

Early Marriage Causes Decreased Growth and Development in Children Under the Age of Three

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Abstract

Introduction: The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between early marriage and child development. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted on a population of mothers with children <3 years old. The subjects of this study are mothers with children aged 3–36 months, who know their age at first marriage, are not currently divorced, and are willing to engage in the study. **Results:** There is a relationship between early marriage and impaired child growth and development. **Conclusions:** It was concluded that early marriage affects the growth and development of children <3 years old. Thus, the government or society needs to make efforts to prevent early marriage through the right approach in Indonesia.

Keywords: Children, development, growth, marriage, mother

INTRODUCTION

Early marriage is defined as marriage before reaching the legal marriage age of 18 years. Early marriage is not only a social issue but also a public health one. Men and women have equal chances of marrying young, but women do it more frequently. Men account for only one-sixth of all early marriages. Every year, one in every five women marries before the age of 18 years. While this is a terrible custom, its prevalence varies greatly across the country. This is a more prevalent occurrence in developing countries than in developed countries.^[1,2] In Indonesia, legal rules and the religious concept of marriage continue to push women into early marriage.^[3] There is even a widespread belief that early marriage is advantageous.^[4] Furthermore, the pandemic was proven to be a motivating force behind early marriage.^[5]

Because the consequences are severe, the United Nations has made the abolition of early marriage a sustainable development goal. This prevents the bride and groom from pursuing higher education, more advanced skills, personal growth, and mobility.^[6,7] It also allows access to reproductive issues and birth defects.^[8] Women who marry at a young age utilize health-care facilities much less than women who marry later in life.^[9] This group poses a risk of premature birth and mortality to newborns.^[10] There is a substantial association between this

marriage and the occurrence of stunting and malnutrition in children under the age of five.^[11]

Objective

There is few research on the impact of early marriage that targets specific groups in Indonesian society. As a result, the purpose of this study is to look into the relationship between early marriage and child development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Subjects

The subjects of this study are mothers with children aged 3–36 months, who know their age at first marriage, are not currently divorced, and are willing to engage in the study. All subjects will be divided into two groups: moms who have married over the age of 18 and mothers who have married under the age of 18.

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Sampling size and technique

This study's participants were moms with children aged 3–36 months. The Slovin's formula is used to calculate the sample size, which is a minimum of 100 samples. Using an accidental sampling strategy.

Analysis of child growth

Children's growth is measured by determining the weight and height according to the child's age. If the weight and height do not match the child's age, it will be categorized in the group of child growth disorders.

Analysis of child development

Fine motor, gross motor, language, and independence are all aspects of a child's development that are assessed. Child development is assessed using a questionnaire with 10 yes or no questions. If 9–10 questions are answered with a yes, the child is considered to be developing normally. If a child replies yes to 9 questions, he or she is classified as having abnormal development.

Statistical analysis

All data are presented in frequency and percentage. Statistical analysis was performed using Chi-square test. The analysis was carried out using the SPSS (IBM, New York, United States) for Windows version 19 software. The *P* value was declared significant if it was <0.05. In addition, the odds ratio calculation is also carried out.

OBSERVATIONS

Table 1 shows the educational qualities of the subjects. High school education is the most common among those who have

Characteristics	Category	Group	
		Control (<i>n</i> =114), <i>n</i> (%)	Early marriage (<i>n</i> =16), <i>n</i> (%)
Level of education	Junior high school	4 (3.50)	9 (56.25)
	Senior high school	93 (81.57)	7 (43.75)
	University	17 (14.91)	0 (0)
Working status	Nonworking	89 (78.07)	16(100)
	Working	25 (21.92)	0 (0)
Number of children	One	83 (73.68)	14 (87.50)
	Two	21 (18.42)	1 (6.25)
	Three	9 (7.89)	1 (6.25)

Table 2: The level of children growth and development

Characteristics	Category	Group		<i>P</i>	OR
		Control (<i>n</i> =114), <i>n</i> (%)	Early marriage (<i>n</i> =16), <i>n</i> (%)		
Growth	Abnormal	3 (2.63)	9 (56.25)	0.000	47.57
	Normal	111 (97.36)	7 (43.75)		
Development	Abnormal	6 (5.26)	11 (68.75)	0.000	39.60
	Normal	108 (94.73)	5 (31.25)		

OR: Odds ratio

been married for more than 18 years. Meanwhile, the most common level of education among 18-year-old marriages is junior high school. In the marriage group of <18 years, the largest frequency of education is that all of them are not working for the task of moms. There are still mothers who work in various industries in groups with marriages over 18 years old.

Table 2 depicts the association between marital age and child development. Marriage age and child growth have a strong link (*P* < 0.05). Moms who marry before the age of 18 years have a 47.57 times greater chance of having children with developmental abnormalities than mothers who marry after the age of 18. In addition, maternal age at marriage and child development had a significant link (*P* < 0.05). Moms who marry before the age of 18 years are 39.60 times more likely to have a child with a developmental problem than mothers who marry after the age of 18.

DISCUSSION

This study involved 130 subjects of mothers who have children aged 3–36 months. After being categorized based on the age of marriage, there were 16 subjects with marriages <18 years and 114 subjects with marriages >18 years. In the marriage group <18 years, most of them have junior high school education and do not work. This is consistent with the previous findings that education level is associated with early marriage. Women who only have primary education are more likely to have primary marriages than those with higher education.^[12-14] Higher levels of education provide an understanding of reproduction, maternal health, and marital health. In addition, strengthening women through employment opportunities also prevents early marriage.^[15-17] Other studies reveal that efforts to prevent early marriage include efforts to have their own income and opportunities for women.^[2]

According to the findings of this study, early marriage can have an impact on the growth and development of children who are born. Mothers who marry before the age of 18 are 47.57 times more likely to have a child with a development abnormality than those who marry after the age of 18. There is an elevated risk of 39.60 for development. This demonstrates that early marriage has a biological impact on the lives of children. Early marriage is linked to malnutrition by mechanisms such as poor maternal nutritional status, low education, lack of access to health care, insufficient feeding, and insufficient

living conditions.^[18] This study's findings are consistent with the earlier research.^[19]

CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that early marriage affects the growth and development of children <3 years old. Thus, the government or society needs to make efforts to prevent early marriage through the right approach in Indonesia.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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