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SUMMARY

HEAR HER SPEAK:

ADOLESCENT GIRLS' PERCEPTIONS AND ASPIRATIONS ON MARRIAGE

West Java and West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

October 2021

CREATING
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SPACES
TO TAKE ACTION ON VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS



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Hear Her Speak: Adolescent Girls' Perceptions and Aspirations on Marriage

West Java and West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

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"Perspectives and Aspirations of Adolescent Girls on Child Marriage in Indonesia" is a learning document generated by the Creating Spaces (CS) project (2016-2021) in collaboration with the Centre for the Study of Family Resilience and Development (CSFRD), Universitas Katolik Atmajaya. This document is for iterative reflection to strengthen the outcome of the project. The project is funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and Oxfam Canada to take action to reduce violence against women and girls (VAWG), including child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) in six countries across Asia.

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On the cover: Creating Spaces youth forum group discussion. Indonesia.
Photo credit: Yayasan Tunas Alam Indonesia (SANTAI).



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ACRONYMS

CEFM	Child, Early and Forced Marriage
CS	Creating Spaces
CSFRD	Centre for the Study of Family Resilience and Development, Atmajaya University
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
KII	Key Informant Interview
KPI	<i>Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia</i> (Indonesia Women's Coalition)
LBH APIK Sulawesi Selatan	<i>Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Asosiasi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan</i> (Legal Aid Institute of the Indonesia Women's Association) in South Sulawesi
SANTAI	<i>Yayasan Tunas Alam</i> Indonesia (Indonesian Universe Bud Foundation) in West Nusa Tenggara
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
YKP	<i>Yayasan Kesehatan Perempuan</i> (Women's Health Foundation)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018, 11% of Indonesian girls and 1% of boys age 20–24 were married before reaching 18 years of age (UNICEF 2020). A great success on gender justice was achieved in Indonesia as the government issued the legal age of marriage for girls to be raised from 16 to 19 in October 2019. This was a significant milestone moment for the women and girls' rights movement, however communities continue to condone child marriage practices across the country.

This document aims to strengthen the work of civil society organisations to bring more changes on the promotion of the policy and its practice on the ground. Its focus is to capture adolescent girls' perceptions and aspirations on marriage, and to examine how traditional and cultural norms and the influential actors who reinforce them shape their perspectives. The document also examines the complexity of political, cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors that surround young girls and their perception of marriage.

The collective voices of adolescent girls aimed at preventing and ending Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM) as well as Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG). These reflections were conducted in three districts in West Java (Bogor, Bandung, and Indramayu), and in two districts in West Nusa Tenggara (West Lombok, and North Lombok). **This paper served as a learning opportunity for partners to strengthen their programming on CEFM, and their understanding of how to engage with young girls on these issues.**

This document highlights:

- 1 Perceptions on marriage – Presenting positive, negative and shifting perceptions on marriage..
- 2 Aspirations of adolescent girls – Exploring the desires of adolescent girls ranging from marriage to education, and from partnership to independence.
- 3 Drivers of CEFM – Analyzing the cultural, societal, familial, economic and other factors that promote CEFM.
- 4 Enforcers of child marriage – Identifying the key actors that promote and support CEFM.
- 5 Game changers – Identifying the key actors that challenge CEFM.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

- Prior to marriage, adolescent girls view marriage positively, but there is disappointment in the reality of marital life and its limits on freedom. Avoidance of CEFM would allow girls to pursue better employment and higher education.
- CEFM programming should be adapted to address region-specific issues, as demonstrated by the differences between West Java and West Nusa Tenggara.
- Married and unmarried girls' aspirations for early marriage widely differed, warranting further study.
- Social and religious norms, as well as community beliefs, shape the perceptions on marriage expressed by adolescent girls. Community and religious leaders and those who perform marriages enforce gendered norms, such as necessary chastity and male dominance. Parents play an important and central role in enforcing both marriage and traditional gender roles.
- A significant factor that gives way to CEFM is poverty. Poverty means that girls lack access to education, and are married to reduce the economic burden of families.
- Prevention of CEFM requires a range of 'game changers' such as adolescent girls themselves, village-level child and youth groups, village governments, and community leaders (religious and traditional).



100 participants from the Youth Jambore event on VAWG and CEFM, Indonesia.
Photo credit: Yayasan Tunas Alam Indonesia (SANTAI)

1

BACKGROUND

The marriage of children under the age of 18 years is still a common practice worldwide and has severe impacts on the social and economic wellbeing, health, safety and rights of young girls.¹ One in five marriages – 650 million girls – are child marriages. According to Save the Children, before 2030, without any preventative intervention, more than 134 million girls will experience child marriage, and an estimated two million will marry before reaching the age of 15 (2018). Ending CEFM is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and supports the achievement of at least eight other SDGs (UN General Assembly, 2015). Under the SDG agenda, 192 countries have committed to ending child marriage by 2030. CEFM exacerbates poverty, gender inequalities, intimate partner violence, and vulnerability to sexual and reproductive health risks for children around the globe.

