. It is important to note that this task cannot be carried out by the government alone. Instead, it requires the collaboration of educational institutions, parents, and other stakeholders. By working together, they can contribute to the construction of the desired values in our society regarding marriage and proper marriage.

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<sup>34</sup> S. Salmah, "Pernikahan Dini Ditinjau Dari Sudut Pandang Sosial Dan Pendidikan," *Al-Hiwar: Jurnal Ilmu Dan Teknik Dakwah* 4, no. 6 (2017).

Cultural factors exert a considerable influence in situations where early marriage coincides with the introduction of distance learning policies, resulting in an increase in such occurrences.<sup>35</sup> A conservative mindset within a given cultural environment can influence individuals to adopt behaviours that align with the prevailing culture. If individuals are unable to establish new habits in accordance with their belief in environmental change, the environment itself will remain unaltered to meet the needs of the new environment. One of the requisite elements of the new environment is education. It is imperative that the educational needs of the population are addressed in order to enhance the quality of human resources. An improvement in the quality of education will also result in more optimal childcare patterns, which in turn will lead to a reduction in the number of children being married off at an early age.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, an increase in the level of knowledge among families and parents about marriage will also contribute to a reduction in the number of early marriages that are currently being carried out and have become a cultural norm.<sup>37</sup> The government should also make efforts to socialise about marriage rules and the negative impacts of early marriage, both from a health, social and economic perspective.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

The practice of early marriage, as observed among the Ambunten community of Sumenep Regency, has witnessed a notable surge during the ongoing pandemic. This is due to the fact that the distance learning policy is perceived to be ineffective and has an adverse effect on the reduction of children's educational activities. Consequently, a considerable number of students have opted to pursue matrimony in lieu of remaining idle and merely awaiting the conclusion of the academic year. The failure of remote learning practices is influenced by a number of factors, including the limited

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<sup>35</sup> Bahriyah, Handayani, and Astuti, "Pengalaman Pernikahan Dini Di Negara Berkembang: Scoping Review."

<sup>36</sup> Mambaya and Stang, "No TitleFaktor Yang Berhubungan Dengan Pernikahan Dini Di Kelurahan Pangli Kecamatan Sesean Kabupaten Toraja Utara."

<sup>37</sup> Rahman et al., "Kajian Budaya Remaja Pelaku Pernikahan Dini Di Kota Banjarbaru Kalimantan Selatan."

<sup>38</sup> Sufyan, "Analisis Terhadap Tingginya Nikah Siri Di Kabupaten Pamekasan."

existing system, economic considerations and human resources, namely families who are unable to provide assistance to students.

Furthermore, the practice of early marriage is predicated on the notion that it is preferable to adultery. This is corroborated by the views of religious leaders, who cite the practice of serial marriage in Islamic boarding schools as a justification for early marriage. Additionally, the KUA's policy of withholding marriage books until individuals reach a certain age provides further support for this perspective. This indicates that the legalisation of this practice is a challenging issue, regardless of the cultural context. The factors that contribute to early marriage include economic, personal, and cultural elements. These can be addressed through the commitment of the government, religious leaders, and parents to foster a new culture, namely one that emphasises education.

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