Indonesia, a country with a large and young population, is no exception. In Indonesia, UNICEF (2020) suggests that 11% of girls and 1% of boys age 20-24 were married before 18 years of age in 2018. Based on the 2018 National Social and Economy Survey (*Survei Sosial Ekonomi Nasional [Susenas]*) (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2018), child marriage occurs more in rural areas as compared to the urban areas as evident in the prevalence of marriage before the age of 18 (16.87% and 7.15% respectively). The report also identified that girls who belong to the poorest households are about two times more likely to be married before 18 than girls from the wealthiest households.

An economic calculation reveals that the problem of CEFM has cost the country at least 1.7% of GDP in 2014 (Grijn and Horii, 2018). In fact, during the past two post-New Order² regimes, the Indonesian government has been investing more in child protection programs, including those to end CEFM. A study by SMERU Institute (Marshan, Rakhmadi, and Rizky, 2015), suggests that Indonesia has made

significant progress over the past four decades. There have been improvements in the level of education of girls and women, with the average years of schooling for women in Indonesia increased from 6.91 to 8.83 between 1971 and 2010. This same period recorded a higher labor participation by women. Overall, pro-poor public policies in health, education and social welfare were reported to be effective (KPPPA, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c; Bah et al., 2020; Tamyis *et al.*, 2020).

On 16 October 2019, after years of continued advocacy efforts by Coalition 18+³ and other supporters, the Indonesian parliament made a historic decision to enact Law No. 16 Year 2019 to increase the legal age of marriage for women from 16 to 19 (equal to men). The amendment creates new momentum to seriously address CEFM practices. Under the amended law, however, the parents of children under the age of 18 may request dispensation from the district or religious courts for them to marry in situations of “extreme urgency;”⁴ there are also amendments to the criminal code under consideration that could encourage continued child marriage practices.

In Indonesia, other literature on the state of child marriage highlights four key reasons why this practice continues today, all tied to long-standing gendered norms and practices in Indonesian society. First, adolescent girls are married young to maintain family honour, and even tribal (community) honour in some locations, by avoiding any pre-marital sexual relations and unintended pregnancy (Grijn and Horii, 2018; Hidayana *et al.*, 2020; Pratiwi and Hari, 2010). There are social pressures and stigma faced by unmarried women past a certain age deemed appropriate for marriage. Second, early marriage is considered the only solution to get out of poverty, when families are struggling to care for all their children (Febriany, 2005, 2006; Hidayana *et al.*, 2020; Utami and Putranto, 2002). Third, in child marriage

cases, parents play a major role in arranging their children's marriage with whom and when they see fit (Tsany, 2015), while children, particularly girls, are expected to be obedient (Habsjah, 2017). Fourth, there is a belief in destiny that encourages families to often accept early marriage proposals, or else bring bad karma on the family (Grijn and Horii, 2018).

The opinions and desires of children, and particularly girls, are rarely a determining factor as parents and influential community members chart out the future trajectory of children's lives. Furthermore, a review of literature studying child marriage practices in Indonesia found that the voices and perspectives of adolescent girls were often overshadowed or missing.

In light of these gaps, this study aimed to empower adolescent girls by giving them a platform to share their perceptions and aspirations on marriage, and to examine how their perspectives are influenced by traditional and cultural norms, behaviours, and attitudes.

This paper highlights five themes:

- 1 Perceptions on marriage – Presenting positive, negative and shifting perceptions on marriage.
- 2 Aspirations of adolescent girls – Exploring the desires of adolescent girls ranging from marriage to education, and from partnership to independence.
- 3 Drivers of CEFM – Analyzing the cultural, societal, familial, economic and other factors that promote CEFM.
- 4 Enforcers of child marriage – Identifying the key actors that promote and support CEFM.
- 5 Game changers – Identifying the key actors that challenge CEFM.

The Hear Her Speak initiative was conducted by the Creating Spaces Indonesia project, with an aim to reduce violence against women and girls (VAWG), and child, early, and forced marriage (CEFM) in Indonesia.⁵ To achieve these goals, the project focuses on three objectives or three pillars: (1) engaging community actors to support and promote positive gender norms; (2) supporting women and girl survivors and victims of violence and child marriage; (3) sharing knowledge and building the capacity of institutions and alliances (networks) to influence policy changes. The project is implemented in four provinces, 12 districts and 25 villages with the following partner organisations:

- Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia (KPI)/*Indonesian Women's Coalition in West Java*;
- National Yayasan Kesehatan Perempuan (YKP)/*Women's Health Foundation in East Java*;
- Yayasan Tunas Alam Indonesia/*SANTAI in West Nusa Tenggara*; and
- Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Asosiasi Perempuan Untuk Keadilan/LBH APIK Makassar and *Legal Aid Institute of the Indonesian Women's Association in South Sulawesi*.

2

KEY THEMES

2.1 POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE

Of the young girls included in this initiative, 75.4% of married women and 76.6% unmarried women had positive perceptions of marriage before getting married in West Java and West Nusa Tenggara. The results demonstrate that most positive perceptions about marriage relate to happiness and financial security. This was consistent for both married and unmarried girls in both areas.

For the young girls, happiness in marriage meant being together with a partner in joy, sorrow, and visiting different places. Other elements included building a family and having children. Marriage is also equated with happiness because it is built on a basis of loving and always feeling loved. Some also saw this happiness as lasting forever, as demonstrated by the following quotations:

“Living together under one roof, sharing joy and sorrow together.”

– 15 years old, married at 15, West Java

“When a couple go out, they must always go out together and filled with joy.”

– 18 years old, married at 17, West Nusa Tenggara

The next positive perception is that marriage is seen as offering a financial guarantor; it can ease the financial burden on parents to have a financial source or provider for their children, and to be economically fulfilled. Indonesian people, in general, assume that the breadwinners in the family are



men or husbands (O'Shaughnessy, 2009). Hence, the idea of marriage as financial guarantor exists as it offers a transfer of financial resources from parents to husbands. Some adolescent girls agree to get married solely to ease the economic burden on parents.

“I wanted to ease the burden of my parents ... I don't have regrets.”

– 24 years old, married at 16, West Java

In addition to the perception of marriage as offering happiness and financial resources, unmarried adolescent girls perceive marriage as part of religious belief and physical intimacy. Marriage is a sacred bond, and as an *ummah* (religious community), marriage is both the fulfillment of religious obligation and a means of seeking the blessings of God. Marriage is also perceived as

a legal and/or religious permit to have sexual relations with a partner. The concepts of fulfilling obligations, relying on God (*ridho* in Bahasa), and completing religious expectations are all related to the Islamic teachings and values upheld by community members in both provinces.

Moreover, unmarried girls in West Java described specific thoughts on the religious perception of both the wife's role and intimacy. It is said that a pious wife is one who follows her husband is sholehah (obedient), and preserves family honour. This demonstrates how adolescent girls learn religious norms related to gendered roles in marriage at a young age.

“(A wife) should not violate her husband's rules. She should be obedient to her husband. She should also observe daily prayers”

–18 years old, West Java

2.2 NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE (BEFORE MARRIAGE)

Findings in West Java and West Nusa Tenggara show that married, as well as unmarried, adolescent girls also have negative perceptions of marriage.

Specifically, almost one third of married adolescent girls reflected on the **complexity and financial problems** associated with marriage before getting married. They defined these complexities as starting from the hassles that arise during the planning and execution of wedding events and last throughout marital life. They also discussed a perceived lack of financial security in marriage that they had observed before getting married themselves. A few married women were also **afraid of not being ready** for the responsibilities of married life. They worried about the possibility of divorce if the relationship was not successful.

“My perception was that being married was identical to facing financial hardships, just like my own family.”

– 17 years old, married at 17,
West Nusa Tenggara

“Marriage was identical with difficulties, many financial problems.”

– 24 years old, married at 15,
West Nusa Tenggara

Both married and unmarried people perceived marriage as **a loss of freedom**. First is the perception that woman will be 'orderly' and submissive towards her husband. In terms of mobility, participants raised how they would have to ask permission from husbands if they wanted to travel.

They also mentioned married women's restrictions relating to work. After marriage, young girls see women's work as focused on household chores. It would limit freedom and the kind of work they can do, particularly in terms of productive work outside the home. Last, they identified a lack of freedom and time to gather with friends.

“It seems happy and joyful, but who knows what lies ahead. (Women only work in the kitchen and have no freedom after marriage. I think (women should) marry after they become successful”

– 19 years old unmarried woman,
West Nusa Tenggara.

Other negative perceptions of marriage stem from feeling unprepared and being of a young age. This concern comes from self-reflection or witnessing the experience of friends who have married young. Participants explained that doing household chores and taking care of children, as well as married life itself, could cause boredom in couples. This can result in bickering or fighting between spouses and

in the worst cases can lead to divorce. Happiness only lasts briefly, at the beginning of marriage, or it only looks happy to outside observers, expressed by most of women in West Nusa Tenggara.

“It seems happy, but it looks like it is going to be difficult once the couple has a child.”

– 19 years old unmarried girl,
West Nusa Tenggara

“The happiness is temporary. You will be bored in no time.”

– 17 years old unmarried girl,
West Nusa Tenggara

2.3 CHANGE IN PERCEPTIONS AFTER MARRIAGE

Most married girls, 74% in West Java and 79% in West Nusa Tenggara, experienced changes in perceptions about marriage after getting married. While a small segment of married girls had considered the social restrictions, financial difficulties, and responsibilities for domestic work prior to marriage, most others were uninformed of the challenges they would experience.

The young girls spoke of social restrictions on outings and travel with friends, and how friends were reluctant to spend time with them once they married. They also had limited time and/or lack of freedom to study and work. These restrictions were imposed by husbands specifically, and by culture more broadly, and were compounded by childcare responsibilities once relationships result in children.

“I used to study only, now I am busy managing the household.”

– 21 years old, married at 17,
West Nusa Tenggara

“Turns out that there is a difference with when we were dating. I could work at that time. It is difficult now, especially when I am nursing my child.”

– 20 years old, married at 17, West Java

Similarly, adolescent girls also experience changed perceptions regarding financial security after marriage. Some of them admit that they are having financial difficulties. This is because the only breadwinner in the family is the husband. If, previously, adolescent girls could directly ask their parents for funds, now they are to wait for their husbands to give them money.

“It is not as beautiful as I imagined. Before I was married, I could ask for money from my parents. Now I must wait for my husband to give me money.”

– 21 years old, married at 16, West Java

“Not as happy as it seems. There is a mental pressure, sometimes we face financial difficulties.”

– 22 years old, married at 17,
West Nusa Tenggara

Most married girls lamented the limited freedom, mental stress, and fatigue they experienced since marriage. Overall, many married girls seemed unaware of realities of marriage before they experienced it directly. Girls’ discontentment with the restrictions on freedom, care burden, and inability to study and work suggests that cultural norms about gender roles conflict with the lives they want.

2.4 ASPIRATIONS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS

The majority (60%) of married girls in West Nusa Tenggara, compared to just over one third (36%) in West Java wanted to marry before 19 years of age, compared to 0% and 2% of unmarried girls respectively (see Figure 1). The difference in results both between provinces for married girls, and between married and unmarried girls are quite significant.

Figure 1: Percentage of married vs. unmarried girls who wish/wished to marry before 19 years old

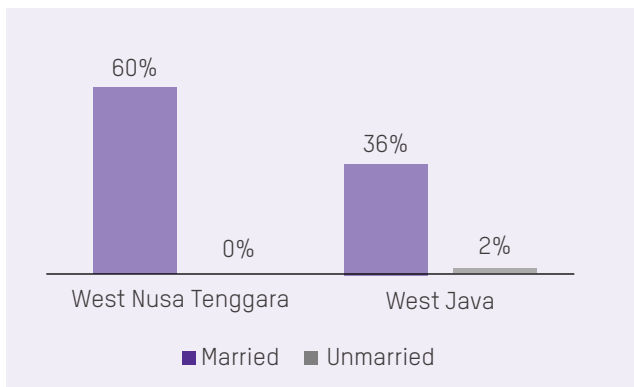


Figure 1 shows the stark differences in perspectives on CEFM between married and unmarried girls, and between the West Nusa Tenggara and West Java. Married girls from West Nusa Tenggara were most likely to state that they wished to marry before 19 years of age. Almost none of the unmarried girls from either region wished to marry in their adolescent years.

Unmarried girls stated various reasons for wanting to delay marriage, including continuing their education and maintaining freedom to work. One referenced the national law prohibiting child marriage.

In general, the aspirations of married adolescent girls were to get ‘a proper job’ and receive higher education (see Figure 2). Getting a better job is a personal achievement desired by 47% of married women in West Java and 64% in West Nusa Tenggara. This regional difference could be influenced by differences in cultural norms and greater poverty in West Nusa Tenggara.

Better or ‘proper’ jobs refer to employment that requires at least senior high school education and professional skills. The types of jobs found most appealing were teachers, doctors, actors, accountants, or business owners. The wish expressed was to work to generate one’s own income (independent of a husband), gain a personal sense of achievement, and ease the financial burden on parents. Up to one third of married girls also expressed a desire to achieve education to the level of at least senior high school.

The next desired achievement was to have a house with complete facilities, as well as other personal property, such as savings, motorcycle and/or car. Ownership of house and property was associated with independence.

Figure 2: Percentage of married girls who wished to pursue an education and/or employment (N=108)

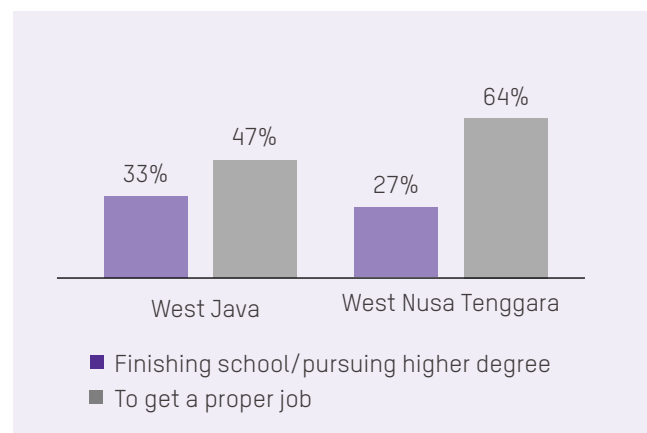


Figure 2 shows the percentage of married girls who aspired to continue their education and/or to work to gain financial independence, security, and for a personal sense of achievement.

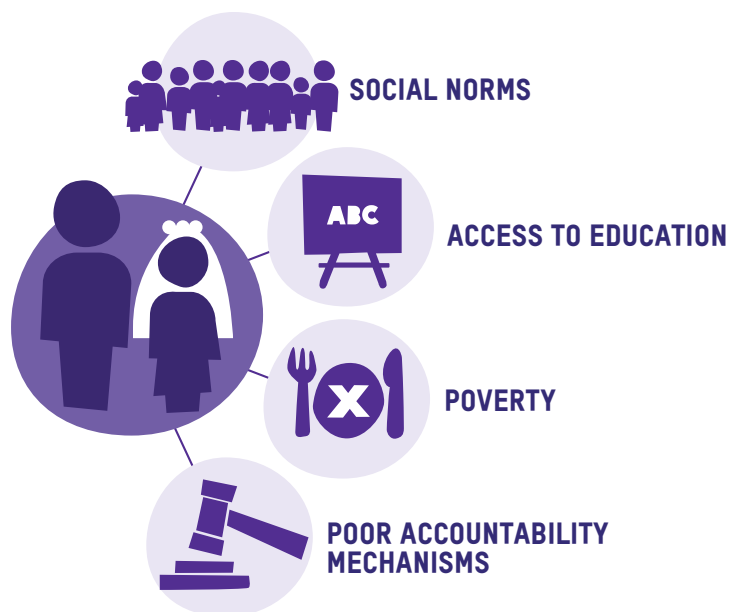
Further exploration is required to understand the factors (e.g., cultural, financial, etc.) underpinning married girls' greater aspiration for marriage and work in West Nusa Tenggara compared to West Java. As mentioned above, cultural differences and higher rates of poverty in West Nusa Tenggara could contribute to the desire for economic stability, be it from marriage and/or employment.

It is also noteworthy, and warrants further study, that almost none of the unmarried women aspired for early marriage, unlike their married counterparts. This was true across both provinces. These findings may be indicative of the increased levels of girls' education, social protection programmes, and advocacy against CEFM in Indonesia that influence these aspirations for marriage.

2.5 DRIVERS OF CHILD, EARLY, AND FORCED MARRIAGE

Adolescent girls report that when and to whom they marry, is rarely their choice and decision. The married and unmarried girls, parents, and influencers who participated spoke to various cultural, socio-economic, and structural factors that support and promote CEFM in West Nusa Tenggara and West Java. See Table 2 for a summary of the key drivers.

Some married women who wish to delay marriage were pressured or forced to marry before the age of 19 by their parents. A 16-year-old married girl from West Java who wanted to delay her marriage noted the following: *"The original plan was my boyfriend and I wanted to be engaged first. My parents disagreed and suggested we marry instead."* When girls come home past their curfew after spending time with a male friend, they risk being married by their parents shortly thereafter to preserve the family honour. If unmarried, families also feared that the community would perceive their daughters as spinsters. These reactions are due to deeply entrenched **cultural and religious norms** around the chastity of girls before marriage and male dominion over women. Child marriage is seen to reduce the risk of pre-marital sex and relations and unintended pregnancies (Ghomeshi, Qasim, and Zarroura, 2020).



Girls who are 'too free' are married off to avoid the negative talk of neighbours. When someone proposes marriage with a girl with this 'free' reputation, it is immediately accepted by parents.

"Because I played too much, my parents were worried. Rather than being the talk of the neighbourhood, when there was a boy who wanted to marry me, my parents just agreed. I was too young to understand what it meant to have a family. When I was being told to marry, I just agreed."

– married girl, West Java

Despite these societal pressures to marry, most married and unmarried girls did perceive that their communities were accepting of delayed marriage (see Figure 3). The majority of both married and unmarried girls in West Java perceived this community acceptance. On the other hand, in West Nusa Tenggara, only 25% of married girls perceived community acceptance on delaying marriage, compared to 68% of unmarried girls.

Figure 3: Percentage of adolescent girls who perceived community acceptance in delaying marriage (N=249)

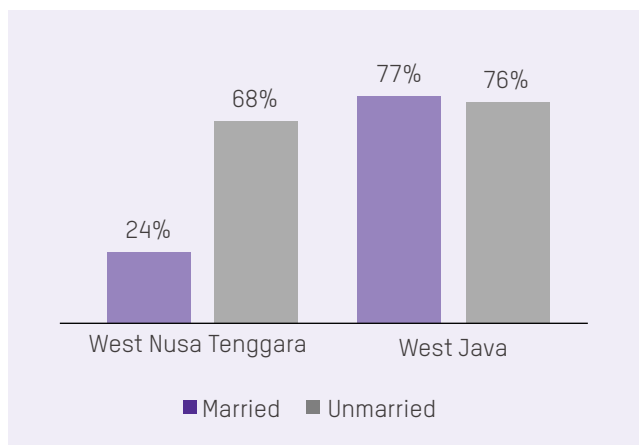


Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of girls from both regions who believed that their communities would be accepting of delaying marriages until after 19 years of age. While the majority of both married and unmarried girls from West Java perceived community acceptance on delaying marriage, only 24% of married girls in West Nusa Tenggara believed that their communities would be accepting.

Another factor driving CEFM practices in West Nusa Tenggara is the continued *merari*⁶ tradition of girl kidnappings. Several married girls from West Nusa Tenggara who did not want to marry young explained that they were ‘stolen’ by males pursuing them:

“I was still in school. The man took me away and I was too ashamed to return home.”

– 22 years old, married at 16,
West Nusa Tenggara

“I wasn’t ready. I still wanted to go to school, but my husband really wanted to marry me so that he lied to ask me out. It turned out that he took me out [of school] to run off and steal me from my home.”

– 21 years old, married at 16,
West Nusa Tenggara

There is also the **inconsistent adoption and circumventing of the child marriage law**. Even with the national marriage law amended to increase the age of marriage to 19 for girls, there is inconsistency in the willingness, support, and awareness of community leaders, government officials, and other influencers with respect to child marriage prevention. With poor enforcement and accountability to uphold the law, child marriage practices continue through unofficial marriage ceremonies (siri) and age forgery. Unofficial ceremonies can lead to difficulties in obtaining government issued identity cards and family cards, as well as limited access to government assistance. Children born from siri marriages will also have difficulty obtaining birth certificates and child identity cards. The process of legalizing an unofficial marriage by the state can only be done after the spouse is at least 19 years of age, and the process is lengthy and difficult to navigate.

Many adolescent girls and their parents spoke to **cultural beliefs on destiny** as another key factor supporting child marriage. It is frowned upon to reject marriage proposals, because of the belief that he who proposes is one’s ‘soulmate’; there is no need to delay marriage once connected to a soulmate. Soulmate is understood here simply as a boyfriend or someone who proposes. There is a need, however, to elaborate on this with further study.

“Why delay when you have met your soulmate?”

– 21 years old, married at 17, West Java

“When you have met your soulmate, you have to marry.”

–17 years old, married at 15, West Nusa Tenggara

Facing **poverty**, families often sacrifice their daughters’ education, and immediately accept marriage proposals. Marrying off a daughter is considered to help reduce the financial burden on families. These findings reinforce similar literature

on CEFM. For instance, UNICEF (2016) found that in Indonesia, CEFM was twice as likely in households with the lowest expenditure levels compared to households that are more affluent. As well, marriage and education are seen as incompatible for adolescent girls, due to traditional gender roles that require girls to stay home and be good wives, daughters-in-law and mothers. On the other hand, some participants spoke to the greater likelihood of girls receiving marriage proposals as work opportunities increased. With greater financial security, boys (or their parents) were in better positions to pursue marriage.

These financial difficulties also affect girls' access to education. Limited **access to education** can accelerate their marriages as well. Some village roads leading to high schools in the district capitals are in poor condition, resulting in high transportation costs. This makes it difficult for girls to continue their educations to higher levels. Parents or poor families choose to keep their daughters home and marry them instead.

Table 1: Summary of drivers of child, early, and forced marriage

Driver	Description	Involved Actors
Cultural and religious norms on chastity before marriage	Girls who spend time with male friends after sunset are often forced to marry due to deeply entrenched social norms that enforce the chastity of girls before marriage. Fears of pre-marital intimacy and sex encourage the practice of CEFM.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Traditional figures • Community leaders • Community members
Cultural beliefs on destiny	There is a perception that when a girl receives a marriage proposal, she has found her 'soulmate' and it would bring bad karma to a family to reject such a proposal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls/Boys • Parents • Community members
Inconsistent adoption and circumventing of child marriage laws	The criminalization of child marriage may have inadvertently led to increases in unofficial child marriage (<i>siri</i>) or age forgery for girls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional figures • Religious leaders • Community leaders • Marriage officiants • Parents
Poverty	Families often have their daughters marry young to relieve financial burdens. High transportation costs to access high schools leads to poor families taking their daughters out of school. Continuing education is often seen as incompatible with being a wife, mother and daughter-in-law.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Male siblings • Extended family • Officers performing the marriage
Work opportunities	Greater work opportunities may prevent girls from getting married in their adolescence. However, greater community economic wellbeing can reduce financial barriers for boys, encouraging them or their parents to seek opportunities for marriage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Officers performing the marriage

2.6 ENFORCERS OF CHILD MARRIAGE

As noted, the interviews with adolescent girls, parents and influencers revealed the significant role that social and religious norms play in driving CEFM in West Java and West Nusa Tenggara. Adolescent girls' perceptions on marriage are influenced by various community actors in their lives, who enforce the norms prescribing gender roles and dominion over women's marital choices.

The study found that religious and traditional leaders, parents, government officers who perform the marriage or those with the title *penghulu* (headman) are the main actors that uphold and enable child marriage practices. They are the primary decision makers when it comes to marriage, and not adolescent girls themselves.

Actors and situations can interact and overlap with each other, and, in the end, this can influence child marriage practices. One example of interaction is disagreement between actors. The study found cases where a *penghulu* from the Office of Religion refused to officiate a child marriage, as it is illegal. Then, parents would choose to continue the child marriage by conducting a *siri* marriage that is officiated by religious leaders (*kyai*). The official registration would take place when the girl reached the legal age to get married.

All actors, however, have reinforcing roles in solidifying CEFM into cultural practice. Similarly, actors in positions of power face societal pressure from other influencers to maintain their traditional views and practices. For instance, for religious leaders who may wish to advocate for an end to CEFM, they may face resistance and backlash. This may act as a deterrent for these actors to champion the delay of marriage if it means being shunned by their peers.

PARENTS were frequently identified by adolescent girl participants as central to all decision making related to their marriages. The key reasoning for pushing early marriage, on behalf of parents, was to prevent adultery and pregnancy out of wedlock, as well as avoid the judgement of neighbours regarding daughters who were considered too 'free' and 'brave.' All these reasons relate back to the entrenched cultural and religious norms condemning pre-marital relations. Abiding by religious values is of the utmost importance for both parents and their children. Finally, parents and their daughters raised the issue of financial difficulties and its influence on marital decision-making.

TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS play a powerful role in setting and enforcing the social norms in their communities. They are highly respected and regarded individuals who shape the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of entire villages who seek their guidance, from children to elders. As it stands, it was found that these leaders condoned child marriage because there is no restriction in their traditional scriptures against it. Adolescent girls who are menstruating were considered old enough for marriage and motherhood. Pregnancy out of wedlock is strongly condemned.

PENGHULU who perform marriages are often proponents of child marriage because of long traditions of this practice. Even with the introduction of the amended marriage law, they are most likely to continue performing unofficial marriages if the practice aligns with their personal and religious beliefs and norms. They have an important role in preventing child marriage, but, as is the case with most community members, the negative consequences of CEFM are largely unknown.

Box 1 summarizes the key modes of marriage noted by participants. It is evident that decision making is largely determined by parents with little room for adolescent girls to voice opinions and desires on whom and when they would like to marry.

BOX 1: COMMON MODES OF MARRIAGE

TA'ARUF PROCESS: The parents of the future husband come to the house for marriage proposal; both parents agree, and the girl is immediately implicated in the marriage.

“His parents came to my house to propose, and both my parents agreed. I finally agreed to be married off.”

— (married girl, West Java)

MATCH MAKING: The couple is introduced by parents, they date for a while, and then get married.

“The dating process started by being introduced by my parents. We dated for one and a half years before we got married ... we were married off to prevent being subject to gossip.”

— (married girl, West Java)

ARRANGED MARRIAGE: The parents arrange the marriage match, with no other choice but to follow their wishes.

FORCED MARRIAGE: The girl is forced by parents to marry the person they are dating.

“I was dating at first, then my parents asked me to marry because I had already dated for too long. I rejected the idea, but my parents still forced me. I finally got married.”

— (married girl, West Java)

2.7 GAME CHANGERS

This section is an explanation of the ‘situation game changer’, which refers to individuals or groups that can influence the tendency of child marriage practices in a significant way, according to the perspectives of the participants. Recognizing that not all the influencers possess the same power to change the direction of child marriage, the Public Participation Spectrum from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) was adapted to define four levels of participation/engagement.⁷

Table 2: Roles of various actors, or ‘game changers’ in prevent child marriage across the four levels of participation

To be informed
Influencers who should be provided with understanding/ facts/objective information on the issue of child marriage
To be consulted and involved
Influencers that we take feedback from, listen to, and work directly with to ensure that issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered; they also help guide the development of programs, alternatives or decisions.
To collaborate with
Influencers that we work in partnership with for input and advice, jointly formulating/ developing solutions and/or options.
To empower
Influencers who have the final say to change their current situation.

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Table 3: Game changers and their role in preventing CEFM

Spectrum	The Game Changers	Roles
To be informed	Family (parents, boys)	To receive information/facts about impact and risk of child marriage, as well as benefits of delaying marriage
To be consulted and involved	Young girls Youth groups (Karang Taruna, Forum Anak, etc.) Survivors of child marriage Families of survivors of child marriage	To provide relevant information on the impact of child marriage To share personal stories as case studies to develop and improve programs To share experiences in dealing with challenges of past program implementation
To collaborate with	Religious leaders (including informal ones, e.g., Koran recitation teachers) Majelis Ulama Indonesia Village Commission for the Protection of Women and Children	To not officiate any marriage that involves children as brides To educate parents (of girls and boys) on the impact of child marriage and benefits of delaying marriage (e.g., through Koran recitation meetings [<i>pengajian</i>]) To address issues that are related to religious teachings To mediate/separate (<i>membelas</i>) the child whenever any underage girl is being taken away from her home* To issue <i>awiq-awiq</i> (local/traditional law) to prevent child marriage
	Youth groups (Katang Taruna, Forum Anak, etc.)	To come up with programs/activities to improve hard skills To be advocates for children's rights To set good examples as role models to the youth in the village To provide activities for children to divert their attention away from marriage
	Local healthcare facilities (<i>Puskesmas, Posyandu</i>) Family Welfare Movement (<i>Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga</i> [PKK])	To educate community members on the risks and health impact of child marriage on girls as well as young children and babies
	Village officials	To be selective/rigorous in checking requirements before issuing marriage licenses (<i>ijin menikah</i>) or marriage certificates To allocate village budget to provide opportunities for children who dropped out of school so they can return To report officials who officiate illegal weddings To issue local/village regulations (e.g., <i>Peraturan Desa</i> [Village Regulations] or <i>Surat Edaran</i> [circular letter]) about child marriage To mediate or prevent any parent-initiated child marriage To mediate (<i>membelas</i>) whenever any underage girl is being taken away from her home*
	Formal/informal education institutions	To come up with a re-entry scheme for formal education or informal training programs (e.g. <i>Kejar Paket</i> [acceleration program])
	Surrounding industries	To provide work opportunities for educated women and girls
To empower	Young girls/survivors of child marriage	To say no when girls are not ready for marriage To say no to sexual/physical advances prior to marriage To educate the community members and school children on the risks of child marriage

* Only relevant to West Nusa Tenggara

3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper sought to gather the perceptions and aspirations of adolescent girls on marriage in the CS project districts of West Java and West Nusa Tenggara. The study heard from girls regarding their experiences and perspectives in navigating societal pressures to marry. It provides further insights into the experiences of children who enter marriage before the age of 19, what factors drive these practices, and which actors play an influential role in preventing CEFM.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

- 1 Most adolescent girls held positive perceptions about marriage before getting married. They perceived happiness in having a companion to share their lives with and having male accompaniment in public spaces to satisfy local norms and customs. On the other hand, women and girl participants expressed that their freedom was restricted by household and care work responsibilities, financial dependence on their husbands, and limited voice and power in marriage relationships. Some of them experience disappointment, mental stress, and exhaustion due to their marital situations. If they could avoid child marriage, married girls expressed the desire to pursue better employment and higher education to improve their family's welfare and achieve financial independence.
- 2 Understanding the differences in perceptions that emerged between married and unmarried girls will require further study. For instance, many married adolescent girls aspired towards marriage before 19 years old, compared to 0-2% of unmarried girls. Unmarried girls also perceived greater community acceptance towards delaying marriage compared to married girls. These differences are likely skewed by the fact that the participants were beneficiaries of the CS project and may have already been educated on the negative consequences of child marriage.
- 3 Compared to married girls in West Java, a greater proportion of married adolescent girls from West Nusa Tenggara aspired towards marriage before the age of 19, noted less community acceptance in delaying marriage, and showed greater eagerness to work. While further study is required to understand these differences, the greater levels of poverty in West Nusa Tenggara is likely a contributing factor. CEFM programming should be adapted to address region-specific issues.
- 4 The perceptions of adolescent girls on marriage were shaped by the social and religious norms and community beliefs prevailing in their communities. Norms related to the chastity of girls before marriage, men's dominion over women, and traditional gender roles were compounding drivers of child marriage practices. Community actors, including community and religious leaders, parents, and officers who perform marriages, enforced and reinforced social norms. For adolescent girls, their parents were key decision makers in who and when they marry.
- 5 Poverty is also a significant factor that leads families to marry their daughters early as a means of reducing financial burden. Poverty also limits access to education due to the costs involved with higher levels of study.



FUN WALK in commemoration of the '16 – Anti Violence Against Women Day' Campaign. District of Bojonegoro, Indonesia. Photo credit: Fadliyati Ulya (YKP)

6 Several actors in society play important roles in preventing child marriage practices. Of these, the most influential 'game changers' are listed below:

- **ADOLESCENT GIRLS:** Empower adolescent girls and youth to be prominent voices challenging CEFM practices. Not merely as beneficiaries, adolescent girls need to determine what efforts they need themselves to stop child marriage. Advocating for higher education for adolescent girls, vocational training on financial resources and decision-making, and awareness raising on women's and girls' rights, leadership, and economic empowerment are all necessary. Survivors of child marriage can also educate others.
- **VILLAGE-LEVEL CHILD AND YOUTH GROUPS:** Both men and women are strategic parties as role models at the village level. These groups can conduct campaigns for adolescent boys and girls, parents, and community and religious leaders on the negative consequences of CEFM.

- **VILLAGE GOVERNMENT:** As policy maker, village governments can protect girls from child marriage practices. This includes preparing a gender-responsive budget from village funds, such as allocating budget for youth empowerment that can prevent child marriages.
- **COMMUNITY LEADERS (RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL):** All leaders in communities need to formulate customary and religious policies and educate one another about how to prevent child marriages.

These key conclusions can inform how Creating Spaces project partners, civil society organizations and women's rights organizations engage with adolescent girls and influencers in a more targeted way, to prevent CEFM while centering women's and girls' voices.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), child marriage, or early marriage, is any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. In forced marriages, one and/or both parties have not expressed their full and free consent to the union. In a child marriage, both parties have not expressed full, free and informed consent. Information retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/ChildMarriage.aspx>
- 2 The New Order (*Orde Baru*) references the 1966-1998 rule of the Suharto government.
- 3 They were supported by the 18+ Coalition, which was coordinated by Creating Spaces partner, Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia, along with legal professionals, academics, interfaith religious leaders, journalists and other civil society organizations.
- 4 Law No. 16 of 2019 on the amendment of Law No. 1 of 1974 about marriage.
- 5 According to the CS Logic Model, the ultimate outcome is to reduce VAWG and CEFM.
- 6 The *merari'* tradition is a particular practice in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, in which a girl is 'stolen' from her home by a man who wishes to be her husband. The origins of the tradition was to preserve the self-esteem and manhood of a Sasak man, because it allowed him to succeed in eloping with his beloved (Saladin, 2013). A subsequent case was related to a girl being stolen from her home by the ex-boyfriend of her cousin. The man then married the woman as revenge, because her cousin has already married somebody else. Upon discussion with a local partner, it was found that the original purpose of *merari'* has been lost and is now more likely used inappropriately for other purposes such as the described case.
- 7 The IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum can be seen here: https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf

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